

Poverty among Single Parents: Is Labor Market Participation a Path to Escaping Poverty?

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This paper focuses on the role of the labor market as one of the principle components of overall policy aimed at reducing income poverty among single parents. The central question under discussion is whether single mothers can escape poverty only or mainly through participation in the labor force, or should employment policy be combined with transfer and tax policies as well as with other measures in order to improve the economic well-being of this group.

The paper consists of four main parts. The first part presents selected findings on the dimensions of poverty among single-parent households (households with a single earner/career who is a woman) in OECD countries. The second part focuses on the economic vulnerability of single-parent families as reflected in the obstacles that these families face in the labor market and in their higher risk of falling into poverty. The third part of the paper discusses policy measures aimed at reducing poverty among single-parent families and the impact of different strategies.

The fourth part of the paper discusses the question of whether employment is a sufficient means for single parents to escape poverty. Empirical evidence questions the ability of single mothers to rely on the labor market as a sole source for economic stability, and emphasizes the limitations of the labor market as an effective path for reducing poverty.

Social policy should take into account not only the special life circumstances of single-parent families, but also the multiple work barriers which characterize them. The discussion that concludes the paper contains recommendations for differential policy measures targeted at single-parent families, which have also the potential to reduce poverty among this group.

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