

# THE EXPECTED EFFECTS OF THE MEASURES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: A CAUSAL CHAIN<sup>1</sup>

---

by **Arthur Heim**, Scientific Advisor at France Stratégie

The Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Poverty places particular emphasis on measures to combat poverty reproduction. To this end, it aims in particular to promote access to and improve the quality of childcare for children from disadvantaged families. This note seeks to shed light on the logic underlying these measures, based on the elements available in the international scientific literature, without claiming to be an exhaustive literature review, in the sense that it does not cover or represent all research on these issues. After a brief review of the early childhood measures contained in the Strategy, this note presents a simple model to illustrate their expected effects.

## Definition of "early childhood" measures in the poverty strategy

The Strategy is intended to address early childhood in two ways. The first objective is to enable disadvantaged families to benefit from formal, and in particular collective, childcare arrangements. A second objective is to improve the quality of early childhood care. In the following paragraph, we present a possible logic model for this axis of the Strategy. It is a simplification of the mechanisms likely to lead to a reduction in poverty in adulthood based on policies promoting access to and quality of formal childcare for<sup>2</sup> disadvantaged children.

---

<sup>1</sup> This English version has been translated from French using DeepL. The original version in French is available on France Stratégie's website :

<https://www.strategie.gouv.fr/sites/strategie.gouv.fr/files/atoms/files/fs-comite-evaluation-strategie-pauvrete-annexes-mars-2020.pdf>

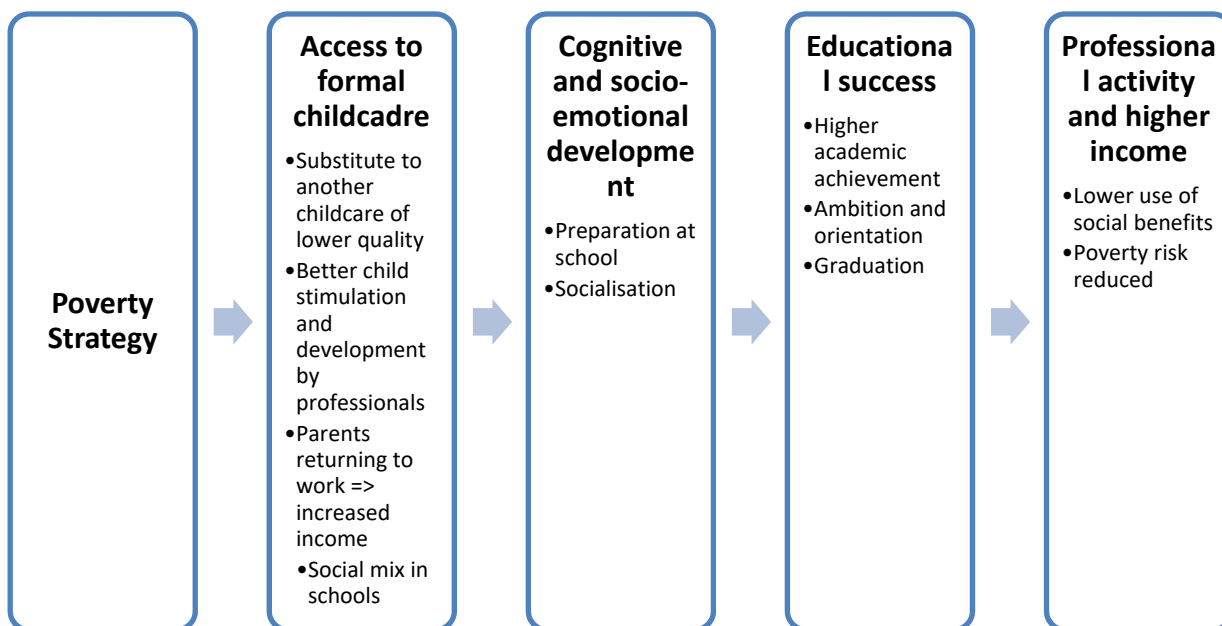
<sup>2</sup> Childcare can be formal or informal. *Formal childcare* can be collective (regular, such as day-care centers and kindergartens; occasional, such as drop-in centers; both, such as multi-accommodation) or individual (childcare assistant at home or home of childcare assistant(s) (Maison d'assistant maternel - MAM). There is also the reception at the parents' home by an employee. *Informal childcare* are non-approved childminders, care by a family member, etc.

It does not prefigure the reality of these mechanisms but helps to identify the risks and steps to be validated in order for this chain to be achieved.

