



Support for Single-Parent and Shared-Parenting Families and Their Children

Assessment and recommendations for action

*Summary of the expert
commission's report*



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth

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Why a report on support for single-parent and shared-parenting families and their children?

To provide tailored support and create fair access opportunities in our society, successful family policy must be aware and considerate of the different life situations and needs of all types of families. Single parents represent a significant group in Germany due to their quantity. For 2023, the Federal Statistical Office estimates there are 1.69 million single parents with minor children in the household. This corresponds to 20 percent of all families. Non-marital partnerships account for a further 12 percent of all families; families of married couples make up 68 percent.

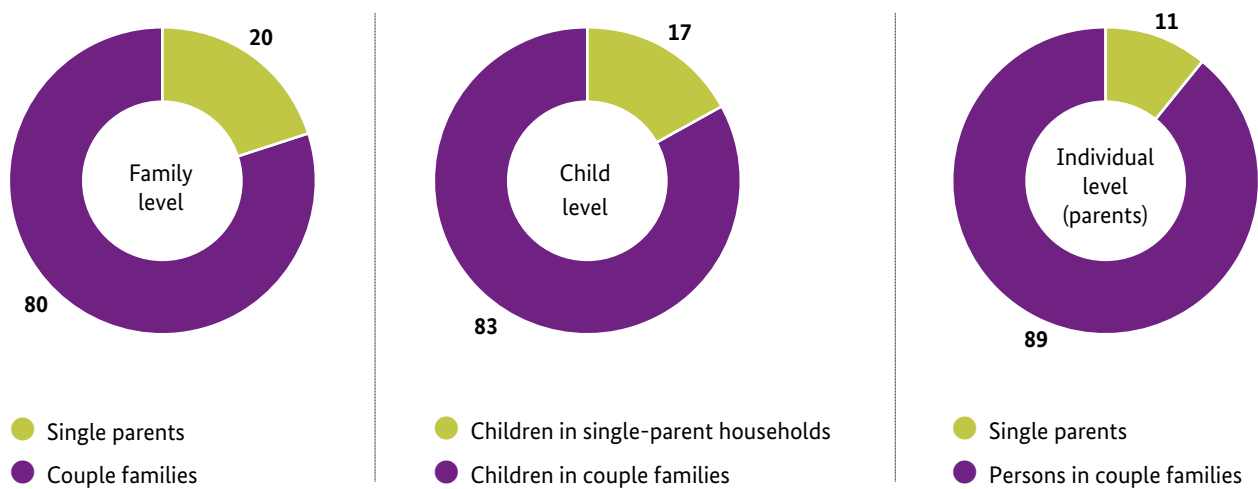
From the perspective of the children, there are 2.5 million children, or 17 percent of all children, living in a single-parent household. The percentages for the child and family levels differ, as the average number of children is higher in couple families than in single-parent families. From the perspective of the individual, 11 percent of all people with minor children in the household are considered single parents (see Figure 1).

Single parents are labelled in the German official statistics as “*alleinerziehend*”, which can be literally translated as “raising children alone”. Effectively, the data does not measure whether or not the child is raised alone but only whether the child lives with only one parent in the same household. With the growing prevalence of shared parenting, one may question whether “*alleinerziehend*” is still the appropriate way of labelling single parents.

Official statistics do not survey shared parenting. As shared parenting and shared custody arrangements become more prevalent, it will be of increasing relevance however to distinguish single parents who are single and who raise their children alone and others who are supported substantially by the other parent in the upbringing of their children.



Figure 1: Families and individuals classified as single parents in official statistics, differences between family, individual and child level in 2023 (Germany; in %)



Note: Only families or persons with children under the age of 18 at the family and individual level and only children under the age of 18 at the child level.

Source: Federal Statistical Office (2024e, 2024h), based on the 2023 microcensus.

Despite the limitations of official statistics, the Tenth Family Report considers single and shared parenting in all its diversity and thus takes into account the growing importance of shared physical custody after separation and divorce. Targeted political recommendations for action require not only the clear definition of terms, but also comprehensive knowledge of the diversity of challenges and needs of single parents and those practising shared parenting. In January 2023, Minister Lisa Paus therefore appointed seven academics with a proven track record in this field to an interdisciplinary expert commission to compile the Federal Government's Tenth Family Report. In the further process, the expert commission consulted two additional

scientists to expand its expertise in the economic and legal fields. In the following year and a half, not only did the expert commission engage in exchange with the relevant interest groups, but the German Family Policy Commission also drew on the knowledge of numerous renowned experts in the field. Additionally, written expert opinions were commissioned, hearings were organised, and forums for exchange were created in order to determine where the challenges lie for single-parent families and families practising shared parenting after divorce and separation and what the best possible support could look like. This summary provides basic information on single parenthood and shared parenting in Germany and outlines key guidelines for a family policy of the future.

Infobox 1: Terminology

Shared parenting

- This refers to the upbringing and care of a child by separated parents who do not both live in the same household
- It covers all separated parents who in principle participate in the care and upbringing of their joint children, regardless of the exact form or extent of care

(Predominantly) Single parenthood

- This is an established term for parents who are mainly or entirely responsible for the care, provision and maintenance of one or more children
- Different definitions of “single parent” are used in individual areas of law and in official statistics
- The term is being redefined to some extent to reflect the increasing prevalence of shared parenting



Source: own presentation.

Empirical review of single parenthood and shared parenting

Development of single parenthood according to official statistics

When describing family forms using official data, it quickly becomes apparent how difficult it is to adequately depict family forms over time and to keep pace with the changing realities of families. The current classification, which distinguishes between single-parent families and (marital/non-marital) couple families with children, dates back to 2005. Until then, non-marital partnerships were not recorded separately but were subsumed under single-parent families (see Infobox 2). The consequences of this redefinition in 2005 are reflected in the number of single-parent families in the official statistics over time (see Figure 2). Until 2004, the number of families classified as single-parent families increased steadily but experienced a significant decline in 2005. This setback occurred because non-marital partnerships were no longer classified as single-parent families from this point onwards, but were instead

categorised as an independent living arrangement. At the same time, the proportion of single fathers among all single parents fell abruptly in the year of the redefinition. The decline in 2005 is solely because many of the supposedly single fathers were living in non-marital partnerships before 2005. With the increasing importance of shared physical custody, there are new challenges for official statistics to adequately integrate new family forms into the old classification. Among the supposed single parents, there is a significant proportion of people who share physical custody and raise their children together (either in an asymmetrical or symmetrical alternating model).

As Figure 2 shows, the proportion of single fathers increased significantly from 2020 and stood at 18 percent in 2023. This drastic increase could very

likely indicate the increasing importance of shared care, which cannot be adequately captured by the data. As it is currently not possible to distinguish “single parents” in the data according to whether or not the other parent is substantially involved in the care, the expert commis-

sion of the Tenth Family Report often refrains from using the term “single parent” and instead uses the phrase “living alone with a child” when presenting official data.

Infobox 2: Family concepts in the microcensus (official statistics)

Family according to the traditional family concept (up to and including 2004)

- Married couples with children: married couples with children in the household
- Single parents: unmarried persons with children in the household
- Childless marriages¹

Family according to the (new) concept of living arrangements (since 2005)

