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The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Support to lone parents

France, 21-22 October 2015

Summary Report



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Justice



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Introduction

The mutual learning seminar, held in Paris on 21-22 October 2015, examined and discussed good practices to support lone parents in the framework of gender equality. Presentations explored policies and good practices in the host country France and the associated country, Germany. A further twelve countries contributed with their country experiences. The seminar concluded with a discussion of learning from and transferability of the good practices, emerging national and European policy issues, and ways forward.

The seminar was very timely as the European Commission is currently discussing a comprehensive approach to addressing poverty and exclusion amongst lone parents in the framework of future gender equality policies and measures to strengthen the achievement of the Europe 2020 targets. Lone parenthood is both a gender issue (women are 98% of lone parent headed households) and a poverty issue (one-third of lone parents live in poverty, compared to 17% of all families).

1. Good practices of the host and associated countries

1.1. France¹

The first session consisted of presentations on the French policy context and examples of good practice in providing support to lone parent families. France has a comprehensive, if complex, system of financial and non-financial support for lone parents. Lone parents ('parents isolés') are a specific 'administrative' category reflecting poor single parents. Recent French policy with a focus on lone parenthood includes a multi-action roadmap for social inclusion and anti-poverty (2015-2017) and the introduction in 2014 of a law on Equality between Women and Men. Since 2013 family entitlements have been significantly increased for lone parents in the light of increasing rates of lone parent family poverty.

In France 85% of lone parent families are headed by women. The majority are less qualified than other mothers, 32% are unemployed and 40% receive no alimony payments from fathers. The poverty rate amongst lone parents has increased from 30% in 2006 to 33.6% in 2012 (representing more significant increase in poverty compared to other households). Lone parents often experience isolation and difficulties in participating in professional and civil life.

There are two types of support for lone parents in France. Universal financial support is provided through family allowances, the provision of childcare services, and supports provided to low-income families (including school allowances, family income supplement and income tax allowances). Additional selective financial support aims to reduce the economic and social gap between lone parent families and other families. Minimum income schemes targeted to lone parents include the lone-parent allowance (API) created in 1976, a 'maternal wage' providing payment

¹ For more in-depth information see the French discussion paper available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_fr/fr_discussion_paper_fr_2015_en.pdf

above the minimum wage, and a minimum integration income (RMI) introduced in 1989 to address unemployment and to improve social and occupation integration.

Since the 1990s goals have emphasised **labour market activation through economic incentives** for work and support to the working poor, for example, through the employment tax credit (PPE) and the in-work income supplement 'activity solidarity income' (RSA). The RSA is an innovative universal allowance aimed at promoting labour market activation and includes basic and supplementary payments, calculated according to the number of children in a household. From January 2016 a new activity premium will provide a coordinated approach, replacing the RSA solidarity income and the PPE. The objective is to provide further incentives to enter employment by sustaining the purchasing power of low-income workers. Increases in family entitlements are also planned, which are expected to improve lone-parent families' material situations. Other family entitlements include the family complement (*Complément familial*) and the family support allowance (*Allocation de soutien familial*) for lone parents raising children without alimony support. A maintenance payment guarantee scheme (GIPA) is being piloted in 20 departments in 2015.

Childcare support for lone parents is provided for under the AGEPI scheme (*Aide à la garde d'enfant pour les parents isolés*). This targets lone parents with children under the age of 10 years who are registered job seekers, and enables them to access a range of flexible childcare solutions, for example, from crèches and registered child minders. However, the one-off payment does not sufficiently cover the costs of childcare for lone parents. An additional innovation, included under the 2015-2017 anti-poverty roadmap contains an obligation for crèches to take 10% quota of poor children, which is carried out in agreement with the national family allowance fund (CNAF).

The following two good practice examples illustrate **local level supports** for lone parent families:

The **GIPA** scheme (*Garantie contre les impayés de pension alimentaire*) is a new child support guarantee to cover non-payment of alimony, introduced under the 2014 law on Equality between Women and Men. It includes provision for a 'maintenance payment guarantee' providing minimum child support for the caring parent. It guarantees the payment of entitlements, simplified procedures and improved information and advice, which is implemented through coordinated policies and local partnerships. GIPA compensates beneficiaries for loss of income, and provides information and mediation for families about parenting rights, childcare and family support services, and job search support. The objective is to prevent isolation, promote social and economic inclusion and co-parenting after parental separation. Local family benefits offices (CAFs) are able to collect up to two years of alimony arrears of child support.

