

Beyond family policy

The effectiveness of policies to address the realities of single parents in the European Union

Rense Nieuwenhuis

Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI)

rense.nieuwenhuis@sofi.su.se



Stockholm
University

STUDY

Requested by the FEMM committee



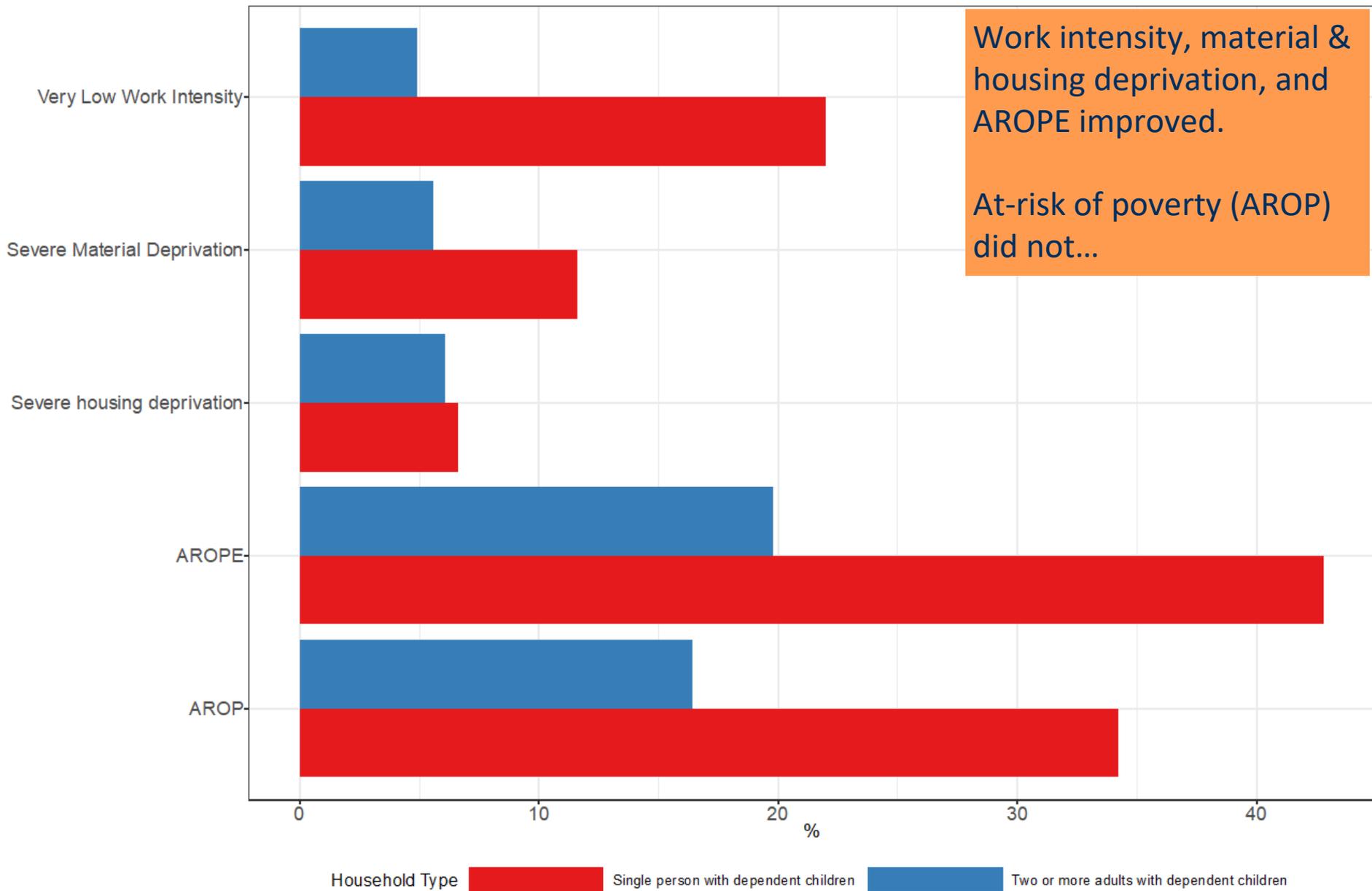
The situation of single parents in the EU



Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs
Directorate-General for Internal Policies
PE 659.870 - November 2020

EN

Figure 4: Various at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion indicators by family type, EU-27 average, 2018



