

Addressing EU demographic challenges: supporting large families and single parents



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Abstract

This study, prepared for the European Parliament's Policy Department for Transport, Employment and Social Affairs and commissioned by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), reviews support for large families and single parents across the European Union. It analyses vulnerabilities of these households and provides recommendations to improve support at both EU and Member State level. Particular attention is paid to the implementation of large family cards across the EU Member States, and the feasibility of a European Large Family Card.

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.

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VERSION(S)

Original: English

Translation (Executive summary only): French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish

Manuscript completed in June 2026.

This document is available on the internet here:

- [Research4committees.blog](https://research4committees.blog)
- [Think Tank of the European Parliament](https://thinktankoftheeuropa.eu)

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCE FOR THIS PAPER

RIBERA ALMANDOZ, Olatz et al. 2026. *Addressing EU demographic challenges: Supporting large families and single parents*. Brussels: European Parliament, Policy Department for Transport, Employment and Social Affairs.

For in-text citations: Ribera Almandoz et al, 2026

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Generative AI tools – ChatGPT 5.4, Microsoft 365 Copilot, Google Gemini and Anthropic Claude Opus

4.8, including within agentic coding environments (Claude Code, Google Antigravity and GitHub Copilot) – were used to assist in writing and debugging the Stata code used for the statistical calculations, support the preparation of figures and tables, and review and improve the readability, phrasing and grammar of parts of the text. AI-generated content in this text has been reviewed by the authors.

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IDENTIFIERS

PDF Web ISBN 978-92-848-3695-6 | doi: 10.2861/6361772 | QA-01-26-151-EN-N

PDF X ISBN 978-92-848-3696-3 | doi:10.2861/7610079 | QA-01-26-151-EN-C

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AROP	At risk of poverty
AROPE	At risk of poverty or social exclusion
AT	Austria
ASF	Allocation de soutien familial
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
BGN	Bulgarian lev (former currency)
CASP	Cohesion, Agriculture and Social Policies
CSA	Chèque Service Accueil
CSO	Civil society organisation
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czechia
CZK	Czech crown (currency)
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
DKK	Danish crown (currency)
EaSI	Employment and Social Innovation Strand
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EDC	European Disability Card
EE	Estonia
ELFAC	European Large Families Confederation
EMPL	Committee on Employment and Social Affairs
ENoS	European Network of Single Parent Families

EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
ES	Spain
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
EU	European Union
EU-LFS	European Union Labour Force Survey
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
EUR	Euro (currency)
FI	Finland
FR	France
GALI	Global Activity Limitation Indicator
GR	Greece
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
HUF	Hungarian forint (currency)
IACK	Inkomensafhankelijke combinatiekorting
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LF	Large families
LFC	Large Family Card
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
LWI	Low work intensity
MFF	Multi-annual Financial Framework

MS	Member State
MT	Malta
N/A	Not available
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NL	Netherlands
NOE	National Association of Large Families
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ÖPA	Österreichische Plattform für Alleinziehende
PL	Poland
PLN	Polish zloty (currency)
PT	Portugal
RMI	Renta Mínima de Inserción
RO	Romania
RON	Romanian leu (currency)
RSA	Revenu de solidarité active
SE	Sweden
SEK	Swedish crown (currency)
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
SMSD	Severe material and social deprivation
SO	Specific objective
SP	Single-parent households
VAT	Value-added tax

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The European Union (EU) is undergoing significant **demographic change**, with profound implications for labour markets, welfare systems and family life. At the same time, **societal shifts** including increased labour force participation among women and changing partnership norms are reshaping family life, with increasingly diverse family forms across the EU. **Varied household forms**, such as large, single-parent, blended, and living apart together families, have specific support needs but also experience shared pressures to reconcile family aspirations with rising costs of living. **Large families and single-parent households face particularly high risk of poverty**, material deprivation and social exclusion, compared to two-parent families with only two children. Understanding the policies that can best support these families is an important priority for the Member States.

Aim and methodology

The analysis used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis (EU-LFS and EU-SILC) with qualitative research (literature review, desk research, policy mapping, and stakeholder consultations) to provide evidence-based findings and policy recommendations. The study's aims were to:

- Analyse **policies and initiatives to support large families and single-parent households** in the EU and understand the context in which these policies are implemented.
- Research the use, accessibility and impact of **Large Family Cards (LFCs) across the Member States** and explore the **feasibility of a European LFC**.
- Develop a set of **policy recommendations** for both Member State and the EU level to strengthen support for large families and single-parent households.

Findings

National and European Union policy support

In the context of significant societal shifts, **increasingly diverse families** across the EU navigate rising costs of living and work-life balance pressures. Single-parent households and large families face distinctive needs and heightened challenges. Data show a clear risk hierarchy: **single-parent households, especially those led by mothers, experience the most severe socioeconomic and health-related disadvantages**, and **large families experience above-average poverty risk** due to the costs of raising multiple children. Although family policy remains primarily a **national competence**, the role of the EU has grown in recent years through initiatives such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Work-Life Balance Directive and the European Child Guarantee. These initiatives have encouraged Member States to **improve family leave, childcare provision and child poverty strategies**. Relevant progress has been achieved, with nearly all Member States offering paternity leave and expanding early childhood education and care (ECEC); but implementation and outcomes vary. **Evidence suggests that well-compensated parental leave, adequate child benefits and affordable childcare have positive effects on parents' employment and child well-being**, although there is little evaluative evidence focused specifically on single-parent or large-family outcomes.

All Member States provide core family benefits, and many offer additional targeted measures (e.g. higher child allowances or tax credits for third and subsequent children or lone parents, maintenance guarantee schemes, extended parental leave, priority childcare access, or larger housing or utility subsidies for larger families). These **supports** help but **are often complex and fragmented**, so many eligible families do not receive all the assistance available to them. Civil society organisations play a

complementary role in some Member States by advocating for families, delivering services, innovating benefits like family cards and assisting vulnerable families in navigating complex welfare systems.

Large Family Card initiatives (LFC)

Several Member States (and regions) have family discount card schemes that grant eligible families – usually those with **3 or more children** – discounts on various goods and services. These can include reduced public transport fares, lower fees for cultural and leisure activities, and special offers from retail and utility partners. Some schemes also extend eligibility to other high-need families (such as those with a disabled child or single parents with two children). **LFCs provide modest financial relief** and a measure of symbolic recognition for larger families. Notable **innovations** include **cross-border acceptance** (for instance, the three Baltic countries mutually recognise each other's large family cards) and **digital platforms** (mobile apps showing available discounts). However, the **overall impact** on household finances **is limited** – the savings cover only a small fraction of costs, and success depends on voluntary participation by service providers. Uptake varies, often constrained by low awareness or administrative hurdles.

Stakeholders consulted generally viewed a potential European LFC as a way to improve recognition and ensure that large families can access benefits when visiting or moving to other Member States. They stressed that **any European LFC should complement, not replace, national schemes**. Key considerations include **inclusive eligibility** (covering families with 3 or more children and similarly high caregiving needs), **integration with national systems** (e.g. via **mutual recognition** so that a national card is valid EU-wide) and **strong partner engagement** to offer meaningful discounts. Without sufficient benefits and **user-friendliness**, a European LFC would have limited added value; thus careful and **consultative design** is needed.

Conclusions and recommendations

Better support for large families and single parents is crucial to reduce child poverty, foster social inclusion, and help parents balance work and family life. Key policy recommendations include:

EU level:

- Establish **definitions** of large families and single-parent households.
- Facilitate **coordination and mutual learning** on family policy through existing EU frameworks.
- Promote **better work-life balance and job quality** (e.g. flexible work arrangements, incentives for fathers to take parental leave and action against workplace bias toward single parents or those with many children).
- Improve **data on diverse family forms** in EU monitoring, fund research and social innovation to identify what works for single parents and large families and consider a **"family impact assessment"** for new EU policies.
- Consider including a separate **indicator for family policies** in the new Multiannual Financial Framework and its performance regulation and update variables in EU social surveys to reflect the complexity of contemporary family structures including blended families and multigenerational households.

Member States:

- Simplify and **integrate benefits** and services to **improve access** (e.g. one-stop information, automatic entitlements).
- Offer **targeted assistance** to single-parent households and large families (for housing, utilities, food, school needs) and ensure that benefits are adequate to living costs and family size.

- Ensure **parental leave** is well-compensated and gender-balanced, with provisions so a single parent can use leave that would otherwise be lost by an absent partner.
- Ensure affordable, quality **early childhood education and care (ECEC)** with priority for single-parent and low-income large families.
- Make **maintenance and tax systems more inclusive** (e.g. via refundable credits).

European LFC:

- Develop the initiative via **consultation**, working with families, national authorities and stakeholders to design a European LFC, clearly defining its goals (e.g. cost-of-living relief, mobility, recognition) and ensuring **broad eligibility**.
- Build on existing family cards by using **mutual recognition or co-branding**, rather than creating a separate system.
- Ensure **partner buy-in and usability** by attracting a wide range of partners and creating a multilingual digital app.
- **Pilot** the scheme in a few countries with **robust monitoring** of its **impact** before scaling up EU-wide, building on learnings from previous similar initiatives (e.g. the European Disability Card, the recently announced European Child Guarantee card pilot initiative).
- Consider using **centralised EU funds**, such as the European Regional Development Fund, for **building** the **digital infrastructure** of the LFC model, while also leveraging EU funds allocated on a Member-State level, such as the European Social Fund Plus, for anti-poverty measures that the LFC could encompass.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context and scope

The EU is undergoing a profound demographic transformation. Fertility rates have almost halved in the past six decades, while life expectancy at birth has increased by 10 years in the same period, leading to a shrinking working-age population and rising old-age dependency ratios^{1 2}. These trends can pose long-term challenges for the sustainability of welfare systems, labour markets, and social cohesion across the EU. At the same time, many Europeans report a gap between the number of children they would like to have and the number they actually have, often due to economic pressures, limited access to childcare, and difficulties reconciling work and family life³. The full diversity of families across the EU, including large, single-parent, blended, and living apart together households, face common challenges amid significant societal shifts. In the context of increased labour force participation among women and changing partnership norms, recognition of and adaptation to the support needs of families is an important priority.

In the EU, 22.1% of households with dependent children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in 2025, compared to 19.8% of households without children⁴. Large families and single-parent households are particularly affected by these challenges, with even greater risks of poverty and social exclusion, greater financial strain, and more complex caregiving responsibilities⁵. These groups experience related barriers to employment, housing, and access to services, which can further entrench disadvantage. Despite increasing diversity among families in the EU, large families and single parent households are also subject to enduring stigma.

Member States have implemented a wide range of policies to support families, including financial transfers, tax benefits, parental leave, and childcare services. However, the scope, generosity, and accessibility of these measures vary considerably across countries. At the EU level, several initiatives – such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Work-Life Balance Directive, the European Child Guarantee, and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child – aim to promote family well-being and social inclusion. Yet, there is growing interest in exploring how EU action could be further strengthened to address demographic challenges and support families more effectively.

One area of particular interest is the use of large family cards, which offer discounts or preferential access to services for families with multiple children. While several Member States operate such

¹ Eurostat, 2025, *Fertility statistics*. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Fertility_statistics#Almost_2_times_fewer_children_born_in_the_EU_in_2023_than_6_decades_ago.

² European Commission, 2022, *Europe's demography, youth and diversity: Making change happen*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/state-union/state-union-2022/europes-demography-youth-and-diversity-making-change-happen_en.

³ Riedrich, C. & Bujard, M., 2025, *Intended, ideal, and actual fertility in 11 European countries: Evidence on fertility gaps in different age groups from the Generations and Gender Survey*. BiB Working Paper 2/2025. Wiesbaden: Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB). Available at: https://www.bib.bund.de/Publikation/2025/pdf/Intended-ideal-and-actual-fertility-in-11-European-countries-Evidence-on-fertility-gaps-in-different-age-groups-from-the-Generations-and-Gender-Survey.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2.

⁴ Eurostat, 2025, *Living conditions in Europe – poverty and social exclusion*. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion.

⁵ OECD, 2011, *Doing Better for Families*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264098732-en>.

schemes, their design, coverage, and recognition vary widely, and there is currently no EU-wide framework for mutual recognition or coordination.

Against this backdrop, the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) commissioned this study to provide a comprehensive assessment of national and EU-level initiatives supporting large families and single-parent households. The study also explores the feasibility and added value of a potential European Large Family Card and aims to develop evidence-based policy recommendations to enhance support for these families across the EU.

The study covers all 27 EU Member States and the EU as a whole. It draws on recent data, policy documents, and stakeholder insights to provide a comparative analysis of trends, challenges, and promising practices. The findings are intended to inform the European Parliament's legislative and policy work.

1.2. Study approach, objectives and methods

The primary objective of this study is to map and assess national and EU-level initiatives supporting large families and single-parent households, with a view to identifying effective practices and informing future policy development, including the potential introduction of a European LFC. The study follows a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis of harmonised datasets, structured desk research and a light-touch literature review, policy mapping, and targeted stakeholder consultations. This approach ensures both breadth – through EU-wide coverage – and depth – through qualitative insights into national contexts and implementation experiences. Further information on the study's objectives and methods is detailed in Annex 1 – Objectives and methods.

1.3. Definitions of single parents and large families

There is no universal definition of a "large family" or "single-parent" household at the EU level. The legal definition of a large family varies across the Member States. In some countries, it is explicitly set out in legislation, for example in Germany (three or more children), Greece (four or more children), Latvia (three or more children), Slovakia (four or more children), and Cyprus (four or more children). By contrast, no formal legal definition exists in countries such as Hungary, Romania, and Italy⁶. The definition of large family can also vary *within* states owing to other criteria. For example, in Spain, current legislation already extends large-family status to households with two children if a child or parent has a qualifying disability. Furthermore, a pending bill aims to expand these benefits and officially equate single-parent families with two children, and families headed by a victim of gender violence to large families⁷. The operationalisation of large family to encompass a range of families with greater support needs is an important innovation in the Member States' initiatives, and these are highlighted throughout the study. However, for international comparability using available data, the quantitative analysis included in this study defines large family as households with three or more

⁶ Stamoulis, D. and Pierrakos, G., 2023, *What constitutes a large family today? A multi-dimensional approach*, *Advances in Social Sciences and Management*, 1, 4, 7. Available at: <https://hspublishing.org/ASSM/article/view/81>.

⁷ Congreso de los Diputados, 2024, *Proyecto de Ley de Familias*, Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales, Serie A: Proyectos de Ley, 11-1, Madrid. Available at: https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L15/CONG/BOCG/A/BOCG-15-A-11-1.PDF.

children under the age of 18. For the purpose of the quantitative analysis in this study, single-parent households (also referred to as “lone parents” or “one-parent families”) are defined as households with only one adult and at least one child under the age of 18. To allow for comparative benchmarking of the specific vulnerabilities experienced by single-parent households and large families, the study also defines a “reference household”. This control group is strictly defined as households with two parents and exactly two children.

1.4. Report structure

The report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1** sets out the context of the study, its objectives, and the definitions of large families and single-parent households used;
- **Chapter 2** examines national and EU-level policies supporting large families and single-parent households, analysing trends and challenges, comparing Member State approaches, assessing the role of the EU and civil society, and identifying best practices as well as gaps and shortcomings;
- **Chapter 3** focuses on LFC initiatives across Member States, providing an inventory of existing schemes, a comparative analysis of their design and impacts, and an assessment of the feasibility and added value of a potential European LFC; and
- **Chapter 4** presents the overall conclusions and policy recommendations.

The report is complemented by 4 **annexes**: 1) Objectives and methods, 2) Overview of core benefits by country, 3) Inventory of EU family card systems, and 4) Country factsheets (in Volume 2).

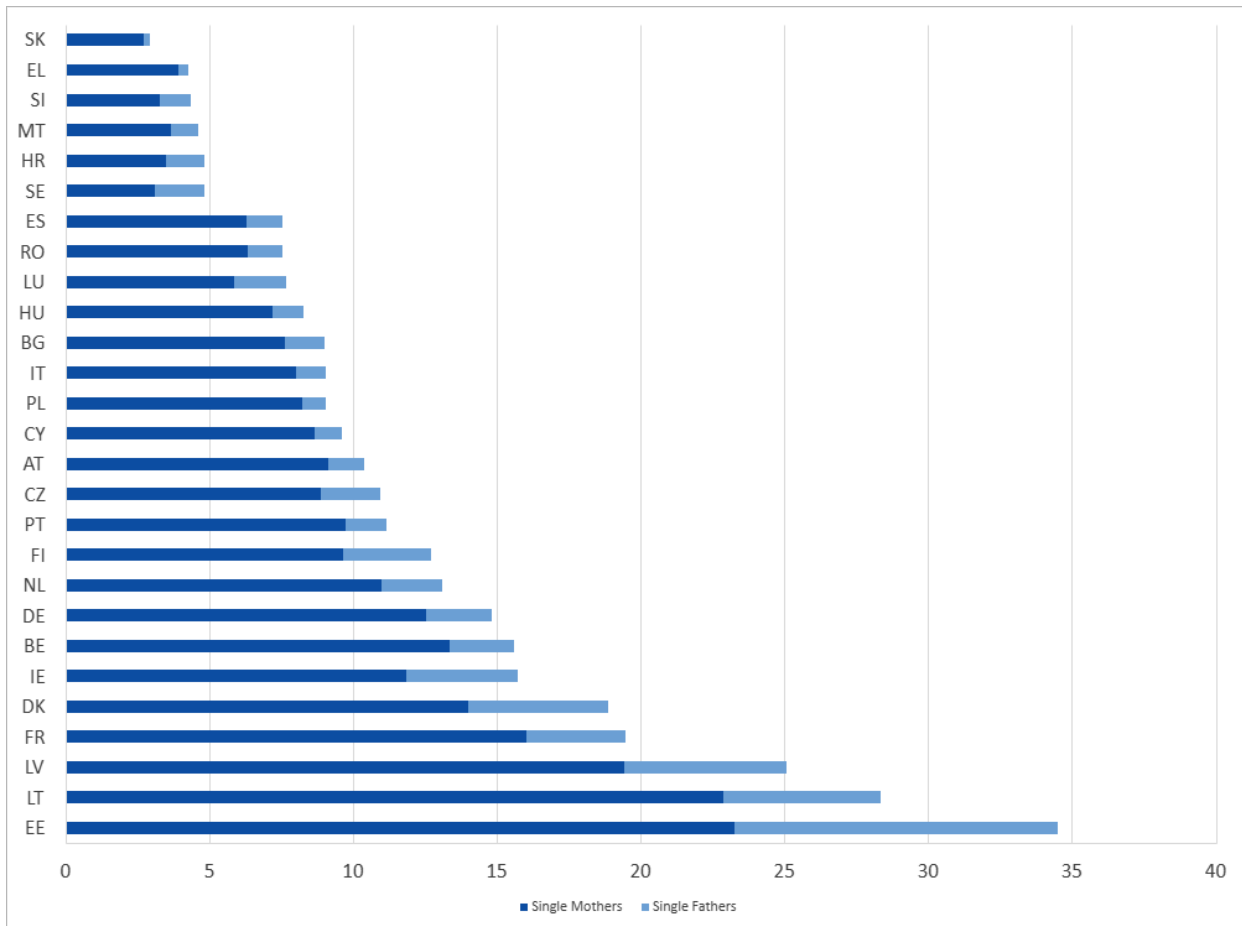
2. NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN UNION POLICIES SUPPORTING LARGE FAMILIES AND SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

2.1. Overview of trends and challenges

2.1.1. Demographic profile and prevalence

Analysis of EU-LFS data highlights that the prevalence of large families and single-parent households varies significantly across Member States. Single-parent households are overwhelmingly female-headed, with an average of 83.0% of single-parent households headed by a woman across the EU-27. In terms of the prevalence of single-parent households, **Estonia** records the highest figures for single-parent households, with approximately 34.5% of households headed by a lone parent (23.2% single mothers and 11.3% single fathers), followed by **Lithuania** and **Latvia** (Figure 1). Conversely, **Slovakia** and **Greece** report the lowest rates of single-parent households.

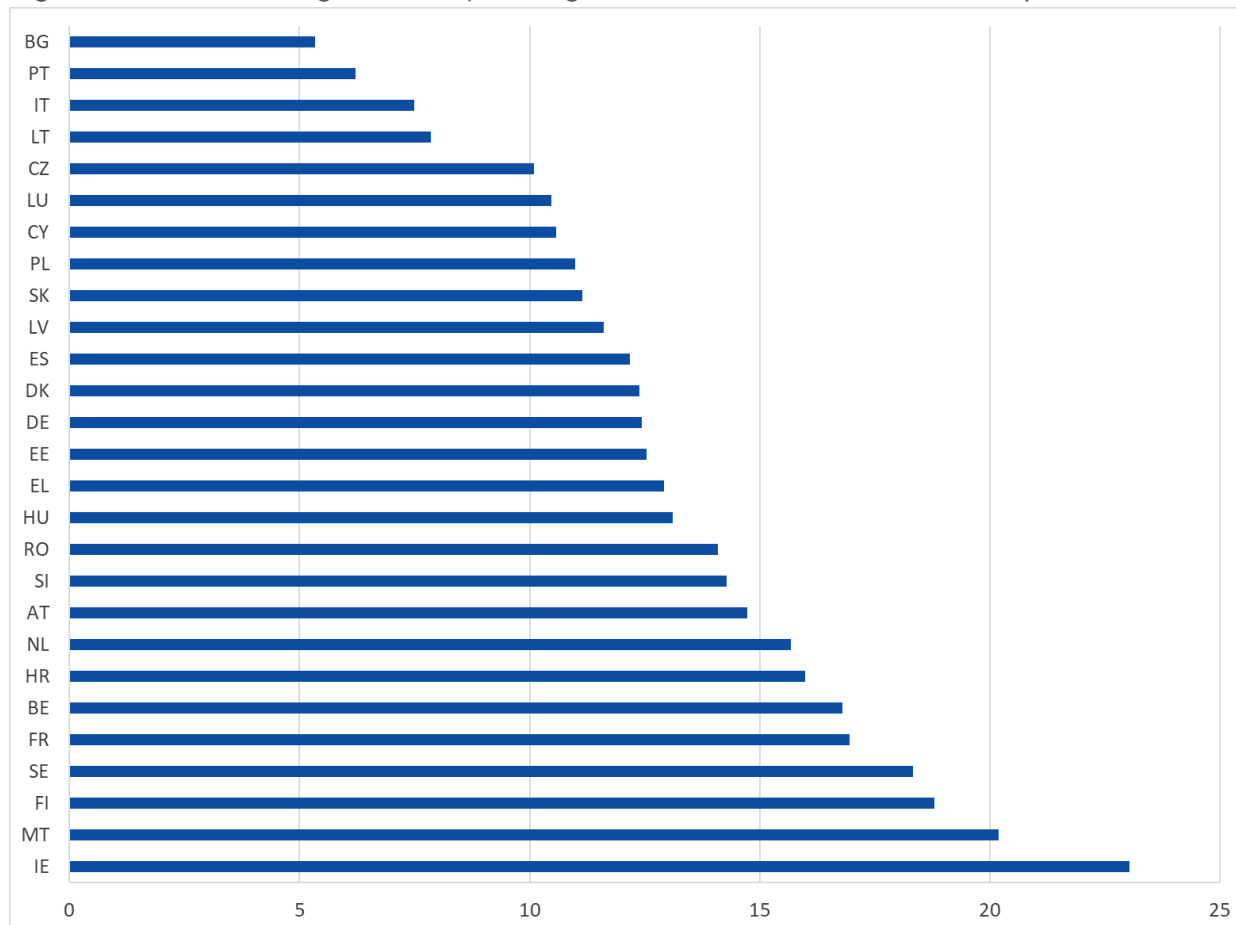
Figure 1: Share of single parent households (mothers and fathers) by Member State



Source: EU LFS 2023.

The pattern for large families (households with three or more children) differs significantly (Figure 2). **Ireland** shows the highest prevalence of large families at 23.0%, followed by **Malta** (20.2%) and **Finland** (18.8%).

Figure 2: Share of large families, among all households with children by Member State



Source: EU LFS 2023.

These family types also exhibit distinct geographic and socioeconomic concentrations. Single-parent households are disproportionately concentrated in cities (47.0%) and densely populated areas, and they show a higher prevalence of low educational attainment (20.4%) compared to reference households of two parents and two children (14.1%). Furthermore, these family structures intersect strongly with migration status: single-parent households exhibit a higher share of non-EU-born parents (15.1%) compared to the benchmark group (11.9%), while large families show the most pronounced intersection, with 23.9% having non-EU-born parents.

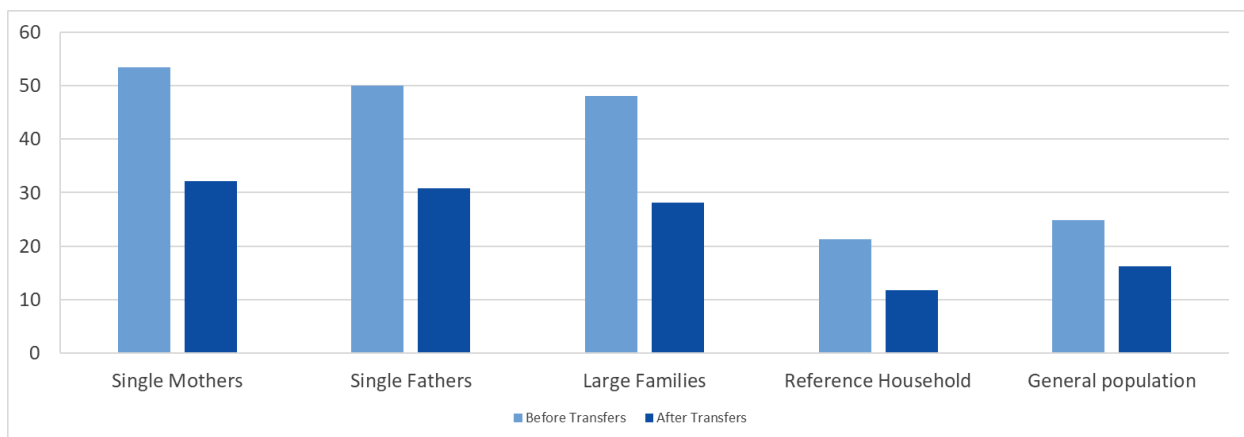
2.1.2. The hierarchy of poverty risk

The analysis of EU-SILC data on risk of poverty and social exclusion reveals a clear stratification of economic vulnerability across family types. Households are considered at risk of poverty (AROP) if their equivalised disposable income is below the threshold of 60.0% of the national equivalised disposable income⁸.

⁸ Eurostat, 2026, *Glossary: At-risk-of-poverty rate*. European Commission, accessed 13 May 2026. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At-risk-of-poverty_rate.

While social welfare systems are highly active, they are not a panacea for poverty risk. Based on the EU-27 average, individuals in single-mother households face a pre-transfer poverty risk of 53.4% (Figure 3). Social transfers effectively reduce this rate by approximately 21 percentage points, yet the residual vulnerability remains high at 32.2%. A similar mitigation effect is seen for large families, whose pre-transfer risk of 48.0% is reduced to 28.1% after child-related benefits are applied. In stark contrast, the reference household maintains a poverty rate of only 11.8% after transfers.

Figure 3: Impact of social transfers on the at risk of poverty rate of individuals by family type



Source: Authors' own calculation based on EU SILC 2023.