The GIPA scheme was tested in 2015 in 20 departments, under the Family Allowance Fund. In the **Belfort** department (in the Franche-Comté region in east France) the experiment includes individual family mediation sessions and group information sessions for parents after separation. Of the 5,800 lone parent families living in Belfort, 900 are in the maintenance arrears. Family mediation, carried out by social workers, lawyers and family counsellors, provide information, assistance and practical arrangements for parents and children after separation. The aim is to encourage communication between parents and address the social, economic and psychological impacts of separation on parents and children. Specific emphasis is

given to the social, psychological and other needs of children, including their participation in local sports and other activities. The aim is to have coherence between local and national family allowance funds and to find solutions to non-payment of alimony. Exemptions are in place for lone parents who have experienced family violence and abuse, where the courts identify targeted interventions in line with the law.

A further example of good practice, in the Paris-based **Institute for Education and Practical Training**, which implements an innovative system of support to assist lone parents' reintegration into employment, provided through a job seekers network, alongside the provision of flexible and longer childcare services. Half of the childcare places are provided for women who do not have jobs and children are given several weeks to settle into the childcare centre, after which job seeker support starts. Women are introduced to the Institute's job seekers network for a six-month period, with the aim preparing the parent and helping her to find a job. Once in employment women have access to flexible childcare. The combination of childcare and practical assistance in job seeking has led to 85%-95% of participants returning to work. Participants sign weekly contracts, both as a symbolic gesture and also to allow childcare hours to be adjusted if there are changes in working hours. The success of the system is based on the targeted support and flexible childcare, which reflects the desire of many lone parents to end their dependence on social benefits.

1.2. Germany²

The second session covered presentations on initiatives to improve lone parents' economic participation in the labour market. In 2014, 40% of all lone parent households in Germany were dependent on unemployment benefits. Of lone parents registered as unemployed, 60% have not completed vocation training. Evidence shows that lone parents want to work and to have access to well-paid, quality jobs, and to have economic independence and end their dependence on means-tested benefits.

The Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA) has responsibility for the labour market integration of women and lone parents. Improving the economic situation of lone parents and their integration into working life and social participation for themselves and their children remains a challenge. Lone parents face difficulties in entering the labour market and in having access to flexible working hours and childcare, skills training and work placements. Recently introduced policy measures to address these challenges include the introduction of a guaranteed childcare place for all children under the age of three years. Since 2010 the Federal Employment Agency policy has been to increase opportunities for lone parents by focusing on their competence development, placements into work and improving opportunities for children and teenagers to participate in society. The Federal Employment Agency has also used ESF funding to promote equal opportunities in the labour market through childcare and programmes for women returning to the labour market after childbirth.

Networking has been widely developed to promote family- and gender-sensitive measures, through cooperation with local bodies in the provision of flexible childcare

² For more in-depth information see the German discussion paper available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_fr/de_discussion_paper_fr_2015_en.pdf

and information events for lone parents. This includes networking with employers to provide jobs offers with flexible working hours and childcare, and with training providers to increase the provision of part-time offers of education and skills training, which is particularly important as many lone parents lack vocational training and prior work experience. Working in networks is viewed as a critical success factor.

Four good practices were presented to demonstrate the importance of networking to support lone parents' activation and integration into work. They result from a **strategic partnership for lone parents** at Federal level between the Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the Federal Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (BMAS).

- **'Reconciliation of work and family life for lone parents'** (BMSFJ, 2009-2010) to improve networking and raising awareness for companies about the need for measures to reconcile work and family life.
- **'Good work for lone parents'** (BMAS 2009-2012) with funding for 77 projects to provide individualised support to lone parents on unemployment benefit to assist with their labour market activation and integration.
- **'Networks of effective assistance for lone parents'** (BMSFJ, 2011-2013) with funding for 105 projects to expand networking amongst a range of agencies in providing coordinated support and assistance for lone parents.
- **'Employment opportunities for lone parent'** (BMSFJ and BA) 2012-2013) aimed at promoting learning and good practice through networking to improve the image of lone parents, by increasing awareness amongst employers about employment opportunities for lone parents.