Triple bind of single-parent families

The disadvantage in well-being of single parents and their families can be explained by the *interplay* between disproportionate inadequacies in:

resources

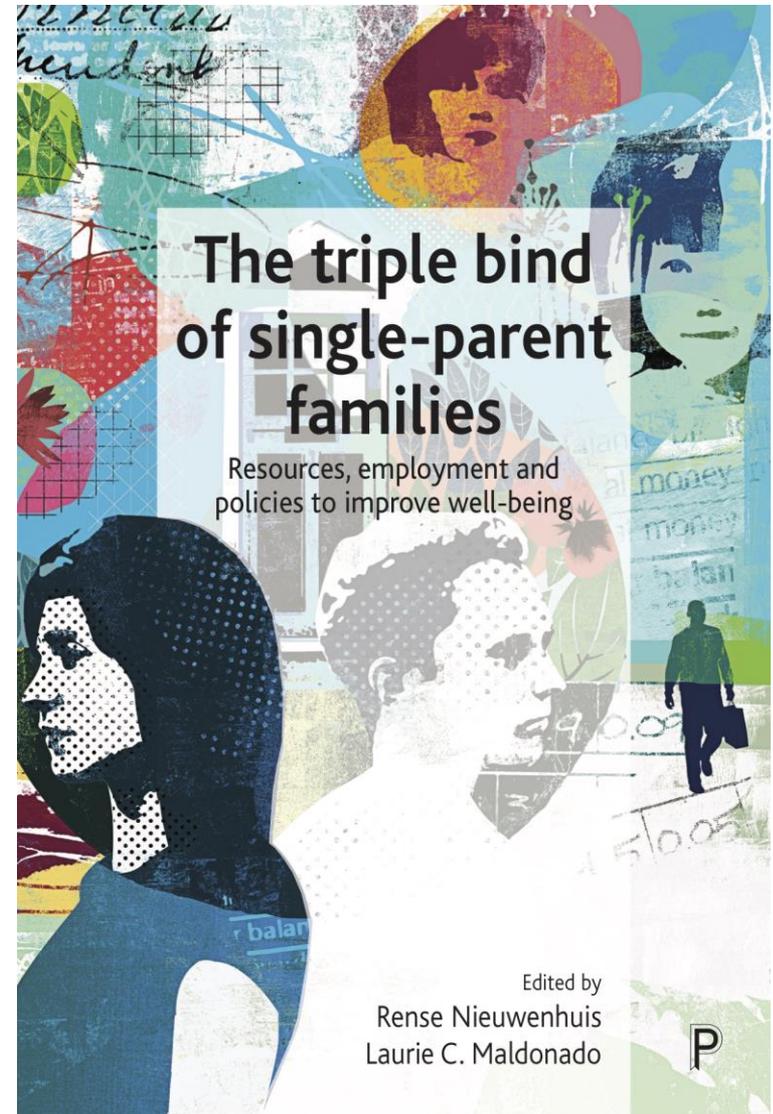
- absence of second caregiver, earner (gendered: often the father)
- lower levels of education

employment

- precarious employment conditions
- gendered disadvantage on labour market

policies

- welfare state retrenchment, turn towards activation
- gendered (family) policy models



Shared residence

- Associated with positive wellbeing among children
- Better outcomes for single mothers
 - Employment
 - Health / Well-being
- Too early for policy recommendations
 - No causal evidence
 - Little known at EU level
 - Invisible to EU social indicators