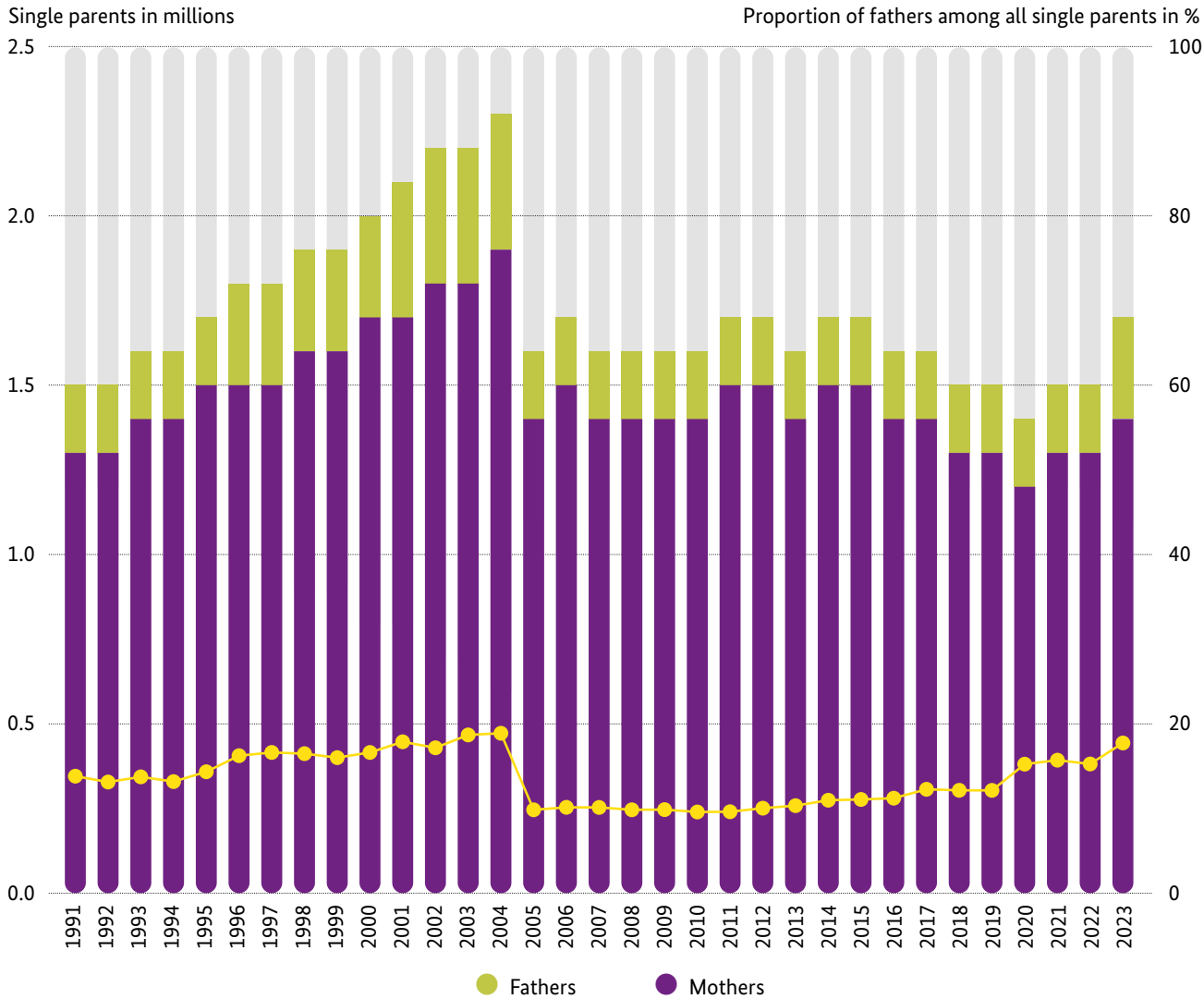
- Married couples with children: married couples with children in the household
- Non-marital partnerships with children: couples living together with children in the household
- Single parents: individuals with children in the household, but without a partner in the household



Source: own presentation

¹ In 2005, the classification of married couples who had no children in the household was changed. Until 2005, they were considered families; since then, they have been classified as non-family living arrangements. At times, widowed and divorced persons who had no children in the household were also considered residual families.

Figure 2: Persons categorised as single parents in the official statistics with children under 18 in the household and proportion of fathers in all single parents from 1991 to 2023 (Germany; number in millions; in %)



Source: Federal Statistical Office (2024g), various specialist series 1/3 of the Federal Statistical Office, based on the population update; own figure.

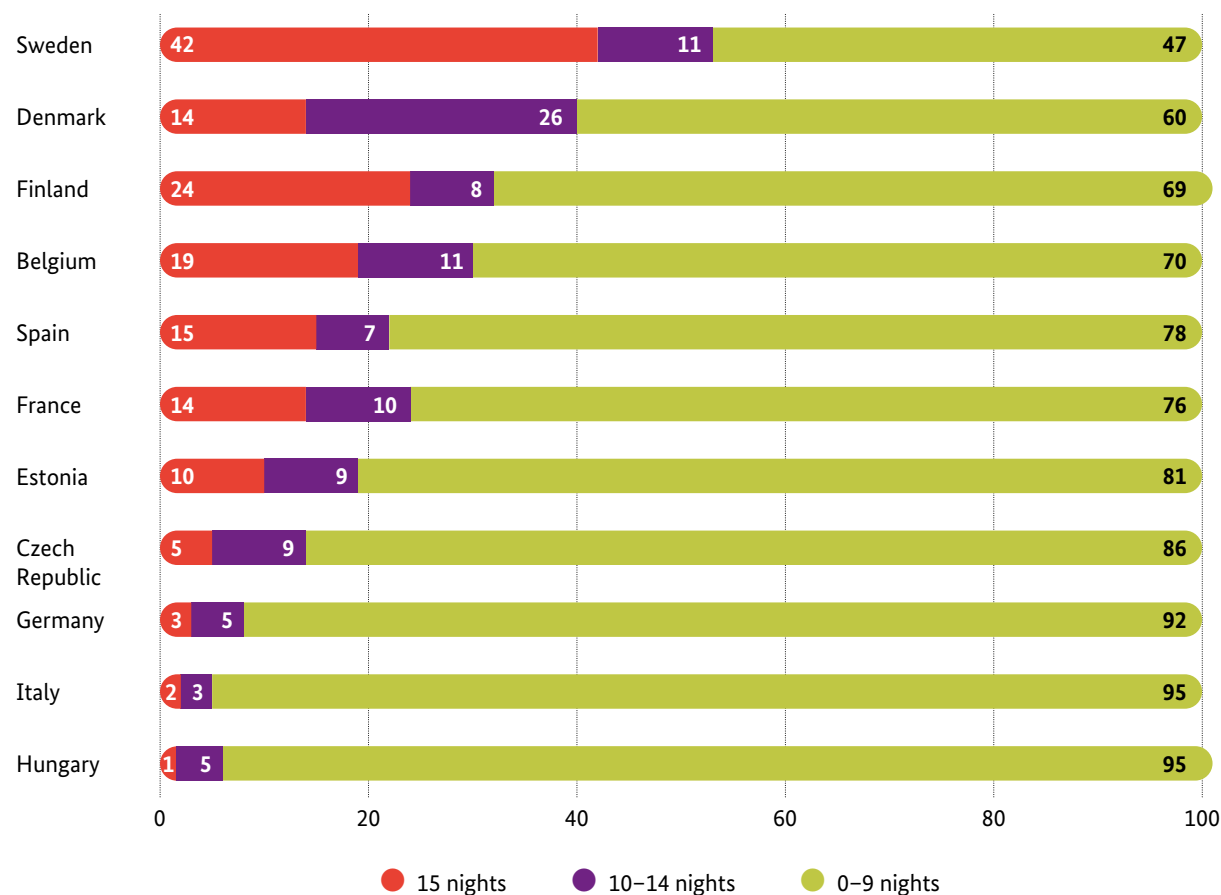


The spread of shared parenting in Germany and Europe

Shared care has not yet been recorded in official data. In the absence of official data, values based on social science survey data, specifically the data from the German Youth Institute's (DJI) large-scale survey study "Growing up in Germany" (*Aufwachsen in Deutschland: Alltagswelten*, AID:A) was used. In an international comparison, shared parenting is quite rare in Germany. The Nordic countries, including Sweden and Finland in particular, as well as Belgium, are pioneers of shared care after divorce and separation (see Figure 3).

If shared care is defined as a frequency of overnight stays of 10 to 15 nights per month with the other parent, then the analyses of the DJI AID:A survey show that 8 percent of children stay overnight with the other parent to this extent. If shared care is defined somewhat more broadly (8 to 15 nights), 12 percent of children spend the night with the other parent relatively often. Around half (51%) of the children either have no contact at all (22%) or never stay overnight with the other parent (29%); however, a further 37% stay there at least occasionally (one to seven nights).

Figure 3: Shared care of children under 18 in the household in a European comparison by number of nights spent with the non-resident parent in 2021 (2019 for Germany) (in %)



Note: Report by the non-resident parent (except for Germany: report by the resident parent). Analyses at child level, i.e. the underage child is the unit of analysis. The sum of the individual percentages in the bars deviate from 100 percent in some cases due to rounding. The figures for Germany are based on the AID:A data from 2019 and relate to the question: "How often does [child's name] stay overnight with the non-resident father/mother? Please give the average number of overnight stays per month." The information on the other countries is based on the EU-SILC data from 2021 according to Hakovirta et al. (2023) and the question: "How many nights does [child's name] spend in your household in a typical month?" Shared care was operationalised as 10 to 15 nights per month with the non-resident parent. Number of cases Sweden: 667, Denmark: 441, Finland: 665, Belgium: 847, Spain: 1,495, France: 1,338, Estonia: 370, Czech Republic: 552, Italy: 766, Hungary: 396, Germany: 1,203. The calculations with the AID:A data were carried out with the design weight calibrated according to the highest school qualification in the household (variable calHH).

Source: Hakovirta et al. (2023), based on EU-SILC 2021; own presentation; AID:A 2019 (Kuger et al. 2020); own calculations.