An innovative approach to expanding employment opportunities has been the appointment of **Officers for Equal Opportunities** in 500 job centres and regional labour offices. They provide women, and lone parents, with information and advice to assist their integration into the labour market. This is carried out by inter-agency networking with employers, training providers and childcare providers. Officers for Equal Opportunity have played an important role in promoting a comprehensive and coordinated approach by addressing the multi-faceted barriers faced by lone parents entering the labour market.

One of the most significant of such barriers is the lack of needs based childcare during off-peak hours, school holidays, after school, or when a parent is sick. In responding to this problem a **network** of registered and qualified **child minders** has been established to provide more flexible childcare. A programme has started to professionalise and regulate child minding for this purpose. **Multigenerational houses** are a further innovative way for providing childcare in Germany – they are funded in 500 regions to encourage civic engagement and services are delivered on the principle of inter-generational solidarity.

Working in networks has been a success factor (e.g. child and youth welfare, other public bodies, training providers, multigenerational houses, counselling organisations for pregnant women etc.). A further point of learning is the need to implement gender mainstreaming in all project activities.

A presentation assessing the German good practices pointed out the strengths and weaknesses in relation to how innovative and sustainable the good practices were in

reducing inequality. Strengths included the implementation of an innovative tool to integrate the non-resident parent, reflecting the dynamic of modern family life where parenting often takes place by two parents living separately. Furthermore, several dimensions of inequality were tackled through institutional support. There were also good attempts at sustainability and sharing learning from the projects. The weaknesses are that the programmes were largely focused on activation, and lacked a focus on gender inequalities. Overall the causes and consequences of lone parent disadvantage are gendered, and they are deep-rooted and multi-faceted.

2. The situation in the other participating countries³

Belgium: The risk of poverty for lone parent households was 36% in 2014. Despite a range of policy measures, including additional family benefits for lone parents and payments for lone parents who do not receive alimony payments, there is a relative low level of income protection for this group. Good provision exists for pre-school care means, but childcare for very young children is limited. Recent policy debates include promoting a model of dual earnings and the labour market activation of mothers. There is a move away from lifelong entitlement to alimony payments to the provision of shared custody of children in divorce settlements. A network of companies has been formed to promote equality (by the Institute for Equality for Women and Men) to discuss reconciliation and the need to adapt working times for employees who are parents. Parental leave is very flexible in Belgium and parents have entitlements to work shorter hours. However, lone parents' poverty is not tackled in a comprehensive way.

Croatia: Lone parent households represent 7% of all households and 84% of lone parent families are headed by women. Unemployment, poverty, access to quality work, and isolation are significant problems faced by lone parents. Lone parent families have a high risk of poverty (31.7%, compared to 18.9% for all families) and in-work poverty rates are higher (at 13.9%, compared to 7.8% for all families). There is no comprehensive policy framework addressing lone parent disadvantage. A small additional child allowance supplement, and a higher rate of social assistance and temporary financial support is payable to lone parents where there is no alimony from a father. Lone parents are identified as a group at risk on the labour market and can avail of labour market support. They have access to subsidised childcare services provided in some municipalities; however, provision is limited. There are currently no policy debates or specific policy measures on lone parenthood in the core government strategies on the rights of the child, on poverty and social exclusion, and gender equality.

Czech Republic: Lone parent families represent one-tenth of families with dependent childcare. Low participation in employment, a high risk of poverty and poor living conditions are common. Lone parents find it difficult to combine work and family life and generally have low educational qualifications. There is a range of social, family and employment policies to support low-income families and the needs of lone parents are considered under the Labour Code. However, there are no specific measures targeted to tackling lone parent disadvantage. Lone parent

³ For more information on the policies of the participating countries see the comments papers available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/other-institutions/good-practices/review-seminars/seminars_2015/lone_parents_en.htm

support is currently being discussed under the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2014-20), although there are no explicitly defined measures for this group. All income support recipients receive job search and social integration support. Despite lone parents being an identified target group for activation programmes, there are no targeted activation programmes for them. Parental leave of up to four years reinforces women's exit from the labour market and has led the government to encourage earlier return to employment. Several NGOs provide childcare support and assist women in job searching and training.