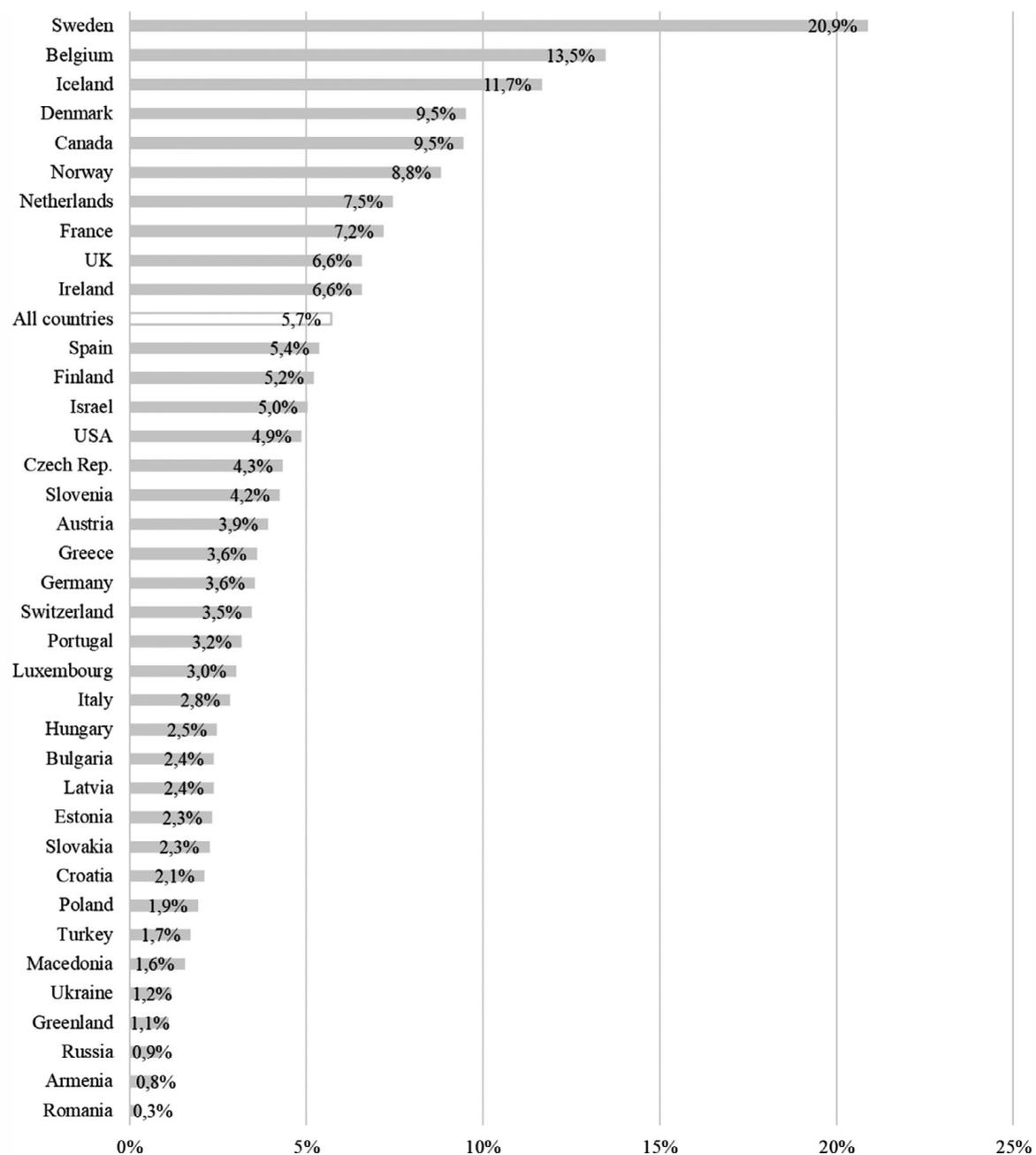
