

Job insecurity and child well-being in single-parent families in Europe: A matter of family and gender policy

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of this article is to extend our knowledge about child deprivation in single-parent families from a comparative European perspective. We first analyse the relationship between the employment status of single parents and child deprivation. Furthermore, we examine whether gender equality in the labour market and family cash benefits reduce deprivation and alleviate the consequences of unemployment and employment precariousness.

Background: Children from single-parent families suffer deprivation mainly due to their parents' job insecurity and the fact that, in general, there is only one breadwinner in their households, usually a woman. However, the situation of these children may differ between European countries according to gender equality and family policies.

Method: We use cross-sectional data from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2014 and multilevel logistic regressions. The analysis is based on a sample of single-parent households (N = 5910) from 28 European countries.

Results: The results indicate that temporary employment and unemployment are associated with a greater risk of child deprivation in single-parent families. The results also show that gender equality in the labour market reduces child deprivation, especially in families where the parent has a temporary employment. Redistributive family policies have a more limited impact.

Conclusion: The main findings indicate that advances in gender equality in the labour market are essential to combat child deprivation in single-parent families in Europe.

Key words: child deprivation, gender equality, labour market, multilevel analysis, poverty



1. Introduction

The percentage of single-parent families has increased significantly over the last decades in most European countries (Fokkema & Liefbroer, 2008; Martin & Kats, 2003; Pérez Corral & Moreno Minguez, 2021). This increase has negative consequences for the well-being of children since amongst the main risks associated with single parenthood are poverty and material deprivation (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Härkönen, 2018). In addition, in many cases, single parenthood bears directly on the reproduction of social and economic disadvantages, affecting the future of children negatively (Bernardi & Boertien, 2017; Hastings & Schneider, 2021; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008; Putnam, 2015).

Studies on single parenthood have mainly focused on the analysis of parents' economic situation, highlighting the disadvantages experienced by these families regarding economic resources and employment (Härkönen, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2020; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018b). Compared with two-parent – so called “intact” – families, progenitors who head single-parent families are more exposed to experiencing shortcomings in education, difficulties in conciliating work and family life, and employment and economic precariousness related to being the only breadwinner. The literature has also emphasized the precariousness of single-parent households is directly related to less care and affective involvement with the children (Brown et al., 2016; Härkönen et al., 2017; Main, 2014; Rees et al., 2010). Moreover, most single-parent families are headed by women, so these families have to face structural gender inequality present in social and power structures (Albelda et al., 2005; Korpi, 2000). However, although single-parent families suffer from economic and employment disadvantages that contribute to the reproduction and exacerbation of child poverty and material deprivation, some differences are observed in European countries according to the welfare state model (Getz Wold, 2012; Misra et al., 2012; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018a). In order to understand well the situation within the social structure of single-parent families and their minor children, it is important that scientific studies blend economic and employment resource profiles, family policy, gender perspective, and the children's perception.

There is much empirical evidence on the links between social and family policies, employment, and the economic situation for different family types (Brady et al., 2017; Christopher, 2002; Chzhen, 2017; Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Hakovirta & Jokela, 2019; Misra et al., 2012; Nygård et al., 2019). Many of these studies have focused on analysing how the public policies of the welfare state and sociodemographic factors (type of family, age, education, employment status) affect family poverty in general. However, few studies examine their effects on child deprivation (Bárcena-Martín et al., 2017). We propose to integrate the individual and institutional perspectives to know more about how family policies could moderate the effects of job insecurity on child deprivation of single-parent families (Zagel et al., 2021; Zagel & Van Lancker, 2022).

Based on these premises, this article examines how employment instability and precariousness of parents heading single-parent families interacts with family spending policies and gender equality progress, in order to explain the variability in child material deprivation from a comparative European perspective.

2. Background

2.1 *Single parenthood, welfare regime and gender inequality*

The cultural changes associated with the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) have led to more individualised and deinstitutionalised family styles with new ways of understanding partnerships, procreation, family breakdown, fatherhood, and motherhood. (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Meil, 2015; Van De Kaa, 1987; Zaidi & Morgan, 2017). All these processes have fed into what is commonly referred to as family diversity and plurality. Although single parenthood may be due to widowhood, as a result of SDT, there was a substantial increase in single-parent families due to the separation or divorce of parents and births out of wedlock (Garriga et al., 2015; Lesthaeghe, 2010). In this regard, some births out of wedlock come from cohabiting couples, who tend to have a higher risk of separation than married couples (Kiernan, 2004). The increase of women's employment and economic independency is one of the major forces of these family changes, while at the same time, it stands to attention that it contributes to the amplification of inequality related to family type, which in turn has an impact on child well-being (Flaquer, 2021; McLanahan, 2004). Thus, the SDT has made the demographic and socioeconomic factors associated with single parenthood and child well-being more complex. Exploring this complexity is one of the challenges of this study.

According to the economic and demographic theories, the growth in single parenthood, joint with the precariousness of the labour market, are challenges that the policies of the welfare state in Europe have to face (Hakovirta et al., 2013). From this perspective, the progressive emancipation of women would seem to be leading to inequality in forms of life and economic situations conditioned by differentiated access to education and employment. This idea is based on the demonstrated existing gender inequality on the labour market and the difficulties in reconciling working and family life which still fall on women's shoulders (Albelda et al., 2005; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008; Rowlingson & McKay, 2002). This would partially explain the precariousness associated with certain families, such as single-parent ones, where the breadwinner is usually a woman.