Estonia: Lone parents represent one-fifth of all families and 92% are headed by women. Lone parents experience poverty, exclusion from the labour market and high dependence on welfare support. State benefits include a single parent's child allowance where the father has not been registered on the birth certificate, and a temporary maintenance allowance in cases of non-payment of alimony. Legislation has been proposed to introduce a state-funded maintenance assistance fund for lone parents who do not receive alimony of €100 per month. Discussion is taking place on how to involve fathers, including a father's parental leave quota, which aims to support fathers' roles after separation. Measures are also being discussed about how to ensure that fathers' names are recorded on birth certificates and legal provisions are being introduced for the collection of alimony payments. Estonia has used ESF funds to provide flexible childcare that can meet the needs of lone parents. The government is currently encouraging employers to provide flexible childcare, and municipal childcare and child minding services are being improved.

Finland: Lone parent families represent 20.5% of all families with children. In 2011 the risk of poverty for lone parent families was 29%. Although the lone parents' employment rate is relatively high, it fell from 90% in 1988 to 65.4% in 2013. The main priority in Finland has been to support women's labour market integration, to reconcile work and family life, and provide an adequate income for families with children. It is principally based on a universal model of support targeted to all families, through parental leave, child allowances, and public funded childcare (including free childcare for children under the age of six years). A home care allowance is paid to parents who stay at home to care for their children, although there is currently a discussion about changing this because it is largely taken-up by women. The parental leave system has also been strengthened to encourage father's participation in childcare, resulting an increase in the 'father's quota' to 54 days in 2013.

Greece: Lone parent families represent 15% of all families. There are no specific policies focused on lone parents, although they benefitted along with other families from improved childcare and equal opportunities introduced under the EU Community Support Frameworks. Greece lacks a comprehensive policy to provide adequate living standards for families. Benefits for families have been severely reduced, abolished, or replaced with means-tested benefits under austerity measures, resulting in the share of the population at risk of poverty rising from 27.7% in 2010 to 36% in 2014. Cash benefits for lone parent families are extremely low and fail to lift families out of poverty. A pilot scheme started in 13 municipalities in 2014 to explore the feasibility of introducing a national minimum guaranteed income. Legislation passed in 2015 prioritises the provision of basic needs for families badly affected by the crisis, including free electricity and food and rent subsidies for a nine-month period.

Hungary: 22% of all families are lone parent families and 91% are headed by women. In 2013 the poverty rate was 34.3% for lone parents. There are no specific

policies that address lone parent disadvantage. Policies for all families include financial assistance, family allowances, local government child benefit for children in need, and family tax benefits. Legislation introduced in 2014 aims to increase the employment rate of women through continuation of childcare benefits after a mother takes up employment and improved access to publicly funded childcare. The 2012 Labour Code requires employers to facilitate reconciliation of work and family life for parents with children under the age of three years, and lone parents are protected from redundancy until a child turns three years of age. Publicly funded childcare for children over the age of three years has been expanded in recent years, but lone parents face difficulty in accessing childcare for younger children.

Iceland: 28% of families are headed by a lone parent and 17% of children are born to women who are unmarried or not cohabiting. 24.3% of lone parents are at risk of poverty. Lone parents that share legal residence with their children are entitled to a range of income related family benefits, including a mother/father wage and a short-term minimum income for families with no other income. Shared custody after separation is a longstanding policy objective that was strengthened in 2012 to enable courts to order shared custody of children. Fathers' participation in the lives of their children after divorce has increased in recent years, in part stimulated by paid parental leave and a fathers' quota, which is provided regardless of whether the parent is resident or non-resident. Support for lone parents' participation in the labour market includes giving priority to children of lone parents in public childcare. There is no flexibility in childcare provision and there is no specific activation measures targeted to lone parents. A comprehensive policy for children and families is currently being drawn up in Iceland, with the aim to support families in the interests of the child and to introduce a new family policy structure.