2.1.3. Multidimensional exclusion and material deprivation

Looking only at income poverty (measured by the AROP rate, which flags those earning below 60% of the median income after social transfers) misses the bigger picture captured by the broader rate of AROPE. The AROPE rate captures the share of households who are at risk of poverty, as well as those who are severely and socially deprived, or living in a household with very low work intensity⁹. Individuals living in single-mother households are especially vulnerable here: while 32.2% face income poverty, their overall risk of poverty or social exclusion jumps to 43.9% (both shares after social transfers).

This 12-point difference – which is the widest gap across all family types examined here (see Figure 4) – represents households that sit above the income poverty line but still face severe exclusion. Just over half of the gap (53.9%) is related to low work intensity¹⁰. Even if welfare transfers push single mother households above the income poverty line, many single mothers still work part-time or not at all, keeping their households below the work-intensity threshold. Another large portion (41.6%) is tied to severe material and social deprivation. This suggests that even when households sit just above the relative income poverty line, they can still face severe material constraints. These material constraints

⁹ Eurostat, 2026, *Glossary: At risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)*. European Commission, accessed 12 May 2026. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_\(AROPE\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_(AROPE)).

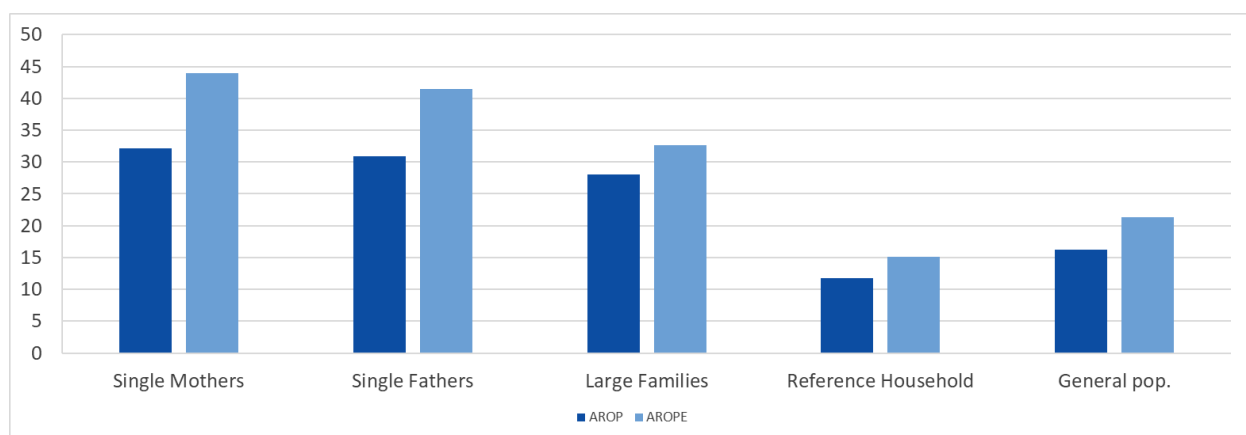
¹⁰ To decompose this "exclusion gap" (the population that is AROPE but not AROP), we rely on the formal definition of the AROPE indicator. Because AROPE requires a household to face at least one of three conditions – income poverty (AROP), low work intensity (LWI), or severe material and social deprivation (SMSD) – anyone in the gap must be facing LWI or SMSD. We first calculate the share of individuals in the gap who have confirmed LWI. Those remaining in the gap who do not have LWI are inferred to be facing SMSD. (A small remaining share is unclassified due to missing LWI survey data).

might include the ability to maintain a warm home, replace worn-out clothes or shoes, or participate in social activities¹¹.

In absolute terms, single mother households experience the highest rate of exclusion driven strictly by severe material and social deprivation. Specifically, 5.1% of all single-mother households fall into this non-monetary exclusion due to material deprivation, facing the harshest material conditions, but not facing the income poverty. For instance, 18.8% cannot afford to heat their homes properly, compared to 14.1% of single father households, 11.7% of large family households, and 7.2% of reference households.

Interestingly, while severe material and social deprivation is the secondary cause of this gap for single mother households (because low work intensity plays such a massive role), it is the primary cause for other household types. It makes up 53.1% of the gap for single father households, 58.5% for large family households, and 74.1% for reference households. This shows that while material deprivation is the most widespread driver of non-monetary exclusion across all family types, the absolute impact remains most severe for single mothers due to their significantly higher overall exclusion rates.

Figure 4: Income poverty and multidimensional exclusion rates for individuals by family type

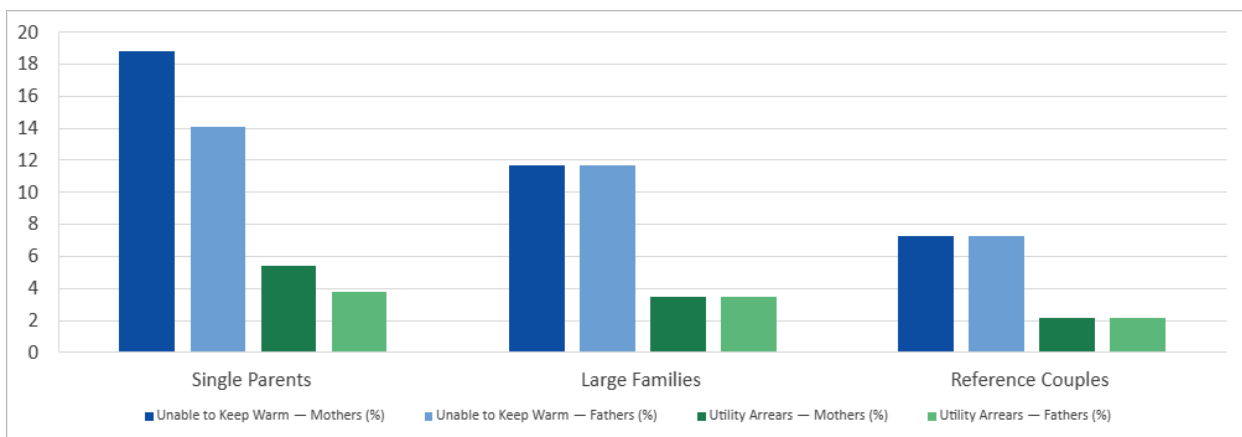


Source: Authors' own calculation based on EU SILC 2023.

This gap highlights that families can be pulled into exclusion by non-monetary material hardships. Energy deprivation is a particularly acute form: across both heating affordability and utility arrears, single-mother households face rates that exceed the reference benchmark by a factor of two or more (Figure 5). Large families face a compounded risk where the cost of maintaining a larger household leads to material deprivation even when their income is technically adequate.

¹¹Eurostat, 2026, *Glossary: Severe material and social deprivation rate (SMSD)*. European Commission, accessed 12 May 2026. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Severe_material_and_social_deprivation_rate_\(SMSD\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Severe_material_and_social_deprivation_rate_(SMSD)).

Figure 5: Share of households facing energy poverty and utility arrears by family type

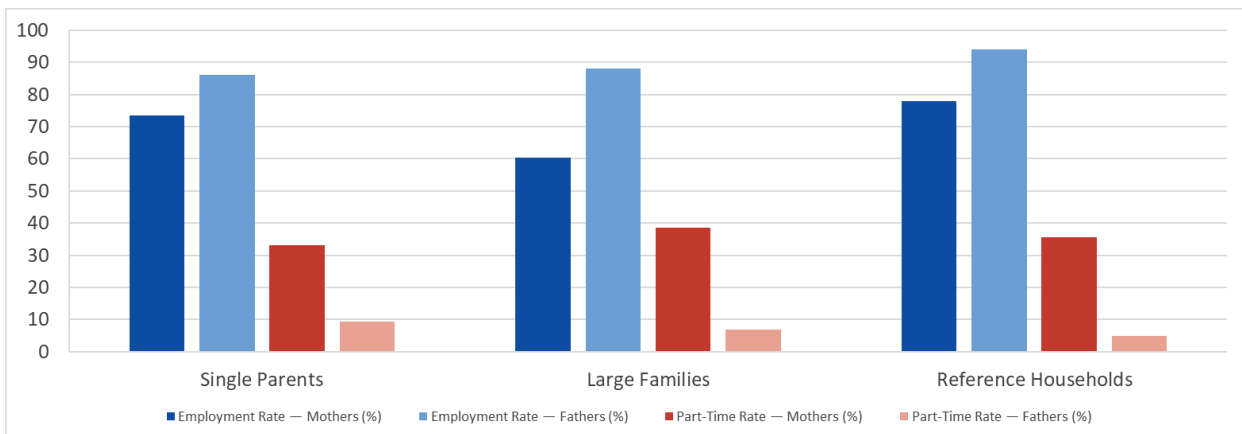


Source: Authors' own calculation based on EU SILC 2023.

2.1.4. Labour market barriers and in-work poverty

The labour market profile of these families reveals significant disparities heavily influenced by structural barriers. Fathers consistently demonstrate the highest attachment to the labour market across all household types. Conversely, mothers in large families face the most severe barriers to the labour market, with an employment rate of only 60.4% (Figure 6). Single mothers show a relatively high employment rate of 73.4%, presumably due to the economic necessity of being the sole earner.

Figure 6: Employment and part-time employment rates of parents by family type



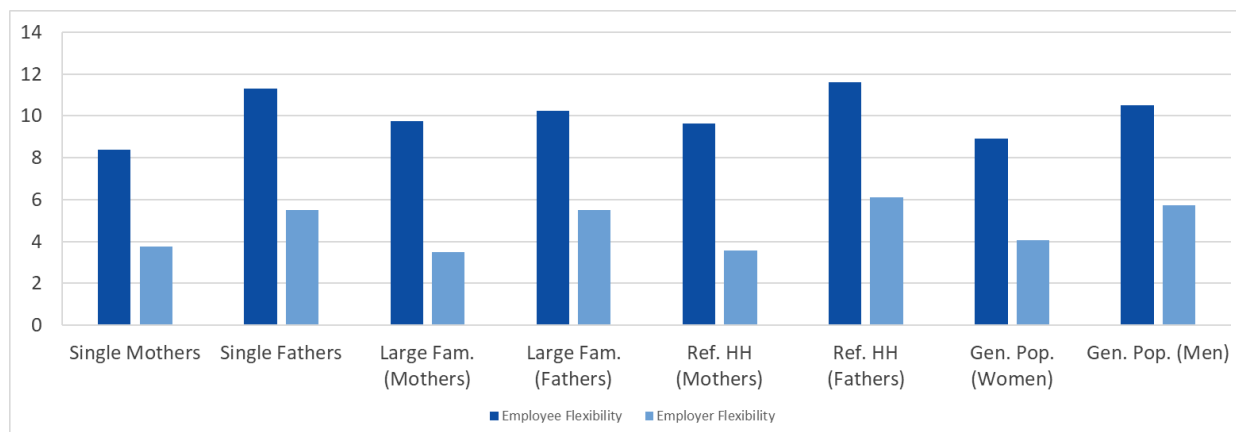
Source: Authors' own calculation based on EU LFS 2023.

Working conditions further exacerbate these challenges. Part-time employment remains a predominantly female phenomenon, but single mothers rely less on part-time arrangements (33.0%) compared to mothers in other household types, likely because they cannot afford reduced hours. Furthermore, single mothers record the lowest employee-driven working time flexibility of all groups (8.4%), significantly limiting their autonomy to schedule hours around care duties compared to fathers in reference households (11.6%) (Figure 7)¹². High employment rates do not guarantee financial security;

¹² Flexibility metrics are based on the 2019 EU Labour Force Survey Ad-Hoc Module. "Employee-driven flexibility" measures worker autonomy, capturing employees who can fully or partially decide the start and end of their working hours (based on the VARIWT

single mothers face an in-work poverty risk of 28.4%, while mothers in large families and reference households face risks of 17.1% and 7.7% respectively¹³.

Figure 7: Working time flexibility of parents by family type



Source: Authors' own calculation based on EU LFS 2019.

2.1.5. Health constraints and child disability

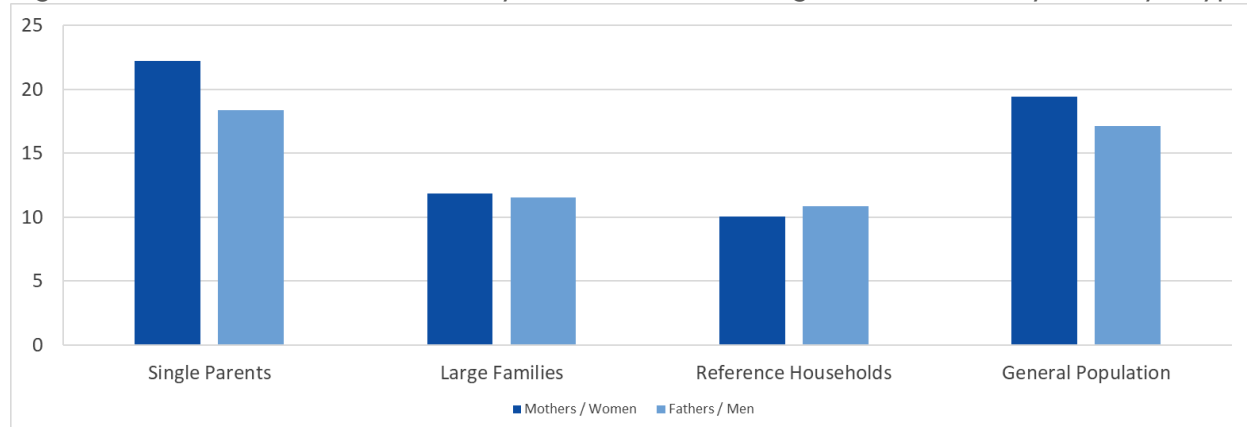
Crucially, parental labour market participation is often maintained despite severe health limitations. Single mothers report the highest prevalence of activity limitations due to health problems as measured by the Global Activity Limitation Indicator (GALI) among all groups at 22.2% (Figure 8)¹⁴. This is more than double the rate of mothers in reference households (10.0%), indicating that single mothers must engage in the workforce while managing disproportionately high levels of disability.

variable). "Employer-driven flexibility" captures schedule unpredictability, measuring employees who face unforeseen demands from their employer to change their working hours at least once a week (based on the FLEXWT variable).

¹³ In-work poverty risk is calculated using EU-SILC 2023 data. It is defined as the share of currently employed adults (aged 18 and over) whose household equivalised disposable income falls below the AROP threshold, which is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers.

¹⁴ GALI measures a respondent's self-assessment of whether they face long-standing limitations – meaning those lasting six months or more – in activities that people usually do, specifically due to health problems. The indicator categorises the severity of these limitations into three levels: severely limited, limited but not severely, or not limited at all. Because of how it measures these ongoing limitations, GALI can be used as a proxy for disability.

Figure 8: Prevalence of activity limitations among individuals by family type



Source: Authors' own calculation based on EU SILC 2023.

2.1.6. Child disability and unmet healthcare needs

The heightened risk of poverty or social exclusion experienced by single-parent households and large families is associated with elevated risks of childhood disability and restricted access to necessary healthcare¹⁵.

The prevalence of childhood disability – defined as an activity limitation due to health problems – is disproportionately concentrated in lower-income households. In 2024, 5.1% of children living in households at risk of poverty had a moderate or severe disability, compared to 4.3% in households above this threshold¹⁶. Because single parents and large families face the highest risk of poverty (Figure 3), they are also much more likely to face the added challenge of caring for a child with a disability. Beyond the prevalence of disability, living in a single-parent household directly exacerbates a child's risk of facing unmet medical and dental needs. In 2024, 5.0% of children living in single-adult households with dependent children reported having unmet needs for medical examination or treatment¹⁷. This rate is significantly higher than the 2.9% observed among children living in households composed of two or more adults. This disparity is even more pronounced regarding dental care. Across the EU, 6.5% of children in single-adult households experienced unmet needs for dental examination or treatment, compared to just 3.7% of children in households with two or more adults.

Consequently, children in single-parent households and large families facing high poverty risks not only experience higher rates of moderate to severe disabilities, but those in single-parent structures simultaneously face acute barriers to accessing essential medical and dental treatments.

2.2. Analysis of the European Union role and impact

This section summaries European Union initiatives supporting large families and single parents, based on desk research and consultations with stakeholders. EU initiatives in this area are not concentrated in a single policy stream, but span across the areas of children's rights, worker's rights, gender equality

¹⁵ Eurostat., 2025, *Health statistics—Children*, European Commission, statistics Explained, accessed 13 May 2026. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Health_statistics_-_children.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

and social inclusion policies. The EU does not have full competence in social policy and in areas of family support and largely operates through soft law that serves to set benchmarks, monitor progress, and coordinate action, rather than a mandate to enforce. Implementation of these initiatives is at the discretion of Member States. Thus, single parents and large family households, which often intersect with vulnerable categories, rely more heavily on Member States' policy. Nevertheless, there are some legislative instruments establishing binding provisions relevant to families, alongside key non-binding strategies and other mechanisms through which the EU can shape national policy choices.

Legislative instruments cover work-life balance (**Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers**), protection of mothers (**Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth**) and equal treatment in employment (**Directive 2006/54 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation**).

The Work-Life Balance Directive, transposed into Member State Law by August 2022, has been seen as a "milestone" in providing family support and de-gendering work, and has led to an expansion of paid paternity leave in countries such as **Belgium** and **Spain**¹⁸. In practical terms, the four main requirements, subject to monitoring, are paternity leave for fathers or second parents of at least 10 working days; parental leave of four months, of which two months are non-transferable and adequately compensated; carers' leave of five working days per year, and the right of carers to request flexible working arrangements¹⁹. However, there were still instances of non-compliance, for example with the non-transferable portion of parental leave, and variation across countries²⁰.

EU legislative instruments are supplemented by a variety of other non-binding instruments, only some of which explicitly recognise large families and single parent households as important groups at risk of social and economic exclusion. Key soft law instruments include the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**, proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission in 2017²¹. The Pillar establishes 20 principles covering a range of policy areas influencing the social rights of European families. The principles most directly concerning families include Principle 2 on gender equality; Principle 3 on equal opportunities; Principle 4 on active support to employment; Principle 5 on secure and adaptable employment; Principle 9 on work-life balance; Principle 11 on childcare and support to children; and Principle 12 on social protection.

¹⁸ European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), 2025, Maternity and paternity leave in the EU, At a glance, European Parliament, Luxembourg. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2025/769505/EPRS_ATA\(2025\)769505_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2025/769505/EPRS_ATA(2025)769505_EN.pdf).

¹⁹ European Commission, 2025, *Work-life balance*, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/rights-work/labour-law/working-conditions/work-life-balance_en.

²⁰ Zumbyte, I. and Szelewa, D., 2024, Assessing compliance: implementation of the EU's Work-life Balance Directive in European countries, Working Paper 4/2024, Deliverable 4.4, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, Luxembourg. Available at: <https://transeuroworks.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/4.2024.Assessing-Compliance.-Implementation-of-EUs-Work-life-Balance-Directive-in-European-Countries.pdf>.

²¹ European Commission, 2021, *European Pillar of Social Rights: building a fairer and more inclusive European Union*, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union_en.

The **EPSR Action Plan**, adopted in 2021, operationalised these principles by transforming them into measurable targets²². They included a commitment to reduce the number of people in the EU at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030, of whom at least 5 million should be children²³. The action plan also supports stronger national implementation mechanisms, building on the social commitments reaffirmed in **the Porto Declaration and Porto Social Commitment** (2021) and the **La Hulpe Declaration** (2024)^{24 25 26}. A new EPSR Action Plan, scheduled for publication in 2026, will build on the achievements of the 2021 Action Plan to support progress towards the 2030 targets on employment, skills and poverty reduction while safeguarding high social standards²⁷.

EU-level communications consistently emphasise that access to adequate resources and affordable, high-quality services is central to meeting both family level and child level needs. For example, the European Commission's **Recommendation 2013/112/EU, Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage**, identifies three interlinked pillars for addressing disadvantage: access to adequate resources, access to affordable quality services, and children's right to participate²⁸. Similarly, the Commission's **Communication on demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action** highlights that labour market integration, access to essential services and the availability of affordable, energy-efficient housing are key determinants of European citizens' ability to start a family²⁹.

In the longer term, EU agenda in social and family policy is shaped by topical **EU-level strategies**. The **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child** (2022–2027)³⁰ is particularly relevant for single-parent households, both in its recognition of heightened poverty risks and through the **European Child Guarantee**³¹, which provides the main implementation vehicle. The Strategy on the Rights of the Child calls on EU Member States to improve the functioning of child protection systems at national level and acknowledges that the poverty risk for children raised by a single parent is up to three times higher

²² European Commission, 2021, *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ European Council, 2021, *The Porto Declaration*, adopted at the Porto Social Summit, 7–8 May 2021, Council of the European Union. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/05/08/the-porto-declaration/>.

²⁵ European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European social partners, 2021, Porto Social Commitment, Porto Social Summit, 7 May 2021. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23974&langId=en>.

²⁶ La Hulpe Declaration on the Future of the European Pillar of Social Rights, 2024, archival documents of the Belgian Presidency, 4. Available at: <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12710/20240718201828/https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/bj0adazv/declaration-finale.pdf>.

²⁷ European Commission, 2025, *Commission seeks views on new Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights*, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-seeks-views-new-action-plan-implement-european-pillar-social-rights-2025-06-18_en.

²⁸ European Commission, 2013, Commission Recommendation of 20 February 2013 on investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage (2013/112/EU), Official Journal of the European Union, L 59, 5–16. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112>.

²⁹ European Commission, 2023, *Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM(2023) 577 final). Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0577>.

³⁰ European Commission, 2021, EU strategy on the rights of the child, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM(2021) 142 final), European Commission. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0142>.

³¹ Council of the European Union, 2021, Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee, Official Journal of the European Union, L 223, 14–23. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021H1004>.

than that of other children³². In practical terms, the European Child Guarantee covers a broad range of policy areas, including ECEC, education, healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing³³. As part of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (detailed below), the European Commission published a **Communication on a strengthened European Child Guarantee** (2026)³⁴. The Communication acknowledges the need to focus on households where children live, including ensuring that adult members of the households have quality employment. It also stresses the need to strengthen the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, for example through better outreach to vulnerable children and consistent support in transitions from childhood into adulthood. Finally, the Commission calls for more robust monitoring of tackling child poverty in the EU³⁵.

In order to implement the objectives of the European Child Guarantee, Member States prepare National Action Plans and report on their implementation progress every two years. Given the EU's limited competence in social policy, Member States retain discretion on which policies are implemented and which instruments are used. To date, specific emphasis within policy implemented by Member States has been placed on ECEC, as well as universal school meals. By contrast, other areas covered by the European Child Guarantee, such as adequate housing, have received much less attention from Member States, in part due to the considerable diversity in social housing prevalence and access across contexts³⁶. Thus, addressing the multi-dimensional needs of single-parent households and large families through the European Child Guarantee remains uneven across policy areas and national contexts.

On 6 May 2026, the European Commission presented the first-ever **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**, which integrates and expands on the existing commitments across the EPSR and the European Child Guarantee³⁷. The strategy highlights that one in five EU citizens, and one in four children in the EU, are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Specifically, children growing up in single-parent families are identified as vulnerable, as "22.9% of EU children AROPE live in single-parent households"³⁸. The Strategy also notes the impacts of childcare responsibilities on women's employment rates, which are 10 percentage points lower on average than those of men³⁹.

³² European Commission, 2021, EU strategy on the rights of the child, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM(2021) 142 final). Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0142>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ European Commission, 2026, Breaking the cycle of child poverty – strengthening the European Child Guarantee. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7f60af79-936f-42b3-a6c4-a4639c6679ff_en?filename=EC-anti-poverty_ECG_2026.pdf, accessed 8 May 2026.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ EU-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

³⁷ European Commission, 'EU Anti-Poverty Strategy', accessed 6 May 2026. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ec5447e3-9f62-4c6b-b53b-af7dad8524eb_en?filename=EC-anti-poverty_proposal_2026.pdf.

³⁸ European Commission, 2026, Commission staff working document reviewing progress made in the implementation of the Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b66da2ac-90e9-4756-a31d-c1bac1e541b7_en?filename=Commission%20Staff%20Working%20Document%20-%20Progress%20Implementation%20European%20Child%20Guarante.pdf.

³⁹ European Commission, 'EU Anti-Poverty Strategy', accessed 6 May 2026, 6. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ec5447e3-9f62-4c6b-b53b-af7dad8524eb_en?filename=EC-anti-poverty_proposal_2026.pdf.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy proposes an overarching framework across three strands of work aiming to eradicate poverty by 2050. The first strand focuses on tackling poverty across every age group, from childhood, through in-work poverty and benefit uptake challenges, until old age. The second strand of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy addresses horizontal challenges such as housing and access to services. The final strand focuses on strengthening governance and funding and improving monitoring to reduce and prevent poverty.

The **Gender Equality Strategy (2026–2030)** and the **European Care Strategy (2022)** are two further strategies highly relevant to family policy. **The Gender Equality Strategy** acknowledges that single parents are largely women and recognises the higher risks of poverty and social exclusion they face. It evokes the Council Recommendation from January 2023 on adequate minimum income to ensure active inclusion of vulnerable groups including single parents⁴⁰. This recommendation speaks to Principle 14 (minimum income) of the EPSR and calls on Member States to “facilitate the take-up of minimum income by single-parent households, predominantly headed by women”. It does not require transposition into national law; however, it is used as a benchmark in the European Semester reporting process.

The European Care Strategy (2022) included the Council Recommendation on Early Childhood Education and Care which updated the original **Barcelona Targets** from 2002⁴¹. The new Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care for 2030 are that at least 45% of children below the age of three participate in ECEC, with specific targets for Member States that have not reached the 2002 goals⁴². In addition, at least 96% of children between the age of three and the starting age of compulsory primary education should participate in ECEC. This is with the view that a sufficient number of hours of ECEC would enable parents to engage in paid work⁴³. A second key recommendation falling under the European Care Strategy is the Council Recommendation on Access to Affordable High-Quality Long-Term Care, which focuses on long-term high-quality care and fair treatment of carers, both formal and informal⁴⁴.

To support progress towards ambitions outlined in these EU strategies, EU **funding instruments** are being used in complementary ways to support large families and single parent households, primarily through investments in childcare, employment, social inclusion and service infrastructure.

⁴⁰ European Commission, 2026, *Gender equality strategy 2026–2030*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM(2026) 113 final), 9. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/1f5fa936-9fba-4435-93f5-32fa220bac82_en?filename=gender-equality-strategy-2026-2030.pdf.

⁴¹ European Parliament, 2022, *European Care Strategy*, Legislative Train Schedule – Promoting our European Way of Life. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-promoting-our-european-way-of-life/file-european-care-strategy>.

⁴² Council of the European Union, 2022, *Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030*, Document ST 14785/22, Council of the European Union. Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14785-2022-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁴³ European Parliament, 2026, *European Care Strategy*, Legislative Train Schedule. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-promoting-our-european-way-of-life/file-european-care-strategy>.

⁴⁴ Council of the European Union, 2022, *Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care*, Official Journal of the European Union C 476/01. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2022_476_R_0001.

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility**⁴⁵, as part of NextGenerationEU, has financed reforms and investments with indirect but significant relevance for these groups, notably through measures to expand the availability, affordability and quality of early childhood education and care, strengthen active labour market policies, and invest in social housing and social infrastructure. Longer term cohesion instruments, in particular the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**⁴⁶ and the **European Regional Development Fund**⁴⁷, provide sustained support for employment, skills development, poverty reduction and access to services.