There is an extensive background in the literature on the individual-level explanations of poverty, particularly in the US literature (Brady et al., 2017). Our study provides a complementary structural and institutional perspective by jointly exploring some of the major social trends that have characterized many Western countries in recent decades: the increase on single parenthood and child deprivation, job insecurity, and gender equality. The question is how welfare states adapt to the changes in single parenthood and child well-being to reduce the gender gap and risk associated with the labour market. At the dawn of the welfare state, one of the problems of single-parent families were that the family policies did not sufficiently protect mothers and children against poverty (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Many single-parent families are in a vulnerable position caused by the increase in divorces, the greater job insecurity, and the income and gender gaps (Huber & Stephens 2006; Kilkey, 2000; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018a; Rowlingson & McKay, 2002).

Therefore, the development of family and gender policies is key in the fight against poverty in single-parent households. Specifically, within the European context, the lower poverty rate of single-parent families in the Nordic countries has been mainly due to policies that have promoted maternal employment and gender equality in the labour market, such as childcare services and parental leave (Hakovirta et al., 2013; Misra et al., 2012; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018a). According to Zagel and Van Lancker (2022), the risks of poverty for single mothers, and the difference with partnered mothers, is lower in countries with high spending on childcare services. However, these family policies have had little development in southern European countries, with family solidarity being an essential factor in the provision of well-being (Almeda et al., 2016; Ferrera, 2005; Moreno Mínguez, 2005; Obiol, 2003). In fact, in these countries the two-parent family model with one male breadwinner has been the focus of family policies introduced by the welfare state.

In short, given the close relationship between precariousness in single-parent families and gender inequality, policies that favour greater equality may go some way towards explaining existing differences in the economic situations of single-parent families and, subsequently, in the well-being of children between countries (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Shaver, 2018). In addition, feminist literature has added to this debate the diversity of family and personal situations of single parenthood, depending on the social class background and institutional contexts that support these families (Albelda et al., 2005; Rowlingson & McKay, 2002, 2005). These studies show that the destinies and situations of mothers and children in single-parent families can be different depending on socio-economic background.

On the other hand, comparative studies on the welfare State have shown the positive effect of expansive redistributive policies on the economic situation of single-parent families and their children (Getz Wold, 2012; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonato, 2018a; Obiol, 2003; Sjöberg, 2004). However, there is not enough empirical evidence on the impact of the labour situation of the single parent on child wellbeing including the variables of social spending policies. For all these reasons, it is necessary to take into account the complexity of changes in single-parent families social composition and social policy contexts to explain the trends of these families and their children.

2.2 *Previous research*

The empirical evidence suggests that unemployment and lack of job security experienced by single parents has a negative effect on several indicators of child well-being, such as educational achievement, emotional well-being, and behaviour (Brand & Simon Thomas, 2014; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2005; Strazdins et al., 2010). In this respect, studies have also confirmed the impact of parents' employment situation on the risks of material deprivation (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Eamon & Wu, 2011). This relationship is explained first because the employment situation affects the ability of individuals to obtain income and, consequently, to consume goods and services necessary for the well-being (Layte et al., 2001). Various studies have shown that unemployment is associated with a higher risk of deprivation (see, for example, Álvares & Amaral, 2014; Eamon & Wu, 2011; Pilkauskas et al., 2012). Moreover, there are some types of jobs, such as temporary

employment, which are often associated with working poverty (Van Lancker, 2012). In general, people with a temporary employment have lower wages than people with a permanent employment (Laß & Wooden, 2020). Likewise, both unemployment and temporary employment not only negatively affect present income but also future income expectations, which can impact on material deprivation (Figari, 2012; Guio et al., 2020). This is fundamentally due to the fact that economic and job insecurity make individuals more conservative with their expenses and consumption (Benito, 2006; Chirumbolo et al., 2021).

Although the relationship between employment and deprivation has been extensively studied, further research is needed for single-parent families examining child deprivation and country contextual factors that could alleviate the impact of the lack of employment and job instability, such as gender equality in the labour market. There is much research on the impact of family policy regimes on gender equality, but few studies have examined the consequences on child well-being (Engster & Stensöta, 2011). As previously stated, supporting the integration of women into the labour market and improving their working conditions contributes to reducing the risk of poverty in single-mother families (Christopher, 2002; Misra et al., 2007, 2012). Therefore, it is to be expected that in countries where women have a greater attachment to the labour market, single-mother families have accumulated more economic resources that could reduce the risk of deprivation as well as the effect of unemployment and job instability. Layte et al. (2001) indicate that the economic resources obtained in the past through employment are essential to avoid deprivation in the present. Furthermore, in countries where there is more gender equality in the labour market, the future employment expectations of single mothers will be better (Misra et al., 2007, 2012; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018b).

On the other hand, there is an interesting study by Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado (2018a) on the economic situation of single-parent families which concludes that there is a lower index of work poverty in single-parent families in northern European countries. This is because there is greater equality in the labour market and more extensive redistributive policies in these countries. This study also shows that in the United Kingdom and Ireland, redistributive policies are very effective in reducing working poverty, particularly family transfers.

The European countries that have a long tradition of egalitarian redistributive policies have further reduced the precariousness of single-parent families in comparison with other countries where such policies have not been developed (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Gornick & Jäntti, 2012; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018a). Likewise, Nygård et al. (2019) find that public spending on cash family benefits contributes to reducing income poverty in households with children in European countries, although it appears to be less effective than public spending on benefits in kind. However, as these authors point out, cash spending can be especially beneficial for households facing employment problems. Despite all this evidence, there is still little knowledge of the effect of family cash benefits on poverty measures based on child material deprivation, especially for single-parent families.

In short, we consider that the inequality in child deprivation due to the employment difficulties faced by single parents could be corrected, or at least moderated, through gender equality in the labour market and redistributive family policies.