Latvia: One-third of families are headed by a lone parent and lone parent families have a risk of poverty of 41.1%, compared to 20.4% for all families. Teenage pregnancy is the key issue and around 20% of children are born without the registration of paternity. These families are at highest risk of poverty and experience difficulties in finding work. State policy on the family aims to protect and support all families, rather than provide specific support for lone parents. There are some targeted measures including a state social security benefit for children who live in lone parent households, a pension payment for children with a deceased parent, and a Maintenance Guarantee Fund where alimony has not been paid. The development of child minding services, including the formalisation and registration of child minders, aims to provide flexible child minding for women working non-standard hours. This is being implemented through an experiment using a voucher system for child minding of two hours a week outside of standard working hours.

The Netherlands: Lone parent families represent 21% of all families and 81% are headed by women. 24% live in poverty for at least a year and 6% live in poverty for more than four years. Although 60% of lone mothers participate in employment, many work part-time and do not earn living wage. Lone parents benefit from policies for all families (child allowances, a tax related credit for low-income parents, and financial support childcare for working parents or if the parent participates in a labour market activation programme). A policy objective is for all social assistance recipients to enter employment, although lone parents are exempted if they care for children under-five years of age. An income related tax deduction is also payable to co-parents if the child lives with each parent for at least three days a week. This along with paid paternity leave and a flexible form of parental leave, aims to encourage fathers' participation in family life. A Ministerial 'empowerment' project is currently discussing with stakeholders (local authorities, employers, women's

organisations) ways to improve working time flexibility for parents and to support women's participation in the labour market through local networks. A good practice is the 'single super mum' civil society network that gives advice and support to single mothers.

Romania: Lone parent families represented 14% of all families in 2011. Research has shown that lone parents face high levels of unemployment, employment insecurity, in-work poverty and exclusion. The dual-earner model in Romania disadvantages lone parents, as incomes from work from one parent are barely sufficient for family wellbeing. Risks of poverty are highest for lone parents with young children. Support for lone parents principally takes place through income support schemes, and a means-tested family allowance introduced in 2010 is conditional on children's school attendance. Recent policy developments include the drafting of a family policy and a family support programmes for low-income families. The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy (2014-2020) emphasises the need for increasing support to low-income families through an integrated income support scheme, integrated services and personalised activation strategies.

The Slovak Republic: Lone parent families represent 16.1% of all families, and 30% of them are at risk of poverty. The majority of lone parents participate in paid work (68% full-time and 3% part-time). However, they have a very low level of work intensity and in-work poverty is commonplace. The risks faced by lone parents are not addressed in national policy but they are eligible for a range of benefits, including a specified minimum income protection for lone parents in material need and longer maternity leave. Lone parents are identified as one group of disadvantaged job seekers. A lack of access to affordable childcare affects participation in the labour market. Measures to support the reconciliation of work and family life are provided for all families, and include a choice between an entitlement to three years parental leave financed through a parental allowance or a childcare allowance to cover some of the costs of childcare for parents wishing to return to work.

3. Key issues discussed during the seminar

Similar patterns and trends were observed across all the participating countries. Participants stressed that lone parenthood is an increasing social phenomenon in all countries; however, lone parents are a heterogeneous social group with different family and life course experiences and risks.

The presented practices from France and Germany provided very good examples of a comprehensive approach to addressing poverty, employment and social policy issues such as reconciliation of work and family life, childcare and the redistributive impacts of child benefits. Elements that seminar participants identified as having the potential for transferability include the guaranteed income for lone parents, dedicated childcare and activation measures for lone parents in France; the project of multigenerational houses in Germany; the provision of flexible forms of childcare in France and Germany; and the approach based on multi-stakeholder networks and coordination of services to facilitate lone parents' access to employment and childcare in France and Germany. The range of policy options, including non-financial and financial support, demonstrate good practices, for example, in employment and family counselling and mediation that are sensitive to different family situations.

There was agreement amongst participants that the **wellbeing of children and a child's rights perspective** should be kept at the forefront of all policy debates; that lone parenthood is a core **gender equality** issue; and that a combination of **universal and targeted measures** is needed to address family poverty, while also taking account of the specificities of lone parents' disadvantage. Participants highlighted the need for policies to avoid social exclusion and stigmatisation of lone parents through a balance of universal and targeted policy measures. In this context it may be useful to see separation as a life course risk, where parents may require time-limited support and assistance to take account, for example, of specific support needs in the first year after separation. In this regards, the German and French examples were very illuminating in demonstrating the importance of local partnerships and networks of support.