Social structure of single parenthood

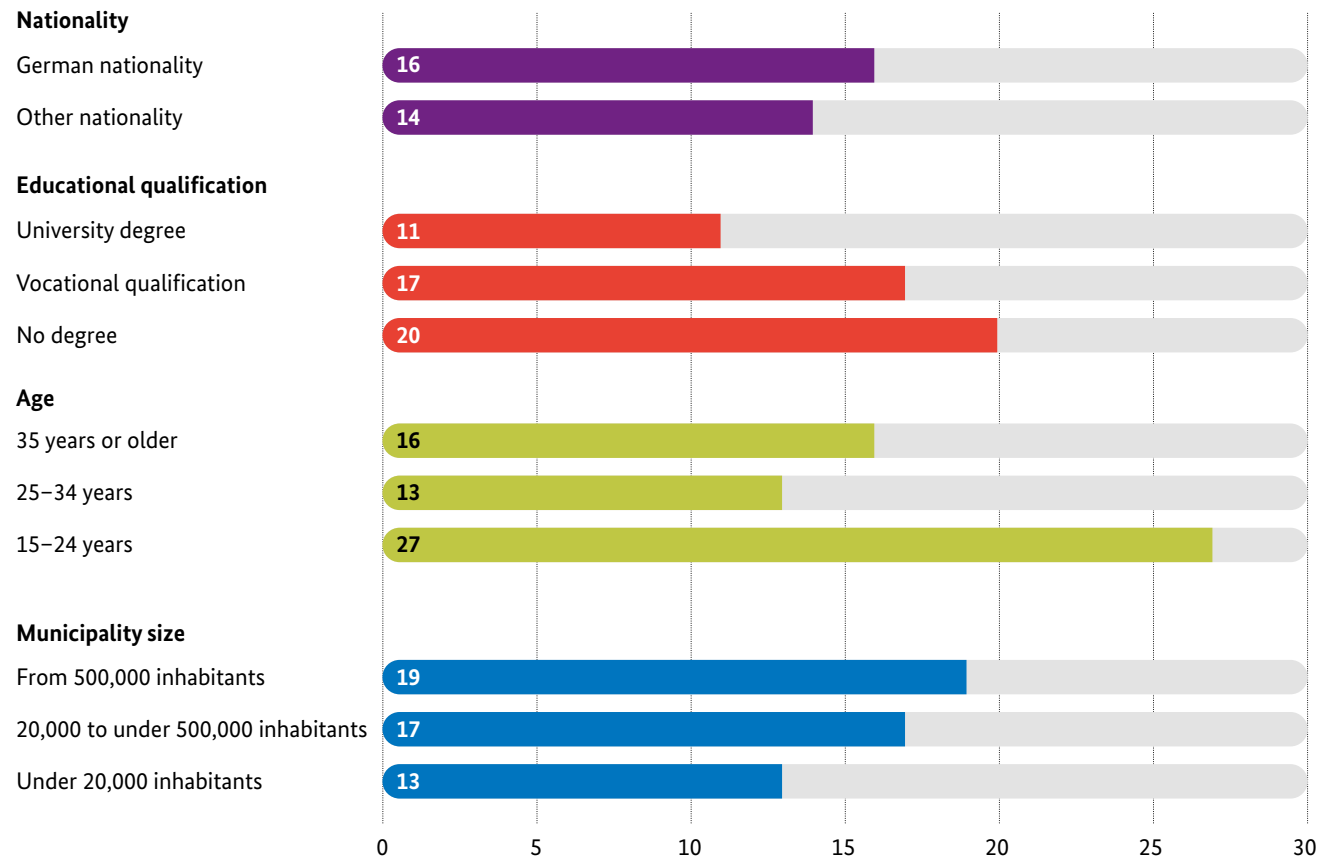
The following section provides a brief overview of the socio-structural location of single-parent families based on official data; due to the insufficient numbers of single fathers, this must be limited to mothers. This means that the reality of life for many single fathers or fathers who are involved in the care of their children as a non-resident parent can only be incompletely described based on the official data, or cannot be described at all.



As emphasised several times, shared care cannot be delimited based on official statistics.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of women living alone with children in the household (classified in the official data as “single parents”) according to key socio-demographic characteristics for 2021 and shows that the family form “single parent” is highly age-dependent. In the 15 to 24 age group, around a quarter are single parents with children compared to around 15 percent in the other age groups. The analyses by educational attainment indicate that the proportion of women with children living alone is significantly higher among women with low formal qualifications than among women with vocational training or a university degree. A look at the urban-rural differences reveals a higher proportion of women living alone with children in large cities (with a population of 500,000 or more) than in smaller towns and municipalities. Against the backdrop of the tight housing market in large cities, the high proportion of women living alone with children in metropolitan areas points to deprivation risks. The figure also shows slight differences by nationality, with the proportion of women living alone with children being slightly higher among German women (including women with dual nationality) than among women with a foreign nationality. However, there are considerable differences within the group of individuals with non-German citizenship (not shown here).

Figure 4: Proportion of women living alone with children among all women with children under 18 in the household in 2021 (Germany; in %)



Note: Analyses at individual level, i.e. the person living in the household with children under the age of 18 is the unit of analysis. Number of cases for nationality, age and municipality size: 57,583; number of cases for vocational/university degree: 57,480. The calculations were weighted with the standard extrapolation factor quarter (variable HR000QQ).

Source: SUF Microcensus 2021 (Research Data Centres of the Federal and State Statistical Offices 2024); own calculations.

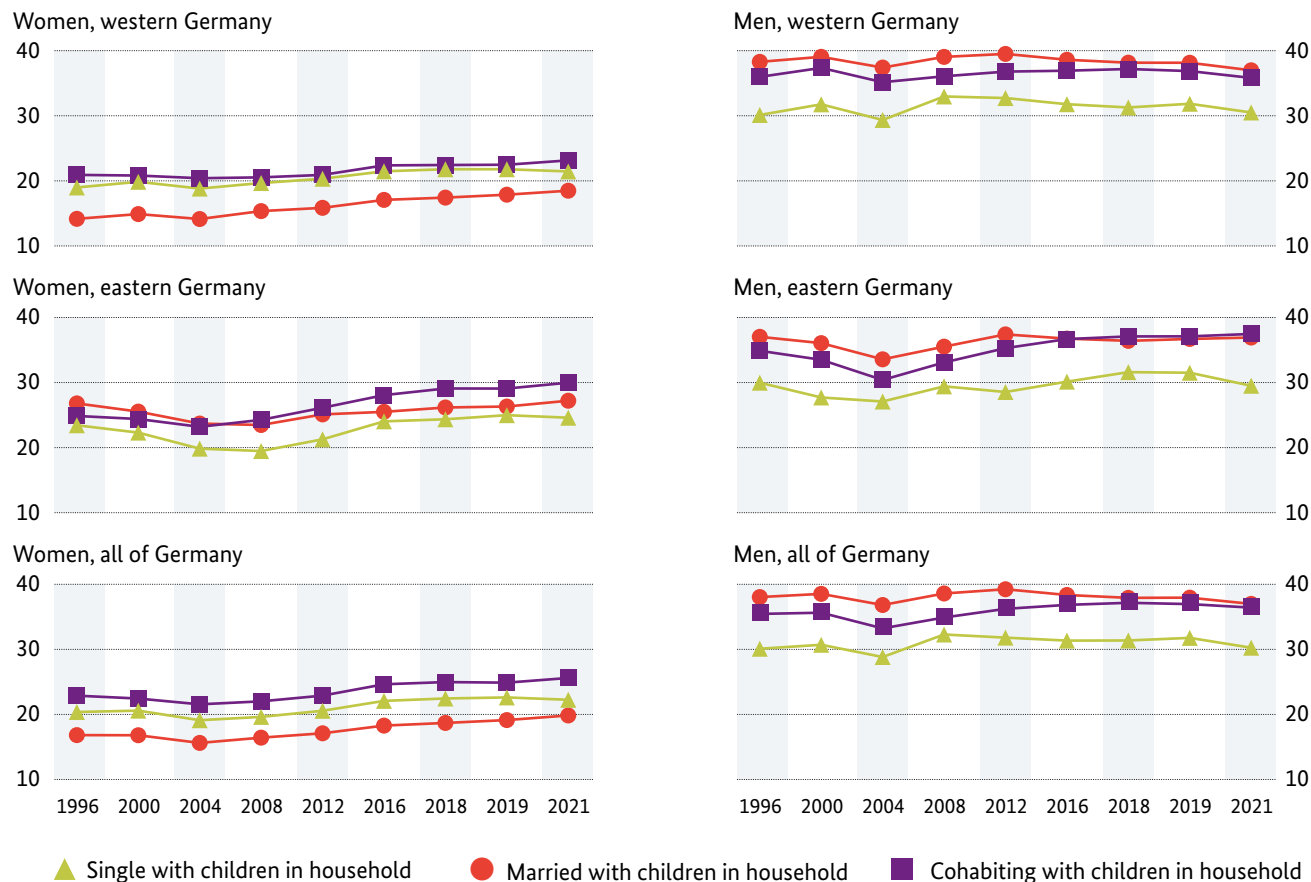
Employment status and employment patterns of single parents

The average weekly working hours of men with children in the household are significantly higher than those of women with children in the household (see Figure 5). These gender-specific differences in employment patterns lead to significantly lower lifetime earnings for women and contribute to the high gender pension gap and the increased risk of old-age poverty for women. However, employment patterns vary not only by gender, but also by family type. Men who live alone with their children work fewer hours per week than men in other family constellations. For women, the correlation is exactly the opposite.

