

Assessment programme of *PM2.V* (Marshall Plan 2.Green, *Plan Marshall 2.Vert*)

Executive summary

THEMATIC ASSESSMENT 12 – EMPLOYMENT PROMOTION AIDS (EPAS) IN THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

The development of new places in the childcare sector is a government policy measure that has been referred to the IWEPS in the context of its assessment *PM2.V* (Marshall Plan 2.Green, *Plan Marshall 2.Vert*). More particularly, the assessment has looked into the creation of EPA posts (subsidized job), in the context of *PM1.0* (Marshall Plan 1.0, *Plan Marshall 1.0*), of mid-2005 at the end of 2012, on the professional insertion of the parents of young children.

Several calls for projects have contributed to the development of EPA employment in the sector, thus, the number of full-time equivalents reached 1,121 in 2012. The policy of granting of EPAs in the childcare sector relates to various types of situation: 1) The so-called traditional care of children under the age of three; 2) the out-of-school care of children of schooling age, before and after the classroom hours and during the holidays; 3) the care of sick children; 4) the flexible care, i.e. outside the usual reception periods and, finally, 5) emergency care allowing the parents access to a job or to vocational training. The objectives are numerous and go from an increase of the care supply to a reduction of precarious employment.

The first stage of the assessment work has concerned a policy analysis and the reconstitution of its logic model. That has consisted of the identification of the problematic situation, the resulting political priority, the resources mobilized around a choice of activities, assumptions on the effects and causalities, the expected results and the external factors which influence the policy and its results.

An unravelling of the policy's intervention rationale has made it possible to refine the initial questioning and to direct the analysis work towards several dimensions: the design of the programme, its implementation and achievements, and, finally, its effects.

The analysis work has been accomplished by combining various methodologies such as case studies and an econometric approach and has scrutinised a wealth of different sources.

Thus, three case studies, relating to the granting of EPAs in traditional, flexible and emergency, and out-of-school care situations have been produced. Their objective was to mobilise the existing administrative sources (files, databases) as well as a series of interviews with decision-makers and field-operators in order to answer a series of assessment questions about the policy's design, implementation and effects.

At the same time, an econometric analysis was carried out in order to estimate the effects of an increased availability of childcare services on the participation of the parents of young children in the labour market.

These various pieces of work have led to a series of observations. The first of them shows that the increased availability of care for children up to the age of three contributes to lifting of the brakes to the professional insertion of women, even though Wallonia is exceeding the objective set by the European Union. However, only women who are part of couples are benefiting from this policy. For single-parent families, other brakes on employment have to be lifted beforehand.

The second observation relates to the multiplication and the diversity of the calls for projects during the period under review. Those have led to a proliferation of public policy objectives and to an extension of the number

and type of the players involved. Although wider needs have thus been met, it has to be noted that the implementation of the public policy has moved away from the initial ambition of an optimisation of the means reserved for the care of children up to the age of three.

The third observation brought to light by the assessment approach relates to the difficulty of having and the need for an inventory of the current childcare supply and demand. This could help with a more coherent planning of the new reception places.

The fourth observation relates to the difficulties generated by the structural under-financing of the childcare services. The existing differential between the amount of the subsidies (and the parent's financial contribution if applicable) and the actual cost of the care, leads the employers to look for additional funding sources. Their very diversity, linked to the compartmentalising of the information per funding source, gives no assurance that the resources are being optimally allocated.

Lastly, it is important to indicate that the EPA mechanism has characteristics that are appreciated by the players in the field. It offers for example a real employment status to the beneficiaries, unlike some other insertion programmes. In out-of-school care in particular, the commitment of staff with EPA status in substitution and addition of more precarious staff has enabled the sector to become more professional. On the other hand, the short-term nature of the jobs that are granted induces in the players a detrimental element of uncertainty with regard to a policy which should by nature be structuring.

The assessment work, which therefore relates to the creation of EPA posts in the PM1.0 context (observation period going from mid-2005 to end-2012), has finally led to the formulation of some recommendations for the future of the childcare policy. The additional EPAs envisaged in the PM2. Green context could be included in the field, considering that, to date, none has yet been granted.