Under the Child Guarantee, Member States whose child poverty rates exceed the EU average (23.4 AROPE, 2017–2019) should dedicate at least 5% of their ESF+ allocation to addressing child poverty⁴⁸. The key areas of ESF+, which are employment, education and skills, and social inclusion, are further divided into specific objectives (SO), of which many are relevant to families. These include SO(c): “gender-balanced labour market participation”; SO(f) “quality and inclusive education and training systems”; SO(j) “integrating marginalised communities”; and SO(m) “addressing material deprivation”⁴⁹. However, there is not a single category that would group figures on family support, and family as a thematic area only appears on a Member State level. For example, **Germany** named “support for families” as one of the main thematic areas for their 2021–2027 ESF+ funded projects⁵⁰. In March 2025, the European Parliament voted to keep ESF+ separate from other funds and called on the Commission to provide “increased, dedicated and well-allocated funding”⁵¹. This support for a standalone ESF+ has been maintained by the European Parliament following the Commission’s proposal for the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034)⁵², which foresees the merging of several funding instruments under the new National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs)⁵³.

Complementing longer-term structural funds are short-term, crisis response instruments. For example, **Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe**⁵⁴ provided temporary, crisis response funding to reinforce income support, employment protection and social services during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent crises. Finally, while the Technical Support Instrument does not

⁴⁵ European Commission, 2021, *Recovery and Resilience Facility*, EU funding programme. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en.

⁴⁶ European Commission, *European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)*. Available at: <https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en>.

⁴⁷ European Commission, 2021, *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*, EU funding programme. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-regional-development-fund-erdf_en.

⁴⁸ European Commission, 2021, *European Child Guarantee*, Investing in children, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/social-protection-social-inclusion/addressing-poverty-and-supporting-social-inclusion/investing-children/european-child-guarantee_en.

⁴⁹ European Commission, *European Social Fund Plus – data and evaluation*. Available at: <https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en/data-and-evaluation>.

⁵⁰ German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), 2025, *The European Social Fund Plus (2021–2027)*. Available at: https://www.esf.de/portal/SharedDocs/PDFs/EN/publications/37956e_esf-plus-programme-brochure-2021-2027.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4.

⁵¹ European Parliament, 2025, *Resolution of 11 March 2025 on the European Social Fund Plus post-2027*, accessed 7 May 2026. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2025-0027_EN.html.

⁵² European Parliament, 2026, *Interim Report on the proposal for a Council regulation laying down the Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2028 to 2034*. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2026-0105_EN.html.

⁵³ European Commission, 2024, *Multiannual Financial Framework*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/multiannual-financial-framework_en.

⁵⁴ European Commission, 2021, *REACT-EU (Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe)*, EU funding programme. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/react-eu_en.

provide direct financial support, it has enabled Member States to design and implement structural reforms in areas such as minimum income schemes, labour market policies and social protection systems.

At EU level, progress on policies and effective use of funding is monitored through a set of **coordination and reporting mechanisms. The European Semester**, originally created in 2010 to provide better coordination of Member States' fiscal and economic policies, had its scope widened in 2017 to include employment and social policies under the EPSR⁵⁵. As part of the European Semester, countries receive annual country-specific recommendations⁵⁶. Family-related recommendations were typically situated under "active labour market policies" and "poverty, social inclusion and social protection"⁵⁷. In the 2024 and 2025 European Semester cycles, over one third of Member States were issued a country-specific recommendation in the area of poverty⁵⁸.

European Semester Monitoring is complemented by reporting under the European Child Guarantee, cohesion policy programmes and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, helping to keep national policies aligned with EU social priorities. The European Child Guarantee Monitoring Framework draws on various surveys from the **European Statistical Office** (Eurostat), such as the EU-SILC, or the EU-LFS data as well as on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data to gather information about the numbers of children in need. It includes six sections focusing on the accessibility and quality of essential services for children's development: "(i) free high quality ECEC; (ii) free education and school-based activities; (iii) at least one free healthy meal each school day; (iv) free healthcare; (v) healthy nutrition and (vi) adequate housing"⁵⁹.

These **Eurostat household surveys should be strengthened** by ensuring that data **captures the familial and care relations both within and between households**, for example capturing where children alternate living between separated parents. This is important to accurately document how living conditions and access to resources differ across multigenerational households and blended households⁶⁰.

While funding instruments under the 2021-2027 Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) have each had separate monitoring systems and indicators, under the new MFF (2028-2034), **a single EU-wide framework for tracking and evaluating budget expenditure** is proposed⁶¹. Among the codes

⁵⁵ European Commission, 2021, *European Semester*, economic and social policy coordination framework, European Commission. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/economy-and-euro/european-semester_en.

⁵⁶ European Commission, 2025, *Country-specific recommendations database*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/country-specific-recommendations-database/.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ European Commission, 2026, *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy*, 19. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ec5447e3-9f62-4c6b-b53b-af7dad8524eb_en?filename=EC-anti-poverty_proposal_2026.pdf.

⁵⁹ European Commission Social Protection Committee, 2025, *ECG monitoring framework*. Available at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/circabc-ewpp/ui/group/bab664d7-1188-47b2-9fa6-869902320ba2/library/b44d7779-dfdd-485b-94ae-0559b696e7b7/details>.

⁶⁰ Gosme, E., Shorey, H., Nieuwenhuis, R. and Uzunalioglu, M., 2025, *Roadmap for boosting the rights and resilience of European families*, rEUsilience project, COFACE Families Europe. Available at: <https://reusilience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/European-roadmap-publication.pdf>, <https://reusilience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/European-roadmap-publication.pdf>.

⁶¹ European Commission, 2025, *Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework and other horizontal rules for the Union programmes and activities*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025PC0545>.

proposed, **family policy does not have a distinct policy area** but can overlap with a wide range of other codes under the policy area of social policy, “promoting women’s participation and gender equality in the labour”; “household food security programmes”; “housing”; “measures to address child poverty”, as well as under the policy area of education and skills, including ECEC⁶².

The cross-cutting nature of family policy can have consequences both in creating barriers to applying for EU funding for stakeholders working in family policy, and in creating administrative complexity. Several stakeholders from civil society organisations representing single parents or large families noted that they did not know how to apply for EU funding or felt that the topic of family was not supported at the EU-level, because of fragmentation across many initiatives⁶³. **Creating a dedicated funding stream and a monitoring category for family support** could decrease administrative complexity. In addition, this would increase visibility of EU programmes by connecting local-level issues to the overarching social inclusion and anti-poverty objectives of the EU institutions.

2.3. Impacts of family policies: review of evidence

EU policy, strategy, funds and coordination mechanisms provide a strong institutional framework for support to families, including large families and single-parent households. However, social policy remains the competence of individual Member States. In this section, we present evidence on the effectiveness and reforms of the most common family-targeted policies implemented at Member State level, summarised in **Table 1**. We focus in particular on parental leave policies, which support parents around childbirth and early childcare; cash transfers and tax credits for families, which provide financial support through benefits, allowances, or tax reliefs; subsidised childcare services, which improve access to affordable care and early education for young children; and employer-provided family policies, such as flexible working arrangements or employer-sponsored benefits. The scope of the literature review covers family policies and their impacts across all household types, as much of the evidence does not disaggregate impacts by family configuration.

2.3.1. Maternity and parental leave policies

Maternity and parental leave policies aim to help parents remain connected to the labour market during short-term employment interruptions, with the goal of reducing the loss of job-specific skills and experience. Currently, all EU countries offer job-protected childcare leave that is wholly or partially paid; however, the design, duration, and level of compensation vary considerably across countries. On average, mothers in the EU are entitled to 66 weeks of paid leave (maternity and parental leave combined), ranging from 16 weeks in **Spain** to 164 weeks in the **Slovak Republic** (OECD Family Database⁶⁴). Some countries offer additional leave for single parents (e.g., **Slovakia**, **Greece**, and **Spain**). In many countries, the length of leave increases when more than one child is born.

Short, well-compensated parental leave (up to one year) is generally associated with positive labour market outcomes for women, including faster returns to work, higher employment rates, improved

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ EU-level and Member State-level CSO stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

⁶⁴ OECD, 2026, *OECD Family Database*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at: https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Family_Database/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf.

career prospects, and higher wages^{65 66}. Longer leave periods can delay return to work, making it more challenging for mothers to resume their pre-maternity career paths. However, studies that examine long-run outcomes (typically more than three years) find that these negative effects diminish or disappear over time, suggesting that there is no long-term labour market penalty associated with taking leave during the first few years of motherhood^{67 68}. It is worth noting, however, that evidence on long-term effects primarily comes from Western European and Nordic countries, which typically offer shorter but more generously compensated leave than Central and Eastern European countries.

Evidence on heterogeneity in the effects of childcare leave on mothers' labour market outcomes is mixed. While some studies suggest that career interruptions may have particularly negative consequences for highly skilled women, others find no significant differences across groups, including high- and low-wage mothers, white- and blue-collar workers, or workers in high- versus low-skilled occupations^{69 70}.

In recent years, policies promoting fathers' use of parental leave have become more prevalent, reflecting the view that greater paternal involvement may facilitate mothers' return to work. Many countries have implemented paternity leave schemes and so-called "daddy quotas" which reserve a portion of parental leave exclusively for fathers. Empirical evidence from a range of countries indicates that father-specific leave increases fathers' take-up^{71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78}. However, fathers rarely exceed their reserved quota, which may limit the scope for substituting maternal childcare. Currently, there is limited evidence regarding the extent to which increased paternal involvement has affected mothers' labour market outcomes.

⁶⁵ Ferragina, E., 2020, *Family policy and women's employment outcomes in 45 high-income countries: A systematic qualitative review of 238 comparative and national studies*. Soc. Policy Adm. 54, 1016–1066. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12584>.

⁶⁶ Olivetti, C., Petrongolo, B., 2017, *The Economic Consequences of Family Policies: Lessons from a Century of Legislation in High-Income Countries*. J. Econ. Perspect. 31, 205–230. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.1.205>.

⁶⁷ Albanesi, S., Olivetti, C., Petrongolo, B., 2023, *Families, labour markets, and policy*, in: *Handbook of the Economics of the Family*. Elsevier, 255–326. Available at: <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1887.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Olivetti, C., Petrongolo, B., 2017, *The Economic Consequences of Family Policies: Lessons from a Century of Legislation in High-Income Countries*. J. Econ. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.1.205>.

⁶⁹ Albanesi, S., Olivetti, C., Petrongolo, B., 2023, *Families, labour markets, and policy*, in: *Handbook of the Economics of the Family*. Elsevier, pp. 255–326. Available at: <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1887.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Ferragina, E., 2020, *Family policy and women's employment outcomes in 45 high-income countries: A systematic qualitative review of 238 comparative and national studies*. Soc. Policy Adm. 54, 1016–1066. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12584>.

⁷¹ Avdic, D., Karimi, A., 2018, Modern Family? *Paternity Leave and Marital Stability*. Am. Econ. J. Appl. Econ. 10, 283–307. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20160426>.

⁷² Bartel, A.P., Rossin-Slater, M., Ruhm, C.J., Stearns, J., Waldfogel, J., 2018, *Paid Family Leave, Fathers' Leave-Taking, and Leave-Sharing in Dual-Earner Households*. J. Policy Anal. Manage. 37, 10–37. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22030>.

⁷³ Cools, S., Fiva, J.H., Kirkeboen, L.J., 2015, *Causal Effects of Paternity Leave on Children and Parents*. Scand. J. Econ. 117, 801–828. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12113>.

⁷⁴ Druedahl, J., Ejrnæs, M., Jørgensen, T.H., 2019, *Earmarked paternity leave and the relative income within couples*. Econ. Lett. 180, 85–88. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2019.04.018>.

⁷⁵ Ekberg, J., Eriksson, R., Friebel, G., 2013, *Parental leave — A policy evaluation of the Swedish "Daddy-Month" reform*. J. Public Econ. 97, 131–143. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2012.09.001>.

⁷⁶ Patnaik, A., 2019, *Reserving Time for Daddy: The Consequences of Fathers' Quotas*. J. Labour Econ. 37, 1009–1059. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3225239.

⁷⁷ Périvier, H., Verdugo, G., 2023, *Where Are the Fathers? Effects of Earmarking Parental Leave for Fathers in France*. ILR Rev. 00197939231201570. Available at: <https://www.ofce.sciences-po.fr/pdf/dtravail/OFCEWP2023-08.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Tamm, M., 2019, *Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labour market participation*. Labour Econ. 59, 184–197. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.04.007>.

There is limited evidence on the effects of parental leave for single parents or large families. A study comparing the employment outcomes of single mothers across EU countries finds that single mothers are more likely to be employed and to work longer hours when they are eligible for parental leave⁷⁹. A 2020 comparison of paid leave entitlements across OECD countries shows that only a few countries provide single mothers with the same leave duration as two-parent households (e.g. **Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Norway**). As a result, single parents are disadvantaged in around three-quarters of the 33 OECD countries that offer paid leave⁸⁰. Parental leave may be particularly beneficial for single mothers and large families, as these groups face higher caregiving demands and have fewer resources to manage disruptions in income or time. For single mothers, paid leave can be crucial for maintaining income and labour market attachment in the absence of a second earner, while for large families it can help reduce cumulative caregiving pressures and support continued employment. However, there is some evidence that parental leave of at least three years may increase the duration of unemployment for single mothers more than for partnered mothers. The reason is that long family leave may further weaken single mothers' labour market position by adding to their existing work–family reconciliation and economic challenges, making them more vulnerable to prolonged unemployment⁸¹.

2.3.2. Child benefits and tax transfers

The purpose of child benefit and tax transfer instruments is to provide financial support to families to help cover the costs of raising children. Such support can take the form of universal direct transfers, either as one-off cash payments (e.g. the “Cheque-Bebé” in **Spain**) or regular monthly payments (e.g. the “500+” programme in Poland), as well as tax credits (e.g. the Child Tax Allowance “Kinderfreibetrag” in **Germany** or Single Earner Tax Credit “Alleinverdienerabsetzbetrag” in **Austria**).

For single parents or large families, some countries provide separate monthly or one-time child benefits (e.g., **Poland, Slovenia, Spain, France, Denmark, Germany**). Others offer an additional single-parent supplement to the general child benefit (e.g., **Finland, Belgium, Estonia, Italy**). Some countries provide targeted tax reliefs specifically for single parents or increase tax reliefs for single parents within general family tax relief schemes (e.g., **Finland, Austria, Germany, Ireland, Spain**).

In general, universal direct child benefits are associated with lower maternal employment, whereas employment-dependent tax transfers are associated with higher employment. Evidence from **Germany's** 1996 increase in child benefits shows that mothers reduced their labour supply, and the policy's impact on improving family finances was limited, partly due to reduced tax revenues from lower maternal employment^{82 83}. The introduction of a one-time EUR 2,500 child benefit in **Spain** led to a

⁷⁹ Bartova, A., Otto, A., Van Lancker, W., 2022, *Making Parental Leave Policies Work for Single Mothers: Lessons from Europe*. Ann. Am. Acad. Pol. Soc. Sci. 702, 129–148. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162221134445>.

⁸⁰ Jou, J., Wong, E., Franken, D., Raub, A., Heymann, J., 2020, *Paid parental leave policies for single-parent households: an examination of legislative approaches in 34 OECD countries*. Community Work Fam. 23, 184–200. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2018.1517083>.

⁸¹ Morosow, K., Jalovaara M., 2025, *Single and partnered mothers' labour market consequences of long family leave*. Community, Work & Family. 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2025.2535739>.

⁸² Hener, T., 2016, *Unconditional Child Benefits, Mothers' Labour Supply, and Family Well-Being: Evidence from a Policy Reform*, CESifo Econ. Stud, 62, 624–649. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cesifo/ifw007>.

⁸³ Tamm, M., 2019, *Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labour market participation*, Labour Econ, 59, 184–197. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.04.007>.

decline in mothers' labour supply⁸⁴, the introduction of universal monthly EUR 120 for a child in **Poland** reduced maternal labour supply^{85 86}. Similarly, the reform that reduced the child benefits for larger families in **Denmark** lead to a substantial increase in the labour supply of mothers⁸⁷. The effects of universal cash benefits tend to be stronger among families with lower socio-economic status, income, and education, as well as among those living in small towns^{88 89 90}.

At the same time, child benefits and transfers positively affect poverty reduction^{91 92 93}. Studies that make cross-country comparisons show that poverty rates are lower in countries with higher levels of spending on childcare^{94 95 96}.

For single-parent and large families, evidence shows that in-work benefits for low-income households increase female labour force participation, particularly among single mothers⁹⁷. Countries with high childcare spending show smaller gaps in poverty rates between partnered and single mothers⁹⁸. Cross-country analyses also indicate that selective child benefit systems result in weaker poverty reduction, whereas universal systems with additional support for single mothers are more effective⁹⁹. However, the design and implementation of policies matter. In countries where child support payments are

⁸⁴ González, L., 2013, *The Effect of a Universal Child Benefit on Conceptions, Abortions, and Early Maternal Labour Supply*, *Am. Econ. J. Econ. Policy* 5, 160–188. Available at: <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles/pdf/doi/10.1257/pol.5.3.160>.

⁸⁵ Gromadzki, J., 2024, *Labour supply effects of a universal cash transfer*, *J. Public Econ*, 239, 105248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2024.105248>.

⁸⁶ Magda, I., Kielczewska, A., Brandt, N., 2020, *The effect of child benefit on female labour supply*, *IZA J. Labour Policy* 10, 20200017. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/izajolp-2020-0017%0A>.

⁸⁷ Jensen, M.F., Blundell, J., 2024, *Income effects and labour supply: Evidence from a child benefits reform*, *J. Public Econ*, 230, 105049. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2023.105049>.

⁸⁸ Gromadzki, J., 2024, *Labour supply effects of a universal cash transfer*, *J. Public Econ*, 239, 105248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2024.105248>.

⁸⁹ Jensen, M.F., Blundell, J., 2024, *Income effects and labour supply: Evidence from a child benefits reform*, *J. Public Econ*, 230, 105049. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2023.105049>.

⁹⁰ Magda, I., Kielczewska, A., Brandt, N., 2020, *The effect of child benefit on female labour supply*, *IZA J. Labour Policy* 10, 20200017. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/izajolp-2020-0017%0A>.

⁹¹ Bäckman, O., Ferrarini, T., 2010, *Combating Child Poverty? A Multilevel Assessment of Family Policy Institutions and Child Poverty in 21 Old and New Welfare States*, *J. Soc. Policy* 39, 275–296. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279409990456>.

⁹² Gromadzki, J., 2024, *Labour supply effects of a universal cash transfer*, *J. Public Econ*, 239, 105248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2024.105248>.

⁹³ Paradowski, P.R., Wolszczak-Derlacz, J., 2025, *Inequality, poverty, and child benefits: evidence from a natural experiment*, *Post-Sov. Aff.* 41, 242–262. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2025.2487372>.

⁹⁴ Hakovirta, M., Skinner, C., Hiilamo, H., Jokela, M., 2020, *Child Poverty, Child Maintenance and Interactions with Social Assistance Benefits Among Lone Parent Families: a Comparative Analysis*, *J. Soc. Policy* 49, 19–39. Available at: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/228326/1/1678776807.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Van Lancker, W., Ghysels, J., Cantillon, B., 2015, *The impact of child benefits on single mother poverty: Exploring the role of targeting in 15 European countries*, *Int. J. Soc. Welf.* 24, 210–222. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ijsw.12140>.

⁹⁶ Zagel, H., Van Lancker, W., 2022, *Family policies' long-term effects on poverty: a comparative analysis of single and partnered mothers*, *J. Eur. Soc. Policy* 32, 166–181. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287211035690>.

⁹⁷ Olivetti, C., Petrongolo, B., 2017, *The Economic Consequences of Family Policies: Lessons from a Century of Legislation in High-Income Countries*, *J. Econ.* Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.1.205>.

⁹⁸ Zagel, H., Van Lancker, W., 2022, *Family policies' long-term effects on poverty: a comparative analysis of single and partnered mothers*, *J. Eur. Soc. Policy* 32, 166–181. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287211035690>.

⁹⁹ Van Lancker, W., Ghysels, J., Cantillon, B., 2015, *The impact of child benefits on single mother poverty: Exploring the role of targeting in 15 European countries*, *Int. J. Soc. Welf.*, 24, 210–222. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ijsw.12140>.

counted as a substitute for social assistance, meaning lone-parent families receive less welfare if they receive more child support, it does not effectively reduce poverty¹⁰⁰.

2.3.3. Subsidised childcare

In many countries, parents going back to work after having a child may benefit from further government assistance through subsidised or publicly provided childcare. Studies show that an increased availability of childcare places has a mostly positive, yet modest effect on women's labour market outcomes. The results depend mostly on the substitutability between formal (state-funded) and informal childcare¹⁰¹. In **Norway**, a large-scale universal childcare reform from 2002 that provided childcare for toddlers increased the employment level of married or cohabiting mothers who moved towards full-time employment¹⁰². In **Italy**, a reform that extended subsidised childcare to 2-year-olds increased labour market participation and employment of mothers¹⁰³. However, a study from **Austria**, examining reforms since the 1950s, found little or no effect on female labour market outcomes, especially in the context of strongly gendered family-career choices. The Austrian study also found that state-funded childcare largely replaced care previously provided by family and relatives¹⁰⁴. Overall, the evidence suggests that expanding publicly provided childcare can support mothers' labour market participation, although the effects vary across countries and depend on several factors, including the extent to which formal childcare replaces informal care provided by family members, prevailing gender norms around work and family, and the design and scale of the reform itself.

Beyond labour market effects, subsidised childcare has also been shown to generate broader social and economic benefits. Research shows that it contributes to positive social and economic outcomes, including poverty reduction, in both the short-term and long-term. High-quality early childcare institutions support children's cognitive and social development, with the strongest benefits for disadvantaged children under three when attendance is longer, and quality is high¹⁰⁵.

With regard to single parents and large families, evaluations from **France** showed that an increase in childcare subsidies had a significant impact on the labour market outcomes of mothers in families with three or more children, especially compared to mothers in one-child families¹⁰⁶. Additionally, expanding public school availability to include two-year-olds (instead of starting at the age of three) had a positive impact on the labour market outcomes of lone mothers relative to those in two-parent families¹⁰⁷. In

¹⁰⁰ Hakovirta, M., Skinner, C., Hiilamo, H., Jokela, M., 2020, *Child Poverty, Child Maintenance and Interactions with Social Assistance Benefits Among Lone Parent Families: a Comparative Analysis*, J. Soc. Policy, 49, 19–39. Available at: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/228326/1/1678776807.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Albanesi, S., Olivetti, C., Petrongolo, B., 2023, *Families, labour markets, and policy*, in: *Handbook of the Economics of the Family*, Elsevier, 255–326. Available at: <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1887.pdf>.

¹⁰² Eckhoff Andresen, M., Havnes, T., 2019, *Child care, parental labour supply and tax revenue*, Labour Econ. 61, 101762. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.101762>.

¹⁰³ Carta, F., Rizzica, L., 2018, *Early kindergarten, maternal labour supply and children's outcomes: Evidence from Italy*, J. Public Econ. 158, 79–102. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2017.12.012>.

¹⁰⁴ Kleven, H., Landais, C., Posch, J., Steinhauer, A., Zweimüller, J., 2024, *Do Family Policies Reduce Gender Inequality? Evidence from 60 Years of Policy Experimentation*. Am. Econ. J. Econ. Policy 16, 110–149. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20210346>.

¹⁰⁵ van Belle, J., 2016, *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and its long-term effects on educational and labour market outcomes*. RAND Europe. Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1667.html.

¹⁰⁶ Givord, P., Marbot, C., 2015, *Does the cost of child care affect female labour market participation? An evaluation of a French reform of childcare subsidies*, Labour Econ. 36, 99–111. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2015.07.003>.

¹⁰⁷ Goux, D., Maurin, E., 2010. *Public school availability for two-year olds and mothers' labour supply*. Labour Econ. 17, 951–962. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2010.04.012>.

Spain, a reform that introduced a full-time public childcare for 3-year-olds increased maternal employment – the effect was driven by older mothers and those with two children or more¹⁰⁸.

Reports analysing the design and implementation of childcare programmes indicate that services should be both affordable and accessible for young children to ensure equality of access¹⁰⁹. The impact of such programmes depends on the quality of services provided, the level of participation (including duration, full-time versus part-time attendance, and child-to-teacher ratios), and the socio-economic background of the children¹¹⁰. Additionally, affordability matters especially for single parents, as in most European countries, they spend a higher proportion of their household income on childcare compared to two-parent households¹¹¹.

2.3.4. Employer policies

A recent 2025 study involved a meta-analysis examining the impact of formal family-friendly policies and informal workplace supports on a wide range of career, job, and work-family outcomes¹¹². Formal policies include flex-related policies, which provide autonomy over when or where work is done (e.g., flexible hours or telework); leave-related policies, which allow time off to care for others (e.g., parental or eldercare leave); care support-related policies, which offer assistance such as childcare or eldercare; and career-related policies, which ensure that balancing work and family responsibilities does not negatively affect career progression (e.g., career breaks or stopping the tenure clock). The analysis also considered informal support provided by coworkers, supervisors, or human resources officials.

The findings indicate that both policies and support generally yield small to moderate positive effects for employees, with informal support exerting a stronger overall influence than formal policies. These policies and supports appear to be more impactful in national contexts that are typically disadvantageous for work-life balance, as they provide a stronger signal of organisational care in such environments. These policies also tend to be more effective in sectors that are less supportive of family life due to their nature of work, such as those with nonstandard hours or limited opportunities to work from home (e.g., healthcare, manufacturing). However, implementing such measures presents greater challenges in sectors characterised by strong on-site presence requirements, irregular schedules, or high share of lower-skilled roles – such as retail, hospitality, care, and other service industries –, where single mothers may be over-represented.

¹⁰⁸ Nollenberger, N., Rodríguez-Planas, N., 2015, *Full-time universal childcare in a context of low maternal employment: Quasi-experimental evidence from Spain*, *Labour Econ.* 36, 124–136. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2015.02.008>.

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF, 2024, *Foundations for the Future: Strengthening Early Childhood Education and Care Systems for Ages 0–3 in Europe and Central Asia*, UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/36911/file/Strengthening%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20Systems%20for%20Ages%200-3%20in%20Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ European Commission, 2022, *Building a better understanding of the impact of early childhood education and care on medium- and long-term educational and labour market outcomes in Europe*, Publications Office, LU. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/building-better-understanding-impact-early-childhood-education-and-care_en.

¹¹¹ European Parliament, 2020, *The situation of single parents in the EU*, Executive summary, Publications Office, LU. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU\(2020\)659870\(SUM01\)_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU(2020)659870(SUM01)_EN.pdf).

¹¹² Blom, R., Jaspers, E., Knies, E., Van Der Lippe, T., 2025, *Family-friendly policies and workplace supports: A meta-analysis of their effects on career, job, and work-family outcomes*, *J. Vocat. Behav.* 157, 104091. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2025.104091>.

The study also shows that these policies may be insufficient to meet the greater demands faced by parents, who require more instrumental support to manage career and work–family responsibilities¹¹³. Moreover, as these groups are more likely to use such policies – especially flex-related ones, they are also more vulnerable to negative spillover effects, such as flexibility stigma (negative perceptions and evaluations that employees face when they use workplace flexibility options). We found no information on how these policies specifically work for single parents and large families.