Here, it is married women whose labour market attachment is below average. On average, single women with children work 22 hours per week in 2021 compared to 20 hours for married women with children and 26 hours for women with children in non-marital partnerships. However, there are striking differences between the East and West of the country. In principle, the average weekly working hours of women with children in eastern Germany are generally higher than in western Germany, but the integration of single mothers into the labour market lags behind that of women in non-marital cohabiting relationships or marriages in the East.



Figure 5: Average weekly working hours of women and men with children under 18 in the household by gender and living arrangements in western and eastern Germany, 1996 to 2021 (mean values in hours)



Note: Analyses at individual level, i.e. the person living in the household with children under the age of 18 is the unit of analysis. Calculations based on usual weekly working hours. The working hours of persons who were not employed were coded 0 and included in the calculations of the mean value. Case numbers on an annual basis: women in western Germany: 36,522 to 46,813, women in eastern Germany: 8,207 to 13,621, women in all of Germany: 44,729 to 57,457, men in western Germany: 31,005 to 40,859, men in eastern Germany: 6,297 to 11,652, men in all of Germany: 37,302 to 50,519. The calculations were weighted with the standard extrapolation factor quarter for the year 2021 (variable HR000QQ) and with the extrapolation factor "regional adjustment layer": household and family factor for the years 2008 to 2019 (variable EF951) and up to the year 2004 (variable EF751).

Source: SUF microcensus in 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2021 (Research Data Centres of the Federal and State Statistical Offices 2024, 2022a, 2022b, 2020, 2018d, 2018e, 2018a, 2018c, 2018b); own calculations.

Poverty and transfer payments for single parents

The poverty risk of single parents is significantly higher, regardless of the underlying data source (see Infobox 3). The monetary poverty risk of women (and men) living alone with children is around three times higher than that of women (and men) in couple relationships (see Figure 6). This finding can be observed to a similar

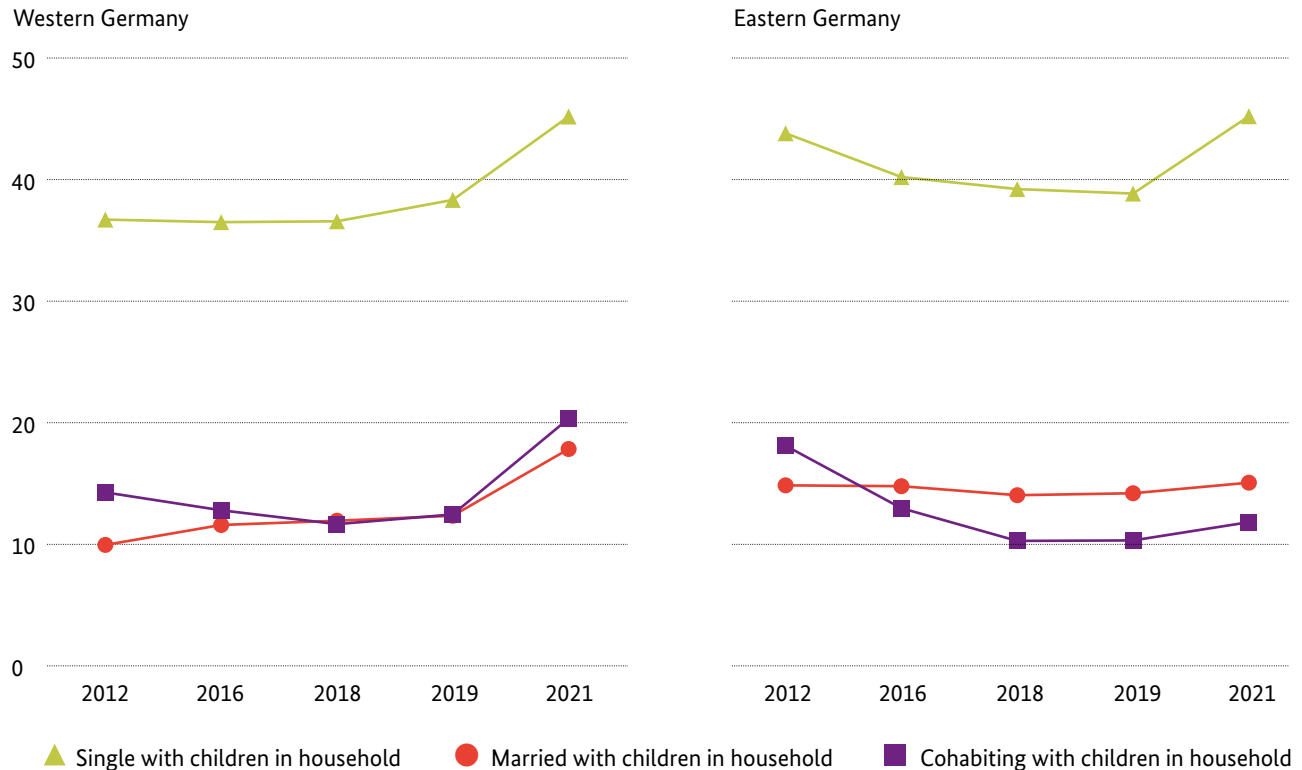
extent for western and eastern Germany. The risk of poverty is particularly high for single mothers with children who have neither a university degree nor a vocational qualification. The risk of poverty is also significantly higher if the youngest child in the household is under three years old.

Infobox 3: Measuring poverty on the basis of official data

Two different official at-risk-of-poverty rates (AROP) are currently published by the federal statistical office: $AROP^{EU}$, which is calculated on the basis of the Europe-wide EU-SILC survey, which has been integrated into the German microcensus as a sub-sample since 2020, and $AROP^{CORE}$, which is based on the entire sample of the German microcensus. While $AROP^{EU}$ shows a poverty ratio of 25.2 percent for single parents in Germany in 2022, according to $AROP^{CORE}$, 43.2 percent of single parents are at risk of poverty in 2022. Due to the large differences between the two data sources, it is difficult to adequately assess the actual burden. However, there are similar correlations between poverty and other factors such as education and migration background, regardless of which indicator is used. Figure 6 shows the poverty risks by family type on the basis of $AROP^{CORE}$.



Figure 6: At-risk-of-poverty rates (AROP^{CORE}) of women with children under 18 in the household by family type in western Germany and eastern Germany from 2012 to 2021 (in %)



Note: Poverty is measured at household level. The level of analysis is nevertheless the individual level, i.e. the adult in the household with children under 18. At-risk-of-poverty rate: threshold: 60 percent of the federal median net equivalised income based on the modified OECD scale. Case numbers on an annual basis: western Germany: 34,740 to 46,693, eastern Germany: 8,067 to 10,605. The calculations were weighted with the standard extrapolation factor quarter (variable HR000QQ) for the year 2021 and with the extrapolation factor "regional adjustment stratum": household, family factor for the years 2012 to 2019 (variable EF951).

Source: SUF microcensus in 2012, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2021 (Research Data Centres of the Federal and State Statistical Offices 2018e, 2020, 2022a, 2022b, 2024); own calculations.

