

**POVERTY RATES FOR SINGLE MOTHERS ARE HIGHER IN THE U.S THAN IN  
OTHER HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES**

Legal Momentum's recent report *Single Mothers Since 2000: Falling Farther Down*<sup>1</sup> detailed high and rising poverty rates for single mothers in the United States between 2000 and 2010. Comparing the U.S. rates to poverty rates for single mothers in other high income countries shows that poverty rates for single mothers are exceptionally high in the U.S.

Table One POVERTY RATES FOR CHILDREN IN SINGLE MOTHER FAMILIES IN THE U.S. AND 15 OTHER HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES IN THE MID-2000'S	
DENMARK	8%
SWEDEN	10%
FINLAND	11%
NORWAY	14%
AUSTRIA	18%
SWITZERLAND	18%
HOLLAND	22%
LUXEMBOURG	29%
SPAIN	30%
ITALY	30%
UNITED KINGDOM	32%
AUSTRALIA	35%
IRELAND	39%
GERMANY	42%
CANADA	48%
15 COUNTRY AVERAGE	26%
UNITED STATES	49%
Ratio of U.S. rate to average rate in other 15 countries	1.88

Table One lists the poverty rates for children in single mother families reported by the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS)<sup>2</sup> for the U.S. and for 15 other high income countries. The rates are for 2004 except for Australia (2003) and Sweden (2005). The 49% U.S. rate was the highest rate and almost twice the 26% average rate in the other 15 high income countries.

The LIS poverty rates are based on a poverty standard that defines poverty as an income less than 50% of median income adjusted for household size. Using the official U.S. poverty standard, the poverty rate was 42% in 2004 for children in single mother families.<sup>3</sup>

The European Union reports the percentage of single parent families in European countries with a household income less than 60% of median income adjusted for household size. Such families are living “in or near poverty.” Table Two lists the in-or-near poverty rates for single parent families in 2007 reported by the European Union for 16 high income European nations,<sup>4</sup> and calculated by Legal Momentum for the U.S.<sup>5</sup> The 50% in-or-near-poverty rate in the U.S. was the highest among these 17 high income countries, and more than one and one half times the 31% average in the other 16 high income countries.

DENMARK	17%
FINLAND	22%
ICELAND	23%
SWEDEN	24%
FRANCE	27%
NORWAY	29%
HOLLAND	30%
AUSTRIA	31%
ITALY	31%
CYPRUS	33%
SPAIN	34%
GERMANY	34%
BELGIUM	36%
IRELAND	40%
UNITED KINGDOM	44%
LUXEMBOURG	45%
16 COUNTRY AVERAGE	31%
UNITED STATES	50%
Ratio of U.S. rate to average rate in other 16 countries	1.61

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> *Single Mothers ...* is available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The LIS is a cross-national data archive and research institute located in Luxembourg with a database that includes income micro data derived from household surveys from a large number of countries at multiple points in time. The LIS Key Figures, available for download at <http://www.lisproject.org/key-figures/key-figures.htm>, are calculated by LIS staff and provide country-level poverty and inequality

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indicators. Legal Momentum downloaded the rates on May 17, 2011 and rounded each rate to the nearer full percentage point.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Table “POV03: People in Families with Related Children Under 18 by Family Structure, Age, and Sex, Iterated by Income-to-Poverty Ratio and Race: 2004 Below 100% of Poverty All Races,” available at [http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005/pov/new03\\_100\\_01.htm](http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005/pov/new03_100_01.htm).

<sup>4</sup> European Union, *Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion A Statistical Portrait of the European Union 2010* at Table 3-2 (2010), available at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-EP-09-001/EN/KS-EP-09-001-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-EP-09-001/EN/KS-EP-09-001-EN.PDF). The European Union refers to these rates as the “at-risk-of-poverty” rates. In the European Union, about seven out of every eight single parents are single mothers. See Eurostat News Release, *Women and Men in the EU Seen Through Figures* (March 4, 2011), available at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/1-04032011-AP/EN/1-04032011-AP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/1-04032011-AP/EN/1-04032011-AP-EN.PDF).

<sup>5</sup> Legal Momentum calculated the in-or-near-poverty rate for persons in the U.S. in primary single parent families with children below age 18 using the U.S. Census Bureau CPS Table Creator II, available at [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/apm/cpstc\\_altpov.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/apm/cpstc_altpov.html). In the U.S., about four out of every five single parents are single mothers.