The literature review highlights several limitations. Most importantly, there is little evidence on how reforms affect specific household types, such as single-parent households or large families, even though these groups may experience policies differently. While some studies focus on single-parent households, evidence on large families remains scarce. As a result, it is difficult to determine whether the effects of a given policy vary depending on household type.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Table 1: Summary of the effectiveness of family policies on maternal labour market outcomes

Reform studied	Methods	Outcomes measured	Key results	Groups mostly affected	Underlying mechanisms
Parental leaves	Meta-analysis	Labour supply, employment rate, wage	Generally positive effect on labour market outcomes for women	Mixed results, no clear pattern	<p>Parental leaves help mothers remain connected to the labour market during short-term employment interruptions, with the goal of reducing the loss of job-specific skills and experience.</p> <p>Short (but not too short) and well-compensated leaves yield the best outcomes. Longer leaves (over one year) may delay return to work and career progression; however, in the long-run, these effects largely fade</p>
Subsidised childcare	Meta-analysis, difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity design	Labour force participation of mothers, gender convergence, and employment	Effects on women's labour market outcomes are generally positive, yet modest	Lone mothers, larger families	<p>Subsidised childcare helps mothers work by making childcare easier to manage.</p> <p>The effectiveness is limited if subsidised childcare crowds out informal childcare</p>

Reform studied	Methods	Outcomes measured	Key results	Groups mostly affected	Underlying mechanisms
Child benefits and tax transfers	Difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity-type design	Labour supply of mothers	Direct, universal child benefits generally reduce maternal labour supply, whereas employment – dependent tax transfers tend to increase female labour force participation	<p>Direct child benefits mostly affect families with lower socio-economic status</p> <p>Tax benefits mostly affect single mothers</p>	<p>Child benefits and tax transfers provide financial support to families to help cover the costs of raising children</p> <p>Generally, benefits that are universal and not employment-dependent create incentives to withdraw from the labour market</p>
Employer policies	Meta-analysis	Career, job and work-family outcomes	Generally, small to moderate positive effects on career, job, and work – family outcomes	Parents tend to benefit less from these policies	<p>Employer policies provide autonomy over when or where work is done</p> <p>More effective in national and organisational contexts that are typically unfavourable for work–life balance</p> <p>May cause the spillover effect</p>
LFC				No data	

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

2.4. Comparative analysis of Member State initiatives, policies and strategies

All 27 Member States provide a foundation of child and family benefits combining direct financial support (cash benefits) with in-kind benefits (goods, services, or access to public provisions). These benefits vary widely in scope, generosity, and targeting, reflecting different national welfare regimes, policy priorities, and fiscal capacities. In general, countries deploy a mix of universal support for all families with children and targeted measures to address the higher needs or vulnerabilities of specific household types; including those of single-parent households and large families. Below we highlight exemplary national measures in key policy areas, summarising both general provisions and targeted measures for single-parent households and large families. Additionally, *Annex 2 - Overview of core benefits by country* and *Annex 4 - Country factsheets* complete information on MS policy measures.

2.4.1. Child and family allowances

Every EU country offers some form of cash allowance to help families offset the cost of raising children. In most countries this is a universal benefit paid to all families regardless of income, while others use means-testing to target low- or middle-income households. Benefit levels typically increase with the number of children, providing a base amount for the first child and higher amounts for each additional child. **Poland's** *Rodzina 800+* (see Box 1) stands out as a fully universal allowance having important poverty reducing impacts for all families, including single parent households and large families. **Lithuania** pays a universal allowance of EUR 122 per month per child plus an additional EUR 56.65 per month per child for all families with 3+ children¹¹⁴. In **Estonia**, large families receive a universal monthly allowance of EUR 450 (3 - 6 children) or EUR 650 (7+ children), paid until the oldest child turns 24¹¹⁵. Other countries vary the rate for larger families through means-tested schemes: in **Bulgaria**, low-income families with two children receive a monthly child allowance of BGN 110 (EUR 56); which rises to BGN 165 (EUR 84) for a family with three children and BGN 175 (EUR 89) for a family with four children¹¹⁶.

Czechia provides an interesting example of recent reform. Since 2025, it has introduced a new “super-benefit” combining four previous social benefits (child allowance, housing allowance, housing supplement and living allowance) into a single payment. The reform assesses households’ financial circumstances as a whole and pays a lump sum rather than separate benefits. It also includes special “vulnerable” categories, such as parents with a child under 4, single parents with one or more children under 7, disabled people, and those aged over 68. Although evidence remains limited, early findings suggest the reform may improve take-up among eligible families who previously underclaimed. Families with children are expected to benefit most, while low-income single adults and households in the second income decile may receive less support¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁴ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Amounts from 2024.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ PAQ Research, 2026, *Superdávka*. Available at: <https://www.paqresearch.cz/post/superdávka/>.

Box 1: Poland: Rodzina 500+/800+

Poland's unconditional child benefit is a standout example of a general family policy with demonstrated impact. Introduced in 2016 as "Rodzina 500+", it provided PLN 500 (EUR 115) per month per child (initially for the second child onward, later extended to every child). By 2024 this benefit was enhanced to "800+" (PLN 800, EUR 175 per child monthly) and made fully universal, with 99.9% of eligible children receiving it. Studies found that 500+ led to a "significant reduction in child poverty".

World Bank and Polish research projected that the programme could reduce extreme child poverty by up to 35–37% and overall child poverty by as much as 75–100%. Indeed, Poland's latest data show that only 16.8% of children in large families and 15.8% in single-parent households are at risk of poverty, roughly half the EU average. This dramatic improvement is widely attributed to the income floor provided by 500+/800+ and its near-complete take-up. The programme is also straightforward – payments are automatic once a child is registered – which minimises administrative barriers for families. The benefit, however, came with a slight decline in mothers' labour-force participation, underscoring the need to pair cash benefits with employment supports.

Source: Own elaboration with data from Statistics PL (2023)¹¹⁸ and Gromadzki (2024)¹¹⁹.

Some Member States increase child allowances or offer supplementary benefits for single-parent households to compensate for the absence of a second household income. For instance, **Denmark** and **Finland** automatically add a supplement to the child benefit for single parents. Denmark pays approximately DKK 1,741 (EUR 233) quarterly per child on top of the universal child allowance, while Finland provides an extra EUR 63 per child per month to single parents¹²⁰. **Estonia** similarly pays a flat EUR 80 monthly "single parent" allowance for any child being raised by a solo parent¹²¹. In a few cases, the single-parent supplement is itself means-tested or income-dependent: in **Cyprus**, a single-parent family allowance of EUR 212 per month is available for those with annual incomes up to EUR 39,000 (dropping to EUR 189 per month for higher incomes)¹²².

These supplements for single-parent households are often integrated with anti-poverty programmes or minimum income schemes. **France** has the ASF (Family Support Allowance, or *Allocation de soutien familial*) which pays EUR 199 per month per child when one parent is absent, rising to EUR 266 per month if the child has lost both parents. This country also has a targeted minimum income tier for lone parents: the RSA (Active Solidarity Income for single parents, or *Revenu de solidarité active pour parent isolé*) which guarantees between EUR 1,107 and EUR 1,385 per month depending on the number of children¹²³. **Spain** offers a 22% uplift on the regionally managed RMI (Minimum Insertion Income, or

¹¹⁸ Statistics PL, 2023, *Pomoc społeczna i opieka nad dzieckiem i rodziną w 2023 roku, tablice 3*. Available at: <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/warunki-zycia/ubostwo-pomoc-spoeczna/pomoc-spoeczna-i-opieka-nad-dzieckiem-i-rodzina-w-2023-roku,10,15.html>.

¹¹⁹ Gromadzki, J., 2024, *Labour supply effects of a universal cash transfer*. *Journal of Public Economics*, 239, 105248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2024.105248>.

¹²⁰ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2, amounts from 2024.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ National Family Allowances Fund (CNAF), 2025, *Les allocations familiales (Af)*. Available at: <https://www.caf.fr/allocataires/aides-et-demarches/droits-et-prestations/vie-personnelle/les-allocations-familiales-af>.

Renta Mínima de Inserción) for single parents¹²⁴. **Hungary** pays higher monthly family allowance rates to single-parent families across all child counts, and allows access to a package of free/discounted meals and social scholarships under a more generous income threshold (180% vs. 165% of minimum pension)¹²⁵. **Croatia** similarly tops up its standard child allowance for one-parent families: if one parent is absent or incapacitated, the child benefit is increased by 15%, and if a child has lost both parents (or the remaining parent is completely unable to work), it is increased by 25% above the usual rate¹²⁶. In **Poland**, low-income single parents are eligible for a means-tested “bringing up alone” supplement of PLN 193 per month per child (approximately EUR 40), up to a family cap of PLN 386 for larger single-parent families¹²⁷. These kinds of dedicated cash supplements help narrow the poverty gap between single- and two-parent families.

Likewise, large families often receive enhanced financial support through a combination of higher child benefit rates or supplements, and targeted income-support top-ups. Beyond offering increasing benefit amounts per child once a family reaches a certain size, many countries also provide dedicated large-family supplements in addition to general child benefits. **France** offers a means-tested family supplement (*Complément familial*) of EUR 196–285 per month for families with three or more children aged 3–21, alongside a flat-rate top-up (*Allocation Forfaitaire*) of EUR 23–94 per month¹²⁸. **Croatia** adds a supplement on top of the means-tested child benefit (EUR 66 per month from the third child, and EUR 133 per month for the fourth and subsequent children). **Hungary** provides a monthly childrearing benefit (*Gyermeknevelési támogatás*) of around EUR 71 (minimum pension rate) for families raising three or more children specifically for the gap period when the youngest child is aged 3–8¹²⁹. **Greece** offers a one-off cash payment to mothers raising 3 children (EUR 700) or 4+ children (EUR 1,000), and the bi-monthly child benefit has double amounts for the third and subsequent children¹³⁰. **Poland** adds a means-tested supplement of EUR 20 per month for large families, though its real value has eroded significantly since 2016 due to lack of indexation¹³¹. In **Wallonia (Belgium)**, support for large families is provided through a means-tested social supplement that is paid per child and increases for households with three or more children¹³².

Several Member States embed large-family support within broader social assistance schemes. This is the case for example in **Portugal**, where the Minimum income (*Rendimento social insercao*) is calculated based on household size, with each child valued at 50% of the adult reference amount (EUR 121.12). This benefit can also be combined with other child benefits¹³³. **Romania**'s Minimum Inclusion

¹²⁴ Ministerio de Derechos Sociales, Consumo y Agenda 2030, 2024, *Informe de Rentas Mínimas de Inserción en España 2024*, Secretaría de Estado de Derechos Sociales, Dirección General de Diversidad Familiar y Servicios Sociales, Madrid. Available at: https://www.dsca.gob.es/sites/default/files/derechos-sociales/INFORME_RRMM2024.pdf.

¹²⁵ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ National Family Allowances Fund (CNAF), 2025, *Le complément familial (Cf)*. Available at: <https://www.caf.fr/allocataires/aides-et-demarches/droits-et-prestations/vie-personnelle/le-complement-familial-cf>.

¹²⁹ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Parentia, 2026, *Child Benefit Amounts in Wallonia: The New System*. Available at: <https://www.parentia.be/en/wallonie/child-benefit/amounts/new-system>.

¹³³ As Tuas Ajudas, 2026, *Rendimento Social de Inserção* [Social Integration Income]. Available at: <https://as-tuas-ajudas.pt/familia/rendimento-social-insercao/>.

Income includes higher benefit scales for families with multiple children, ranging from RON 125 (EUR 25) for one child to RON 500 (EUR 101) for four or more, with even higher amounts for single-parent large families – up to RON 600 (EUR 121) if they have four or more children¹³⁴. In addition, mothers who are receiving the minimum inclusion income and other vulnerable groups (mothers with disabilities, minor mothers, refugees) receive a RON 2,000 (EUR 402) voucher at the birth of a child¹³⁵. **Spain** offers a Minimum Living Income (*Ingreso Mínimo Vital*) and child aid supplement where families receive EUR 115 for a child under three years; EUR 80.50 for children between 3–6 years, and EUR 57.50 for children 6–18 years¹³⁶.

2.4.2. Tax benefits for families with children

Most Member States provide some form of tax-based support for families. Only a few countries do not offer any significant tax deductions or credits related to children, including **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Cyprus** and **Sweden**. The design differs: in some countries (like **Germany** and **Austria**) a portion of parents' income is exempted (deducted) per child, reducing taxable income, whereas others (like **Czechia** or **Bulgaria**) use tax credits that directly reduce the tax bill by a set amount per child. The overall effect is to lower the tax burden on families in recognition of the costs of childrearing. While income-related tax benefits, such as refundable tax credits, are effective in reducing poverty among low-wage earners¹³⁷, particularly when paired with generous cash allowances, other types of tax allowances and non-refundable tax credits often fail to benefit low-income families, as these families typically lack sufficient tax liability to be eligible to the full benefits¹³⁸. To improve inclusivity, some states make child tax credits refundable (payable as a benefit if tax liability is zero), as in **Czechia** or **Poland**.

Relatively few countries have special tax provisions for single parents as a distinct category, but there are notable examples. In **Germany**, the *Entlastungsbetrag für Alleinerziehende* gives a tax discount equivalent to EUR 4,260 for the first child and EUR 240 for each additional child. In **Ireland**, single parents can claim the *Single Person Child Carer Credit*. **Spain** notes additional criteria for single parents under the working mothers tax deduction (on top of the standard EUR 1,200 per year + up to EUR 1,000 for childcare costs for children under 3), which can be up to EUR 2,150 per year for a single-parent family unit (as of 2025)¹³⁹. **Finland** has employment income credit which directly reduces state income

¹³⁴ Libertatea, 2026, *Ce este venitul minim de incluziune și ce categorii de români primesc bani în 2026* [What the Minimum Inclusion Income Is and Which Romanians Receive It in 2026]. Available at: <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/ce-este-venitul-minim-incluziune-categorii-romani-primesc-bani-2026-5596719>.

¹³⁵ Direcția de Asistență Socială Târgu Mureș, 2026, *Electronic Supported Social Ticket for Newborns*, accessed 13 February 2026. Available at: <https://dastgmures.ro/en/welfare-benefits/electronic-supported-social-ticket-for-newborns/>.

¹³⁶ Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2020, *Real Decreto-ley 30/2020, de 29 de septiembre, de medidas sociales en defensa del empleo*. Boletín Oficial del Estado. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2020-11416>.

¹³⁷ Van Lancker, W., Ghysels, J., & Cantillon, B., 2025, *The impact of child benefits on single mother poverty: Exploring the role of targeting in 15 European countries*. International Journal of Social Welfare, 24, 3, 210–222. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ijsw.12140>.

¹³⁸ Matsaganis, M., O'Donoghue, C., Levy, H., Coromaldi, M., Mercader-Prats, M., Rodrigues, C. F., ... & Tsakoglou, P., 2007, *Child poverty and family transfers in Southern Europe. Microsimulation as a tool for the evaluation of public policies: methods and applications*, 3, 293–321. Available at: <https://books.google.nl/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=gGmPWsvhR60C&oi=fnd&pg=PA293&dq=child+benefits+poverty+EU&ots=tYbt7wlsye&sig=yOpOtelSkq75uZoiBmpKiME12H-Y#v=onepage&q=child%20benefits%20poverty%20EU&f=false>.

¹³⁹ 2025, *Unmarried with children: Filing your income taxes in Spain*, Xolo Blog. Available at: <https://blog.xolo.io/es-us/unmarried-with-children-filing-your-income-taxes-in-spain>.

tax and the amounts increase by EUR 105 per child (as of 2026). This is doubled for single parents and the nationwide coverage for tax-filing single parents was close to 100%¹⁴⁰.

Most countries with family-focused tax policies build in higher relief for families with three or more children. **Latvia** allows the personal income tax allowance for dependent persons (EUR 250 per month per child) to be claimed by a non-working spouse specifically when the family has at least 3 children under 18 with at least one child under 7, or has at least 5 children, effectively giving a one-earner large family the benefit of two tax-free allowances¹⁴¹. **Malta** sets more favourable income tax brackets for taxpayers supporting children, with the thresholds rising substantially if you have two or more children (these brackets apply whether the taxpayer is a single parent or not)¹⁴². In **Hungary**, a combination of progressive child-related tax allowances and long-term exemptions for mothers is in place (see Box 2).

Box 2: Hungary: Tax incentives for large families

Hungary has implemented one of the most far-reaching packages of tax incentives targeted at large families in the EU, combining progressive child-related tax allowances with long-term exemptions aimed primarily at mothers. At the core of the system is the family tax allowance, which reduces the personal income tax base in a graduated manner according to the number of dependent children. As of 2025, the monthly tax base reduction is equivalent to approximately EUR 37.50 for one child, EUR 75 per child for two children, and EUR 124 per child for three or more children, significantly increasing disposable income for larger households.

Beyond this graduated allowance, Hungary introduced a lifetime personal income tax exemption for mothers of large families. Since 2020, mothers with four or more children have been exempt from paying personal income tax for life, regardless of employment status or earnings. This measure was expanded in October 2025 to include mothers with three children, substantially widening its coverage. In addition, women with three or more children who re-enter employment benefit from reduced social contribution rates, paying a maximum of 13% (or the minimum wage threshold) for the first 18 months of employment, followed by a reduced rate of 6.5% for a further six months.

These measures illustrate a policy approach that uses the tax system not only to offset the costs of raising children, but also to reward larger family size and strengthen work incentives, particularly for mothers. At the same time, the strong reliance on income-tax reductions means that the benefits accrue most to households with sufficient taxable income, raising questions about distributional effects among lower-income large families.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on national legislation and secondary policy analysis.

¹⁴⁰ Verohallinto, 2026, *What tax deductions can I get?* Finnish Tax Administration. Available at:

<https://www.vero.fi/en/individuals/deductions/what-can-i-deduct/these-deductions-are-calculated-automatically-by-the-tax-administration/>.

¹⁴¹ The legal acts of the Republic of Latvia (latv. - Latvijas Republikas tiesību akti), *Regulations on the amount of the non-taxable minimum and tax allowance for calculating personal income tax* (latv. - 'Noteikumi par neapliekamā minimuma un nodokļa atvieglojuma apmēru iedzīvotāju ienākuma nodokļa aprēķināšanai'). Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 676. Available at:

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/295500-noteikumi-par-neapliekama-minimuma-un-nodokla-atvieglojuma-apmeru-iedzivotaju-ienakuma-nodokla-aprekinasanai>.

¹⁴² Malta Tax and Customs Administration, 2026, *New tax rates*. Available at: <https://mtca.gov.mt/docs/default-source/documents/2026-tax-rates.pdf>.

Similarly, **Czechia** has a tax relief for employed parents with dependent children up to 26 years, with deductions jumping from CZK 15,204 (EUR 610) for the first child to CZK 22,230 (EUR 890) for the second, and CZK 27,840 (EUR 11,151) for the third (as of 2026). **Austria** provides a child tax credit of EUR 70.90 per child each month, automatically paid with the Family Allowance (*Familienbeihilfe*). In addition, families earning less than EUR 7,411 per month before tax can benefit from a Single Earner Tax Credit (*Alleinverdienerabsetzbetrag*) of EUR 612 per year for one child, EUR 828 for two children and EUR 1,101 euros for three children (2026). For each additional child, EUR 273 are added¹⁴³. In **Portugal**, families with three or more dependent children receive a 5% increase in the overall cap on deductible personal income tax expenses (such as education or healthcare costs).

Because tax-based benefits can disproportionately favour higher earners, some countries ensure low-income large families also benefit through refundable credits or automatic adjustments. Under the **Austrian** tax relief scheme *Familienbonus Plus*, which allows families to save up to EUR 2,000 per year for a child under 18 and another EUR 700 per year for a child over 18 but still qualifying for Family Allowance, an additional child allowance may be paid as negative tax of up to EUR 700 per year to ensure that those earning below the tax threshold still benefit¹⁴⁴. In **Germany**, the child-tax system includes a tax allowance (*Kinderfreibetrag*) which benefits higher earners more. All eligible families receive a child benefit (*Kindergeld*) as a monthly cash payment. When assessing income tax, the tax office carries out a tax optimisation assessment and automatically applies the tax allowance for those who would benefit from it more than from the cash benefit¹⁴⁵. As a result, lower-income families receive *Kindergeld* (cash benefit) while higher-income families benefit from the tax allowance instead, thereby tailoring the mechanism to income without requiring the family to take any action¹⁴⁶.

2.4.3. Birth-related and parental leave enhancements

Birth grants or childbirth allowances and parental leave policies form another key pillar of family support. Several Member States maintain birth grants that do not vary with family size (e.g. **Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg**), whereas others provide progressive benefits that increase for multiple births or larger families¹⁴⁷. For example, **Cyprus** offers higher one-off birth grants for second and subsequent children, **Estonia** increase lump-sum birth payments for multiple births (twins, triplets, etc.), and **Spain** has a one-off birth/adoption grant of EUR 1,000 that is reserved for vulnerable families such as single parents, large families, and families with disabled parents¹⁴⁸.

All EU Member States have established minimum parental and family leave rights in line with the Directive 2019/1158, which mandates at least 4 months of parental leave per parent, of which 2 months are non-transferable (cannot be given to the other parent), as well as rights to paternity leave for fathers and carers' leave (see [Section 2.2 – analysis of EU role and impact](#)). In practice, many countries

¹⁴³ Arbeiterkammer, *Steuervorteile für Familien* [Tax advantages for families]. Available at: https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/beratung/steuerundeinkommen/steuertipps/Steuervorteile_fuer_Familien.html.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ iamExpat Germany, 2026, *Child Benefits in Germany (Kindergeld)*. Available at: <https://www.iamexpat.de/expat-info/social-security/child-benefits-germany-kindergeld>.

¹⁴⁶ Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit), 2024, *Child Benefit (Kindergeld) – Information Leaflet KG2-E*. Available at: https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/datei/kg2-e-merkblattkindergeld_ba014317.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

go well beyond the EU minimum standards in terms of leave duration and compensation, and some tailor their leave policies to support single parents or larger families.

Recognising that a single parent cannot share leave entitlements with a partner, some countries have adjusted their leave schemes to avoid penalising single-parent households. A leading example is **Spain**, which has recently equalised fathers' leave to the same duration as mothers' (16 weeks each), placing Spain at the forefront of leave equality. Importantly, if one parent is absent (e.g. a single-parent household), Spain now allows the sole parent to claim the leave entitlements of both parents in certain cases, effectively doubling the leave period available and ensuring a single parent is not penalised by the inability to share leave. Another example can be found in **Slovakia**, which extends the duration of maternity leave for single mothers to 37 weeks (compared to 34 weeks for mothers in two-parent families, or 43 weeks in case of multiple births for single mothers versus 40 weeks for couples)¹⁴⁹.

A number of countries grant longer parental leave when a family has a third or higher-order child, or when twins (or multiples) are born. In **Croatia**, parental leave extends to 15 months per parent for the third 3rd and subsequent children or multiple births (compared to 4 months for the first and second child)¹⁵⁰. In **Poland**, maternity leave is extended in case of multiple births (20 weeks for one child, 31 weeks for twins, and two additional weeks for each child thereafter)¹⁵¹. These extensions also apply in cases of fostering, except for professional foster parents. Parental leave is extended by two weeks when more than one child is born or fostered.

2.4.4. Labour market support and leave entitlements

In addition to the parental leave enhancements seen above, some Member States have introduced special welfare-to-work pathways, flexible leave options, or extended leave benefits for single parents that aim both to prevent poverty by facilitating employment, and to accommodate the unique constraints of single parenthood. For instance, **Malta** has a cash benefit called *Tapering of Benefits – Single Parent Assistance (Tnaqqis Gradwali tal-Beneficcji)* which ensures a gradual withdrawal of social assistance when single parents return to work. All single parents who work at least 10 hours a week and have children under 23 are eligible. In-work benefit for single parents also decreases with income, with employed single parents receiving up to EUR 1,627 per child per year. These labour-market-oriented supports are sometimes introduced as part of wider benefit reforms aimed at increasing employment among single parents while maintaining income protection. **Ireland's** reform of the One-parent Family Payment and the introduction of the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment illustrate both the potential employment gains and the distributional trade-offs associated with such approaches (see Box 3).

¹⁴⁹ European Commission, 2024, *Mutual Information System on Social Protection*. Available at: <https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/>.

¹⁵⁰ Croatian Institute for Health Insurance, 2021, *Rodiljne i roditeljske potpore ('Maternity and parental support')*. Available at: <https://hzzo.hr/rodiljne-i-roditeljske-potpore>.

¹⁵¹ Kurowska, Godlewska-Bujok and Michon, 2024, *Poland country profile*. International Network on Leave Policies and Research. Available at: https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2024/Poland.pdf.

Box 3: Ireland: One-Parent Family Payment and the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment

Ireland carried out a reform of benefits targeting single parents in 2012–2015 when the “One-Parent Family Payment” was adjusted to cover parents with their youngest child up to 7 years of age, instead of up to 18 years of age, as before. This was accompanied by a transitional benefit aimed at encouraging single parents into work; the Jobseekers Transitional Payment. Recognising that they are single parents of young children, recipients of the jobseekers’ transitional payment did not have to be available for full-time work, however, they meet with a caseworker to discuss a personal plan which could include employment or education.

The impact of the reform has been contested: One 2023 study found that these reforms increased lone parents’ average weekly working hours by around 2–5 hours and reduced their poverty rate by 10–14 percentage points, however, an evaluation commissioned by the Irish Department of Social Protection in 2018 found that “53 per cent of lone parents surveyed reported being financially worse off since the reforms”.

Source: Authors’ own elaboration with findings from Redmond et al., 2023 and Millar et al., 2018¹⁵² ¹⁵³.

A number of countries extend sickness or annual paid leave or offer extra time off for single parents to help them manage care emergencies. **Hungary** grants single working parents double the standard sick-leave entitlement when they need to stay home to care for an ill child, recognising that a lone parent cannot alternate with another caregiver¹⁵⁴. **Greece** provides single parents an additional 6 working days of paid annual leave each year (or 8 days if they have three or more children), on top of normal leave entitlements. They have also piloted a programme “Nannies of the Neighbourhood,” offering means-tested vouchers (EUR 500 for full-time care or EUR 300 for part-time) to help single parents afford in-home childcare for babies and toddlers¹⁵⁵. **Croatia**, in its sick-leave regulations, waives the usual requirement that both parents must be employed in order for one to take leave to care for a sick child; a single parent is automatically eligible for such leave¹⁵⁶.

2.4.5. Maintenance or child support guarantees

One critical issue for many single parents is securing child maintenance (financial support from the non-resident parent). Traditionally, policy in this area focuses on enforcing the legal responsibility of the other parent after separation or divorce¹⁵⁷. However, many countries have recognised that relying solely on enforcement can leave the children in single-parent families vulnerable if the other parent fails to pay or if the resident parent is unable or unwilling to pursue child support payments. This may be due to safety concerns, time or other resource barriers to engaging in legal processes, or concerns for future obligations on children to support the non-resident parent in return. The reasons why resident parents

¹⁵² Redmond, P., McGuinness, S. and Keane, C., 2023, *The impact of one-parent family payment reforms on the labour market outcomes of lone parents*, Oxford Economic Papers, 75, 2, 346–370, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oenp/gpac029>.

¹⁵³ Millar, M., Gray, J., Rooney, C. and Crosse, R., 2018, *The (in)adequacy of in-work benefits in Irish lone parent labour market activation policy*, Journal of Poverty and Social Justice, 26, 3, 379–400, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/175982718X15299561388618>.

¹⁵⁴ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Nieuwenhuis, R., 2020, *The situation of single parents in the EU*, Publication for the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, Luxembourg, 34. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU\(2020\)659870_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU(2020)659870_EN.pdf).

may be reticent to pursue child support directly from the non-resident parent are therefore numerous. As a result, some Member States now operate different forms of guaranteed or advance maintenance scheme: the state pays a defined amount of child support to the resident single parent, and then the state seeks repayment from the debtor parent (or absorbs the cost if recovery is not possible). These guarantees usually are triggered under certain conditions – for example, after a legal process has confirmed non-payment or if the absent parent’s whereabouts are unknown – and may be time-limited or subject to means-testing. While child support policies are generally seen as less effective than child benefits at reducing poverty within single-parent families, they are associated with small to moderate reductions in poverty¹⁵⁸.