The financially strained situation of many people living alone with children leads to significantly higher rates of transfer benefit receipt (see Figure 7). A regional comparison shows that the transfer receipt rates of single parents in eastern Germany were significantly higher than in western Germany, especially in the years 2004 to 2008, but had approached the western German level by 2018. This recent downward trend, although less

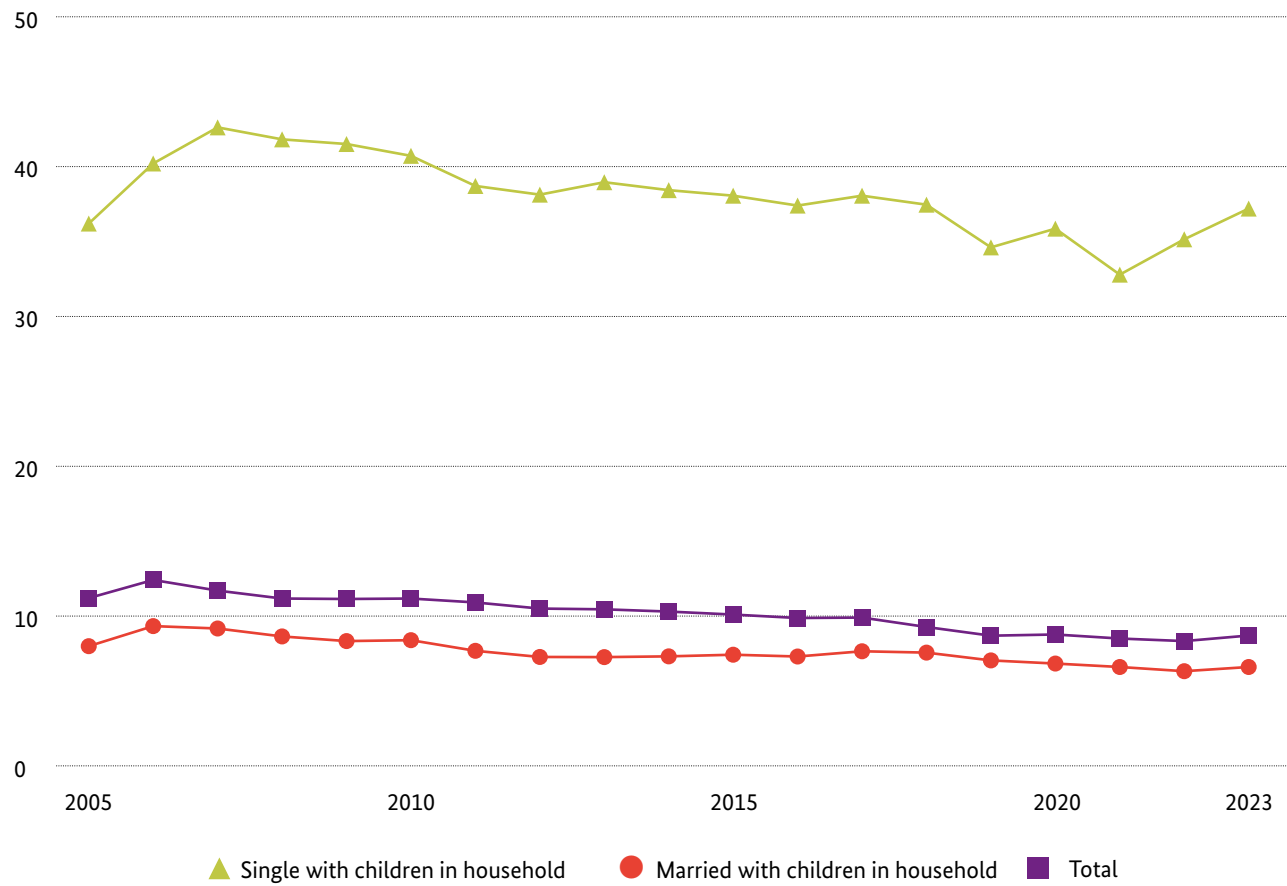
pronounced, can also be observed among couple families with children in eastern Germany. Further analyses indicate that the official statistics tend to underestimate the transfer receipt and poverty risk rates of single parents, as it also erroneously includes people practising shared parenting who are better off financially in the group of single parents.

Health and well-being of single parents

The vulnerability of single parents and their children is reflected not only in the limited availability of material resources, but also in their health and general well-being. Single parents in Germany, as well as internationally, are significantly more frequently affected by health and mental health problems than parents in couple households. Single mothers suffer more frequently from depression and stress, report poorer general health and more frequently exhibit harmful health behaviour (such as smoking) than mothers in couple families. These health burdens are particularly pronounced if the separation was associated with conflict. In addition, non-residential parents are also affected by health and psychological stress – a group that has received little attention in research to date.



Figure 7: SGB II receipt rates by household type from 2005 to 2023 (Germany; in %)



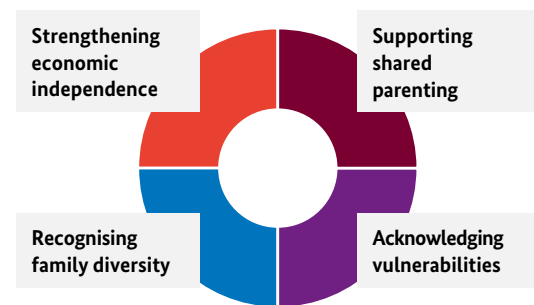
Note: SGB II receipt rate = share of benefit communities receiving SGB II benefits among all families or living arrangements of the corresponding type in the total population. Reference figures according to data from the Federal Statistical Office based on the microcensus.

Source: Statistics of the Federal Employment Agency (2024a), based on administrative data of the Federal Employment Agency, and reference values based on a special evaluation of the microcensus, expert hearing Cordula Zabel (Zabel 2023).

Family policy orientation of the report

The Tenth Family Report builds on the guidelines for a future-oriented and sustainable family policy that were developed in the report (see also Figure 8). It emphasises the need for a policy that strengthens the resilience of both the individual and society as a whole, especially in crisis phases of life such as separation, divorce or the loss of the other parent through death. At the same time, parents and children should be able to rely on the support of the community during these phases. Four central objectives guide our actions, which are explained in more detail below.

Figure 8: Central goals of a future-oriented family policy for single-parent and shared-parenting families



Source: own figure.

(1) Strengthening economic independence

Social and family policies differ in whether they take an ex-ante (preventive) or ex-post (reactive) approach to supporting parents and balancing care responsibilities and the costs thereof. The aim of the ex-ante approach is to reduce the economic risks of separation and divorce or the death of the other parent by strengthening the economic independence of both parents already before separation or divorce. In an international comparison, Sweden in particular is regarded as a country that has consistently promoted the economic independence of mothers through the early expansion of childcare, the establishment of individual taxation in the 1970s and the individualisation of benefit entitlements and thus focused on ex-ante protection. The parental leave benefits, which is income-dependent, also provides strong incentives to become established in the labour market before starting a family. While economic independence is supported in Sweden, it is also consistently demanded.

In Germany, the expansion of childcare (advanced in particular since 2005), the income-related parental leave benefits (2007) and the legal entitlement to a childcare place for children from the age of one (2013) are among

the central measures aimed at greater integration of parents (in particular mothers) into the labour market and thus ex-ante risk prevention, i.e. counteracting the emergence of economic risks of separation and divorce in the early family phases. However, in contrast to Sweden, Germany has not only maintained income tax splitting for married couples but has also retained measures such as survivors' pensions and pension equalisation. One exception is post-marital maintenance as a classic form of ex-post compensation, which was fundamentally reformed in 2008. The 2008 maintenance law reform has led to lower post-marital maintenance payments. At the same time, many divorced women still do not earn a living wage. Further reforms to maintenance law must therefore be carried out with caution in order to avoid maintenance cuts leading to precarious situations in the household of a parent who continues to be the main carer. Any further development of the legal framework must strike a careful balance between the ex-ante promotion of economic independence and the adaptation of ex-post compensation mechanisms. It must be kept in mind that although economic independence is an overriding goal, it is not achievable for everyone in the current structures.

(2) Promoting shared parental responsibility

Attitudes towards motherhood and fatherhood have changed considerably in recent decades. Fathers are now more involved in caring for their children than in the past. At the same time, mothers' employment rates and working hours are steadily increasing and marginal employment is on the decline. Nowadays, young women and men alike are striving for their own professional career and economic independence. Nevertheless, there are persistent tendencies and, from the birth of the first child, traditional patterns often still emerge and become entrenched thereafter.

Economic explanations have long assumed that couples rationally agree on how they will organise care and paid work in the partnership when they enter into marriage or have their first child. The decision for an unequal division of care and paid work was seen as a conscious, private decision that couples make – under the assumption that marriage is indissoluble. More recent economic approaches also take into account the normative social constraints, historical path dependencies of gender-roles and the possibility of dissolving the couple relationship. This reflects the empirical reality that it is primarily women who take on financial risks by reducing their paid employment after starting a family to focus on caregiving. This can increase their risk of poverty in the event of separation, divorce, or the death of the other parent.

In addition, numerous studies show that traditional gender role orientations continue to guide actions in the post-separation period. Mothers are highly pressured after separation and divorce as they have to fulfil the roles of family breadwinner and caring mother at the same time. If they do not stay with the child after separation and divorce, mothers are socially sanctioned and stigmatised more than fathers. Conversely, separated fathers are more likely to be socially sanctioned if they fail to meet their maintenance while it is assumed to be “normal” that they do not reside with their child or children after separation and divorce.