In this study, we have opted for using indicators of child deprivation that allow us to analyse its different dimensions. In particular, we examine child deprivation through the dimensions established by the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis for the European Union (EU-MODA) (Chzhen et al., 2016; Chzhen & de Neubourg, 2014). Analysing diverse material deprivation dimensions is highly relevant, given that the causes and, above all, the consequences of each one of these, may vary (Heflin et al., 2009). The objective of this article is thus to contribute to the literature on child deprivation in single-parent families from a comparative European perspective while addressing the following questions: 1) does the employment situation of single-parent families explain the deprivation experienced by the children of such families; and 2) can family redistributive policies and gender equality in the labour market moderate the impact of unemployment and job insecurity on child material deprivation in single-parent families?

The answers to these questions will help us to go forward in designing public policies that seek to combat inequalities, poverty and child deprivation from a comparative and gender perspective, which will, in turn, contribute to improving family and child well-being.

3. Methods

3.1 Data and Study sample

This study uses microdata from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), a data base with information on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions of individuals and households for all European countries (Eurostat, 2021). More specifically, we have selected cross-sectional microdata from the year 2014 for our analysis. This wave of EU-SILC includes a module with additional information on child deprivation. The module refers to the deprivation experienced by all of the children in a household between the ages of 1 and 15 (European Commission, 2014). In this sense, in accordance with the protocol of the survey, if a child is exposed to deprivation in one item, the rest of the children living in the same household are also considered to be deprived of the item in question. Apart from the EU-SILC microdata, we use data about each country from the data bases of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and Eurostat.

We focus on the study of single-parent households with children aged between 1 and 15. We define as single-parent households all households where parents live without a partner and with their children. As Chzhen and Bradshaw (2012), we also include in our sample those households where, in addition to the single-parent family unit, there are also other adults or family members living, such as the children's grandparents. The final sample consists of 5910 single-parent households from 28 different countries.¹

¹ The EU-SILC offers information about 32 European countries, from which we have excluded Iceland, Norway, Serbia and Switzerland due to missing data for some variables of the study.

3.2 *Dependent variables*

Based on the dimensions of child well-being from EU-MODA, we have created five dependent variables. Each of these variables consists of different items of child deprivation from EU-SILC according to the connection they have with the dimensions of EU-MODA (Chzhen et al., 2016; Chzhen & de Neubourg, 2014). These dimensions are nutrition, clothing, education, leisure, and social life. Even though the EU-MODA framework also includes “information” and “housing” dimensions, the latter are not comprised of child deprivation items, but rather of items of deprivation affecting the whole household (Chzhen & de Neubourg, 2014; Stefánsson et al., 2018). We therefore do not use these two dimensions as dependent variables. The aggregation of items in dimensions is similar to that carried out by Chzhen et al. (2018), who use 11 out of 13 indicators of child deprivation proposed by EU-SILC in the microdata for 2014.² *Nutrition* is based on two items indicating if the children of the household (i) eat fruit and vegetables at least once a day; or ii) have a meal containing meat, chicken or fish. *Clothing* also comprises two items indicating if children i) have any new clothes or ii) have two pairs of shoes that fit them well. *Education* includes i) books adequate for the children’s age, ii) attendance to childcare services, or iii) participation in school trips and events. However, it should be noted that the items used in this dimension may vary according to the age of the children in the household, as attendance to childcare services is only taken into account for children between the age of three and the minimum compulsory school age. Moreover, for participation in school trips only children of compulsory school age are considered. *Leisure* is based on three items that indicate if children have i) leisure equipment for outdoor play, ii) any indoor games, or iii) a regular leisure activity. *Social life* includes i) the celebration of special occasions, or ii) occasionally inviting friends over to play or eat.

The five deprivation variables are dummy variables that take the value of 1 if the children of the household are deprived of one or more of the items in the corresponding dimension. Studies of European countries normally use deprivation variables based on the lack of items due to reasons of non-affordability (see, for example, Bárcena-Martín et al., 2017; Guio et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in EU-MODA child deprivation is defined as the lack of an item due to non-affordability just as much as because of other unspecified motives (Chzhen & de Neubourg, 2014).

3.3 *Micro-level explanatory and control variables*

The key independent variables of this study reflect the situation of single parents on the labour market. In particular, these variables identify three types of employment situations:

2 Apart from the child deprivation items from the 2014 module, these authors also include an indicator for assistance to nursery services for the education dimension. The information about this indicator is provided annually by EU-SILC.

stable work (employed with a permanent contract and self-employed with employees³), temporary work (employment on a contract with a limited duration) and unemployment.⁴

Moreover, we control for other characteristics of parents and households. The characteristics of parents include education level (categorised in two levels: tertiary education and lower than tertiary education), age (50 years or older, between 40 and 49, between 30 and 39, under 30), gender (categorised as male and female) and country of birth (same as country of residence, another European country, non-European country). Amongst household characteristics, we have included the age of the youngest child in the household (younger than 12 and between 12 and 15), the number of children (one, two, and three or more), and the household size (only single-parent family unit and single-parent family with other adults). These variables have been used in previous studies analysing their relationship with material deprivation in families with children (see, for example, Bárcena-Martín et al., 2017; Chzhzen & Bradshaw, 2012; Eamon & Wu, 2011). Descriptive statistics for all study variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
<i>Dependent variables</i>		
Nutrition	0.15	0.36
Clothing	0.15	0.36
Education	0.20	0.40
Leisure	0.37	0.48
Social life	0.28	0.45
<i>Micro independent variables</i>		
Employment status		
Stable job	0.69	0.46
Temporary job	0.11	0.31
Unemployed	0.20	0.40
Lower than tertiary education	0.69	0.46
Age		
50 or older	0.10	0.29
40-49	0.43	0.49
30-39	0.37	0.48
Younger than 30	0.10	0.30
Female	0.89	0.32

3 This definition of stable work is quite similar to the one used in previous studies such as that of Cantalini (2017) and Ichino et al. (2008). Both permanent contracts and self-employment with employees are characterized by presenting a low risk of precariousness (Eichhorst & Tobsch, 2017).