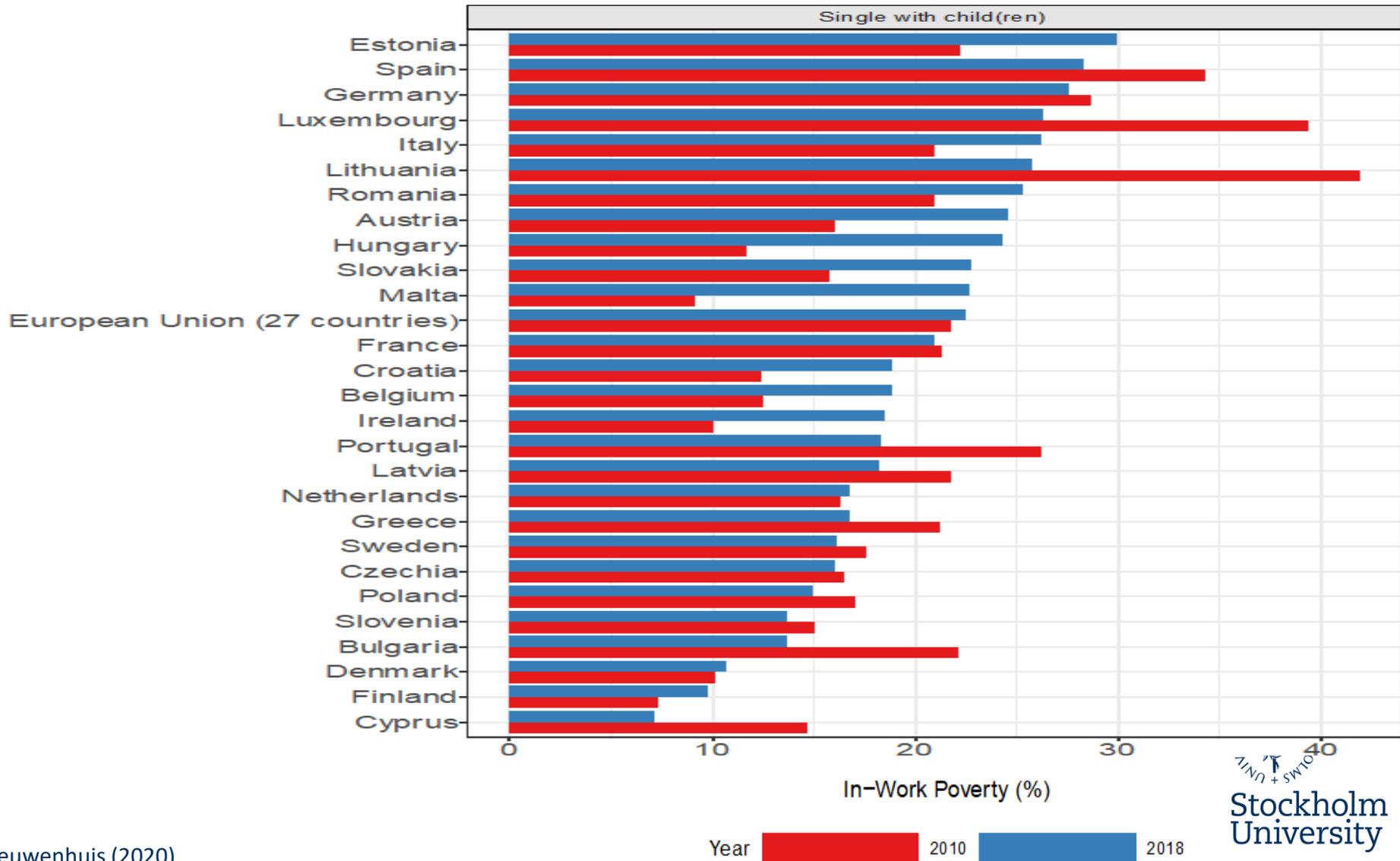