The design of these schemes varies. In **Czechia**, for example, if a parent is not receiving court-awarded alimony, the state will provide up to CZK 3,000 per month per child (EUR 120) for up to 6 years, but only while official enforcement proceedings are underway; moreover, every four months the recipient must demonstrate that the other parent is still failing to pay¹⁵⁹. **Germany**’s advance maintenance (*Unterhaltsvorschuss*) programme pays between EUR 225 and EUR 393 per month per child (depending on the child’s age) to single parents not receiving child support, generally until the child turns 18¹⁶⁰. **Croatia** offers temporary child support in cases of non-payment by the liable parent, with the government paying a monthly amount (up to a specified cap) for the child until the parental support is resumed¹⁶¹. **Latvia** operates a Maintenance Guarantee Fund that provides children with payments when the non-resident parent does not fulfil maintenance obligations; the state then pursues the debtor for the owed amount¹⁶². These programmes ensure that children receive at least a basic level of financial support, even if one parent defaults.

2.4.6. Housing support and other material needs

Given that housing costs (rent, utilities, mortgage payments) can be a major strain on family budgets, some European welfare systems include housing benefits or subsidies, which are typically means-tested but often adjust in value for larger or more vulnerable households. Commonly, the amount of housing allowance one can receive depends on household size, composition, and income. For instance, some countries offer housing support for single parents, although support is more often linked to low income rather than to single parent status. In **Greece**, the rent allowance pays EUR 70 in single-parent households (vs. EUR 35 in two-parent homes)¹⁶³. However, this may often be on a regional level. **France** offers a means-tested housing allowance where 21.2% of all recipient households are lone-parent families, with documented impact of reducing child poverty by 6.6 percentage points for single-parent

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2026, *Náhradní výživné* (‘substitute maintenance’). Available at: <https://mpsv.gov.cz/nahradnivyzivne>.

¹⁶⁰ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ministerial Decision 71670, 2021, *Determination of terms and conditions for the implementation of the Housing Allowance Programme*, Volume B, 2021. Available at: <https://www.epidomastegasis.gr/Content/hb/FEK-B-4500-2021.pdf>.

families with one child¹⁶⁴. In **Austria**, Vienna offers special provisions for single mothers under the scheme *Wohnen für Mutter und Kind*¹⁶⁵.

Social housing and rent subsidies often have household-size adjustments, which means large families either qualify more easily or receive higher amounts. **Sweden**, for instance, has a housing allowance which is available to families with children, the amount varies on the number of children, size of the home, and the family's income level and can be granted to both renters and homeowners to help with fees¹⁶⁶. **Slovakia** redesigned its housing benefit (*Príspevok na bývanie*) to include a higher tier for big households: a family of five or more can receive up to EUR 308 per month to assist with housing expenses (compared to lower maximums ranging from EUR 10,060 to EUR 26,270 for smaller households)¹⁶⁷. **Lithuania** entitles families with three or more children to be considered for municipal social housing or rent compensation vouchers, although implementation is decentralised and subject to local criteria and waiting lists¹⁶⁸. **Greece's** rent subsidy increases by EUR 35 with each child, up to a cap of EUR 210 per month, meaning a large family can receive significantly more per month than a smaller family if their income qualifies.¹⁶⁹ Families with children have priority for social housing for example in **Belgium** (Wallonia and Brussels), **Bulgaria** or **Estonia**¹⁷⁰.

Some countries address utility costs for large families. **Latvia** offers a EUR 25 monthly reduction on electricity bills for families with three and more children¹⁷¹. **Spain** also offers a 'social energy voucher' in the form of electricity bill discounts of 25–65% for vulnerable households, which may or may not include large families¹⁷². In **Portugal**, families with three or more children are eligible for lower value-added tax (VAT) on electricity: they can benefit for from 6% VAT on electricity up to the first 300 kWh consumed every 30 days. The remaining electricity is taxed at 23% VAT (as of 2025)¹⁷³. In addition to this, many municipalities reduce municipal property tax in Portugal, or offer discounted rates for water bills: according to a survey by the Portuguese Large Families Association, 104 municipalities provide a

¹⁶⁴ Vie publique, 2025, *Réforme 2021 des aides au logement : quel bilan de la synchronisation avec les revenus ?* Available at : <https://www.vie-publique.fr/en-bref/297126-aides-au-logement-apl-alf-als-quel-bilan-de-la-reforme-de-2021>; European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2023, Baptista, I., Guio, A., Marlier, E. and Perista, P., *Access for children in need to the key services covered by the European child guarantee – An analysis of policies in the 27 EU Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/45993>.

¹⁶⁵ Transparenzportal.gv.at, 2026, *Unterhaltsvorschuss*. Available at: <https://transparenzportal.gv.at/tdb/tp/leistung/1027283.html>.

¹⁶⁶ Försäkringskassan, 2026, *Housing allowance for families with children*. Available at: <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/english/job-seeker/housing-allowance/housing-allowance-for-families-with-children>.

¹⁶⁷ Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, n.d., *Príspevok na bývanie*. Available at: <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/rodina-socialna-pomoc/hmotna-nudza/davky-hmotnej-nudzi/davka-hmotnej-nudzi/osobitny-prijemca.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija [Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania], 2025, *Noriu įsigyti ar išsinuomoti būstą ' [I want to buy or rent a home]*. Available at: <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/socialine-parama-kas-man-priklauso/noriu-isigyti-ar-issinuomoti-busta/>.

¹⁶⁹ Ministerial Decision 71670, 2021, *Determination of terms and conditions for the implementation of the Housing Allowance Programme*, Volume B, 2021. Available at: <https://www.epidomastegasis.gr/Content/hb/FEK-B-4500-2021.pdf>.

¹⁷⁰ Belgium, 2022, *National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee*, 64, accessed 17 April 2026. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=25530&langId=en>; European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2023, Baptista, I., Guio, A., Marlier, E. and Perista, P., *Access for children in need to the key services covered by the European child guarantee – An analysis of policies in the 27 EU Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/45993>.

¹⁷¹ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ For everyone else, the lower VAT is for the first 200 kWh per 30-day period (as of 2025). Source: Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2; INLIS, 2026, *Tax Break on Electricity for More Families in Portugal*. Available at: <https://www.inlis.pt/post/tax-break-on-electricity-for-more-families-in-portugal>.

Family Water Tariff, 106 offer a Social Water Tariff and 111 offer a discounted Family Municipal Property Tax (the total number of municipalities is 308 and 155 filled out the 2025 survey)¹⁷⁴.

Beyond cost reductions, some policies aim to help large families expand or improve their housing situation as their needs grow. **Estonia** provides a housing grant of up to EUR 10,000 (applicable twice) for low-income families with 3+ children for renovation, purchase or mortgage repayment¹⁷⁵. **Italy** offers a 'First-Home Fund' scheme where large families are entitled to a 90% mortgage guarantee from the government. Other priority groups include couples under 36, public housing tenants and single parents. The government offers guarantees of up to 90% for buying or renovating a primary home¹⁷⁶. **Hungary's** CSOK Plus housing loan scheme cancels debt on childbirth: the 2nd child cancels EUR 25,000 of principal and the 3rd child cancels the remaining balance – directly linking homeownership finance to family size. In addition to this, there is a housing grant for married couples or families committing to three children in rural areas (in localities with less than 5,000 inhabitants) of up to HUF 15,000,000 (EUR 37,461.04)¹⁷⁷.

2.4.7. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Affordable, high-quality early childcare is seen as crucial across the EU for both child development and enabling parents' employment. Across the EU, ECEC provision is generally highly subsidised or provided free for key early years. Most countries guarantee a certain number of free hours or capped fees for preschool-aged children, with a mix of universal schemes and means-tested support, and many include special provisions to benefit single parents and large families. Several countries offer free pre-primary education from around age 3 until compulsory schooling, and many apply income-related fee caps or free hours. In some systems where public childcare places are limited, vulnerable families may receive priority access. For example, in **Bulgaria**, ECEC is entirely free of charge since 2022 – and there is high enrolment for children aged 3+; there is compensation for families not admitted to public ECEC due to lack of places¹⁷⁸. In **Hungary**, kindergarten for 3–6 years is also free of charge and parents pay only for meals¹⁷⁹. **Malta** offers 30 hours of kindergarten per week free for all 2.75–5-year-olds, with additional hours available for families where both parents (or one in a single-parent family) are working or studying¹⁸⁰. According to a study by the Maltese Central Bank, the scheme benefited especially single mothers and families with multiple children¹⁸¹. **Ireland** has an income-assessed national childcare

¹⁷⁴ ELFAC (European Large Families Confederation), 2026, *Portugal: 115 Municipalities Are Distinguished for Family-Friendly Policies*. Available at: <https://www.elfac.org/portugal-115-municipalities-are-distinguished-for-family-friendly-policies/>.

¹⁷⁵ Riigi Teataja, 2025, *Lasterikaste perede kodutoetuse kasutamise tingimused ja kord [Conditions and procedure for the use of the home grant for families with many children]*. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/126062020023?leiaKehtiv>.

¹⁷⁶ Il Sole, 2024, *First home mortgages for the under 36s, the manoeuvre extends aid for three years: here's how it works*. Available at: https://en.ilsole24ore.com/art/first-home-loans-under-36-manoevra-estensione-aiuto-tre-anni-questo-e-como-funziona-AG74upl?refresh_ce=1.

¹⁷⁷ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹⁷⁸ Eurostat, 2023, *Children in formal childcare or educational by age group, duration and risk of poverty or social exclusion*, accessed 12 January 2026. Available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_caindform25__custom_16420624/default/table?lang=en&page=time:2024; UNESCO, n.d., *Early for All: Bulgaria's Free and Compulsory Pre-school Reform*. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education/early-all-bulgarias-free-and-compulsory-pre-school-reform>.

¹⁷⁹ Hungarian National Assembly, 2011, *Act 190 of 2011 on national public education*. Available at: <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100190.tv>.

¹⁸⁰ Jobsplus Malta, 2024, *Free Childcare Scheme Brochure 2024*. Available at: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/media/y4uhlno0/fcs-brochure-webuse-2024-latest-in-pdf.pdf>.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

scheme that offers subsidy rates that increase for each additional child, thus indirectly supporting larger families¹⁸². **Slovenia** also operates an income-graded system in public kindergartens and families with a low average monthly income do not pay fees. Families with two children in kindergarten also do not pay fees for the second child¹⁸³.

Single parents, who have fewer informal care options and must balance work and caregiving alone, often benefit from targeted childcare supports, such as reductions for ECEC fees. In **Belgium**, there are ECEC fee reductions for single parents and low-income families in Wallonia and Brussels¹⁸⁴. Some countries have childcare subsidies that are means-tested. For example, in **Austria**, single parents and low-income families can apply for grants towards childcare costs for up to 156 weeks per child¹⁸⁵. In the **Netherlands**, there is a means-tested childcare allowance (*Kinderopvangtoeslag*), which does not have specific provisions for single parents, however, by considering household income, parents in one-income families are more likely to benefit¹⁸⁶. ECEC support for single parents largely either falls into a universal model of ECEC provision, or is means-tested. In some countries, single parents also receive priority access in ECEC spaces, as in **Spain** and in **Portugal** for children aged 0–3¹⁸⁷. Besides these few examples of targeted support, subsidies and preferential access to ECEC is not given specifically to single parents. However, many countries have priority admission schemes for ECEC settings for children with working or studying parents, or for children at risk of poverty and social exclusion¹⁸⁸.

Large families also receive additional advantages in many Member States. **Greece**, for instance, offers voucher subsidies for ECEC, with qualifying income thresholds rising with the number of children. The income thresholds for full placement value were up to EUR 27,000 (≤2 children); EUR 30,000 (3 children); EUR 33,000 (4 children); EUR 36,000 (5+ children)¹⁸⁹. **France** also offers a childcare voucher scheme (*Chèque Service Accueil*) where larger families receive lower hourly rates or free hours after the fourth child. For families with four or more children, childcare is free of charge under all rate

¹⁸² Citizens Information, 2026, *National Childcare Scheme (NCS)*. Available at: <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/pre-school-education-and-childcare/national-childcare-scheme/>.

¹⁸³ Vlada Republike Slovenije (Government of Slovenia), 2026, *Znižano plačilo vrtca* [Reduced Kindergarten Payment]. Available at: <https://www.gov.si/teme/znizano-placilo-vrtca/>.

¹⁸⁴ Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance, 2024, *A la recherche d'une place d'accueil pour votre enfant ?* Available at: <https://www.one.be/public/brochures/brochuredetail/brochure/a-la-recherche-dune-place-daccueil-pour-votre-enfant/>.

¹⁸⁵ Oesterreich.gv.at, 2026, *Kinderbetreuungsbeihilfe (Childcare allowance)*. Available at: https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/de/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/familie-und-kinderfuersorge/kinderbetreuung/Seite.370300.

¹⁸⁶ Dienst Toeslagen, 2026, Ministerie van Financiën (Department of tax allowances, Ministry of Finance), *Toeslagenkaart 2026 (Overview of Allowances 2026)*. Available at: <https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/nl/toeslagen-2026/uw-toeslagen-in-2026#:~:text=Hoeveel%20toeslag%20krijg%20ik%20in%202026%3F%20U%20kunt,meer%20zijn.%20Hoe%20komen%20jullie%20aan%20mijn%20inkomen%3F>.

¹⁸⁷ Ministerio de Educación, Formación Profesional y Deportes, 2023, *La admisión del alumnado y la elección de centro en las Administraciones educativas*. Available at: <https://www.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/mc/redie-eurydice/sistemas-educativos/educacion-infantil/admision-alumnado-centros-sostenidos-fondos-publicos.html>; Instituto da Segurança Social, 2026, *Creche Feliz [Happy Crèche]*, accessed 13 February 2026, <https://www.seg-social.pt/ptss/pssd/menu/familia/desenvolvimento-criancas-jovens/creche-feliz>.

¹⁸⁸ European Parliament Research Service (EPRS), 2025, *Participation in early childhood education and care*, Briefing, European Parliament, Brussels. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/772916/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)772916_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/772916/EPRS_BRI(2025)772916_EN.pdf).

¹⁸⁹ DYPA, 2024, *Invitation of interest to invite customers to submit registration applications & re-enrolment of infants and young children in the nurseries of the D.P.A. school year 2024–2025*. Available at: <https://www.dypa.gov.gr/storage/taa-13042023/6zkm4691o2-ogfprosklhsh-endiiferontos-eggrafes-sxol-periodu-2024-2025.pdf>.

categories¹⁹⁰. In some countries, ECEC fees are at the discretion of municipalities who may offer reduced fees to low-income households (e.g. **Lithuania**¹⁹¹).

2.4.8. Other in-kind support and concessions for families with children

EU Member States complement cash payments and services with a variety of in-kind benefits, discounts, and concessions aimed at families. These policies are quite diverse, often smaller in scale, but together they help families with the everyday costs of raising children and acknowledge the special status of single parents or large families.

a. Free or subsidised school meals and materials

One widespread form of support is providing free or subsidised meals in preschool and school education. **Bulgaria, Denmark, Lithuania** and **Finland**, for instance, offer universal free meals in preschool education for all children¹⁹². Another example is found in **Hungary**, which offers free catering in nurseries or kindergartens and a 50% discount for meals in schools for families raising three and more children¹⁹³.

Other countries offer families support with costs they face at the beginning of the school year. **Ireland** has a Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowance which is a means-tested payment that contributes towards the cost of uniforms and shoes. The School Social Action (*Ação Social Escolar*) in **Portugal** provides free or partially reimbursed school meals, transport and materials for low-income pupils¹⁹⁴. The study did not identify support with school materials specifically for large families or single-parent households, but provisions for lower income families intersect with these two more vulnerable household types.

b. Transport benefits

Transport benefits are another form of support. **Bulgaria** offers a free annual trip via railway and bus to mothers of three or more children¹⁹⁵. Other ways in which the costs of transport are reduced for families include a vehicle tax discount for families, such as in **Portugal** where families with at least three dependents of which two are under 8 years old (*Desconto no Imposto Sobre Veículos*), can qualify for a discount once every five years¹⁹⁶. A similar scheme is a Motor Vehicle Tax Refund for Large Families in **Slovenia**¹⁹⁷. **Croatia** provides a 100% public transport subsidy for school-age children who have a

¹⁹⁰ For families with one child, the rate is between EUR 3.50 and EUR 4.00, depending on income and rate category. For families with two children, the rate is between EUR 2.70 and EUR 3.20, for families with three children, the rate is between EUR 1.60 and EUR 2.10 per hour.

¹⁹¹ The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026, *On the approval of the Description of the Pre-primary Education Procedure*. Available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.460922/asr>.

¹⁹² European Commission, 2023, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Baptista, I., Guio, A., Marlier, E. and Perista, P., *Access for children in need to the key services covered by the European child guarantee – An analysis of policies in the 27 EU Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/45993>.

¹⁹³ Család.hu, 2026, *Gyermekkeztetési kedvezmények*. Available at: <https://csalad.hu>.

¹⁹⁴ Banco Santander Portugal, 2025, *ASE – Ação Social Escolar [School Social Support]*. Available at: <https://www.santander.pt/salto/ase>.

¹⁹⁵ Country factsheets, Annex 4, Volume 2.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ E-Uprava (Government of Slovenia), n.d., *Vračilo davka na motorna vozila na velike družine [Refund of Motor Vehicle Tax for Large Families]*. Available at: <https://e-uprava.gov.si/si/podrocja/davki/obdavcitev-prevoznih-sredstev/vracilo-davka-na-motorna-vozila-na-velike-druzine.html?lang=si>.

single parent or no parents, ensuring that the cost of commuting to school is not an added burden on these families¹⁹⁸.

c. Recreational, cultural, and honorary concessions

In some cases, policies for large families serve a primarily symbolic or honorary purpose – often aimed at recognising parents (especially mothers) of large households. These can include awards, titles, or lifetime privileges that have modest financial benefit but high symbolic value. For example, **Cyprus** offers an ‘Honorary Allowance for Mothers of Many Children’ which targets mothers who have raised four or more children over 18 years and who satisfy an income test¹⁹⁹. This honorary allowance is not only aimed at providing income support, but also as a token of appreciation. Other countries have historically awarded medals to mothers of large families (e.g. some Eastern European countries had “Mother Heroine”-type medals, though such practices are less common in the EU today). Even when these measures involve only small stipends or discounts, they carry practical significance for families by signalling social value and sometimes by facilitating networking among large families. Section 3 explores some such initiatives by providing a detailed comparison of LFC schemes.

2.5. Gaps and shortcomings in family provision

Despite the breadth of family support policies across the EU, certain gaps and shortcomings have been identified in both the design and implementation of measures targeting large families and single-parent households. These gaps are shaped by structural, administrative, and political factors, and they can undermine the effectiveness of available policies and benefits.

In terms of general family support, across Member States, benefit systems vary widely in their generosity, accessibility, and coherence. Some countries operate highly universalist systems where single parents and large families benefit from broad-based services and cash transfers, while others rely on targeted schemes that require families to navigate complex eligibility criteria and application processes. While certain benefits – such as tax deductions or social security contributions – can be applied automatically, many others require proactive claims, which can act as a barrier to take-up, particularly for disadvantaged families²⁰⁰.

Moreover, family benefits often lack a coherent and coordinated approach across policy areas such as housing, education, and employment²⁰¹. For example, benefits can often have multiple policy objectives such as alleviating poverty, incentivising fertility, supporting work-life balance, or recognising caregiving roles. Whilst this multiplicity of aims does not necessarily conflict, and can complement one another by addressing co-existing or interlinked issues, there is also potential for complex or fragmented provision and inconsistent outcomes.

Administrative complexity is a major barrier to accessing support for families. Families frequently need to apply separately for child benefits, housing subsidies, energy discounts, and other forms of support,

¹⁹⁸ Srednja škola Novi Marof, 2024, *Obavijest o prijevozu za školsku godinu 2024./2025.* ('transport notice for the school year 2024/2025'). Available at: <https://www.ssnm.hr/obavijest-o-prijevozu-za-skolsku-godinu-2024-2025/>.

¹⁹⁹ Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare (Republic of Cyprus), 2026, *Child Allowance Scheme Information Page*. Available at: <https://wbas.dmsw.gov.cy/dmsw/ydep.nsf/All/C71DD6941A09FEE3C22587C3003F20CC?OpenDocument>.

²⁰⁰ EU-level and Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²⁰¹ EU-level stakeholder consultation, March 2026.

often through different agencies. This fragmentation can lead to under-claiming and increased stress. Parents with additional care responsibilities (including those with large families, single-parents, and those raising children with disabilities) may face greater barriers in navigating this complex environment and finding the support for which they are eligible. Likewise, migrant parents may face additional difficulties associated with language barriers and limited familiarity with the national support context. Stakeholders from EU-level, national, and local large-family associations called for the creation of one-stop platforms or integrated service centres to streamline access and improve take-up across diverse families²⁰². The concept of “family centres,” already in place in countries such as **Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, and Ireland**, was highlighted as a promising model^{203 204}. These centres provide a single point of access for a range of services for families, and often include targeted outreach to large families and single parents in particular. Providing a similar function for single parents, the Single Parents Centre in Budapest, **Hungary** fills this gap on local level²⁰⁵.

At the EU level, family policy is a complex terrain of various initiatives, which can be fragmented across sectors²⁰⁶. Stakeholders consulted expressed concern about the lack of a coherent family policy framework and the need to ‘mainstream’ family policy into all policymaking. While instruments such as the European Child Guarantee and the European Pillar of Social Rights acknowledge the needs of children in large families, they do not explicitly address the family as a unit²⁰⁷. European Large Families Confederation (ELFAC) called for the introduction of a “family impact assessment” for all EU legislation, similar to existing gender and environmental assessments. They also advocated for the re-establishment of a European Observatory on Family Policies to monitor trends, share best practices, and advise on policy development. Stakeholders also highlighted the need to assess the impact of policy on diverse family types; the **Austrian** platform of single-parent associations, *Österreichische Plattform für Alleinziehende* (ÖPA), suggested that a single-parent family code could help unify policy and assess impacts for single parents.

Finally, housing emerged as a critical but under-addressed area. Despite being a key determinant of family well-being, access to affordable, adequately sized housing for large families remains limited in many Member States. Likewise, access to stable housing can be particularly challenging for single parents. Housing deprivation, overcrowding and housing cost overburden are particularly common amongst single mothers in numerous Member States²⁰⁸. Stakeholders suggested that the EU could play a stronger role by using structural funds and fiscal surveillance mechanisms to encourage Member

²⁰² EU-level and MS-level CSO stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²⁰³ Gosme, E., Shorey, H., Nieuwenhuis, R. and Uzunalioglu, M., 2025, *Roadmap for boosting the rights and resilience of European families*, rEUsilience project, COFACE Families Europe. Available at: <https://reusilience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/European-roadmap-publication.pdf>.

²⁰⁴ EU-level stakeholder consultation, March 2026.

²⁰⁵ Egyszülős Központ, n.d., *Single parents in Hungary*. Available at: <https://egyszulo.hu/>.

²⁰⁶ Serapioni, M., 2023, *Towards greater family policy integration across Europe: Overcoming sectoral fragmentation in supporting families with young children*. Report of the European Observatory on Family Policy, accessed 12 May 2026. Available at: <https://coface-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Towards-greater-integration-in-family-policy-across-Europe.pdf>.

²⁰⁷ EU-level and Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²⁰⁸ Nieuwenhuis, R. and Zagel, H., 2023, *Housing conditions of single mothers in Europe: the role of housing policies*. European Societies, 25(2), pp.181–207. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2022.2117835>.

States to invest in family-friendly housing schemes, including fixed-interest loan programmes and social housing initiatives²⁰⁹.

2.5.1. Gaps and shortcomings in targeting single-parent households

Policies aimed at supporting single-parent households often fall short of addressing the full complexity of their needs. While many Member States offer targeted benefits, these measures frequently reduce poverty only modestly and are constrained by structural and administrative limitations.

A key issue is the lack of a consistent legal definition of single-parent status across Member States. In some countries, such as **Belgium**, single-parent status is formally recognised in tax and benefit systems. In others, eligibility for support depends on a combination of income thresholds, child age, or household composition, without a clear legal status. This inconsistency creates confusion and inequity. Stakeholders from the European Network of Single Parent Families (ENoS) have called for a universal EU-wide definition or of status for single-parent households to standardise eligibility and recognition and improve access to support²¹⁰.

Family diversity and re-partnering further complicate eligibility. Policies often fail to account for blended families, shared custody arrangements, or informal caregiving structures. In some cases, such as the new 'super-benefit' in **Czechia**, child support payments interact problematically with social protection systems. By being treated as income, child support may lose eligibility for other benefits and weaken the overall support package²¹¹. Strict income thresholds and steep benefit withdrawal rates can also create employment disincentives, as single parents may lose substantial support when increasing their working hours or earnings²¹². Another challenge lies in the enforcement of child maintenance obligations. First, these schemes generally do not assist widowed single parents or those who have no (known) second parent. Additionally, in some countries, such as in **Czechia**, single parents must initiate legal proceedings to secure child support from non-resident parents²¹³. This process can be lengthy, emotionally taxing, and financially burdensome. Even where maintenance guarantee schemes exist, they often require proof of non-payment or ongoing enforcement efforts, placing the responsibility on the single parent. For example, in **Hungary**, prior to recent reforms, around 25% of eligible children received no child support, and parents had to endure strenuous legal processes to claim support which some stakeholders consulted as part of the study considered "humiliating"²¹⁴. Although Hungary has since introduced a state-backed maintenance guarantee, stakeholders emphasised that navigating the bureaucracy remains a significant barrier. Finally, migration and asylum processes can result in long-term separation of families or lack of recognised paternity, scenarios in which single parents might fall outside the standard maintenance enforcement system²¹⁵. Such insights

²⁰⁹ EU-level and Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²¹⁰ EU-level CSO stakeholder consultation, March 2026.

²¹¹ EU-level stakeholder consultation, March 2026.

²¹² EU-level and Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²¹³ Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2026, *Náhradní výživné 'substitute maintenance'*. Available at: <https://mpsv.gov.cz/nahradnivyzivne>.

²¹⁴ Member State-level stakeholder consultation, March 2026.

²¹⁵ Eurochild, 2024, *Annual Report 2024*, Eurochild, Brussels. Available at: <https://eurochild.org/annual-report-2024/>.

underline that while maintenance guarantees can be a vital safety net, further steps (like simplifying claims or broadening eligibility to all single parents in need) could improve their effectiveness.

Access to ECEC is particularly important for single parents, who face more acute pressures in balancing employment and unpaid care responsibilities. Outside of universal systems of ECEC access, single parents rarely receive priority access or fee reductions that are associated with single-parent status and not income-tested. Recognising the importance of quality ECEC in child development and its particular importance for sole parents who may have reduced access to informal care options, this is a key gap. In particular, ECEC must be accessible and flexible to the needs of single parents, with sensitivity to the challenges of nonstandard working hours and school holidays in the absence of a second resident caregiver²¹⁶. Outside of a handful of examples including **Portugal** and **Poland**, ECEC prioritisation is rarely given to single parents on these grounds.