4 Given that one of the main aims of this study is to analyse the effect of instability and labour precariousness on child deprivation, we have not included single parents who are not active on the labour market. We also do not include the self-employed without employees since we did not find a significant relationship between this employment situation and most dimensions of child deprivation in an alternative analysis (available upon request).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (continued)

Country of birth		
Country of residence	0.93	0.26
EU country except country of residence	0.03	0.17
Non-European country	0.04	0.20
Youngest child between the ages of 12 and 15	0.30	0.46
Number of children		
One	0.58	0.49
Two	0.33	0.47
Three or more	0.09	0.28
Single-parent family unit	0.72	0.45
<i>Macro independent variables</i>		
Employment gender equality	71.38	4.39
Family cash benefits	1.33	0.55

Sources: EU-SILC 2014, EIGE database, Eurostat database.

3.4 Country-level variables

On the country level, we include a variable that takes into account employment gender equality. For European countries, the EIGE has developed a Gender Equality Index comprised of six domains (work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health) (EIGE, 2017). In our employment gender equality variable, we use data from the work domain for 2015.⁵ This domain captures equality between men and women in three subdomains: participation on the labour market (measured by full-time equivalent employment rate and duration of working life), employment segregation (measured by men and women's labour participation in the education, human health and social services sectors) and labour conditions (timetable flexibility and employment perspectives). The values of the index range from 1 to 100, where countries with a bigger punctuation have greater equality. As Table 2 shows, Italy, Greece, Slovakia, and Czech Republic are the countries with the lowest level of equality in the work domain. Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, and the UK have the highest values.

Secondly, we include spending on family cash benefits (measured in % of GDP) as a variable of family policy. The data for this variable were obtained from the Eurostat database for 2014. In accordance with the European System of integrated Social Protection Statistics (ESSPROS), expenditure on cash family benefits is comprised of periodic family allowances for each child, parental leave, birth allowances, and benefits for covering the specific needs of single-parent families or families with disabled children (Eurostat, 2019). Several previous works have used expenditure on these types of family allowances as an indicator of family policy (Arcanjo et al., 2013; Luci-Greulich & Thévenon, 2013; Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015). Spain, Poland, Netherlands, and Portugal have the lowest expenditure levels (see Table 2). Conversely, Luxembourg, UK, Austria, and Germany have the highest values.

⁵ We use data from 2015, as the EIGE Gender Equality Index does not provide data for 2014.

Table 2: Gender equality in the domain of work (2015) and family cash benefits (2014) by country

Country	Gender equality in the domain of work	Spending on family cash benefits
Austria	76.1	2.0
Belgium	73.8	1.8
Bulgaria	68.6	1.2
Croatia	69.4	1.2
Cyprus	70.7	1.2
Czechia	66.1	1.5
Denmark	79.2	1.4
Estonia	72.1	1.5
Finland	74.7	1.5
France	72.1	1.6
Germany	71.4	2.0
Greece	64.2	1.0
Hungary	67.2	1.7
Ireland	73.9	1.9
Italy	62.4	1.0
Latvia	73.6	1.0
Lithuania	73.2	0.8
Luxembourg	74.0	2.6
Malta	71.0	1.0
Netherlands	76.7	0.6
Poland	66.8	0.6
Portugal	72.0	0.7
Romania	67.1	0.8
Slovakia	65.5	1.5
Slovenia	71.8	1.3
Spain	72.4	0.5
Sweden	82.6	1.4
United Kingdom	76.6	2.2

Sources: EIGE database, Eurostat database.

Note: Spending on family cash benefits is measured as a percentage of GDP.

3.5 Models

We use multilevel logistic regression models for the analysis. These models are appropriate as they control the two-level structure of our data, given that households are grouped according to countries (Hox, 2010; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). We first use a random intercept model through which we examine the association between the employment situation variables and the different child deprivation dimensions, including in the estimate the rest of independent variables on micro and macro levels. Next, we

estimate cross-level interaction models, in which the employment situation variables are interacted with the macro-level variables (one interaction in each model). In this way we check if and how the relation between single parents' employment situation and child deprivation is moderated by gender equality and the level of spending on cash family benefits in the countries studied. In the cross-level interaction models, the random slope is included for the employment situation variable involved in the interaction (Heisig & Schaeffer, 2019).⁶

4. Results

Table 3 shows the results of the estimates of the first multilevel model with which we analyse the relationship of the independent variables with the five child deprivation dimensions (nutrition, clothing, education, leisure, and social life). Focusing first on the results of the determinants on the micro-level, we find that the two employment situation variables (temporary job and unemployed) are significantly related to the risk of deprivation in all five dimensions. In particular, the results indicate that children of single parents with a temporary job or who are unemployed have a greater risk of deprivation than children of single parents with a stable job. Therefore, this result indicates the great influence of the employment status of single parents on all dimensions of child deprivation.⁷ It should be noted that the effect of temporary jobs seems to be stronger in the education dimension, while the smallest impact is observed in the nutrition dimension. With regard to the results of the control variables, it appears that children are more likely to suffer deprivation in any of the five dimensions if their parents do not have a high educational level. In comparison with children of single parents aged 50 years or older, children of parents aged between 30 and 49 are less likely to suffer education deprivation. The risk of nutrition deprivation is also smaller if parents are aged between 30 and 39. Nevertheless, if single parents are younger than 30, their children are more likely to suffer deprivation in leisure and social life. Another relevant characteristic is the gender of single parents, given that children are more likely to be deprived in all dimensions if the single-parent household is headed by a woman. We found that children of parents born in an European country different to that of their residence have a significantly higher risk of deprivation in education and social life. In addition, children who live with single parents from non-European countries have a higher probability of suffering deprivation in education, leisure, and social life. The results also indicate that in single-parent households where the youngest child is older than 11 years, there is a greater risk of child deprivation in nutrition, education, leisure, and social life. Children who live with one or more siblings have a greater risk of suffering deprivation in nutrition, clothing, and education. Moreover, if children live with two or more siblings, they are more likely to suffer deprivation in leisure and social life. Finally, in households