The legal framework for post-separation families in Germany is currently still strongly characterised by the “residence model”, i.e. after separation and divorce there is a primary care-taking parent with whom the child lives and a non-resident parent who lives in another household. Since the custody law reform of 1998, joint legal custody for divorced parents has been the rule and family law is thus fundamentally based on a model of joint and equal parental responsibility for both parents. After separation and divorce, parents should exercise parental care at their own responsibility and by mutual agreement in the best interests of the child and try to come to agreement in the event of differences of opinion. Nevertheless, there is still no coherent, legally codified overall concept for strengthening joint physical custody after separation and divorce.

(3) Taking vulnerabilities into account

Socio-political frameworks are historically evolved structures that are closely interwoven with the prevailing gender roles and social conditions under which they emerged. Since the late 19th century, the design of socio-political institutions in Germany was guided by the emerging industrial society, which was based on the division of labor. In this system, unpaid care work and paid employment were clearly divided along gender lines.

As a result of economic change, however, the welfare of a household increasingly depended on two incomes. This development was also made possible by a change in social values. The male-breadwinner model largely gave way to a two-earner model. However, this development has created a particular vulnerability for single parents who have to support themselves and their children on just one income. This particularly affects those who have relied on the continued existence of the partnership while it was still in place and, as a result, have withdrawn from the labour market – often for a longer period of time – in order to devote themselves primarily to family duties. These single parents are confronted with a particularly precarious economic situation in the event of divorce and separation. Another group of single parents who in principle have good employment opportunities are unable to exploit their earning and income potential because inadequate child-care infrastructure and rigid labour market structures often restrict their ability to work full-time. As they still



have to perform extensive care work for their children, they are burdened in many ways. This results in extensive support needs for this group.

The death of a parent is a critical life event for children, and they need support in coping with it. The separation of parents is also usually a particularly stressful phase of life for parents and children. After the separation or divorce of their parents, some children live in multi-local family contexts and are therefore confronted with new developmental tasks and challenges. Together with their parents, they have to reorganise their everyday lives

and come to terms with the changes in their living environment. This involves maintaining or expanding their opportunities to participate in education and care settings as well as in leisure activities.

Children need support and possibly also protection, for example when it comes to disputes about access rights or cases of (imminent) family violence or threats to the child's welfare. Finally, a particular vulnerability concerns all cases in which a parent and/or the children experience or are at risk of experiencing family violence or child endangerment.

(4) Recognising family diversity and taking shared care into account

The family constellations that result are just as diverse as the paths to single and shared parenting. Family research often distinguishes between three family models: firstly, the nuclear family consisting of a marital or non-marital partnership and the biological children living in it; secondly, stepfamilies, in which one parent is the non-biological parent of at least one child living in the household with them; and thirdly, single-parent families, where an adult lives with a (biological) child in the same household (see Figure 9, top section).

If shared care is also taken into account, this results in a variety of realities for families with cross-household care responsibilities. Figure 9 (bottom section) describes examples of constellations: in the first case (1), the nuclear family, one of the two parents has

in addition to a joint child another child in a partnership who lives in shared physical custody. Previously, this child was not included in this household. By taking shared care into account, the nuclear family becomes a family with one joint child and one child in shared care. The second case (2) is even more complex, as it is a stepfamily in which there is another child living in shared care. Among other things, this raises the question of the parent-child relationship between the stepparent and the child of the current partner who only lives in the household on an irregular basis. The third case (3) is a household in which one child is raised alone and one child is raised in shared care.

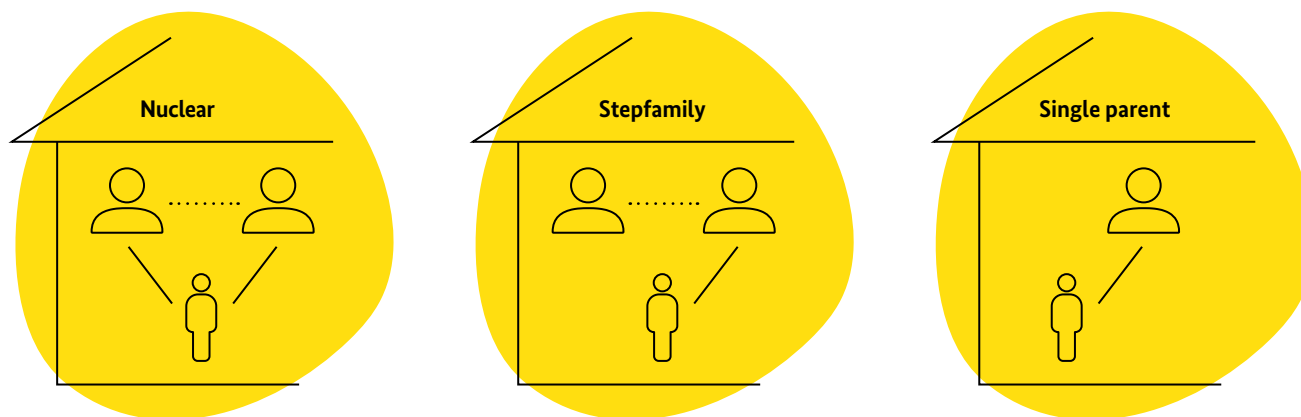
The illustration shows the complexities that arise when considering shared care. They make clear what has so far been obscured by the household-based perspective on the family. Parental relationships are individual and result from the respective parent-child relationship. Accordingly, more attention should be paid to individual parent-child relationships.

If family forms are to be categorised and shared care taken into account, this results in a large number of constellations that would have to be aggregated in a meaningful way. In the long term, official statistics will have to face up to this task. On the one hand, this means recording shared care in the data and, on the other, transferring it to a new concept of family forms.

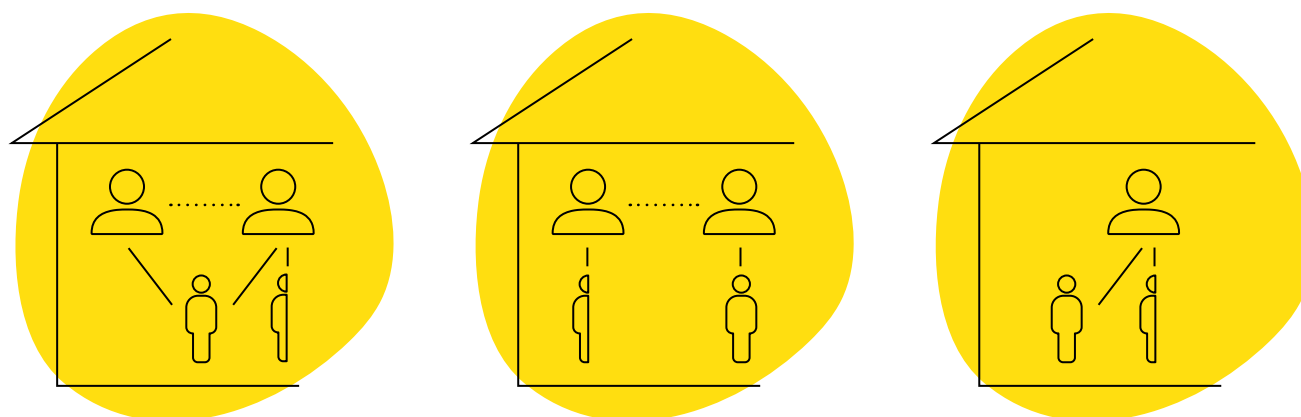


Figure 9: Family forms taking into account parents providing separate care in different household contexts (illustrative example)

Classic distinction between nuclear family, stepfamily and single-parent family



Consideration of shared care (selected constellations)



..... Partnership relationship

—— Legal parent-child relationship

Source: own figure.

Recommendations of the expert commission

The recommendations of the expert commission are based on the goals of a future-oriented and sustainable family policy and refer to the four family policy guidelines outlined above. The following selected recommendations are to be regarded as particularly central.

(1) Strengthening economic independence

The expert commission advocates for creating a family policy framework that is consistent over the life course. Consistency over the life course means that economic independence cannot be demanded only after the end of the partnership but should be promoted throughout the life course. The current regulations continue to promote the specialisation of one parent in unpaid care work in partnerships with children but demand the economic independence of both parents upon separation. These contradictory incentives should be removed. In addition, mothers and fathers must be empowered so that they can pursue employment that secures their livelihood on the labour market.

In order to achieve the goal of strengthening economic independence, the expert commission recommends further expanding institutional childcare in terms of quantity and quality and promoting compatibility.

- As the availability of institutional childcare has a long-term and preventative effect on securing employment and reducing the risk of poverty, the commission recommends that all parents with children from age one until the end of elementary school should be legally entitled to eight hours of institutional childcare in a daycare facility, or all-day school on all five working days.