Stakeholders also highlighted the need for more holistic and integrated support. While single-parent families are diverse, stereotypes of so-called 'broken families' result in single parents and their children commonly experiencing stigmatisation²¹⁷. Stigma, alongside isolation and the higher prevalence of disability among single-parent households, was cited as adding additional barriers to accessing support²¹⁸. In **Hungary**, stakeholders identified the Single Parents' Centre in Budapest as an example of best practice in this regard. The centre offers over 80 services – including legal aid, psychological counselling, housing support, and community activities – under one roof. This integrated approach addresses the multifaceted needs of single-parent families and reduces the burden of navigating multiple agencies.

At the EU level, stakeholders noted that single-parent households have only recently begun to receive policy attention. While the Child Guarantee and the European Pillar of Social Rights acknowledge the vulnerability of children in single-parent households, these instruments remain non-binding and rely on Member State initiatives.²¹⁹ Civil society actors stressed the need for more robust EU-level data, research, and coordination to inform policy and ensure that single-parent families are not overlooked²²⁰.

2.5.2. Gaps and shortcomings in targeting large families

Despite the array of policies and benefits, large families face ongoing challenges such as higher rates of poverty (especially in regions with low social transfers), difficulties in accessing adequately sized housing, and occasionally social bias. While many countries offer enhanced child benefits, tax relief, or housing subsidies for large families, among other benefits, large family organisations across the EU warn that these measures are often insufficient or inconsistently applied²²¹.

²¹⁶ Nieuwenhuis, R., 2020, *The situation of single parents in the EU*, Publication for the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, Luxembourg, 45. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU\(2020\)659870_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU(2020)659870_EN.pdf).

²¹⁷ Carroll, N. and Yeadon-Lee, T., 2021, 'I'm Mum and Dad in One, Basically': *Doing and Displaying 'Good Lone Motherhood'*, *Sociology*, 56, 504-522. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385211037606>.

²¹⁸ EU-level CSO stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²¹⁹ EU-level stakeholder consultation, March 2026.

²²⁰ EU-level CSO stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²²¹ EU-level and MS-level CSO stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

Stakeholders highlighted that the most effective support systems are those that combine multiple forms of assistance into a coherent and accessible package. **France**, for instance, combines monthly cash support, tax relief, subsidised childcare, free education, and preferential access to housing – a comprehensive safety net that has kept the poverty rate for 3-child families relatively low. Interestingly, France consistently has one of the EU's highest fertility rates. Similarly, Nordic countries, ensure through universal services that even big families are not left out. For instance, **Finland** ensures that a family of 5 benefits from free schooling, an extensive child benefit, and municipally-provided housing, if needed.

In contrast, in countries where support for large families is fragmented or underfunded, stakeholders report that families often resort to coping mechanisms such as older children caring for younger siblings due to unaffordable childcare or living in overcrowded conditions because adequately-sized homes are out of reach²²². In **Lithuania**, for example, stakeholders reported that large families often live in overcrowded two-room apartments and struggle to afford basic necessities. While some support exists, it is often targeted only at very low-income households, leaving low-to-middle-income large families without adequate assistance.

Eligibility definitions also require refinement. In some Member States, large-family benefits are limited to families with three or more children from the same union, excluding blended families or those with adult children still living at home. Ensuring eligibility definitions do not exclude certain large families (like those with a disabled adult child still at home, or grandparent-led large families) is another refinement being discussed. In **Spain**, some Autonomous Communities have begun to address this by treating single-parent families with two children as equivalent to two-parent families with three children, recognising the comparable caregiving and financial burden²²³. However, such inclusive approaches remain the exception rather than the norm.

On the demographic front, stakeholders caution that financial incentives alone are unlikely to reverse declining fertility trends. Broader factors, such as job security, gender equality, cultural norms, play a critical role. At the same time, they acknowledge that supportive child and family policies can remove certain structural barriers that disincentivise family expansion. In **Poland**, for instance, surveys after the introduction of 500+ child benefit (now increased to PLN 800 per child) showed that some families decided to have additional children sooner than they would have because the benefit gave them financial security and confidence²²⁴. While causality is hard to pin down, it suggests that at minimum, good support for large families can help those who already desire more children to realise their plans without fearing financial instability.

²²² Member State-level stakeholder consultation, March-April 2026.

²²³ Member State-level CSO stakeholder consultation, April 2026.

²²⁴ Member State-level stakeholder consultation, April 2026.

2.6. The role of civil society organisations in addressing support gaps

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a pivotal role in bridging gaps in support for large families and single-parent households in the EU. Stakeholder consultations underscore that CSOs often step in where public policy falls short, by providing targeted services, advocacy, and innovative schemes that directly address the needs of families facing poverty, care burdens, and insufficient state provision. At both the EU level and within Member States, CSOs fulfil four key functions: (1) policy advocacy and representation of family interests, (2) service delivery and support to families on the ground, (3) innovation in family benefits (for example, creating and administering family discount card programmes), and (4) acting as “rights intermediaries”, helping vulnerable EU families access formal entitlements in complex welfare systems. CSOs help to mitigate support gaps – whether due to limited government programmes, lack of awareness, or social stigma – and ensure that the voices of large families and single parents are heard in policymaking.

Through their advocacy and campaigning work, CSOs can also help to challenge misconceptions and tackle stigma against single parent and large families²²⁵. Despite the prevalence and diversity of single-parent households, one study suggests that Europeans are less accepting of these families and perceive single parenthood to be more detrimental to child wellbeing compared to other family types²²⁶. Examples of stigma facing single parents and large families were also prevalent in consultations with stakeholders at both the EU and Member State level. One stakeholder from a single-parent family CSO in **Hungary** emphasised that upon becoming single-parent families, families can experience trauma and social isolation due to negative stereotyping²²⁷. A stakeholder from ELFAC detailed the varying historical reasons for stigma in different Member States. As examples, the stakeholder cited the fact that in **Spain**, there is reluctance to discuss large families due to historical associations with the Franco regime; in **Germany**, stigma is linked to religious or political stereotypes, and in other countries, large families can be perceived as either wealthy or immigrant households which can politicise the provision of state support²²⁸. Against the range of misconceptions and stereotypes, CSOs provide crucial representation and assistance.

2.6.1. Civil society organisations in the space of single-parent households

CSOs have been crucial in highlighting the distinct needs of single-parent households and in providing integrated support where government measures are fragmented. Organisations such as COFACE Families Europe and the newer ENoS have worked to put single parents on the EU policy agenda. Stakeholders consulted noted that only in recent years have single-parent issues gained recognition at EU level – a change that they consider largely driven by persistent civil society lobbying. COFACE has leveraged evidence from its member organisations to push for stronger EU action on affordable childcare, work-life balance, and data improvements (e.g. capturing blended families and single-parent statuses in EU social surveys). ENoS, an alliance of single-parent groups from **Austria, Germany, Italy**, and others, facilitates cross-country exchanges of best practices (for instance, on custody

²²⁵ Solaz, A., Poortman, A. R., Mortelmans, D., Bernardi, L., & Steinbach, A., 2025, *Attitudes toward child well-being in diverse families across Europe*, Demographic Research, 53, 307-324. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2025.53.11>.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Member-State level CSO Stakeholder consultation, April-May 2026.

²²⁸ EU-level CSO Stakeholder consultation, April-May 2026.

arrangements or anti-poverty measures) and presents unified demands – such as calls for simpler access to benefits and non-discrimination of single-parent families – to national and EU authorities.

At the Member State level, CSOs often fill service gaps for single parents. A prominent example is the Single Parent Centre (*Egyszülő Központ*) in Budapest, run by a **Hungarian** Non-governmental organisation (NGO). Opened in 2018, this centre provides a one-stop hub of over 80 services tailored to single parents, including legal aid (e.g. support with alimony enforcement), psychological counselling, job search assistance, childcare, and material support (donations of food, clothing, school supplies). This holistic approach addresses the complex challenges single parents face (from income insecurity to social isolation) in a coordinated way that government agencies often struggle to achieve. The Budapest Single Parent Centre has also spurred innovation by launching a “Single Parent Card” programme, which functions similarly to a family discount card. The card offers discounts for cultural and leisure activities and certain public services (like municipal transport), negotiated through partnerships with businesses and local authorities. Such initiatives not only alleviate financial strain but also promote the social inclusion of single parents and their children.

National umbrella organisations play a “rights intermediary” role by guiding single parents to the assistance they are entitled to and advocating for policy change. In **Austria**, ÖPA unites around 40 regional single-parent associations. ÖPA engages with policymakers to press for better support – e.g. calling for priority access to childcare and social housing for single parents and streamlining cumbersome benefit application processes. It has created an online portal (“KOMPASS”) that compiles information on all relevant services, benefits, and legal rights for single mothers and fathers, thus helping families navigate the welfare system. Similarly, in **Belgium** and **Spain**, single-parent advocacy groups (such as COFAMO and the Isadora Duncan Foundation) raise awareness of the diverse realities of single-parent families, combat stigma, and lobby for formal recognition of single parents as a vulnerable group in need of targeted support. These CSOs also organise peer support networks and workshops – an important complement to formal aid, since many single parents benefit from community solidarity and advice in handling daily challenges.

2.6.2. Civil society organisations in the space of large families

For families with many children, civil society organisations have long been key players in both policy advocacy and direct support, often working in tandem with public authorities. At the European level, ELFAC serves as the umbrella for national large-family associations in 26 countries. This CSO champions the interests of large families (typically those with three or more children) by engaging with EU institutions and promoting a family-friendly perspective in social and economic policies. Stakeholders from ELFAC observed that many EU frameworks (e.g. the European Pillar of Social Rights, Child Guarantee) address child poverty or social inclusion broadly but lack specific focus on family size. In response, ELFAC lobbies for measures like a systematic “family impact assessment” for new EU legislation (to ensure laws do not inadvertently penalise large households) and greater EU support for sharing best practices among Member States. ELFAC has also leveraged EU-funded projects to research family issues – for example, participating in a Horizon project that examined how having children affects students in higher education – thereby building an evidence base and policy recommendations (such as calls for more housing suitable for big families, or tax fairness for larger households).

At the national level, robust large-family associations exist in many countries and often partner with governments to design or implement support schemes. In **Poland**, the association “3 Plus” was a driving force behind the introduction of the nationwide Large Family Card (*Karta Dużej Rodziny*) in 2014. The government issues this card to families with 3 or more children, granting discounts on public transport, museum entry, and at various retailers; the 3 Plus association played a significant role in advocating for

the policy and continues to collaborate by recruiting private companies as discount partners. In **Hungary**, the National Association of Large Families (NOE) – founded in the late 1980s and now representing over 16,000 families – performs a dual role of interest representation and member service. NOE regularly channels feedback from large families to the government (for instance, survey data collected by NOE highlighted needs that informed new policy measures, such as a car purchase subsidy for families with 3+ children). Concurrently, NOE runs its own membership discount card scheme (the NOE Card), which offers 5-15% discounts at grocery chains, bookstores, petrol stations, and recreational facilities nationwide. This self-help approach both eases living costs and creates a sense of community solidarity among large families. Similar associations in countries like **France, Italy, Spain,** and **Latvia** also provide a mix of advocacy and practical benefits, from negotiating reduced utility fees at the municipal level to organising family holiday events and experience-sharing forums.

CSOs also flag several challenges in supporting large families. One is the variability of definitions and support across Member States – what counts as a “large family”, and what aid they receive, differs widely, making it hard to apply one-size-fits-all solutions. CSOs often step in to advocate for more inclusive definitions (for example, lobbying governments to extend benefits to families with a disabled child as equivalent to an additional child, or to single fathers raising many children alone). Another challenge is resource constraints for the CSOs themselves. While some large-family associations receive government subsidies or have thousands of fee-paying members, others rely primarily on volunteers, which can limit their reach and the sustainability of programmes like discount cards if not institutionalised. Despite these hurdles, CSOs for large families have achieved notable impacts: they have improved public perceptions (e.g. in **Latvia**, the Large Families Association successfully pushed to label large families as “honorary families”, combating stigma), and they have influenced policy breakthroughs (such as universal child allowances in **Poland** and housing support schemes in **Hungary**, which benefited from strong public backing due in part to CSO advocacy).

3. LARGE FAMILY CARD INITIATIVES ACROSS MEMBER STATES

3.1. Inventory of existing family card systems

Across Member States, a diverse array of family card systems is in place. Table 2 summarises the existing Family Cards, with an additional table covering key dimensions of their implementation included in Annex 2. This inventory includes both *large* family cards, and generic family cards that are not restricted for use by large families exclusively, in order to fully capture and learn from the range of approaches to family card implementation currently employed across Member States.

Table 2: Family card systems across European Union Member States

Member State	Generic family card	Large family card	Name of scheme
AT	✓		Regional initiatives: <i>Familienpass / Familienkarte</i>
BE		✓	Regional initiatives: e.g. <i>Carte famille nombreuse</i> in Wallonia
BG			
HR	✓		<i>e-Dječja kartica "Mudrica"</i>
CY			
CZ	✓		<i>Rodinný pas</i>
DK			
EE		✓	<i>Perekaart</i>
FI			
FR		✓	<i>Carte familles nombreuses</i>
DE		✓	State-level or local initiatives: e.g. <i>Landesfamilienpass</i> in Baden-Württemberg
EL		✓	<i>πιστοποιητικό πολυτεχνικής ιδιότητας (Certificate of large families)</i>
HU		✓	<i>NOE kártya</i>
IE			
IT	✓		Regional initiatives: e.g. <i>Carta della famiglia</i> in Trentino

Member State	Generic family card	Large family card	Name of scheme
LV		✓	<i>Goda ģimenes</i>
LT		✓	<i>Šeimos kortelė</i>
LU			
MT			
NL			
PL		✓	<i>Karta dużej rodziny</i>
PT		✓	<i>Cartão de família numerosa</i>
RO			
SK	✓		<i>Rodinný pas</i>
SI			
ES		✓	<i>Tarjeta/título de familia numerosa</i>
SE			

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on country factsheets.

The landscape of existing Family Cards across EU Member States shows a diverse range of approaches. In terms of coverage, there is a distinction between national cards (**Poland, Spain**) and cards that are implemented at a regional scale (**Austria, Belgium**). Numerous cards are valid across regional or national borders (**Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Belgium, Czechia**, and regional cards in **Austria** and **Italy**). These examples of regional or national integration of family card systems vary in their degree of institutionalisation and the extent to which benefits are reciprocated across borders.

Eligibility across family card systems can be grouped into two approaches: the first is a general family card for which any family with a child (normally up to age 18) is eligible (**Austria, Czechia**). The second is a specifically *large* family card for which the general eligibility criteria tend to be 3 or more children up to age 18. However, within some family cards, the benefits accessed by families are staggered according to the number of children. Within both approaches, there are examples of adapted eligibility criteria for families with disabled children and/or parents, for children who are in education beyond the age of 18, and for single-parent households. While the general approach is for the card to be issued to parents or guardians, benefits are extended to grandparents and even pregnant mothers in some cases.

It is increasingly common practice for family cards to be accessible in both physical and digital formats. Several family card schemes use their own app to increase the ease with which families can access

benefits associate with the card. However, in certain cases, such digital solutions have not yet been introduced. For example, in **Latvia**, stakeholders noted that an app would eliminate the need for families to carry individual physical cards for each member – which can be inconvenient and problematic if forgotten – and would also enhance clarity and transparency regarding available discounts²²⁹.

The administration of family cards is most commonly overseen by public departments or ministries in the relevant regional or national administrations. However, in some cases civil society organisations are responsible for the implementation and management of the family card, often in partnership with the public sector (**Belgium, Hungary**). Where public sector departments or ministries take responsibilities for administration, the financing of family card implementation, management and marketing comes from public budgets and from membership fees. Where civil society organisations take administrative responsibility, these may be fully funded by the organisation itself or through membership fees. In general, the discounts offered by partner organisations are funded by the partner, and in some cases partner organisations even pay a small fee to apply to be part of the family card discount scheme.

Data on the take up of family cards varies in its availability. However, the prevalence of family card use across different contexts is diverse. In some contexts, especially where the family card has an established history, it is commonplace for most families to have a family card (such as in the Tyrol province of **Austria** and **Poland**). In regions where the family card is comparatively new, take up is lower (such as the Trentino province of **Italy**).

3.2. Comparative analysis of advantages and barriers

The literature review identified that there are virtually no studies examining the effects of introducing LFCs. As a result, there is no conclusive evidence on the ability of LFCs to mitigate cost of living pressures among large families, or to encourage families to have more children as a result. This is a key area where further primary research to understand the implementation and impact of family cards on large families using the scheme would be beneficial. However, individual studies of LFCs in national contexts offer some insights into the advantages, impacts, and limitations experienced by LFC users.

A key consideration among Member States family card systems is the aim of the card. Within the diverse offering across Member States, different systems are oriented towards improving family support in various ways. Some family cards are more explicit in their intention to mitigate the cost of living for families. Other cards are targeted more explicitly at increasing access to leisure and cultural experiences for children, rather than administered as a policy instrument that reduces the cost of daily living for large families. For example, the *EuregioFamilyPass*, which unites the individual regional family cards in Tyrol, South Tyrol and Trentino to be used across the **Austria-Italy** border, offers a range of advantages that are more targeted towards recreation, mobility and culture. The goal of this integrated family card is to enable families to access memorable experiences in the region and promote cross-border mobility. The family card system strengthens family-friendly provision in the region, and the benefits offered aim to increase quality of life for families through making cultural and recreational experiences more accessible for families. However, the policy focus of this system is less oriented

²²⁹ Member State-level stakeholder consultation, April 2026.

towards tackling the day-to-day costs and pressures experienced by families, and especially large families.

The relevance of LFCs to reducing the economic pressures facing large families largely depends on the array of benefits offered to families. For example, recent evidence highlights that the advantages of the LFC in **Poland** rest on the relevance of benefits and discounts to the needs of families and to their accessibility. The Supreme Audit Office of Poland deemed the LFC a good complementary family policy instrument, drawing attention to the fact that the compatibility of the LFC with the actual needs of large families must be ensured²³⁰. Similarly, evidence based on a user satisfaction survey and focus group interviews suggested that the discounts offered to LFC holders in Poland were often symbolic and not suitable for their needs²³¹. More recently, the Polish LFC has broadened its focus to incorporate benefits that support families' needs. For example, the recent policy that links large family status to extended unemployment protection reflects a more holistic approach towards addressing the broader challenges experienced by large families.

Across both Member State and EU level consultations, multiple stakeholders stressed that LFC benefits must be reflective of the needs of large families, and accessible in terms of their location, in order to offer meaningful impact on families²³². While many LFCs are oriented towards increasing access to cultural experiences and recreational opportunities, they do not directly address the causes or symptoms of deprivation that large families are more vulnerable to. The extent to which LFCs alone can make substantial improvements to quality of life for large families (and single parent households where applicable) was called into question. LFCs can indeed increase access to services, recreational and cultural experiences for families, but to address the substantial divergence in risk of poverty of these families compared to reference families a broader array of policy measures is needed.

3.3. Identification of best practices and innovative approaches

3.3.1. Cross-border integration

Various family card systems have integrated recognition and use across regional and national borders, allowing families to access benefits across a wider region. Cross-border family card recognition fosters greater regional integration, facilitating the mobility of families and widening access to a range of benefits. Two examples of large-scale integration include the LFCs of **Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania**, and the *EuregioFamilyPass* uniting Tyrol in **Austria** with the provinces of South Tyrol and Trentino in **Italy**. Practically, these systems of integrated family cards are based on mutual recognition of individual cards, whereby the administration and management of the card sit within the relevant regional or national department.

²³⁰ Supreme Audit Office of Poland, 2016, *Karta Dużej Rodziny jako element polityki prorodzinnej państwa*, Nr ewid. 29/2016/P/15/045/KPS, Supreme Audit Office of Poland, Warsaw, Poland. Available at: <https://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,10863,vp,13204.pdf>.

²³¹ Bebel, A., 2014, *Wspieranie rodzin wielodzietnych przez samorządy lokalne—przykład Karty Dużej Rodziny*. Studia i Prace WNEIZ US, 35(2), 279-293. Available at: https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/texts/studia-i-prace-wydzialu-nauk-ekonomicznych-i-zarzadzania/2014-tom-35-numer-2/studia_i_prace_wydzialu_nauk_ekonomicznych_i_zarzadzania-r2014-t35-n2-s279-293.pdf.

²³² Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

The Baltic family card system enables families holding **Lithuania's** *Seimos Kortele*, **Latvia's** *3+ Goda Gimenes Karte*, or **Estonia's** *Perekaart* to access benefits from participating partners across the region. The holders of a national card can use it to access benefits with participating partners across the other two countries. The cross-border discounts and benefits are only accessible to families if the partner has opted into the regional scheme. As a result, the number of benefits available to a large family visiting the other countries are reduced compared to their own nation, and partners may need to be incentivised to consent for regional use to expand the integration of these three national systems. The Baltic family card system offers an interesting approach to facilitating cross-border cooperation across national LFC systems, based on mutual recognition of benefits at the discretion of partners. Partners opt in to offering their discounts to LFC holders from other Baltic states.

In practice, the participation of partners in the regional LFC system varies greatly by state. Stakeholders consulted highlighted, for instance, that **Latvia** offers many more benefits to neighbouring LFC holders than **Lithuania**²³³. The challenge of reciprocity across integrated family card systems is an important consideration. One stakeholder suggested that the integration needs to be institutionalised for partners to recognise the benefit of offering reciprocal discounts to LFC holders from neighbouring countries.

The *EuregioFamilyPass* is another unique model that reflects a more institutionalised integration of regional family cards. The card was introduced in 2017 supported by the Interreg Programme, an EU funding programme that supports cross-border and interregional cooperation. The *EuregioFamilyPass* unites the three standalone provincial family cards for Tyrol, South Tyrol and Trentino under one system that is valid across the region. While the front of the cards issued reflects the provincial family card, the back reflects the integrated *EuregioFamilyPass* which gives access to benefits in the whole Euregio. Unlike the Baltic system where partners opt in to regional coverage, the *EuregioFamilyPass* is based on mutual recognition and automatically ensures full access to benefits across each of the three provinces.

3.3.2. Expansive eligibility criteria

While the standard eligibility for LFCs tends to be 3 or more children under 18, it is common practice for the eligibility criteria for LFCs to encompass a broader range of situations. Across numerous LFCs, the eligible age range for families with children with disabilities is expanded. The relaxing of eligibility criteria to offer increased access to families with children with disabilities, with parents with disabilities, with children in continued education, and to low-income and single-parent households all reflect notable innovations reflecting the diversity of family configurations and the range of care needs that families have. Extensions of benefits to include use by other carers, including grandparents or a temporary guardian, also ensures that family card benefits can be accessed by a broad array of caregivers.

Spain's LFC (*Tarjeta/Título de Familia Numerosa*) is an example of an innovative expansion of eligibility criteria to access LFC benefits. While the standard eligibility criteria cater to families with 3 or more children up to the age of 21 who are living at home and financial dependent, the threshold is adapted to reflect the additional care needs experienced by families with children with disabilities or

²³³ Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

parents with disabilities. Families with two children, if one or more are registered as disabled, are eligible for the card. Families in which both parents are disabled, or one parent has a registered disability meeting the threshold, are eligible with two children. Widowed parents with two children are also entitled to the card. The Spanish LFC's eligibility criteria also reflect the diverse nature of blended families, whereby adopted, fostered or unrelated children living with a guardian are counted as family members and a parent's civil partner or spouse is considered a parent.

The state-level LFC offered in Baden-Württemberg in **Germany**, *Landesfamilienpass*, is another example of a particularly inclusive approach to eligibility criteria. This card is available to families with 3 or more children, single parents with 1 child or more, families with severely disabled children, or low-income families receiving social benefits. Similarly, **Poland's** *Karta Dużej Rodziny* is valid for parents indefinitely, and it can be issued even to parents of grown-up children. Children of large families may benefit from the card until they reach adulthood, finish tertiary education (up to 25 years of age) or as long as the child's certificate of disability remains valid. These approaches acknowledge the array of different families requiring support and aim to include the diverse families experiencing heightened vulnerability and more acute care needs.

3.3.3. Broad range of benefits

Family cards have the greatest potential to improve the quality of life of large families when benefits are accessible and relevant to the needs of families. Many family cards provide discounts that increase access to fun, recreational and cultural experiences. While these opportunities are valuable for both parents and children, they have less direct relevance to the needs of families experiencing greater risk of poverty and social exclusion. Across the range of family card systems, there are examples of a diverse range of services and opportunities accessible to families, with best practice encompassing support that helps families meet their basic needs. This includes discounts or benefits that reduce the cost of living and increase access to necessities (food, clothing, healthcare and wellbeing, mobility).

For example, **Croatia's** *Mudrica* card provides cardholders with discounts on essential healthcare services including dentists and optician appointments. Reductions in the cost of public transport require coordination between the family card system and public services. Many family card systems feature such benefits across train and bus services, including the national LFCs in **Poland**, **Latvia**, **Greece** and **France**. Other examples of progressive services covered by family card systems include fuel savings (e.g. *OÖ Familienkarte* in the province of Upper **Austria** and **Poland's** national LFC) and discounts on home and car maintenance (**Croatia**). The **Austrian** province of Styria's *ZWEI & MEHR Family Pass* partners with organisations providing access to discounts for counselling, adult education, and support groups for parenting children with disabilities.

While the value of increasing access to services and support for large families is an important feature of LFCs, stakeholders and users of family cards stress the importance of access to recreational, leisure, and cultural opportunities for families. Ensuring a broad range of accessible opportunities for families to take advantage of relies on the family card system's attraction and development of a range of partners spread across geographical areas. To do this, existing family card schemes must provide clear benefits to partner participation. As partners offering discounts to cardholders must generally fund this offer themselves, family card systems can ensure partners benefit through using the card's platform to communicate available benefits, feature specific partners, and endorse the positive perception of 'family-friendly' businesses.

Partnership models between public sector LFC administrators and civil society have proven a successful approach to recruiting and maintaining partners. In **Poland**, recruiting businesses for the *Karta Dużej Rodziny* LFC programme is carried out by an NGO contractor with local branches. The

businesses are later approved by the Ministry for Family, Labour and Social Policy to ensure compatibility with LFC aims. There has been a significant increase in the number of recruited businesses since the NGO took over that task from the local administration. In an interview, a Ministry for Family, Labour and Social Policy representative attributed this to the fact that the local NGO knows the needs of large families, as the contractor has previous experience in supporting large families.

3.3.4. Staggered benefits by family size

Recognising that accessing and affording services is increasingly challenging for families with more dependent children, a staggered approach to family card benefits offers an innovation solution to providing proportional advantages to families with greater support needs. **Croatia's Mudrica** card adopts this approach. Users of the family card access benefits that increase with the number of children across three categories: 1, 2 and 3+.

Spain's LFC distinguishes between a "general" and a "special" large-family category, with the latter applying to families with five or more children, as well as some four-child families whose household income per family member falls below a specified threshold. This tiered system is an innovative feature because it links the level of public support to both family size and financial circumstances, with families in the special category receiving more generous discounts and benefits, including higher reductions for public services such as transport and sports facilities.

3.3.5. User-friendly Large Family Card app

The integration of a physical family card with a virtual app is increasingly common across family card systems, giving families using the card more flexibility. These are particularly effective when they combine access to the card with user-friendly information about how it can be used in the area. For example, **Croatia's Mudrica** e-card can be accessed via a free mobile app. The app features an interactive map locating partners, so users can easily identify benefits in their area. Similarly, the *EuregioFamilyPass* in provinces of **Austria** and **Italy**, has a website featuring an interactive map, categorising and locating benefits offered to cardholders in the region.