6 By including the random slope, we cannot interact the two employment situation variables (temporary job and unemployment) with the country-level variable in the same model. This is due to the limited sample size. Therefore, following the methodological approach of Heisig and Schaeffer (2019), we have only one interaction in each model.

7 Table A1 in the appendix summarizes the results for the main explanatory variables.

with only a single-parent family unit, the risk of child deprivation in leisure and social life is lower than in households where there are more adults.

Table 3: Multilevel logistic regression analysis of child deprivation in single-parent households

	Nutrition	Clothing	Education	Leisure	Social life
<i>Micro variables</i>					
Employment status (ref. Stable job)					
Temporary job	0.240* (0.132)	0.421*** (0.131)	0.611*** (0.111)	0.374*** (0.095)	0.361*** (0.103)
Unemployed	0.812*** (0.095)	1.070*** (0.094)	0.875*** (0.086)	0.826*** (0.075)	0.912*** (0.078)
Lower than tertiary education	0.736*** (0.101)	0.654*** (0.101)	0.962*** (0.097)	0.755*** (0.070)	0.617*** (0.077)
Age (ref. 50 or older)					
40-49	-0.229 (0.140)	-0.214 (0.151)	-0.421*** (0.129)	-0.137 (0.108)	-0.089 (0.118)
30-39	-0.314** (0.149)	-0.181 (0.158)	-0.356*** (0.136)	-0.012 (0.114)	-0.025 (0.124)
Younger than 30	-0.077 (0.183)	-0.146 (0.193)	0.120 (0.166)	0.498*** (0.141)	0.404*** (0.150)
Female	0.247* (0.136)	0.530*** (0.146)	0.335*** (0.126)	0.306*** (0.097)	0.188* (0.106)
Country of birth (ref. Country of residence)					
EU country except country of residence	-0.459 (0.340)	0.306 (0.260)	0.441** (0.222)	0.285 (0.189)	0.367* (0.193)
Non-European country	0.126 (0.187)	0.274 (0.185)	0.619*** (0.158)	0.522*** (0.140)	0.648*** (0.143)
Youngest child between the ages of 12 and 15	0.347*** (0.093)	0.059 (0.099)	0.486*** (0.087)	0.268*** (0.071)	0.169** (0.077)
Number of children (ref. one)					
Two	0.270*** (0.087)	0.473*** (0.088)	0.512*** (0.080)	0.018 (0.065)	-0.053 (0.071)
Three or more	0.638*** (0.137)	0.890*** (0.134)	0.966*** (0.124)	0.458*** (0.108)	0.261** (0.115)
Single-parent family unit	0.061 (0.092)	0.106 (0.094)	-0.049 (0.083)	-0.161** (0.069)	-0.162** (0.074)
<i>Macro variables</i>					
Employment gender equality	-0.126*** (0.035)	-0.053 (0.048)	-0.086*** (0.031)	-0.046 (0.029)	-0.085*** (0.030)
Family cash benefits	0.349 (0.292)	-0.073 (0.408)	-0.231 (0.268)	-0.345 (0.257)	-0.032 (0.261)
Constant	5.573**	0.433	3.507	2.209	4.263**
Var Intercept	0.519	1.074	0.445	0.421	0.433
Observations	5910	5910	5910	5910	5910
Number of groups	28	28	28	28	28
Log likelihood	-2235.900	-2169.212	-2549.417	-3517.102	-3140.971

Sources: EU-SILC 2014, EIGE database, Eurostat database.

Note: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10. Standard deviations in parentheses.

The results for the macro level variables show the presence of a statistically significant relationship between the employment gender equality indicator and the likelihood that children from single-parent families may suffer deprivation in nutrition, education, and social life. The greater the gender equality is, the smaller the risk of child deprivation in these dimensions. Spending on family benefits in cash does not seem to be significantly associated with any of the child deprivation dimensions in single-parent families.

Tables 4-7 show the results of the models that include interaction terms between the employment situation variables, the gender equality index, and expenditure on family benefits. In Table 4, the results show that the relation between temporary work and deprivation in nutrition, education and leisure is moderated by employment gender equality in the countries studied. Figure 1 represents these results graphically. As illustrated, the average marginal impact of temporary work on these three dimensions of child deprivation diminishes as employment gender equality increases. Results in Table 4 also indicate that the effect of temporary work on clothing and social life deprivation is not moderated by gender equality. On the other hand, as the results in Table 5 indicate, employment gender equality does not moderate the relationship of unemployment with any of the five dimensions of child deprivation.