FIGURE 1. Prevalence of Symmetric Joint Physical Custody (JPC) Arrangements on Nonintact Families in 37 European and North American Countries ($N = 92,886$).

Note. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study (2002, 2006, 2010; HBSC).

Single parents increased their employment, but employment no guarantee against poverty



Summary so far

- Single parents experience poverty and deprivation to a far larger extent than two-parent families
- Their income poverty risks have not declined, despite
 - Increased education
 - Increased involvement separated fathers
 - Increase in employment
- Why then haven't their poverty risks declined?
 - Policies for single-parent families
 - Policies for all families with children
 - Policies for all (families)

Policies specific for single-parent families: Child Support

Child support achieve only a marginal reduction in poverty

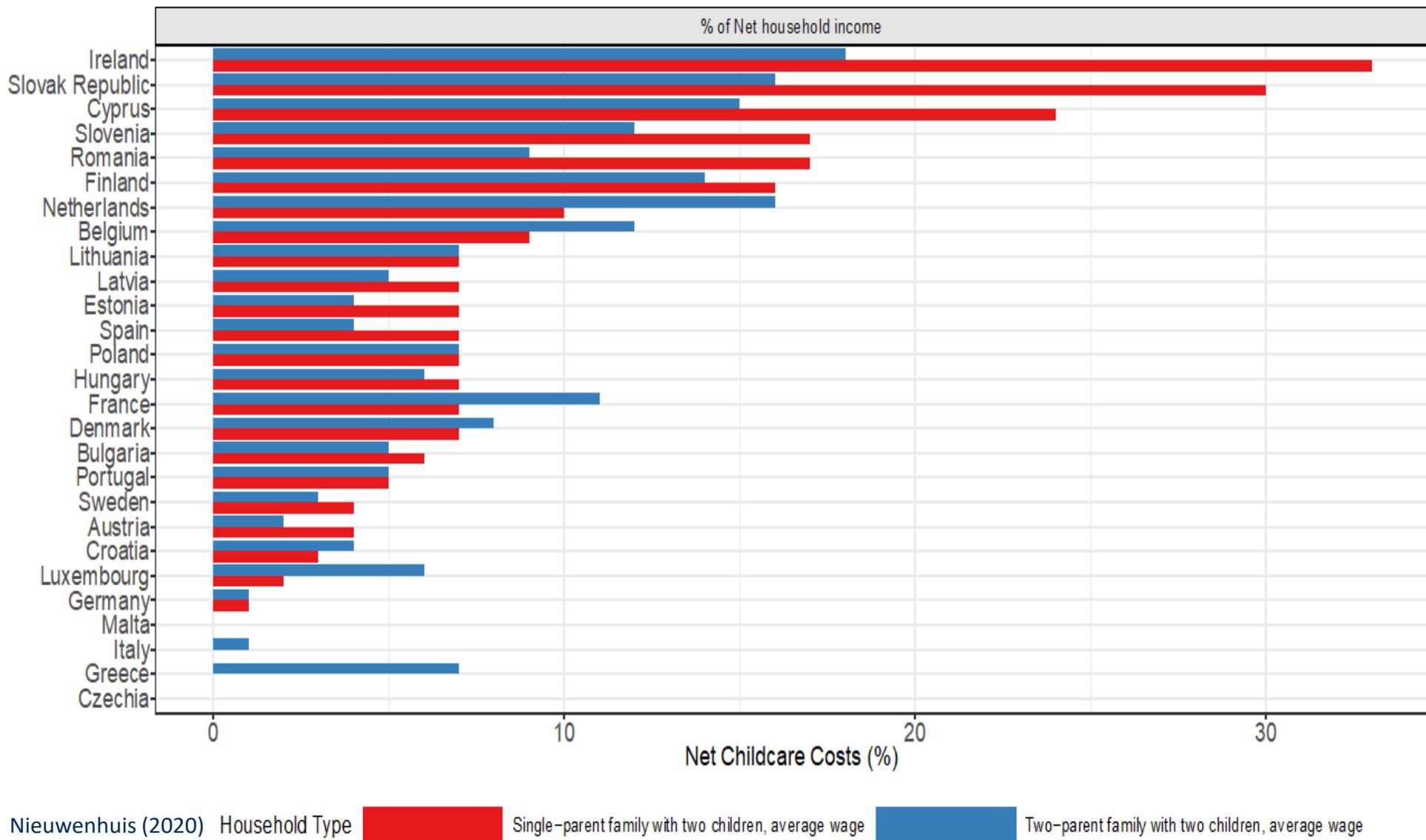
- Majority single parents do not receive child support
- Small amounts
- Rules cannot keep up with family diversity (e.g. repartnering)
- Interplay with other policies (e.g. child support subtracted from means-tested social assistance)
- Possible trade-off between poverty reduction and gender equality