3.4. Assessment of feasibility and added value of a potential European Large Family Card

3.4.1. Added value of a European Large Family Card

The study's assessment of a potential European LFC draws on the desk research of existing national and regional LFCs, existing EU-level initiatives (notably the European Disability Card), and on stakeholder consultations. It is important to note that the evidence base for assessing a European LFC is limited. There are no robust impact evaluations of existing national LFC schemes in terms of their effect on poverty reduction, child well-being, or family welfare, and much of the available evidence is descriptive in nature. In addition, while stakeholders consulted across European and Member State institutions and civil society organisations were largely supportive of a European LFC, it is important to mention that the sample was weighted towards actors who advocate for greater recognition of large families and EU action in this area.

With these limitations in mind, the evidence identified key areas in which a European LFC could add value to the current system of support for large families. These potential benefits are listed below.

a. Improving social recognition and inclusivity

Large families are often associated with specific stigma or stereotypes. Stakeholders from civil society organisations noted that large families are sometimes viewed as a burden on public resources or as

socially marginalised, especially when they intersect with other vulnerabilities like low income or single parenthood, and that employers are often hesitant to hire a parent of many children (particularly mothers) due to assumed childcare and scheduling conflicts. In addition, this group of families increasingly takes on diverse forms, with blended families increasingly common across the EU. Large families also intersect with other diverse characteristics that are especially susceptible to disadvantage in the EU, including single-parent families, adoptive families, and rainbow families.

A European LFC could help counteract these perceptions by providing social recognition and validation of large families in their diverse forms. This could contribute to the societal perspective of their value and make EU societies more inclusive to families that fall in this category. Stakeholders suggested that such recognition, if accompanied by visible benefits and a unified EU-wide identity, could shift public narratives and promote a more positive image of large families across Member States²³⁴.

b. Improving quality of life and participation in recreational activities

If implemented successfully, a European LFC could improve quality of life for large families, reducing cost of living and increasing access to a range of services and opportunities. Families with more dependent children face greater barriers to accessing a range of support and activities. With benefits that offer discounts to a range of necessities (e.g. transportation or material support), recreational activities, and cultural experiences, the European LFC could have a meaningful impact on large families' day-to-day living conditions as well as access to memorable and fun experiences to be shared. As a result, a European LFC could help make family life more feasible and enjoyable for EU citizens in large families.

c. A means of targeting support within EU competence

Because family policy remains primarily a Member State competence, a European LFC based on mutual recognition of a large-family status could offer an EU-level mechanism that respects subsidiarity while providing a visible signal of EU action. Stakeholders consulted – predominantly from EU institutions and civil society – viewed this approach as an uncontroversial means of targeting support to a group of families that tend to face higher care burdens and increased costs of living without encroaching on national prerogatives²³⁵. Using an expansive definition of large family could increase the range of families experiencing greater care needs who would be eligible for support. However, broader eligibility would also require careful design to avoid diluting the targeting of support and to ensure that benefits remain proportionate to need.

d. Increasing cross-border mobility and integration

A European LFC would facilitate movement of large families around the EU, potentially making international travel more affordable and giving visiting families access to benefits in other EU Member States. Stakeholders noted that families with three or more children often face logistical and financial barriers when travelling, such as higher transport costs, limited accommodation options, or lack of recognition of their family status abroad.

²³⁴ EU-level stakeholder consultations, March 2026.

²³⁵ EU-level and Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

A European LFC, by ensuring mutual recognition of large-family status across Member States, could help reduce these barriers and make travel more accessible and affordable. By doing so, a shared European LFC could also foster a sense of European identity and inclusion, while also supporting the free movement for large families, a core EU principle²³⁶. The practical value of this benefit would, however, depend on whether partner providers (transport operators, cultural institutions, accommodation providers) in host Member States actually extend discounts to visiting cardholders, which experience from the Baltic LFC scheme suggests cannot be assumed (see Section 3.3.1).

3.4.2. Feasibility considerations

While a European LFC offers many potential benefits to diverse families in the EU, the practical feasibility of implementing such a system across the region depends on a range of interlocking design, institutional, financial and operational choices. Existing challenges, while acknowledged, were not necessarily seen as insurmountable by stakeholders²³⁷. Precedence for a cross-border card giving recognition to a specific group of EU citizens across all Member States is being established with the ongoing introduction of the European Disability Card (EDC)²³⁸ as well as with the very recent announcement of a pilot programme for a new digital European Child Guarantee card, to be launched in 2027²³⁹. However, there remain several considerations regarding the design and implementation of a potential European LFC system requiring careful assessment before it is deemed feasible.

²³⁶ EU-level CSO stakeholder consultation, March 2026.

²³⁷ EU-level and Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²³⁸ European Commission, 2026. *European Disability Card and European Parking Card*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/european-disability-card-and-european-parking-card-persons-disabilities_en.

²³⁹ European Commission, 2026. *Breaking the cycle of child poverty – Strengthening the European Child Guarantee*. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7f60af79-936f-42b3-a6c4-a4639c6679ff_en?filename=EC-anti-poverty_ECG_2026.pdf.

Box 4: Learnings from the European Disability Card

The ongoing introduction of the EDC follows a successful pilot project in 8 Member States from 2016–2018. The card will serve as proof of disability status across EU Member States, meaning that cardholders travelling across national borders should get access to the same preferential treatment and special conditions as country residents. These might include priority access in recreational or cultural attractions, discounted tickets and transport, and personal assistance.

Positive lessons transferable to a European LFC: A key strength of the EDC initiative has been its inclusive and consultative design. A public consultation in 2023 allowed over 2,500 people with disabilities to contribute to the European Commission’s legislative proposal. The Directive was approved by the European Council and the European Parliament in 2024, and Member States now have 42 months to apply the measures in the Directive. The EDC is expected to be operational in 2028. It will be issued by competent national authorities within Member States, who are responsible for determining eligibility criteria for granting disabled status as well as for covering administrative costs. The EDC demonstrates the value of mutual recognition without harmonising national eligibility criteria. Member States retain control over who qualifies, while the card ensures recognition across borders. Additionally, the EU Directive provides institutional stability and a common visual identity. This experience shows that institutionalising the card through EU legislation, supported by delegated acts and a common visual identity, can ensure long-term sustainability and trust among users and service providers. This decentralised but coordinated model offers a promising blueprint for the design and implementation of a European LFC.

Challenges encountered that are directly relevant to a European LFC: Several lessons can be drawn from the EDC’s conception and design. First, reconciling diverse national eligibility systems has proven complex, with Member States operating very different disability assessment criteria. Similar (or greater) diversity exists across national definitions of “large family”. Second, the long implementation timeline (from 2016 pilot to full application expected in 2028) reflects the complexity of rolling out such an instrument at EU level. Third, the EDC highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement. Ensuring service providers honour the card across borders is not automatic; it requires active partner engagement, monitoring and, where a legal basis exists, enforcement. Fourth, the initiative underscores the need for clear, accessible information and a central EU-level portal to support consistent communication and uptake. Variable quality of national digital infrastructure and information platforms risks creating uneven user experiences across Member States. Finally, funding and administrative costs fall largely on Member States, which can create disparities in implementation pace and quality.

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on European Commission (2021)²⁴⁰ and stakeholder consultation²⁴¹.

a. Integration with existing family card schemes

Implementation of a European LFC system would result in substantial overlap with existing family card schemes, which have a diverse range of eligibility criteria and benefits. A potential European LFC could follow the integration model of existing examples of cross-border integration of cards, including the

²⁴⁰ European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, EY and IRVAPP, 2021, *Study assessing the implementation of the pilot action on the EU Disability Card and associated benefits – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021. Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/429261>.

²⁴¹ EU-level CSO stakeholder consultations, April 2026.

Baltic LFC system uniting **Estonia, Latvia and Lithuanian** and the *EuregioFamilyPass* across **the Austrian-Italian** border. In these mutual-recognition models, cards are issued by the relevant national or provincial administration but are valid for use in the neighbouring regions. The benefit of this approach is that existing cards with different administration systems remain functional without disruption, decreasing complexity for families using the card. Some family cards have distinct local histories and are a source of considerable pride at the Member State or regional level, suggesting that a European LFC should not replace or usurp the role of existing card systems but complement them²⁴².

However, EU-wide mutual recognition is considerably more complex than these regional examples suggest. Some Member States operate no family card scheme at all; in others, cards are open to any family with one or more children, while elsewhere they are restricted to families with three or more. Differences in how families with diverse care needs are recognised (children or parents with disabilities, pregnant women, single-parent households, blended families) would need to be reconciled, as would differences in administration (public, NGO-led, or mixed) and in whether cards are free or subject to a user fee. There is no straightforward template for bridging these differences, and the EDC experience suggests that even where mutual recognition (rather than harmonisation) is the goal, significant coordination effort is required²⁴³. It is therefore likely that a European LFC would complement rather than replace existing systems, with its practical benefits heavily dependent on the willingness of national authorities and partners to align.

b. Incentivisation of partner participation and reciprocity

A key concern that emerges from case studies of existing family cards and LFCs is the importance of ensuring that partners, across the public and private sector, recognise clear benefits from participating in the scheme. User experiences suggest that LFCs can have a meaningful impact on family life when benefits offered are relevant, accessible and desirable. As partners in the private sector voluntarily offer advantages under family card schemes, providing suitable recognition to participants is an important aspect of maintaining a range of benefits. In existing systems, marketing and communication with family card users that spotlight and provide visibility to partners offers a clear benefit. So too does a form of recognition that partners are 'family friendly'. Existing family cards which make use of interactive maps, social media, and other marketing materials like newsletters, have success in fostering a community of engaged partners and help make family card discounts the norm. The feasibility of this approach rests on the availability of central resources to develop such resources.

Ensuring a clear institutional foundation to a family card system is also important for partner participation and reciprocity of benefits across border. For example, one of the reasons why partners in **Lithuania** have been slow to take up the opportunity to reciprocate benefits to visiting LFC holders in **Estonia** and **Latvia** is the lack of clear institutional framework underpinning the regional card. If partners do not see the necessity or benefit of extending family card benefits at a European level, the challenge of implementing a European LFC will be heightened.

²⁴² Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March–April 2026.

²⁴³ EU-level stakeholder consultation, March 2026.

c. Institutionalisation and administration of a European Large Family Card

Ensuring that a European LFC is institutionalised is an important priority, as large families and partners need to feel that the system is reliable and consistent beyond the tenures of different individual stakeholders. Proper institutionalisation of a European LFC would require coordination between relevant public bodies in Member States, partners across the public and private sectors issuing benefits, and with civil society to ensure the system is reflective of the needs of users. Learning from the introduction of the European Disability Card, establishing an EU Directive with specific measures in place to ensure coordination and implementation could make administration more feasible. Alternatively, situating the institutionalisation and administration of the European LFC within a civil society organisation could streamline efficient coordination and prioritising of large family's needs, such as ELFAC. However, this may come at the expense of ensuring direct participation from Member State administrations.

d. Inclusive eligibility criteria to maximise support

To reap widespread and meaningful benefits for European families, the eligibility criteria for a potential European LFC should arguably be expansive and inclusive. Large families reflect one configuration of families with increased care burdens and heightened disadvantage, but support needs are present across a range of families. To feasibly have a meaningful impact, a European LFC should be designed with families with the additional needs of children or parents with disabilities, single-parent households, and low-income families in mind. Parents of grown-up children could also possibly remain in the scheme to some degree, as a countermeasure to an increased risk of poverty.

Recognising the importance of inclusivity in the card's implementation, stakeholders query how appropriate and inclusive the terminology of a 'large' family card is, and whether framing the initiative as a 'family card' or even 'care card' may better reflect the aims of the scheme. Benefits could be staggered across different tiers so that families with greater need (such as having more dependent children) receive greater access to support through proportionally increasing benefits.

e. Funding a European Large Family Card

Financial feasibility is a central consideration, particularly given the limited evidence available to assess the effectiveness of large family cards in reducing poverty and improving living standards for children. Before committing resources, careful assessment of the added value of a European LFC relative to the investment required, and relative to alternative policy instruments such as the European Child Guarantee or ESF+ investments, is essential.

In some countries, LFCs are issued free of charge with administrative costs supported from national budgets (e.g. **Poland's** *Karta Dużej Rodziny*) while in others, a small fee is charged (e.g. **Estonia's** *Perekaart*). Reducing any financial barriers to participation is a key priority for a potential European LFC, to ensure access by the most vulnerable families. The preferred approach is to avoid any user fees to fund administration of a European LFC.

Given that family cards intersect with both national and regional policy provision, and that the Commission has previously indicated that a LFC may fall outside its scope²⁴⁴, co-financing arrangements between the private sector, Member States and European institutions could be explored. For example, as is already the case in existing family card systems, private sector partners opt into the scheme and offer discounts at their own discretion in exchange for positive communications and a 'family-friendly' reputation. Member States could finance public service discounts for families (through national or European funding), but centralised funding could be used to create, maintain and monitor the LFC network, including mapping benefits available and facilitating cross-border cooperation and learning.

There are several funding options that could be accessed to help with financing different aspects of the European LFC. For the digital infrastructure underlying a family card, **the European Regional Development Fund** is relevant for EU-wide activities such as app development and cross-border verification systems. There is a precedent from the 2014–2020 programming period, when the *EuregioFamilyPass* was financed under the European Regional Development Fund (2017–2020), under the theme of 'efficient public administration'²⁴⁵. The focus of this funding was to integrate and strengthen existing benefits in border regions of Tyrol, South Tyrol and Trentino. The **ESF+** also has an Employment and Social Innovation Strand (EaSI) which encompasses social innovation pilots and cross-border projects²⁴⁶.

A second financing consideration for the European LFC includes the provision of public service discounts to families, including state subsidies in a wide variety of areas from transport to energy provision. Member States could draw on funds such as the ESF+ if the family card is framed as an anti-poverty measure delivering discounts on transport, food, education and services, or as a delivery mechanism for Child Guarantee Commitments. Member States already use ESF+ for family support services, for example an award-winning **Czech** project developed an online screening tool connecting women with free post-partum psychosocial support²⁴⁷. However, given that the ESF+ allocates an envelope for each Member State based on their characteristics, using some of this funding to support a potential LFC is at the discretion of individual Member States. Thus, while it may be feasible to map state-level benefits and link them through a digital EU-wide infrastructure project, there would be a wide variety of family support measures or discounts corresponding to different national priorities and local contexts.

f. Consultative design to incorporate public perspectives and priorities

Given that the feasibility of the potential European LFC system relies heavily on the buy-in and uptake of both families and partners, a consultative approach to design is important. Similar to the approach taken in the conception of the European Disability Card, a public consultation that brings together

²⁴⁴ European Parliament, 2011, *Parliamentary question P-011045/2011*. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-7-2011-011045-ASW_EN.html#def1, accessed 11 May 2026.

²⁴⁵ European Commission, 2026, *Kohesio project*, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. Available at: <https://kohesio.ec.europa.eu/en/projects/Q4295652>.

²⁴⁶ European Commission, 2026, *European Social Fund Plus*. Available at: <https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en/direct-management-easi>.

²⁴⁷ European Commission, 2025, *European Social Fund Plus*. Available at: <https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en/news/czech-project-wins-regiostars-2025-early-support-families-after-childbirth>.

families, businesses and civil society organisation would be invaluable. This would help solidify the objectives of the card based on lived experience of the needs of families in Europe. Ascertaining whether a European LFC's primary goal is to reduce family's costs of living, increase access to recreational opportunities, increase cross-border mobility or another objective will inform the best implementation strategy, but should be shaped by European families themselves.

g. Digital infrastructure and accessibility

As shown in previous sections, the integration of both physical and digital formats is becoming increasingly necessary to enhance accessibility and prevent exclusion. This dual format allows families to access benefits flexibly across different contexts. However, the EDC and national LFC experiences reveal disparities in the accessibility of national card websites and information materials. For a European LFC, ensuring that all digital platforms meet EU accessibility standards and are available in multiple languages would be critical. A central EU portal could serve as a hub for information, benefit directories, and application guidance, helping to reduce fragmentation and improve user experience.

h. Monitoring, evaluation and enforcement mechanisms

The EDC experience highlights the importance of establishing robust monitoring and enforcement frameworks to ensure consistent implementation across Member States. Stakeholders agreed that without clear mechanisms to track usage, assess impact, and address non-compliance, the effectiveness of such a card could be undermined²⁴⁸. For the LFC, this suggests the need for a centralised EU-level monitoring system, possibly supported by a standardised data collection template and periodic reporting obligations. Additionally, enforcement provisions – such as requiring service providers to honour the card and providing families with accessible complaint mechanisms – would be essential to ensure the card's credibility and utility.

i. Prioritisation of targeted action supporting families at risk

Finally, the feasibility considerations also warrant an assessment of the degree to which a European LFC is the best course for providing support for families with greater care demands, whether this is due to having more dependent children, only one parent, or disability among parents or children. Much of the added value of a European LFC lies in its symbolic recognition of the value and needs of families and in facilitating access to transportation and culturally enriching activities. However, there is insufficient evidence to conclude whether an LFC offers more scope to alleviate risk of poverty and social exclusion encountered more acutely by these families compared to existing initiatives, including through the European Child Guarantee.

²⁴⁸ EU-level and Member State-level stakeholder consultations, March – April 2026.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Families across the EU are increasingly diverse but juggle shared pressures across rising costs of living and reconciling home and work life. Family life sits against a backdrop of considerable societal shifts, including increased labour force participation among women, changing partnership norms, and significant demographic change. Supporting families across the EU requires recognition of, and adaptation to, the full spectrum of contemporary family forms including large, single-parent, blended, and living apart together households. Understanding the different support needs across and within these varied groups, as well as the policy approaches that have positive impacts on them, are important priorities. The gap reported between desired and actual family size suggests that supportive policy that makes family life more feasible in light of contemporary changes and pressures could help European citizens meet their family aspirations.

Single-parent households and large families face particular challenges, with unique and heightened care responsibilities. Analysis of the multifaceted vulnerabilities experienced by single-parent households and large families across Member States reveals a distinct hierarchy of risk: single parents, particularly mothers, consistently face the most severe economic and health-related disadvantages, while large families face distinct, compounded risks compared to the reference baseline. Social transfers soften, but do not solve, structural income poverty for these household types. Social transfers reduce initial risk but fail to fully close the gap relative to reference two-parent, two-child households.

Broader risk of poverty and social exclusion is heightened among these households, particularly for single-parent households. Severe material deprivation is the primary driver of single-parent exclusion, manifesting as an acute inability to afford everyday necessities, such as adequate home heating or timely utility payments. 'Work-first' initiatives ignore the reality of high work intensity among single parents. While the AROPE metric flags very low work intensity as a key driver of exclusion, single mothers often face the exact opposite reality. They maintain high employment rates, yet still suffer from in-work poverty and severe health-related limitations. Pushing traditional labour activation on a group already working at maximum capacity is counterproductive.

The role of EU policy in shaping support for single-parent households and large families has increased substantially over the last decade with the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights principles. A range of policy initiatives targeting gender inequality, work-life balance, and care indirectly and directly cater to these families. Legislative progress with initiatives including the EU Work-Life Balance Directive have led to concrete improvements among Member States. Various other ensuring policy initiatives such as the European Child Guarantee, and funding instruments including the European Social Fund Plus, aim to support members of at-risk families, indirectly capturing single-parent and large family households who are more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. Under these soft law policy initiatives where Member States are responsible for implementation, the EU's role is more supportive. It provides benchmarks and monitoring frameworks, including through the European Semester, and collects substantial data to assess progress and inform future policy. However, without a universal definition across the EU for both large families and single-parent households, it remains challenging to capture a comparative picture of the situation of these family types.

While EU policy and initiatives provide a firm foundation for multidimensional family policies, these remain largely the competence of the Member States. There is a lack of evidence assessing the impact of specific policies on large families or single-parent households in particular. Shorter (up to one year) and well-compensated parental leave is generally associated with positive labour market

outcomes for women. While universal child benefits are associated with lower maternal labour market participation, they do positively affect poverty reduction. Subsidised childcare has a positive but modest impact on mothers' labour market outcomes, as well as wider documented social and economic benefits including poverty reduction. Employer policies generally reap small to moderate positive effects for employees, but impacts are smaller among individuals with greater care demands, including parents. The review of existing evidence points to an imperative for research into how policies impact labour market participation, risk of poverty, and risk of social exclusion among families with greater care support needs including large families and single-parent households.

Across Member States, support for single-parent households and large families is delivered both directly and indirectly through a range of policy domains but remains fragmented and uneven in its effectiveness. The policy domains include increased child benefits, tax relief and allowances, maintenance and child support guarantees, targeted income support, increased access to ECEC, housing support, labour market activation policies, and leave extensions, among other measures. However, the effectiveness of these measures is often undermined by complex eligibility rules, administrative burdens, and fragmented delivery systems which are difficult for families to navigate. This unevenness leads to under-claiming of entitlements for some eligible families, and leaves others – particularly vulnerable families with lower incomes or complex caregiving arrangements – without adequate support. Addressing these systemic barriers is essential to ensuring that family policy delivers on its promise of inclusion, equity, and meaningful support for those with the greatest care responsibilities.

Efforts of the EU and Member States to support single-parent households and large families are complemented by CSOs, who play a critical role in mitigating support gaps for these families. CSOs fulfil four key functions: policy advocacy and representation of family interests, service delivery and support to families on the ground, innovation in family benefits (for example, creating and administering family discount card programs), and acting as “rights intermediaries”, helping vulnerable EU families access formal entitlements in complex welfare systems. CSOs help to bridge support gaps and ensure that the voices of large families and single parents are heard in policymaking.

Family cards and Large Family cards across Member States are a means of targeting support to families with heightened care support needs. Family card systems exist across various Member States, offering cardholders a range of discounts, from access to cultural and recreational experiences, to family travel and mobility, to shopping for food and clothes. Many of these family cards are specifically tailored to large families, with eligibility criteria restricted to those families with 3 or more children or other criteria related to increased care needs. The review of family card systems identified a number of innovative practices, including cross-border integration, expansive eligibility criteria, meaningful partners and benefits for families, staggered discounts according to family size, and user-friendly apps for cardholders. Stakeholder consultations pointed to the value of LFCs in giving symbolic recognition to large families, alongside increasing access to memorable and fun bonding experiences for families. They also highlighted the importance of family cards also providing tangible and accessible benefits that mitigate cost of living.

A European LFC offers a valuable means of improving social recognition of large families across the EU, and of fostering greater integration and mobility of this group across Member States. If implemented sensitively to the needs of large families, a European LFC could offer a means of targeting support to families that have a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion, providing greater access to resources that reduce cost of living and improve quality of life. However, depending on the scope and set-up of a European LFC, the economic benefit for families may be limited relative to the significant

material hardship they often face, underscoring the importance of situating the card within a comprehensive and integrated package of support.

There remain several considerations for the administration, financing and implementation of a European LFC to ensure it is feasible. These considerations include the inclusivity of eligibility criteria to encompass various families with support needs, the degree of integration with existing family card systems, sustainable financing and institutionalisation of the European LFC, and how to incentivise partner participation and reciprocity across borders. Ultimately, the feasibility of a European LFC rests on the degree to which the preferences of families with heightened care support needs and of potential partners participating in the system are embedded into the design and delivery.

4.1. Policy recommendations for the European Union Institutions

- **Establish EU-wide statistical definitions for diverse family types:** Understanding a comparative picture of the situation of large families and single-parent households across Member States is hampered by a lack of universal definition. Eurostat should establish statistical definitions of diverse families to facilitate targeted awareness and comparison of the growing diversity of families. This includes large families, single parents, blended families, and living apart together couples.
- **Strengthen coordination and peer learning:** Recognising the EU's supportive position in family policy, over which Member States have competence, EU institutions should continue to facilitate coordination, benchmarking, and monitoring, as well as facilitating shared learnings across Member States. Coordination and monitoring measures such as the European Semester, initiatives such as the European Child Guarantee, and the European Pillar of Social Rights should be leveraged to promote the exchange of best practices, particularly in areas such as integrated service delivery, inclusive eligibility definitions, and effective outreach to vulnerable families.
- **Advance job quality and flexible work arrangements:** Building on important progress already made under the EU Work-Life Balance Directive, future EU efforts should focus on improving job quality, particularly for parents with high childcare responsibilities. Support should prioritise expanding employee-driven working-time flexibility, reducing stigma associated with part-time work and flexibility, and creating tailored in-work benefits that accommodate caregiving needs without penalising parents who need to reduce their hours.
- **Invest in targeted family research, monitoring and evaluation:** Greater evidence is needed to identify the impact of specific policies and interventions that best support families that are more at-risk, including single-parent households and large families. EU funding instruments – such as Horizon Europe, ESF+, and the Technical Support Instrument – should facilitate research and pilot initiatives that evaluate how family policies and benefits affect labour market participation, poverty, and social exclusion among these groups. Consider earmarking or prioritising funding within these funding instruments to ensure the uptake of family policy initiatives, and better leverage existing monitoring tools such as the European Semester to achieve a higher implementation rate of country-specific recommendations.
- **Consider creating a dedicated funding stream and monitoring category for family support:** Building on improved evidence and evaluation, the planned unification of the current fragmented monitoring landscape into a new set of indicators as outlined in the MFF Performance Regulation, together with the requirement for Member States to focus on four key

social objectives in the 2028-2034 MFF²⁴⁹, offers an opportunity to simplify the funding landscape and standardise indicators. In this transition, it is important to recognise the challenges of measuring social policy impact and to develop targeted family policy indicators with clear, measurable dimensions of progress. These indicators should be designed in close consultation with stakeholders and ensure that organisations working on the ground with single parents, large families, and other family types can effectively benefit from EU funding and monitoring frameworks.

- **Improve data collection and family typology in EU surveys:** EU social surveys (e.g. EU-SILC, EU-LFS) play a crucial role in generating comparable data on the state of family life in European Member States. Variables included in these surveys should be updated to better capture the complexity of modern family structures, including blended families, multigenerational households, and shared custody arrangements, for example through employing the 6-category families-in-households typology suggested by the rEUsilience project and by capturing care relations across households²⁵⁰. This will enable more accurate monitoring of family well-being and inform more responsive policymaking.
- **Mainstream family impact assessments:** In line with stakeholder recommendations, the EU should consider introducing a “family impact assessment” for new legislation and policy initiatives, similar to existing gender and environmental assessments. If implemented with sensitivity to diverse family situations, including single parents and large families, this would help ensure that EU actions do not inadvertently disadvantage families with greater care responsibilities.

4.2. Policy recommendations for the Member States

- **Simplify and integrate support systems:** Benefit and support systems at the national level should be transparent and easy to understand, to facilitate greater access by vulnerable families with complex needs. Member States should review where support systems are fragmented and seek to alleviate competing goals.
- **Prioritise the alleviation of material deprivation, particularly among single-mother households:** Despite high work intensity, severe material deprivation is markedly high among single mothers and their households. National poverty alleviation frameworks must expand

²⁴⁹ European Commission, 2025, *Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amending Regulation (EU) 2023/955 and Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025PC0565>.

²⁵⁰ rEUsilience (“Risks, Resources and Inequalities: Increasing Resilience in European Families”) was a European research project funded by Horizon Europe and Innovate UK (2022–2025) examining how families respond to socio-economic risks and how labour markets, welfare states, and family policies shape resilience and inequalities across diverse family forms. The project proposed a six-category “families-in-households” typology to better reflect family diversity in European data: (1) no relation, (2) single-person household, (3) couple household, (4) two-generational household, (5) multigenerational household, and (6) complex household. See: <https://reusilience.eu/>. Source: Gosme, E., Shorey, H., Nieuwenhuis, R. and Uzunalioglu, M., 2025, *Roadmap for boosting the rights and resilience of European families*, rEUsilience project, COFACE Families Europe. Available at: <https://reusilience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/European-roadmap-publication.pdf>; <https://reusilience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/European-roadmap-publication.pdf>.

beyond basic income transfers to target direct material deprivation. Interventions should prioritise targeted housing support, utility subsidies, and free or affordable nutrition to relieve day-to-day household hardships.