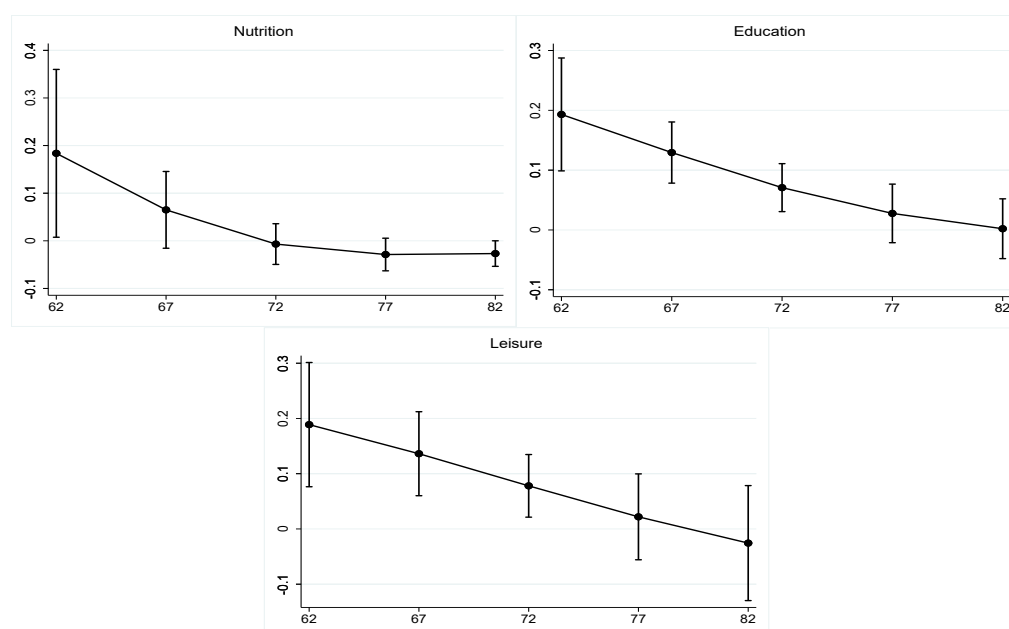
Table 4: Cross-level interaction between temporary job and employment gender equality

	Nutrition	Clothing	Education	Leisure	Social life
<i>Micro variable</i>					
Employment status (ref. Stable job)					
Temporary job	6.465** (3.077)	0.612 (2.698)	4.040** (1.785)	4.143** (1.804)	1.591 (1.883)
<i>Macro variable</i>					
Employment gender equality	-0.117*** (0.035)	-0.056 (0.049)	-0.080** (0.032)	-0.039 (0.030)	-0.083*** (0.031)
<i>Interaction</i>					
Temporary job*Employment gender equality	-0.091** (0.044)	-0.003 (0.038)	-0.049* (0.026)	-0.053** (0.025)	-0.017 (0.027)
Constant	4.951**	0.536	3.068	1.754	4.092*
Var Temporary job	0.203	0.088	0.022	0.051	0.043
Var Intercept	0.511	1.062	0.462	0.419	0.434
Observations	5910	5910	5910	5910	5910
Number of groups	28	28	28	28	28
Log likelihood	-2231.590	-2168.922	-2546.964	-3514.183	-3140.170

Sources: EU-SILC 2014, EIGE database, Eurostat database.

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. Standard deviations in parentheses. Estimations include all other variables shown in Table 3.

Figure 1: Average marginal effects of temporary work on child deprivation in nutrition, education and leisure according to employment gender equality



Note: The horizontal axis shows the values of the employment gender equality index.

Table 5: Cross-level interaction between unemployed status and employment gender equality

	Nutrition	Clothing	Education	Leisure	Social life
<i>Micro variable</i>					
Employment status (ref. Stable job)					
Unemployed	0.908 (1.628)	0.627 (1.754)	3.197* (1.659)	-1.291 (1.349)	2.850 (1.823)
<i>Macro variable</i>					
Employment gender equality	-0.125*** (0.036)	-0.057 (0.047)	-0.077** (0.032)	-0.045 (0.031)	-0.082*** (0.030)
<i>Interaction</i>					
Unemployed*Employment gender equality	-0.001 (0.023)	0.006 (0.025)	-0.033 (0.023)	0.029 (0.019)	-0.028 (0.026)
Constant	5.480**	0.732	2.930	2.375	4.000*
Var Unemployed	0.004	0.015	0.058	0.028	0.105
Var Intercept	0.549	0.979	0.483	0.467	0.401
Observations	5910	5910	5910	5910	5910
Number of groups	28	28	28	28	28
Log likelihood	-2235.672	-2168.511	-2547.229	-3515.037	-3136.799

Sources: EU-SILC 2014, EIGE database, Eurostat database.

Note: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10. Standard deviations in parentheses. Estimations include all other variables shown in Table 3.

With regards to the interaction of single parents' employment situations with spending on family benefits in cash, the results of Table 6 show that only the relationship between temporary work and deprivation in clothing is moderated by this type of social expenditure. As can be observed in Figure 2, in countries with greater spending on family benefits, the average marginal effect of temporary work on this dimension is lower. The results in Table 7 indicate that the relationship between unemployment and child deprivation is not moderated by spending on family cash benefits.