- The expert commission also recommends developing concepts to increase the availability of childcare places and school daycare to meet the flexible needs of parents at off-peak times and at weekends and to provide the necessary resources at federal, state and local authority level. It is important that quantitative expansion should not be at the expense of childcare quality.
- In addition to the quantitative and qualitative expansion of childcare, household-related services can also contribute to a better work-life balance. The commission recommends the introduction of a voucher model for household-related services for households with special support needs in household management or in flexible childcare at times outside of childcare provision.

In order to achieve the goal of economic independence, the expert commission recommends strengthening family fairness in the world of work as well as in labour and social law and breaking up rigid working time patterns.

- The commission advocates for giving employment law a stronger role in shaping family time policy. It may also be possible to legally regulate the consideration of care-related concerns when changing working hours. Care or family-related needs could be strengthened by only allowing urgent operational reasons to be invoked against them. In the case of requests for more flexible working arrangements, a right should be established to enable remote working in particular.

In order to achieve the goal of economic independence, the expert commission recommends promoting the egalitarian division of care work in existing partnerships by reducing disincentives and creating new options.

- Established regulations such as income tax splitting or the free co-insurance of the non-working or only marginally working spouse in statutory health insurance should be reviewed. In addition, such benefits should be linked less to marriage and more to the assumption of care work.

- In order to create new options for parents and promote an egalitarian division of care work in existing partnerships, the commission agrees with the recommendations of the Ninth Family Report for a symmetrical parental leave model (3+ 8+ 3) with a dynamic income replacement benefit. Each parent should receive three exclusive months of parental allowance, with a further eight months being freely divisible. At the same time, the wage replacement rate should rise to 80 percent for up to seven months per parent. For each additional month, there should be a 50 percent wage replacement. Single parents and main carers with an asymmetrical care model should continue to be able to claim the full 14 months of parental leave benefits. Parents practising shared physical custody should be treated in the same way as couples with children in order to give both parents an equal opportunity to actively participate in the care of the child. The offsetting of the minimum parental leave benefit against welfare benefits should be abolished.

In order to achieve the goal of economic independence, the expert commission recommends making better use of opportunities to participate in the labour market.

- Special efforts are required to increase the opportunities for young single parents with young children to participate in the labour market. The expert commission recommends that job centres be obliged to provide advice on opportunities for (initial or further) qualification and employment for mothers and fathers with children under the age of three regardless of

whether they use daycare or the type of family form they live in.

- Job centres are assigned a key role to play in the coordination of support services and life course-related planning of qualifications and employment promotion. The cooperation between youth welfare services and job centres or employment agencies, which is already being implemented in some locations, should be expanded nationwide. Targeted advice services that are tailored to the specific situation of single and separated parents (online advice, flexible appointments, individual coaching and promotion of social networking) should also be made available nationwide.
- People returning to work after family-related interruptions need legal entitlements to qualification and retraining measures. Therefore, the restrictions introduced by Hartz III and replaced by discretionary services should be reversed. Further, the reform of maintenance law in 2008

meant that ex-spousal maintenance was curbed and the caregiving parents were assumed to be able to work full time after the youngest child turned three. In view of the fact that the legal requirements for divorced caring parents to work from the child's age of three have become much stricter as a rule, comprehensive legal entitlements to training and further qualifications, transition measures, coaching, and advice from a single source are more urgent than ever. Firms are called upon to provide access to company training and further education regardless of gender and type of family.

- To this date, the option of part-time vocational has hardly been used. However, part-time training can be a flexible opportunity to obtain a vocational qualification, especially for young single and shared-parenting parents with young children. For companies, part-time vocational training is also an opportunity to recruit skilled workers that has so far been little used. Childcare should be provided for parents in training to make it easier to combine family and training.

(2) Promoting shared parental responsibility

The expert commission states that equal participation in care and employment must be a central goal of a future-oriented and sustainable family policy. The shared responsibility for raising children and caring for children is not limited to the time of the partnership, but also includes the time after separation and divorce.

Structures must be created that enable parents to share parenting and care responsibilities after separation and divorce. Policies must open up options so that parents can choose the care arrangements that best meet their needs after separation and divorce, taking into account the needs of the children.

In order to promote shared parental responsibility, the commission recommends that all care models be reflected in law.

- Shared care after separation and divorce not only promotes the parent-child relationship, but can also make a significant contribution to relieving the burden on the resident parent. The expert commission notes that against the background of substantial changes in family behaviour, it is time to initiate a comprehensive reform of family law in which the law is adapted to new realities and shared care is systematically regulated. Instead of an isolated solution, physical custody should be thoroughly regulated by law. Such a reform will address the role of maintenance payments between the parents after separation and divorce. These payments should account for the additional costs that accrue when children alternate between two households.
- Joint physical custody should be supported and facilitated by the legislator across all areas of law (registration, labour, social, tax and family law). In family law, all care models should be treated equally.
- The previous regulation on the obligation to work in the context of childcare maintenance, according to which the parent who primarily cares for the child after separation and divorce be expected to work full-time from child's age of three, is too rigid and does not take account of other factors (such as the special burdens of caring for several young children or children with disabilities). When reforming childcare maintenance, the legislator should grant an appropriate transitional period within the scope of the employment obligations, which also takes other factors into account and is characterised by the concept of protection of legitimate expectations. The problems of adapting individual working hours within the framework of company working time organisation have so far often been underestimated and the time requirements of life with children insufficiently recognised.
- New regulations in family law must be introduced in a consistent manner with new regulations in social law. Accordingly, the additional costs of shared parenting should be taken into account in an appropriate manner. High costs for shared parenting (travel and accommodation costs) should be tax-deductible as extraordinary costs.

In order to promote shared parental responsibility, the expert commission recommends that the child's perspective and children's rights be given appropriate consideration.

- Children generally benefit when both parents are involved in the care and upbringing after a separation or divorce. Nevertheless, shared care is usually logistically challenging for children. The commission recommends that the voice of children and young people be given greater consideration in this context. Children should also be given a right to advice on custody and contact law issues independent of their parents.
- International evaluation research on shared physical custody has shown that the opinions of children and their experiences with shared parenting are often not sought or are neglected, whether in court proceedings or in the context of mediation and counselling of parents. For this reason, the commission recommends that children of a certain age should be able to submit applications in family court proceedings themselves. It is recommended to grant children their own right to file an application in family court proceedings to modify visitation arrangements starting at the age of twelve.



- The commission is also in favour of reviewing and optimising the procedures at family courts from the child's perspective. The family courts should be provided with personnel and space resources so that the personal hearing of the child in family court proceedings can be carried out with as little stress as possible.

In order to promote shared parental responsibility, the commission recommends raising awareness of shared care and shared parental responsibility.

- It must not be considered "normal" if fathers withdraw from their parental role after separation and divorce. On the other hand, mothers must not be socially sanctioned if the child does not live with them, but exclusively or predominantly with the child's father. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) could take action against social reservations through awareness campaigns. Educational work could be carried out in the context of family education and counselling as well as in the context of birth preparation courses.
- Overcoming the normative barriers of shared parenting also involves putting established concepts to the test. The concept of single parenthood is still common and necessary in law; however, it is not uniformly defined and can be used in different ways.

The use of terms can even have different meanings and consequences in different areas of law. The expert commission therefore recommends that the use of terms, their respective legal policy objectives and contradictions be examined in depth and, if necessary, reformed.

In order to promote shared parental physical custody, the commission recommends that separation and divorce counselling be promoted and adequately equipped.

- The mandatory task of separation and divorce counselling is currently operating at the limits of its capacity in some cases, exacerbated by the shortage of specialists and dwindling resources. The General Social Service (ASD) as well as parenting, partnership and family counselling centres act as mediators who support parents in reaching out-of-court settlements in contentious cases. However, these mediators must be adequately equipped for this task. In an international comparison, Germany is characterised by the fact that divorce cases are brought before the courts comparatively often. In order to reduce the burden on the courts, youth welfare offices and advice centres could play a key role. Specifically, the expert commission calls for the municipal youth welfare offices to be given sufficient resources to offer and carry out partnership conflict and separation counselling, as well as promote parenting counselling. These municipal youth welfare offices provide the majority of separation counselling in Germany.

- So far, legal and economic issues have only been part of the portfolio of family counselling centres in exceptional cases. There is an urgent need to expand expertise in the area of legal and financial advice and to strive for closer networking and cooperation with social advice centres for financial and debt issues as well as maintenance advance funds. Uniform, scientifically tested standards for the separation and divorce counselling process are also urgently needed.
- Although the reforms to the Act on Proceedings in Family Matters and in Matters of Non-Contentious Jurisdiction (FamFG), which have only taken place in recent years, are supported by the expert commission (e.g. qualification of the procedural and family court judges), there is a need for further action with regard to the selection and remuneration of guardian ad litem services.