- **Reassess adequacy of child benefits:** Noting that social transfers only partially mitigate poverty risk of single parents and large families, policymakers should regularly reassess the baseline adequacy of child benefits and their effectiveness in reducing multidimensional poverty measures. This should include systematic mechanisms to review and adjust benefit levels in line with inflation and rising living costs, to prevent the erosion of real value over time and ensure benefits remain fit for purpose during periods of economic volatility. Furthermore, while large families often benefit from a broader array of established support mechanisms across Member States, evidence indicates that single-parent households experience the highest overall risk of poverty and severe material deprivation. Therefore, child benefits should be progressively increased or supplemented specifically for these family types to better reflect their distinct vulnerabilities, higher poverty risks, and additional financial pressures.
- **Promote equitable parental leave:** Parental leave should be relatively short (up to one year) but well-compensated, with stronger incentives for fathers' uptake beyond minimum quotas to promote a more equal distribution of care and facilitate mothers' return to employment where desired. Leave systems should also be designed to ensure equity for single parents, particularly those with sole custody, by allowing flexibility in the allocation or use of non-transferable leave entitlements so that children in single-parent households are not disadvantaged by the absence of a second parent.
- **Expand access to high-quality, affordable and flexible childcare:** Investing in affordable, high-quality ECEC should be a central pillar of support for single-parent households and large families, as it delivers dual benefits of supporting parental employment and improving child development. Consistent investment of administrations at the national and local levels into a high quality ECEC system and workforce is a crucial step. ECEC must be flexible and accessible to diverse families, sensitive to the needs of single parents who may work longer hours or across school holidays without additional informal childcare support.
- **Ensure inclusive tax and maintenance systems:** Tax systems should include refundable credits or tailored deductions for single parents and large families, ensuring support reaches low-income households. Maintenance guarantee schemes should be simplified and broadened to cover all single parents in need, including those without a legally recognised second parent.
- **Strengthen partnerships with civil society organisations:** Member States should actively involve civil society organisations – including family associations, single-parent networks, and large-family organisations – in the design and delivery of family support policies. By consulting and codesigning measures with these groups, and by providing appropriate funding or logistical support for their outreach and services, governments can harness on-the-ground expertise to address policy gaps and ensure assistance reaches vulnerable families more effectively.

4.3. Policy recommendations regarding a potential European Large Family Card

- Launch with a public consultation:** The starting point for designing a European LFC, or a more general European Family Card that offers support to a wider range of families with additional care support needs, should be a public consultation. A public consultation in which families, civil society organisations, and potential partners can share perspectives on the value and key dimensions of the initiative is an important starting point to ensure a European LFC tangibly meets the needs of families. Consultations should also consider the degree to which a European LFC meets the needs of families compared to other existing initiatives. Efforts should be made to include diverse families, including the most vulnerable families, to ensure a European LFC can be designed to primarily benefit those most in need of support.
- Define and prioritise clear objectives:** While there are many ways in which a European LFC could add value, deciding on a European LFC's primary goal(s) is crucial, as this decision will shape the overall design of the card and its relationship to the systems supporting families already in place in the Member States. Some choices of primary goals include (but are not limited to): reducing family's costs of living, increasing access to recreational opportunities, increasing cross-border mobility, and reducing the stigma surrounding large families. Public consultation could help identify which goals should be prioritised.
- Ensure inclusive and flexible eligibility criteria:** To maximise impact, eligibility should be broad and inclusive, encompassing not only families with three or more children but potentially also those with disabled children or parents, single-parent households, and low-income families under certain conditions. Consideration should be given to blended families, grandparent-led households, and families with adult dependent children. A tiered benefit structure could ensure proportional support based on family size and need.
- Institutionalise and finance the LFC for long-term sustainability:** A strong institutional foundation is key to ensuring the LFC's reliability and continuity. Drawing on the EDC model, and from the success of the cross-border *EuregioFamilyPass* implemented through an Interreg EU funding programme, the LFC could be supported by an EU Directive or Council Recommendation to ensure Member State participation and mutual recognition. A European LFC pilot should be aligned with, and complementary to newly announced European Child Guarantee Card pilot²⁵¹. The LFC could draw on the European Regional Development Fund or the EaSI strand of the ESF+. Administration could be led by Member States or civil society organisations (e.g. ELFAC), with clear coordination mechanisms to ensure consistency and accountability.
- Integrate with existing national and regional card systems:** The European LFC should complement, rather than replace, existing family card schemes. Mutual recognition models, such as the Baltic LFC system and the *EuregioFamilyPass*, offer useful templates. A co-

²⁵¹ European Commission, 2026, *Breaking the cycle of child poverty, Strengthening of the European Child Guarantee*. Available at: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7f60af79-936f-42b3-a6c4-a4639c6679ff_en?filename=EC-anti-poverty_ECG_2026.pdf.

branding approach, where national cards incorporate a European LFC logo or digital credential, could facilitate seamless cross-border use while respecting national diversity.

- **Develop a robust digital infrastructure:** The LFC should be available in both physical and digital formats, with a user-friendly app and a central EU portal providing multilingual information on eligibility, application procedures, and available benefits across Member States. Digital tools should be multilingual and meet EU accessibility standards and include features like interactive maps and partner directories.
- **Foster meaningful partner participation:** To ensure a wide and relevant range of benefits, the LFC system must incentivise public and private partners to participate. This includes offering visibility through proactive promotion, interactive maps, and “family-friendly” recognition schemes. Partnerships with civil society organisations can support recruitment and engagement of local businesses, as seen in Poland’s and Spain’s successful NGO-led partner outreach model.
- **Establish monitoring, evaluation, and enforcement mechanisms:** A centralised EU-level monitoring framework should be developed to track card issuance, usage, and impact. Standardised data collection and regular reporting will support transparency and continuous improvement. Enforcement provisions should ensure that service providers honour the card and that families have access to redress mechanisms in cases of non-compliance.
- **Pilot and evaluate before full rollout:** Given the diversity of existing systems and the lack of comprehensive impact evaluations, a pilot phase in a group of volunteering Member States could test the European LFC’s design, uptake, and effectiveness. This would allow for adjustments before broader implementation and help build political and public support.

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ANNEX 1 – OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to map and assess national and EU-level initiatives supporting large families and single-parent households, with a view to identifying effective practices and informing future policy development, including the potential introduction of a European LFC.

To this end, the study aims to:

- **Analyse policies and initiatives to support large families and single-parent households in the EU and understand the context in which these policies are implemented.** This includes mapping key national policies across the 27 Member States and examining relevant initiatives at the EU level, with attention to gaps, shortcomings, and prospects for future policy developments. It also involves understanding the challenges related to single-parent households and large families in the EU and key trends over time.
- **Research the use, accessibility, and impact of LFCs across Member States,** including a comparative analysis of their design, implementation, and effectiveness and an exploration of gaps, barriers and good practices.
- **Develop a set of policy recommendations for both Member States and at the EU level** to strengthen support for large families and single-parent households, including an assessment of the need, feasibility, and design options for a potential European LFC.

The results of this study provide the European Parliament with evidence-based insights to support its legislative and policy work on demographic challenges and family support across the EU.

Methodological approach

The study follows a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis of harmonised datasets, structured desk research and a light-touch literature review, policy mapping, and targeted stakeholder consultations. This approach ensures both breadth – through EU-wide coverage – and depth – through qualitative insights into national contexts and implementation experiences.

Analysis of harmonised data

We produced a concise statistical profile of single-parent and large-family households across the EU-27. This analysis is grounded in harmonised European survey data, primarily drawing upon the 2023 iterations of the EU-LFS and the EU-SILC. The resulting statistical profile provides a multi-dimensional view of household vulnerabilities, focusing on the following key areas: demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, poverty and social exclusion, material deprivation, and labour market attachment and barriers. An earlier wave of EU-LFS data from 2019, featuring an ad-hoc module on work-time flexibility, was also used to explore this topic.

Literature review

We conducted a light-touch review of the literature on the effectiveness of the most common policies targeted at families, focusing on any existing evidence of their impact on large families and single-parent households. We focused on parental leaves, cash transfers and tax reliefs, subsidised childcare services, and employer-provided family policies, such as flexible working arrangements or employer-sponsored benefits. To identify quasi-experimental studies in the EU context, we used academic research databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus. To ensure the inclusion of the most recent

evaluations, we searched for papers published since 2015. In a few cases, we included studies published before 2015 to broaden the geographical scope of the analysis.

We primarily relied on existing meta-analyses that synthesise evidence from numerous studies across multiple countries to identify general trends and patterns in the literature, as well as quasi-experimental single studies that demonstrate the effects of particular reforms. Where possible, we supplemented the peer-reviewed studies with grey literature. We documented the effects of these policies on parents' labour market outcomes, poverty reduction, and social inclusion.

Policy mapping

We conducted targeted desk research to map relevant EU-level initiatives supporting families, with particular emphasis on provisions for large families and single-parents' households. We also mapped policies and initiatives supporting large families and single-parent households directly and indirectly at the Member State level.

Stakeholder consultation

We carried out thirteen semi-structured stakeholder consultations with representatives from EU institutions, national authorities, and civil society organisations. At the EU level, these stakeholders included representatives of the European Commission, COFACE Families Europe, ELFAC. At Member State level, we consulted stakeholders covering national authorities and civil society organisations in a selection of countries like Austria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. These interviews were conducted virtually by videocall, and predominantly in English or in other Member State languages where feasible. Key stakeholders were identified during the desk research and policy mapping phase of research. The consultations provided qualitative insights into the design and implementation of support measures, including LFC schemes, and helped identify best practices, implementation challenges, and stakeholder perspectives on the feasibility of a European LFC. The consultations also served to validate findings from the desk and data research phases.

Limitations of the approach

The quantitative analysis was limited by sample size constraints. While EU-SILC and EU-LFS provide robust macro-level data, small sample sizes for specific, highly vulnerable sub-intersections (e.g., single fathers with low education in smaller Member States, or specific disability categorisations) limit granular, representative descriptive statistics at Member State level.

The literature review highlighted gaps in academic research on the effectiveness of family policies. Most importantly, studies often assess the impact of policies on families in general, but there is little evidence on how reforms affect specific household types, such as single-parents or large families, even though these groups may experience the impact of policies differently. While some research focuses on single-parent households, evidence on large families remains scarce. As a result, it is difficult to determine, based on the literature review, whether the effects of a given policy vary by household type and whether single parents or large families should benefit from a different set of policies. Stakeholder consultations provided some observational evidence to fill this gap, but the scarce evidence on the effectiveness and impacts of policy on different household types is a notable area for future research.

Desk research and stakeholder consultations were primarily conducted in English but did make use of other EU languages where feasible and needed, including Polish, Spanish, Hungarian, and Czech. While we anticipated that key policy documents would be available in English, it was not possible to carry out a comprehensive review of available sources in each Member State's language(s).

ANNEX 2 – OVERVIEW OF CORE BENEFITS BY COUNTRY

Table 3: Overview of benefit availability for large families and single-parent households across European Union Member States (MS)

MS	In-cash child benefit	Tax benefits / credits	ECEC / Childcare support	Housing support	Targeted support for single parents	Targeted support for large families
AT	Universal family allowance with increments per child	Child tax credit; single earner tax credit; refundable income-tax deduction with increments per child	Subsidised ECEC with priority or fee waivers for low-income and SP in some local schemes	Municipal housing allowances (e.g. Vienna)	SP tax relief; advance maintenance payments	Multiple child tax allowance; regional Family Cards (<i>Familienpass</i>)
BE	Universal child benefit (devolved to regions) with means-tested supplements for SP and LF	Federal income tax deduction with increments per child and extra deduction for SP	Free pre-school (2.5 yrs+, 23 hrs/wk); subsidised childcare fees (means-tested)	Priority access to social housing for families with children in some regions	Federal tax allowance for single parents; reduced ECEC fees in some regions	Reduced ECEC fees in some regions; low-interest means-tested housing loans (Wallonia), regional LFC
BG	Means tested monthly child allowance with increments per child; means-tested monthly allowances for raising children under the age of one (not means-tested for adoptive SP)	Income-tax relief per dependent child; higher deduction for 3+ children	Free ECEC since 2022; compensation if no public place available; free meals in ECEC	Priority access to social housing for families with children	Monthly allowance for a child ineligible for survivor pension	One free annual railway or bus trip for mothers 3+children
HR	Means-tested child benefit with top-ups for 3+children and SP	Progressive tax factor by child rank for personal income tax	Local fee reductions for families with multiple children	Local housing benefit	Temporary alimony for children of absent parent; sickness leave eligibility for sick children	Pronatalist supplement for 3+children; extended parental leave for

MS	In-cash child benefit	Tax benefits / credits	ECEC / Childcare support	Housing support	Targeted support for single parents	Targeted support for large families
						3+children; national LFC
CY	Means-tested child benefit with increments per child (not means-tested for 5+ children)	Income thresholds increase with children	Subsidised nursery fees (maximum rates for LF and SP); free compulsory pre-primary from 4yrs+	Mortgage guarantees and rent subsidies for LF	Monthly SP family allowance; special childbirth allowance for single mothers	Honorary allowance for mothers of many children (4+); higher childbirth grants for 2+children
CZ	Means-tested "super benefit"	Child tax credit increasing with increments per child	Municipal fee waivers for low-income or SP families	Housing component within "super benefit"	Substitute maintenance allowance for unpaid alimony	Child tax credit increments; regional FC (<i>Rodinnýpas</i>)
DK	Universal child benefit	N/A	Universal ECEC entitlement; capped parental co-payment ($\leq 25\%$ cost); ECEC meals	Means-tested housing allowance for renting, dependent on number of household members	Child allowance for SP; extra child allowance for SP; special benefit for unknown paternity	Higher childbirth grants for multiple births
EE	Universal child allowance	N/A	Capped ECEC fees ($\leq 20\%$ of min wage)	Priority access to social housing for families with children; means-tested housing grant for LF	Monthly SP allowance (EUR 80)	Allowance for families with many children (3+); higher childbirth grants for multiple births; national LFC (<i>Perekaart</i>)

MS	In-cash child benefit	Tax benefits / credits	ECEC / Childcare support	Housing support	Targeted support for single parents	Targeted support for large families
FI	Universal child benefit with increments per child and SP supplement per child	Employment-income credit, doubled for SP	Subsidised ECEC; income-based ECEC fees; sibling discounts	Means-tested housing allowance scaled by family size	Child maintenance allowance	N/A
FR	Universal family allowances for 2+ children with top-ups for 3+children; means-tested supplements	Family-quotient income-tax system with increments per child	Universal ECEC; subsidised childcare; free preschool ages 3-6	Means-tested housing allowance	Family-support allowance; Active Solidarity Income for SP	Means-tested family supplement for 3+ children; national LFC (<i>Carte Familles nombreuses</i>)
DE	Universal child benefit with increments per child and means-tested child supplement	Child tax allowance with increments per child; child costs deductibility	Subsidised ECEC; fees and caps determined at Land level	Means-tested housing benefit with variation by household size	Advance maintenance payments for SP; tax relief for SP with increments per child	Multiple-birth grants for families with triplets or more; local family cards
EL	Means-tested child benefit with increments per child (doubling for 3 rd and subsequent children)	Tax reductions with increments per child; tax free threshold with increments per child	Means-tested voucher-based subsidies for ECEC	Rent allowance increments per child and SP	SP family leave (higher for 3+ children); voucher for home-based care	One-off benefit for mothers 3+; 50% transport discount for 4+ children
HU	Universal family allowance with increments per child and higher rates for SP; child-rearing benefit	Family tax break with increments per child	Free ECEC ages 3-6 (min 4h / day); free meals for LF	Mortgage loan reduction with increments per child	Childcare sickness benefit; means-tested package for at-risk children	Childrearing support for 3+ children; lifelong personal income tax exemptions and social contribution

MS	In-cash child benefit	Tax benefits / credits	ECEC / Childcare support	Housing support	Targeted support for single parents	Targeted support for large families
						tax relief for mothers 3+; LFC (<i>NOÉkártya</i>)
IE	Universal child benefit (EUR 140 / month)	Single-Person Child Carer Credit	National Childcare Scheme– income-based subsidy	Housing Assistance Payment and Rent Supplement	One-Parent Family Payment; Jobseeker's Transitional Payment	N/A
IT	Universal benefit (<i>Assegno Unico Universale</i>) with supplements for 3+ children and SP	Tax deductions for dependents; extra EUR 200 for 3+ children	Income-based ECEC fees; nursery bonus (EUR 1,500–3,600)	Mortgage guarantees for large families	N/A	Mothers' bonus; LFC (discontinued 2021)
LV	Universal family benefit with increments per child	Dependent tax allowance (EUR 250 / child / month)	Free ECEC from 1.5 yrs; municipal subsidies for private care	Housing guarantee for 3+ children	Maintenance guarantee fund payments	National 3+ Family Card
LT	Universal child benefit EUR 122.50 + EUR 56.65 top-up for 3+ children	Progressive tax allowances by child number	Free 20h / week ECEC; fee waivers for low-income families	Social housing priority for 5+ children	Means-tested income support	Additional child benefit for 3+ children; national Family Card (<i>Šeimokortelė</i>)
LU	Universal family allowance + age supplements	Progressive tax deductions by child count	26h / week free ECEC (3+ yrs) + childcare voucher (<i>Chèque Service Accueil – CSA</i>)	Rent subsidy + EUR 80 per child	REVIS supplement EUR 87 / child	Free ECEC for 4+ children

MS	In-cash child benefit	Tax benefits / credits	ECEC / Childcare support	Housing support	Targeted support for single parents	Targeted support for large families
MT	Income-related child allowance; in-work benefit for families with children	Favourable tax rates for parents and SP	Free childcare scheme (30h / week)	Rent assistance and energy benefits	In-work benefit; Tapering of Benefits programme	Amount of child allowance scales with children and stays flat after the 3 rd child
NL	Universal child benefit (<i>Kinderbijslag</i>); child budget (<i>Kindgebonden budget</i>)	Income-dependent combination credit	Subsidised ECEC allowance (<i>Kinderopvangtoeslag</i>)	Housing allowance by family size	Income-dependent 'combination' tax credit (<i>Inkomensafhankelijke combinatiekorting IACK</i>) for SP with child < 12 yrs	Higher child budget for 3+ children
PL	Universal Family 800+ benefit; means-tested family allowance	Progressive tax deduction (3 rd child + higher rate)	Free ECEC (5h / day); municipal subsidies	Mortgage support and loan guarantees for families with children	Family allowance supplement (PLN 193 / child)	Family allowance supplement for 3+ children; national LFC (<i>Karta Dużej Rodziny</i>)
PT	Means-tested child benefit (<i>Abono de família</i>) + top-ups for 2+ children	Child tax deductions EUR 600-900 / child; VAT relief on utilities	Free ECEC network (0-3 yrs); priority for siblings	Municipal property tax and water tariff reductions	Indirect support via child benefit formula	Tax reliefs for 3+ children; municipal LFC (<i>Cartão de Família Numerosa</i>)
RO	Universal child allowance + minimum inclusion income for families with children	Parent tax deduction RON 100 / child / month	Subsidised ECEC; priority for low-income families	Priority social housing for families with children	Higher benefit scale for SP in minimum income scheme	Higher benefit scale for 3+ children in minimum income scheme

MS	In-cash child benefit	Tax benefits / credits	ECEC / Childcare support	Housing support	Targeted support for single parents	Targeted support for large families
SK	Universal child benefit EUR 60 / month	Child tax credit EUR 100 / child < 15 yrs	Free ECEC from age 5; fee waivers for low-income families	Housing allowance tier for 5+ members	Extended maternity leave (37 wks)	Extended maternity leave (43 weeks) for multiples; higher parental allowance for twins
SI	Means-tested child benefit	Progressive tax allowances by child rank	Income-graded ECEC fees; 2 nd child free	Property tax reduction by family size	30% child-benefit add-on	Annual allowance (EUR 496–603); social security contribution waiver for 4+ children
ES	Means-tested child allowance	Tax deductions for working mothers; child credits	Free ECEC 25h / week (3–6 yrs)	Housing aid for vulnerable families	Minimum Living Income supplement (+22% for SP)	Income threshold increase for LF; national LFC (<i>Título de Familia Numerosa</i>)
SE	Universal child allowance	N/A	Universal ECEC with fee caps and sibling discounts	Housing allowance by family size	Maintenance allowance for SP (<i>Underhållsstöd</i>)	Multi-child supplement (SEK 150–730 / month)

Note: SP=Single-parent households; LF=large families; N/A=not available.

Source: Authors' own analysis based on desk research. For more detailed information, see Annex 4 in Volume 2.

ANNEX 3 – INVENTORY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FAMILY CARD SYSTEMS

Table 4: Inventory of European Union Family Card Systems

MS	Name of scheme (Year introduced)	Administering authority / Promoter	Geographical coverage / Cross-border recognition	Format (Physical / Digital / App)	Eligibility criteria	Financing model	Take-up / Coverage
AT	<i>Familienpass / Familienkarte</i> in different regions (1980s–2000s)	Regional administration s	Regional (with some cross- border recognition in Italy and Slovakia)	Physical and digital (app)	Families with ≥ 1 child under 18 (with eligibility extended to include grandparents, childminders and family friends)	Public financing through regional budgets + partner contributions (via small joining fee)	Regional: e.g. in Lower Austria, over 200,000 families (in 2024)
BE	<i>Carte famille nombreuse</i> (2018)	Civil society programme authorised by regional authorities	Regional (Walloon region and Brussels; informal reciprocal recognition in France)	Physical and digital	Families with ≥ 3 children (lifelong right for parents; children receive age specific cards)	Member fees and small admin charges + regional support	No data available
BG	N/A						
HR	<i>e-Dječja kartica "Mudrica"</i> (2020)	National Ministry of Demography and Immigration	National	Digital (app)	Families with ≥ 1 child under 18	Public financing of administration	25,000 users (in 2022)
CY	N/A						

MS	Name of scheme (Year introduced)	Administering authority / Promoter	Geographical coverage / Cross-border recognition	Format (Physical / Digital / App)	Eligibility criteria	Financing model	Take-up / Coverage
CZ	<i>Rodinný pas</i> (2006)	Regional administrations	National (with some cross- border recognition in Slovakia and Austria)	Physical, with digital registratio n (some regions have apps)	Families with ≥ 1 child under 18	Regional financing of administration + voluntary partner discounts	188,000 families
DK	N/A						
EE	<i>Perekaart</i> (2014)	Estonian Association of Large Families	National. Discounts apply to holders of the Latvian and Lithuanian Family Cards	Physical	Families with ≥ 3 children under 18 (up to 26 if studying or with a disability)	Member fee	10,000 valid family cards (in 2024)
FI	N/A						
FR	<i>Carte Familles nombreuses</i> (1921)	Ministry of Ecological Transition	National	Physical	Families with ≥ 3 children (for first request, at least 1 minor for renewal) or parents who have had or raised ≥ 5 children	Processing fee	377,000 families (in 2024)
DE	One statewide programme and local initiatives	N/A	Local or state level	N/A	Families with ≥ 3 children, single parents with ≥ 1 child, families	N/A	N/A

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MS	Name of scheme (Year introduced)	Administering authority / Promoter	Geographical coverage / Cross-border recognition	Format (Physical / Digital / App)	Eligibility criteria	Financing model	Take-up / Coverage
	(e.g. <i>Landesfamilienpas s in Baden- Württemberg</i>)				with severely disabled children, or low-income families receiving social benefits		
EL	N/A						
HU	<i>NOE kártya</i> (2006)	National Association of Large Families	National	Physical (validation sticker)	Families with 3+ children	Membership fees	16,000 family members (of the National Association of Large Families)
IE	N/A						
IT	<i>Carta della Famiglia</i> (2020; discontinued 2021)	Department for Family Policies	N/A	Digital	Families with ≥3 children under 26	N/A	N/A
LV	<i>Goda ģimenes</i> (2016)	Society Integration Fund	National. Discounts apply to holders of the Estonian and Lithuanian Family Cards	Physical or digital	Families with ≥3 children under 18 or under 24 in education/defense service; or families caring for a disabled child	State funded	67,000 parents (2026)

MS	Name of scheme (Year introduced)	Administering authority / Promoter	Geographical coverage / Cross-border recognition	Format (Physical / Digital / App)	Eligibility criteria	Financing model	Take-up / Coverage
LT	<i>Šeimos kortelė</i> (2019)	Ministry of Social Security and Labour	National. Some discounts apply to holders of the Estonian and Latvia Family Cards	Physical or digital (app)	Families with ≥ 3 children under 18. Includes children under 24 who are not employed, have no children of their own, and are studying	Partnership model (Public/Private)	N/A
LU	N/A						
MT	N/A						
NL	N/A						
PL	<i>Karta Dużej Rodziny</i> (2014)	Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy	National	Physical and digital	Families with ≥ 3 children up to 18, or 25 in education. Coverage is indefinite for children with moderate or severe disabilities. Parents are covered indefinitely (even seniors with grown-up children can apply for the card for themselves only).	Mixed financing model (state or municipal budget and private commercial partners)	1,900,000 families (in 2025/2026)

MS	Name of scheme (Year introduced)	Administering authority / Promoter	Geographical coverage / Cross-border recognition	Format (Physical / Digital / App)	Eligibility criteria	Financing model	Take-up / Coverage
PT	<i>Cartão de Família Numerosa</i> (N/A)	National NGO in partnership with municipal authorities	20 municipalities (2026)	Physical and digital (from 2023)	Families with ≥ 3 children	Membership fees and partnerships	12,000 families associated with the Portuguese Large Families Association, of which 6,000 had the app (in 2024)
RO	N/A						
SK	<i>Rodinný pas</i> (2014)	Bratislava Self- Governing Region	Regional (with cross-border recognition in Lower Austria, Burgenland and the Trnava region)	Physical and digital	Families with ≥ 1 children	Regional government	Over 7,950 families in the Bratislava region (in 2026)
SI	N/A						
ES	<i>El título de familia numerosa</i> (1941)	Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and 2030 Agenda; autonomous community	N/A	Physical or digital (dependin g on region)	Families with ≥ 3 children, families with ≥ 2 children if one child has a disability, families where a parent has a disability, or widows/widowers with ≥ 2 children. Larger	Federal government / Autonomous communities	N/A

MS	Name of scheme (Year introduced)	Administering authority / Promoter	Geographical coverage / Cross-border recognition	Format (Physical / Digital / App)	Eligibility criteria	Financing model	Take-up / Coverage
		administrations			benefits for families with ≥5 children		
SE	N/A						

Note: N/A indicates there is no formal large family card scheme available for the MS or no data available for a certain aspect.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on country factsheets.

This study, prepared for the European Parliament's Policy Department for Transport, Employment and Social Affairs and commissioned by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), describes support for large families and single parents across the EU. It analyses the vulnerability of these households and sets out the provision of support at both EU and Member State level. Attention is paid to the implementation and impact of large family cards, and of a potential European large family card.

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This document is available on the internet at: www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses

IP/A/EMPL/FWC/2023-028/LOT2/SC3

Print ISBN 978-92-848-3696-3 | doi:10.2861/7610079 | QA-01-26-151-EN-C
PDF ISBN 978-92-848-3695-6 | doi: 10.2861/6361772 | QA-01-26-151-EN-N