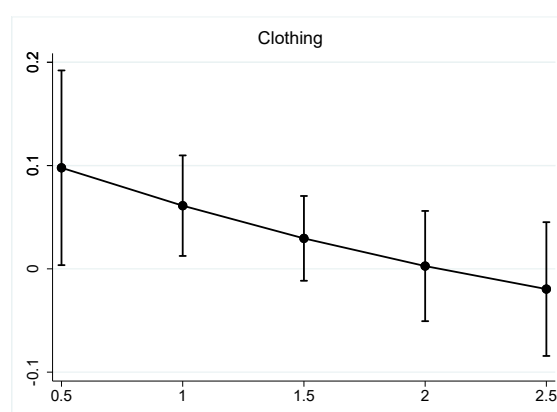
Table 6: Cross-level interaction between temporary job and family cash benefits

	Nutrition	Clothing	Education	Leisure	Social life
<i>Micro variable</i>					
Employment status (ref. Stable job)					
Temporary job	0.460 (0.554)	1.016*** (0.366)	0.563** (0.283)	0.253 (0.334)	0.544* (0.290)
<i>Macro variable</i>					
Family cash benefits	0.354 (0.294)	-0.022 (0.406)	-0.181 (0.280)	-0.357 (0.264)	-0.016 (0.263)
<i>Interaction</i>					
Temporary job*Family cash benefits	-0.291 (0.396)	-0.493* (0.279)	0.011 (0.207)	0.110 (0.224)	-0.136 (0.210)
Constant	4.838*	0.470	4.959**	2.134	4.195*
Var Temporary job	0.378	0.029	0.048	0.075	0.049
Var Intercept	0.515	1.059	0.483	0.423	0.435
Observations	5910	5910	5910	5910	5910
Number of groups	28	28	28	28	28
Log likelihood	-2233.280	-2167.474	-2548.808	-3516.339	-3140.166

Sources: EU-SILC 2014, EIGE database, Eurostat database.

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. Standard deviations in parentheses. Estimations include all other variables shown in Table 3.

Figure 2: Average marginal effects of temporary work on child deprivation in clothing according to the level of family benefits in cash



Note: The horizontal axis shows the value of family benefits in cash as a percentage of GDP.

Table 7: Cross-level interaction between unemployed status and family cash benefits

	Nutrition	Clothing	Education	Leisure	Social life
<i>Micro variable</i>					
Employment status (ref. Stable job)					
Unemployed	0.907*** (0.260)	1.043*** (0.259)	1.070*** (0.248)	1.054*** (0.206)	1.099*** (0.271)
<i>Macro variable</i>					
Family cash benefits	0.370 (0.303)	-0.074 (0.393)	-0.169 (0.281)	-0.334 (0.269)	0.010 (0.255)
<i>Interaction</i>					
Unemployed*Family cash benefits	-0.064 (0.182)	-0.011 (0.183)	-0.161 (0.178)	-0.187 (0.144)	-0.176 (0.188)
Constant	5.492**	0.792	4.048*	1.283	3.977*
Var Unemployed	0.003	0.016	0.045	0.008	0.089
Var Intercept	0.548	0.979	0.487	0.448	0.403
Observations	5910	5910	5910	5910	5910
Number of groups	28	28	28	28	28
Log likelihood	-2235.611	-2168.535	-2547.879	-3515.509	-3136.994

Sources: EU-SILC 2014, EIGE database, Eurostat database.

Note: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10. Standard deviations in parentheses. Estimations include all other variables shown in Table 3.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study analyses how job instability and employment precariousness of single parents affects five dimensions of child deprivation: nutrition, clothing, education, leisure, and social life. Twenty-eight European countries are analysed. We also look at how the relationship between single parents' employment situation and child deprivation is moderated by employment gender equality and family spending policies in the countries studied.

Our main results indicate that, in comparison with the children of single parents who have a stable job, children of single parents with a temporary job or who are unemployed have a greater risk of deprivation in the five dimensions. These findings correspond with those of earlier research on single-parent families where it has been shown that unemployment and precariousness both have an impact on material deprivation (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Eamon & Wu, 2011). In fact, the results of the temporary employment variable indicate that even when single parents have a job, this is not always enough to protect their families from material deprivation (Eamon & Wu, 2011). Therefore, the empirical evidence available confirms that parents' employment situation is of significant relevance for children's well-being. In this sense, it should be pointed out that single-parent families are more exposed to economic and labour precariousness than two-parent families, which is fundamentally due to the fact that there is only one main breadwinner in the household - usually a woman experiencing shortfall in salarial and income distribution (Albelda et al., 2005; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018b; Rowlingson & McKay, 2002). Single parents are forced to confront the double challenge of a lack of time

and economic resources needed to care for their children, find ways to conciliate professional and family life, as well as ensure that they satisfy their own and their children's needs (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018b).

One of the novel findings of this study is that the risk of child deprivation is related to European countries' indicator of employment gender equality. More specifically, we find that in countries with less gender equality, such as in Southern Europe, children of single-parent families have a higher likelihood of suffering nutrition, education, and social life deprivation. This is a reflection of the fact that, given that most single-parent families are headed by women, the gender gap on the labour market has an important impact on child deprivation (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Shaver, 2018). In general, more equal societies have developed family policies that seek to encourage the conciliation of family and professional life, as well as labour policies that favour equal integration on the labour market for women with children (Misra et al., 2007, 2012). Furthermore, our results show that the effect of temporary employment on child deprivation in nutrition, education, and leisure is mainly concentrated in countries with less employment gender equality. This is possibly because, in countries with greater gender equality, single mothers may have had better past employment experiences that have allowed them to accumulate more economic resources to face precarious employment situations in the present. Furthermore, single mothers will have better prospects for future employment in these countries. Our results seem to show that single mothers with temporary employment prioritize expenditures in the three dimensions mentioned. However, the results also indicate that gender equality does not alleviate the effect of unemployment on any of the types of deprivation, which could be due to the great economic difficulties associated with the lack of employment (Eamon & Wu, 2011; Pilkauskas et al., 2012).