Participants also agreed that it is vital to tackle the **risks associated with lone parents' social disadvantage and poverty**. Despite cultural, policy and economic differences across Europe, lone parents share a disproportionate risk of poverty. This is a complex issue and requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that tackles lone parents' time pressures and difficulties in combining work and family life, as well as structural inequalities in the labour market. In particular, the risks of poverty are the greatest when lone parents have young children, when they are unemployed, and when financial and social benefits for lone parents are low.

Affordable and flexible childcare is vitally important for lone parents, as is the coordination of services and improvements in childcare that give priority to the most vulnerable groups. Examples of measures to provide flexible childcare through the registration and professionalisation of child minding, as well as networking and engaging employers to provide childcare and flexible working hours were regarded by participants as being essential to facilitating access into employment.

Encouraging fathers' participation, through fathers' quotas for paid parental leave and paternity leave, family mediation and policies to encourage co-parenting after separation, and measures to ensure that non-resident parents make alimony payments were discussed as ways to support fathers' participation. In particular, parental leave prior to separation plays a key role in sustaining co-parenting after separation, and should be available to non-resident fathers after separation. However, participants were clear that fathers' participation should not be prescriptive, particularly where there is a history of domestic violence and where fathers refuse to engage with their families. In these cases the government has a key role to play in providing a replacement income.

Participants agreed that priority should be given to ensuring lone parents' **access to quality employment**, with working hours that enable lone parents to balance work and family life. Having access to quality employment is not only empowering for women, but can facilitate their economic independence and family wellbeing. Lone parent disadvantage can often be located prior to separation, particularly for those that work in low paid, part-time jobs or where they opted out of the labour market because of childcare responsibilities. Low pay and a pattern of part-time working means lone parents find it difficult to earn an income that matches their benefits.

Inter-agency working plays a positive role in engaging different stakeholders, including state and local actors, civil society networks and employers. For example, civil society networks can empower and give voice to lone parents, as well as support them with childcare, training and job searching.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The closing remarks from the European Commission highlighted the importance of lone parenthood being viewed as core gender equality issue concerning the wellbeing and rights of parents and children. In August 2015 the European Commission published a new roadmap for reconciliation measures, which will benefit to lone parents. It includes benchmarks for Member States, and a possibility to raise the Barcelona targets on childcare and to address time gaps, long working hours and flexible working time. Lone parents benefit from a comprehensive approach that also examines dedicated measures to address the underlying causes of lone parents' poverty. However, robust evidence is needed to promote the activation of lone parents and a broader approach that reflects needs at different stages of the parenting cycle.

The following conclusions of the seminar draw together the main discussions about the way forward:

- **Comprehensive and coordinated strategies** are needed to address poverty in all families, and in the specific context of lone parent families. Policies should aim to reduce stigmatisation and stereotyping of lone parent families. A comprehensive and multi-faceted approach needs to take account of good evidence and data on the quality of life of lone parents and their children, including measures to address the risks of poverty, social assistance, support measures, activation measures, the quality of jobs, and access to childcare.
- A **child-centred approach** should inform all policy developments, to ensure the wellbeing of the children of lone parents and to support their participation in community and social life.
- Lone parenthood is a gender equality issue that should be addressed through **national and European strategies on gender equality**, with a priority to stimulate women's economic independence; provide access to affordable, flexible and good quality childcare; and create quality jobs and family friendly workplaces. Key structural problems associated with gendered labour markets, the gender pay gap and access to childcare need to be tackled in a comprehensive way.
- Further **qualitative research and data** is needed to uncover the complexity and diversity of lone parent families in order to build learning for multi-faceted policy interventions. This will need to take account of factors such as local and family support networks and the parenting role of non-resident fathers. Benchmarking could also help in drawing inspiration from examples.
- New commitments and additional funding are needed to tackle the inequalities faced by lone parents, which will result in long-term wellbeing and savings in public funding. **Pilot projects at local levels** can help to implement a multi-faceted approach that combines income guarantees, family support, mediation and activation measures that are sensitive to the individual needs of women and their children.
- Finally, all measures should be implemented through a **gender mainstreaming approach**. The ESF has the potential to be a very useful tool in the new

programming period, and emphasis should be given to ensuring that actions are gender mainstreamed.