



PERMANENT MISSION OF HUNGARY
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Supporting Single Parents as a Means of Women's Empowerment
***High-Level Panel Discussion on the occasion of the sixty-third session of
the Commission on the Status of Women***
Tuesday, March 12, 3.00-4.15 p.m.,
Conference Room 12, General Assembly Building

Concept Note

Background

The number of single parents has been increasing around the world. About 320 million children - one in every seven children under the age of 18 - is living in a single-parent household, more than 80 percent of which are led by women.

While the context of all single-parent families might differ – the most widespread factors being widowhood, divorce, separation or abandonment, among others -, single parents, and especially single mothers share many challenges. They often have to face discriminatory laws and policies, violence and stigmatization, as well as a higher risk of poverty and socio-economic marginalization. The high likelihood for the intergenerational transmission of poverty also threatens to define the future of children growing up in families in vulnerable situations - the future of a new generation.

Discrimination in law or in practice against single mothers may occur in the form of limited rights to inheritance, land or property, as well as social stigma and harmful traditional beliefs, often resulting in multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, which impede the full realization of their human rights and women's empowerment. In addition, female-headed households are at a higher risk of poverty and marginalization due to the lack or lower levels of income. Single mothers very often cannot achieve work-life balance, as they are facing an increased share of unpaid care and domestic work, which most often lead to the necessity of renouncing opportunities for decent work, professional commitments and career prospects, in order to fulfil family responsibilities.

This vicious cycle results in even more limited opportunities for education, training and labour market participation, and at the same time, these women are many times forced to take on jobs that remains considerably below their qualifications and potential, which is a serious "waste" of human capital for the society as a whole. Moreover, due to all these factors – financial challenges, increased working hours and stress levels – are proven to result in poorer health and obstacles to the mental health and well-being of single parents.

These barriers also severely affect children growing up in a single-parent household, who very often do not enjoy the same opportunities as their peers raised by both parents in the same supportive family environment. Their education and academic support, extracurricular activities and healthy lifestyle can be at risk from the lack of adequate resources and capacity of parental care.

Against this background, governments, in partnership with local authorities, civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders should work together to eliminate these barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment, and ensure that single parents, especially mothers, their children and families are not left behind.

Reviewing discriminatory legislation and addressing negative social norms are key in this regard. In addition, social inclusion and the economic empowerment of single parents and their families require inclusive, targeted, tailored and family-responsive policies and comprehensive social protection systems and measures. Accessible, affordable and quality childcare services are essential in enabling single mothers to reconcile their family commitments with income-generating activities. Education policies and programmes should provide single mothers with an opportunity to continue and complete their education, and also support children raised by single parents, where the situation so requires. The perspectives of single-parent households should also be taken into account in the provision of healthcare services, in order to ensure the best outcomes for these families. And finally, efforts should be multiplied to achieve women's full participation in all spheres of life and their leadership at all levels, including for those who raise their children alone.

Objectives of the event

The high-level panel will discuss policies and best practices supporting single parents, with special regard to single mothers and their children in different regions of the world and in different contexts.

As a successful example of such efforts, participants of the event will learn about the *Single Parents' Center* in Budapest, Hungary. A community space bringing together civil society organizations, practitioners and professionals to provide comprehensive services and programs to single parents in the full spectrum of prevention, crisis intervention, employment assistance, as well as programs for parents, children and community-building. The Center offers legal and psychological counselling, mediation and support groups for the mental health well-being of parents in need; coaching, trainings and workshops to facilitate their career development, as well as childcare services, mentoring and medical checkups for their children.

Panelists and the audience will seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the main gaps and challenges that single parents, and specifically, single mothers have to face when it comes to their human rights, socio-economic opportunities and the upbringing of children in different societies and contexts?
- How can national and local governments, the private sector and civil society work together to provide social protection and long-term financial and social stability for single mothers and their children? What makes a policy sustainable and able to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty in these households?
- What successful policies exist to enable single parents to balance work, household and family commitments? What kind of innovative solutions exist in this regard?
- What specific policies and services are the most important in providing the best possible outcomes for children growing up in a single-parent households? How are education, health and childcare services interlinked in this regard?