As far as expenditure on family cash benefits is concerned, not considering its effect according to the parent's employment status, the results obtained indicate that this social spending is not significantly related to any of the five dimensions of child deprivation. As a moderating factor for the impact of employment problems, family benefits only diminish the impact of temporary employment on clothing deprivation. These findings partially dispute previous research on income poverty (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018a; Nygård et al., 2019). The results could indicate that family benefits alone are insufficient to alleviate material deprivation significantly (Bárcena-Martín et al., 2017). It may be necessary to combine them with other social benefits, such as unemployment benefits, to make a difference as a contextual factor (Chzhen, 2017).

The findings of this study confirm that in Europe, advances in gender equality help to reduce child deprivation in single-parent households, especially in families where the parent has a temporary job. In line with literature, our findings confirm that redistributive family policies have a more limited impact (Brady et al, 2017; Zagel & Van Lancker, 2022). In general, these results are especially relevant as the proliferation of new family models, such as the single-parent family, contributes to an increase of child well-being inequality (McLanahan, 2004; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). Similarly, these novel findings continue with a line of research on poverty in single-parent families which has shown that an employment policy aimed at reducing employment inequality related to gender and social class contributes to decreasing poverty (Christopher, 2002; Misra et al., 2007, 2012; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018a). The ground-breaking contribution of our analysis is

that we have included child deprivation indicators in relation with employment gender equality and redistributive policies that had not previously been considered in studies realised on a comparative European level.

On the other hand, the analysis has confirmed that, apart from single parents' employment situation, there are other characteristics such as education level, age, gender, and parents' nationality that have an influence on the risk of child deprivation. Likewise, the number of children in the household and the age of the youngest child have a bearing on child deprivation. These results correlate with previous studies (Bárcena-Martín et al., 2017; Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Eamon & Wu, 2011).

This study has provided additional suggestions about how child deprivation in single-parent families may be moderated by employment and family policies that encourage labour equality between the sexes, contributing to increasing child well-being. This is especially important for southern European countries, where family policies have focused principally on the traditional two-parent family model (Almeda et al., 2016; Ferrera, 2005; Moreno Mínguez, 2005). Our comparative study has revealed the importance of policies that encourage gender equality in the labour market in order to improve the conciliation conditions and economic situation of single-parent families, and to reduce child deprivation. If European countries do not confront these employment and social challenges, poverty in single-parent families generated by the labour market will persist, with grave consequences for children who live in these households.

This study has some limitations. First, given the cross-sectional nature of the data, we cannot control for unobserved factors in our models. Second, the data used are from 2014, the last year the EU-SILC provided information on child deprivation. It prevents us from considering single-parent families' employment and economic situation after the Covid-19 health crisis.

In conclusion, we have found evidence for individual-level and contextual level explanations for child deprivation in single-parent families. This has implications for the study of single parenthood in relation to employment as an explanation of child deprivation and the comparative study of the welfare state and progress in gender equality. From the point of these findings, we suggest considering different interpretations (demographic, individual, and contextual policy regime) to understand the position of single-parent families and child deprivation. Future studies should focus on the importance of family diversity, the composition of risk factors in single-parent families and the complexity of child deprivation from a comparative perspective.

Data availability statement

Access to EU-SILC microdata has to be provided by Eurostat. Macro-level data are available: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs>; <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

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Appendix

Table A.1: Direction of the association between the main independent variables and the child deprivation variables

	Nutrition	Clothing	Education	Leisure	Social life
Temporary job	+	+	+	+	+
Unemployed	+	+	+	+	+
Employment gender equality	-	0	-	0	-
Family cash benefits	0	0	0	0	0

Note: Based on results of Table 3.

Information in German

Deutscher Titel

Arbeitsplatzunsicherheit und Kindeswohl in Einelternfamilien in Europa: Eine Frage der Familien- und Geschlechterpolitik

Zusammenfassung

Fragestellung: Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, unser Wissen über Deprivation bei Kindern in Einelternfamilien aus einer vergleichenden europäischen Perspektive zu erweitern. Zunächst analysieren wir den Zusammenhang zwischen dem Erwerbsstatus von Alleinerziehenden und Deprivation bei Kindern. Darüber hinaus untersuchen wir, ob die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter auf dem Arbeitsmarkt und Familiengeldleistungen Entbehrungen reduzieren und die Folgen von Arbeitslosigkeit und prekärer Beschäftigung lindern.

Hintergrund: Kinder aus Alleinerziehenden sind vor allem durch die berufliche Unsicherheit der Eltern und die Tatsache, dass es in der Regel nur einen Ernährer in ihrem Haushalt gibt, meist eine Frau, benachteiligt. Die Situation dieser Kinder kann jedoch je nach Gleichstellungs- und Familienpolitik zwischen den europäischen Ländern unterschiedlich sein.

Methode: Wir verwenden Querschnittsdaten der European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2014 und mehrstufige logistische Regressionen. Die Analyse basiert auf einer Stichprobe von Alleinerziehenden Haushalten ($N = 5910$) aus 28 europäischen Ländern.

Ergebnisse: Die Ergebnisse weisen darauf hin, dass befristete Beschäftigung und Arbeitslosigkeit mit einem höheren Risiko für Deprivation bei Kindern in Einelternfamilien einhergehen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen auch, dass die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter auf dem Arbeitsmarkt die Deprivation bei Kindern verringert, insbesondere in Familien, in denen der Elternteil einer befristeten Beschäftigung nachgeht. Umverteilende Familienpolitiken haben eine begrenzte Wirkung.

Schlussfolgerung: Die wichtigsten Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Fortschritte bei der Gleichstellung der Geschlechter auf dem Arbeitsmarkt wesentlich sind, um die Deprivation bei Kindern in Einelternfamilien in Europa zu bekämpfen.

Schlagwörter: Deprivation bei Kindern, Gleichstellung der Geschlechter, Arbeitsmarkt, Mehrebenenanalyse, Armut

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