Policies for all families with children

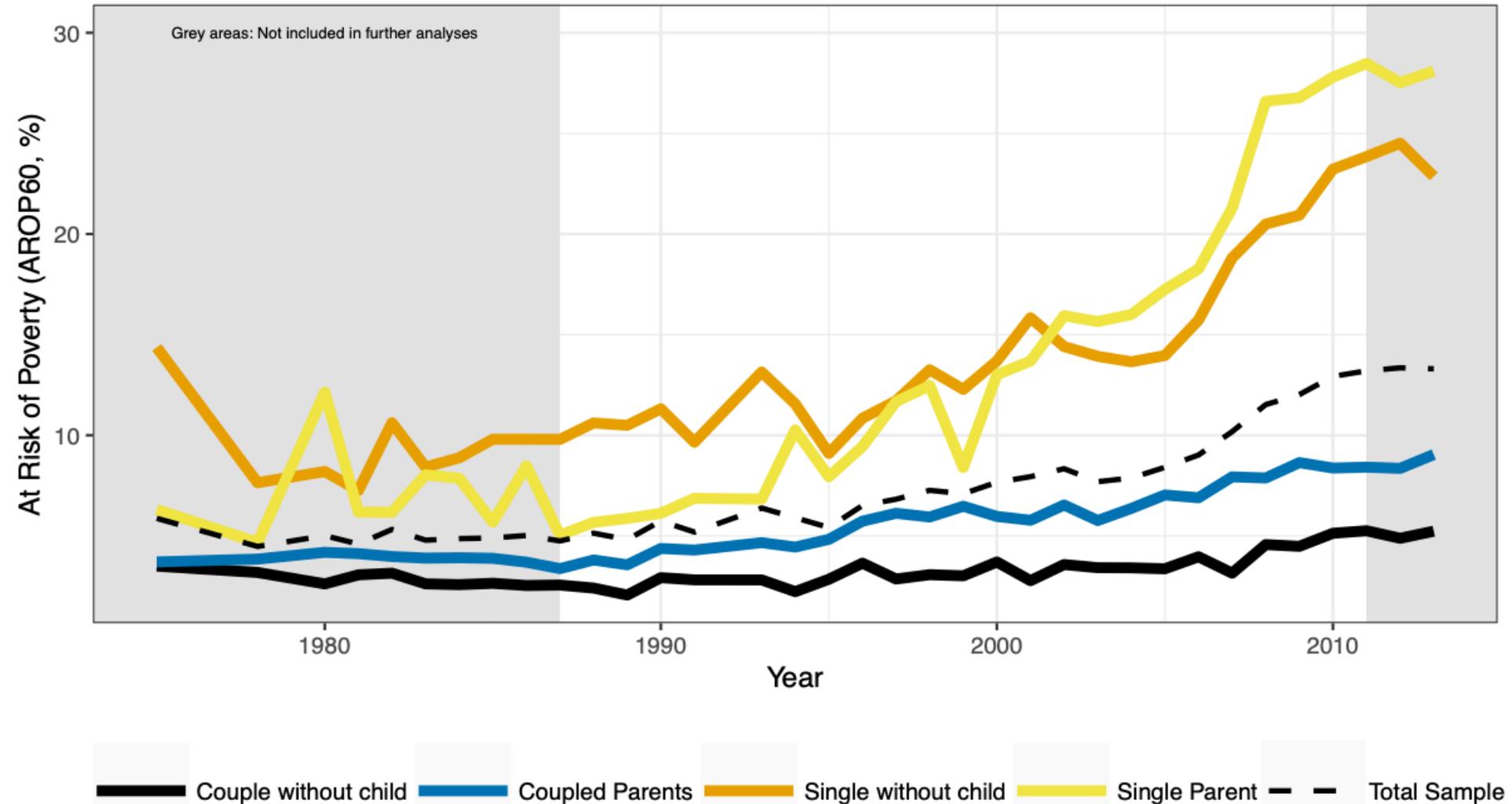
Family policies (child benefits, paid parental leave, childcare/ECEC) are well-documented to support the employment and economic well-being of single parent families.

- **Challenges with targeting:** stigma, low take-up, reduced voters' support
- **Life-course perspective:** Retain mothers' employment before becoming a single mother
- **Gender equality:** Reserved leave for fathers improves gender equality, and fathers' involvement in children's life