In order to promote shared parental physical custody, the commission recommends improving protection against domestic violence.

- Domestic violence can be a central cause for the termination of a partnership. In cases of suspected domestic violence, the aim of the family court hearing should generally not be to reach a consensual contact agreement as quickly as possible. The currently envisaged period of four weeks appears to be too short in these cases – especially in view of the fact that youth welfare offices and specialist advice centres are often overburdened.
- Decisions on contact are particularly problematic in cases of domestic violence. The expert commission welcomes the planned reforms to child custody law, which are intended to make it legally clear that in cases of domestic and/or sexualised violence, especially in unclear investigative situations, there is no reason to assume that contact in such cases is in the best interests of the child.
The expert commission also believes that the planned new legal regulation, which provides for easier possibilities to (temporarily) suspend access and contact rights in cases of (suspected) domestic violence, is a necessary reform. Furthermore, family procedural law should be amended such that there is no longer a requirement to seek parental consent in cases of domestic violence or suspected violence.
Rather, the focus should be on carrying out a comprehensive examination and securing evidence in cooperation with the institutions involved, such as the youth welfare office, specialist counselling centers or the police, which at the same time guarantees the protection and stabilisation of the victims of violence.
- In addition to the established telephone hotlines, the services and, above all, the places in the shelters and homes are of crucial importance to ensure the immediate protection of women and men affected by violence.

(3) Combatting poverty and taking vulnerabilities into account

The expert commission is in favour of strengthening the economic independence of families and promoting shared physical custody. At the same time, the realities and vulnerabilities of family life must be taken into account.

To combat poverty and take appropriate account of vulnerabilities, the commission recommends reducing complexities in social law and facilitating access.

- For various reasons, single parents often do not earn a living income, are at risk of monetary poverty and are therefore often dependent on basic security benefits. The ways to achieve economic independence and thus escape transfer payments should be the primacy of a sustainable family policy. Against this background, the expert commission therefore welcomes the federal government's aim of simplifying the application process for benefits and increasing the take-up of the child supplement. Efforts should also be made to increase the uptake of other benefits such as housing benefit or citizen's allowance by setting specific targets.

- Due to poverty, single parents are not only more dependent on social transfers than other family forms, but are also exposed to an increased risk of over-indebtedness. In this regard, efforts are needed nationwide to provide people with easier and low-threshold access to social, financial, livelihood and debt counselling services.

In order to combat poverty and take appropriate account of vulnerabilities, the commission recommends granting social benefits that ensure a living wage.

- The expert commission calls for a redefinition of the minimum subsistence level for children, adolescents and young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who are still living with their parents. It should be determined in a transparent and realistic process. Children and young people should be appropriately involved. In addition, the minimum subsistence level for parents should no longer be based on the consumption expenditure of single households, but on that of family households. The minimum subsistence level for children should be determined on the basis of the consumption expenditure of the middle income category. The redefinition of the minimum subsistence level for children and young people also has consequences for the amount of the minimum maintenance, the advance maintenance payment and the child supplement.
- In relation to maintenance advances (Maintenance Advance Act), the commission considers

the offsetting of the entire child benefit against the maintenance advance to be problematic. In accordance with child maintenance law, only half of the child benefit should be taken into account. In the area of tax consideration, the expert commission is in favour of empirically determining the tax relief amount for single parents, which has so far been based on “freehand” estimates. It is proposed to convert the allowance in the empirically determined amount into a deduction from the tax liability, so that the same relief effect would be achieved for all single parents who pay income tax in at least the amount of the deduction. Further consideration should be given to “negative income tax” to those single parents who pay little or no tax. The expert commission also advocates for better coordination of housing benefits and child supplement. The commission calls for the transfer deduction rates for housing benefit and child supplement to be structured in such a way that at least an effective marginal burden of over 100 percent is ruled out.

- The concept of the temporary benefit unit (*temporäre Bedarfsgemeinschaften*) in the Second Book of the Social Code (SGB II) should be abandoned; instead, the legislator should create a flat-rate additional need for children in temporary benefit units of separated parents and take into account alternating additional needs in an appropriate manner in order to ensure that the child’s needs are covered in both parental households.

In order to combat poverty and take appropriate account of vulnerabilities, the commission recommends promoting affordable and adaptive forms of housing.

- Rising rents and cramped living space are a generally pressing social problem that particularly affect single and separated parents. They are relegated to overpriced and cramped living space or are forced to continue living together despite the potentially conflictual separation phase. Single and separated parents therefore benefit in particular from a regulated rental market with rent controls, reduced-price housing and housing subsidies, provided this does not affect the amount of housing available.
- Housing conditions can also be an obstacle to practising shared care. Single and separated parents can therefore benefit greatly from adaptable housing and shared forms of housing. Shared forms of housing can also provide a social network for mutual support. The creation and provision of such housing at affordable prices should be an objective of municipalities and public and private actors in the housing sector.



In order to promote shared parenting, the commission recommends creating free time for parents and children and strengthening health promotion.

- Separation and divorce can have a negative impact on well-being and health. The commission recommends strengthening health promotion, especially for highly stressed single and separated families. This includes both general family health promotion concepts and specific services for single and separated mothers and fathers, which can be provided by family centres and counselling centres, for example. The focus here should be on relational prevention measures that are directly geared towards the living environments of families, such as municipal prevention chains (*kommunale Präventionsketten*).
- In principle, the health insurance funds and the National Prevention Conference (NPK) already have a mandate to shape health promotion for single-parent families, but there has been a lack of coordinating practice to date. Existing coordination and advice centres for single parents and accompanying model projects financed by the health insurance funds could set an example here.
- The expert commission recommends the public sector (the federal government, federal states and local authorities) to strengthen and expand early support services (*“Frühe Hilfen”*) and volunteer services, in particular to extend the age limit for children in services of outreach health professionals within the early support and volunteer services. Concerning volunteer services, it is recommended to coordinate them nationwide, for example along the lines of the “Healthy Children Network” in Brandenburg.
- Single parents and shared-parenting parents with children with disabilities are a particularly vulnerable group. On the one hand, the expert commission recommends the bundled provision of quality-tested information on help and support services for all parents of children with disabilities, for example via a corresponding online information portal. Secondly, it recommends individual advice specifically for single and separated parents, for example in the form of qualified case management.

(4) Adequately recording family diversity – updating statistics and evaluation research in line with the times

The expert commission recommends adequately measuring family forms in official statistics and social science surveys and developing an appropriate system of indicators for reporting purposes. Moreover, evaluation research should be strengthened. Finally, the use of terminology (such as “*alleinerziehend*”) should be reflected and adjusted, depending on what is actually measured in the respective data.

The commission recommends that family diversity be reflected adequately in official statistics and social science surveys.

Evidence-based policy advice requires solid and reliable data. Otherwise, policies cannot be targeted efficiently. To date, it has not been possible to measure shared physical custody in official data (such as the German microcensus). Non-residential parents, i.e. parents who do not live with their children in the household, cannot yet be identified. Little is known about their social structure and living conditions. The expert commission therefore recommends reforming the official statistics accordingly to depict family forms in an updated manner.

To further develop statistics and evaluation research adequately, the commission recommends updating of the official system.

- In the long term, indicator systems need to be developed to make the success of family policy measurable. In addition to economic indicators (such as improving the recording of poverty and the material situation, see below), family policy targets include the reduction of the high rates of contact breakdown between parents and children after separation and divorce, the reduction of partner violence, especially during the separation process, the payment/receipt of child maintenance after separation and divorce and the payment/receipt of childcare/spousal maintenance after separation and divorce.
- The child and youth welfare statistics lack figures on the frequency and use of separation and contact counselling, so that apart from isolated figures from the counselling centres, hardly any statements can be made about their quantity and quality. Annual statistical surveys in the context of child and youth welfare would be useful here. It would also be desirable for the official family court statistics to be updated in a similar way.

To further develop statistics and evaluation research adequately, the expert commission recommends strengthening evaluation research

- Evidence-based policy advice requires robust studies that can provide information on how certain measures and programmes work. This also includes understanding how the law is implemented in practice and what consequences this has for the individual. In addition to a reliable reporting system, impact analyses need to show how case law affects the lives of parents and children in the short and long term.
- There has been too little rigorous empirical research into the practice of family courts to date. Problems for legal research in the area of family court proceedings arise from the fact that the legal framework conditions make research difficult. The expert commission recommends a corresponding improvement in the regulation of factual legal research for family court proceedings.
- Childhood, youth and family research should devote more attention to the question of what influence the various forms of shared physical custody have on the well-being of parents and children and how they must be designed so that they can be implemented productively for all parties involved.



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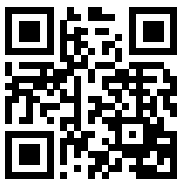
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