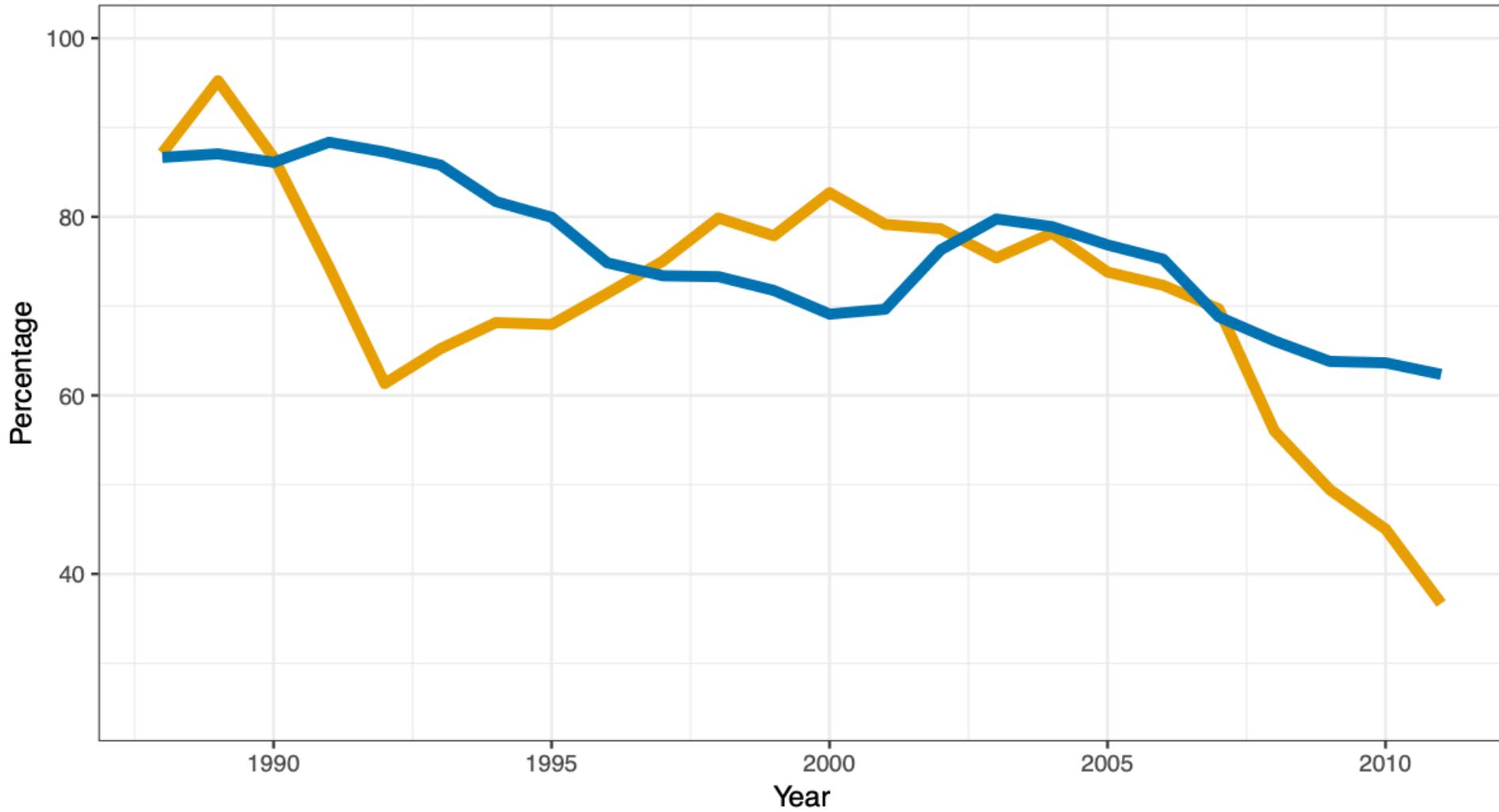
Despite subsidies, out-of-pocket expenses for ECEC large burden on household income single paernts



Policies for all families (in working age) Reform of unemployment benefits resulted in surge in poverty among single parents in Sweden

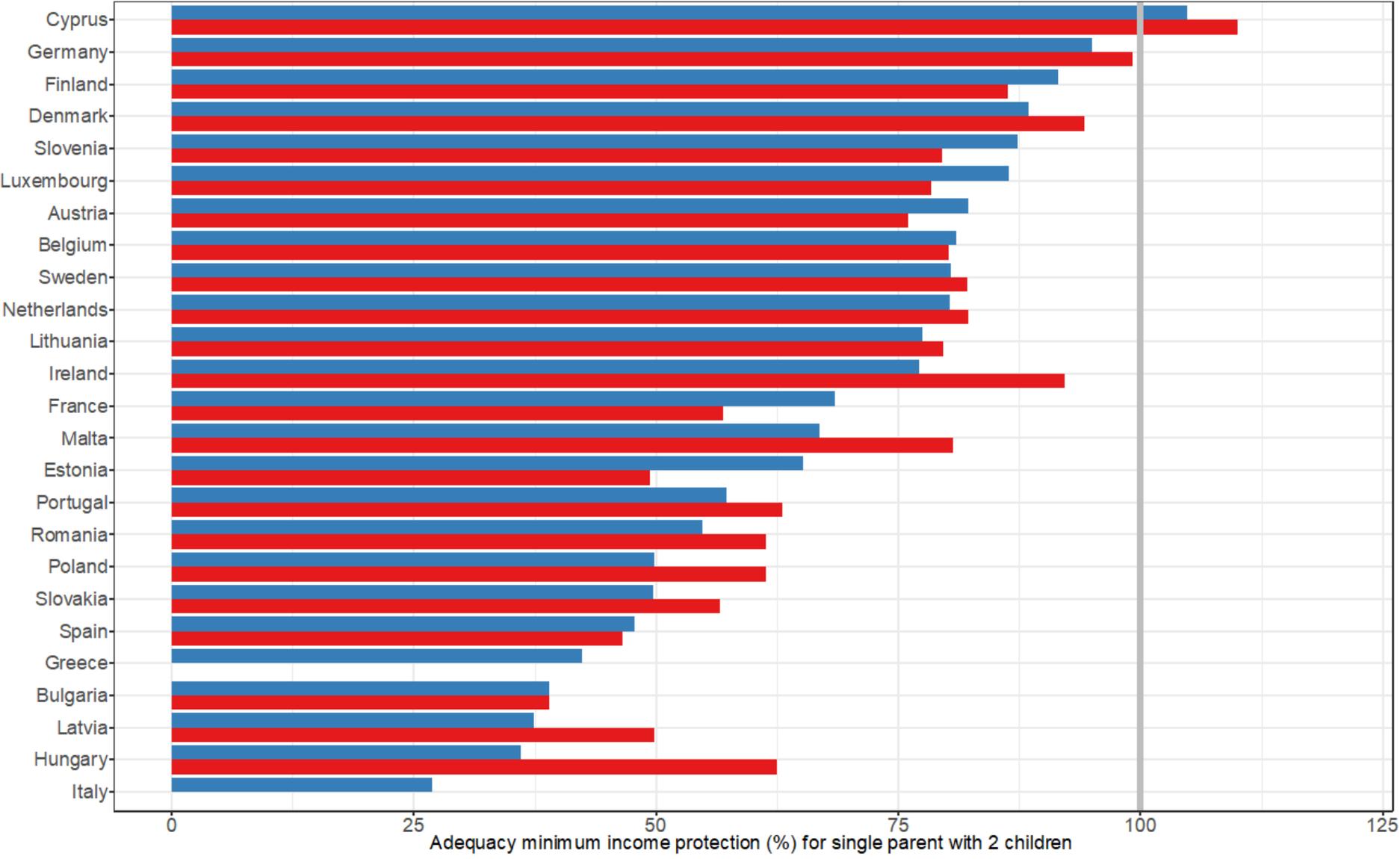


Retrenchment of unemployment benefits in dual-earner Sweden



Benefit receipt Net replacement rate

Figure 16: Adequacy of minimum income protection for single parents, EU Member States, 2010-2018



Conclusion: Three directions of thought

Resources:

- Reconsider gender, family diversity, and the role of fathers
- Invisible in current EU social indicators

Employment:

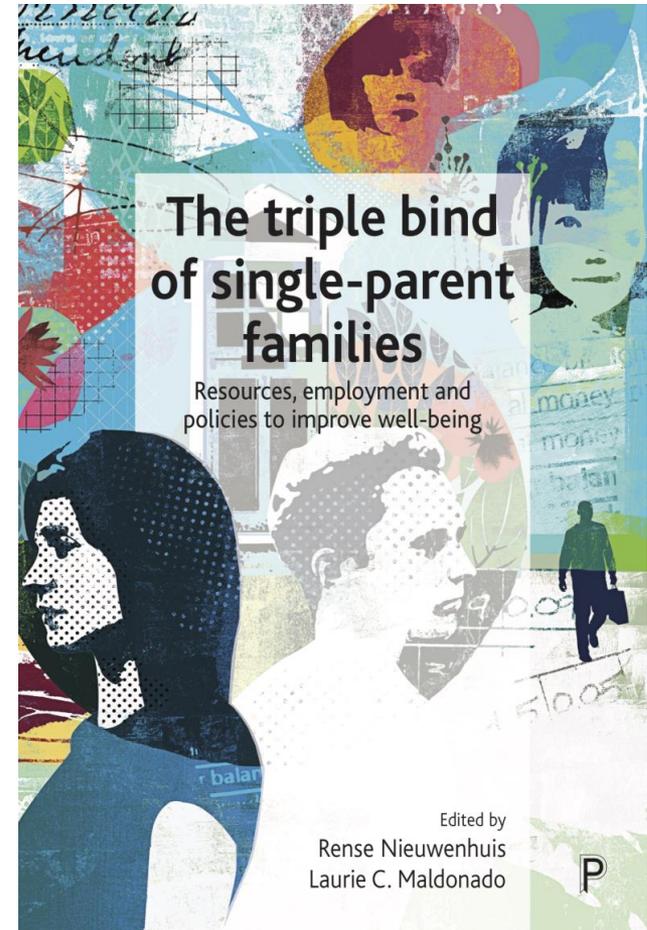
- Earnings often inadequate for single parents
- Gendered inequality often originated prior to separation

Policy:

- Effective policies beyond those that are specific to single parents, or even beyond families with children
- Single parents are often affected most by inadequate social protection

"Single parents do better in societies with institutions that support equality of gender and equality of class.

Just like everyone else."



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