### Expected effects of these measures in the fight against poverty

The idea behind the Strategy's measures to increase the access of disadvantaged families to high-quality childcare is that their children benefit from this policy in several ways. First, children in childcare can benefit directly from interactions with the early childhood professionals who care for them, the environment in which they live, and interactions with other children. In addition, since parents no longer have to care for their child, they are more available for work, which can improve families' disposable income.

**Figure 1 - Causal Chain for Early Childhood Measures of the Poverty Strategy focused on modes of reception**



Source: France Stratégie

These different phenomena are likely to affect the child's development in several dimensions (cognition, language, motor skills, socio-emotional development). An improvement in these skills would facilitate their entry into kindergarten through the experience and a form of habit being separated from the main attachment figures (parents in particular) as well as better socialization.

In a similar fashion as a chain reaction, if these effects persist over the course of the child's schooling, the child should have a favourable educational path, better academic results,

an orientation that allows access to fields of his or her choice, a higher probability of obtaining diplomas, and so on. At the end of this chain, there is a professional activity of possibly higher level, a higher income, a lower risk of being poor or using minimum social benefits. However, at each stage of this model, the chain can be broken because there is actually no effect or because other policies or other contextual elements interact with the policy under evaluation. Short-term observations will not allow us to conclude with certainty to the reality of this chain. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that, without the Strategy, these children would have benefited from another type of care (parental, informal or formal), and that it is not certain that the type of care permitted by the Strategy would have led to more beneficial effects than this "counterfactual" type of care.

### **Evaluation questions posed by the causal chain**

The identification of the expected effects through this simplified causal chain helps to identify the evaluation questions that the evaluation committee will have to answer:

- Do the Strategy's measures improve access opportunities and increase the use of formal childcare for disadvantaged children?
- Do the Strategy's measures improve the quality of formal childcare facilities?
- Does access to formal childcare promote the development of skills in young children, particularly disadvantaged children?
- Does the quality of the formal childcare system impact on the acquisition of young children's skills?
- Does access to formal childcare for underprivileged children lead to better educational success?
- Does access to a childcare allow for better professional integration?

The first two questions can only be addressed based on new evaluations since they directly question the effectiveness of the poverty strategy measures. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the measures aimed at promoting access to childcare for disadvantaged families are based on the introduction of the "diversity and territory" bonus ("bonus mixité et territoires"), and on optional transparency measures in the allocation of places in ECEC<sup>1</sup>.

The diversity bonus is intended to increase the remuneration of managers who take in more than a certain percentage of disadvantaged children, which may promote social diversity within the establishments but does not guarantee increased access to facilities for the poorest families. Similarly, measures in favor of transparency do not require that the social origin of the children be a priority criterion. The committee will therefore have to

---

<sup>1</sup> Early Childhood Care Facilities (ECEC) are all the facilities, neither family nor school, that offer a place to live to children from 0 to 6 years old.

ensure that it evaluates not only the impacts of measures to promote access to childcare facilities for disadvantaged children, but also that it questions these measures on other aspects of the evaluation : their relevance or consistency.

Moreover, the measures do not prevent children from living in poverty, they are mainly aimed at providing quality public services without tackling the poverty situation as such. Poverty in childhood is associated with lower educational attainment, an increased risk of unemployment and continued poverty in adulthood (Duncan *et al.*, 2010, 2012). Growing up in a poor household is also associated with higher adult mortality rates (Case *et al.*, 2005), as well as health problems such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease (Johnson and Schoeni, 2011).

It would then be useful to question the relevance of the measures to child poverty. Once this recommendation has been made, it is important to briefly review the issues surrounding the indicators to be considered. Poverty is a multidimensional concept that is difficult to summarize in an indicator such as income poverty. The very recent work of (Rico *et al.*, 2019) discusses child poverty in France and compares the classification proposed by different indicators based on ELFE data. In particular, they show that monetary poverty only very partially covers poverty in living or housing conditions. Moreover, family characteristics associated with the risk of poverty do not play the same role according to these definitions. The proposed assessments will have to consider these different definitions.

The following questions find more answers in the scientific literature. It should be noted that as the effects move away from those observable during early childhood, it is increasingly unlikely that the effects are attributable to childcare alone, without having had any interaction with other policies. This is why the formulations of the evaluation questions question the "reduced form" of the causal chain without necessarily questioning the mechanisms. In order to obtain an answer to these questions it is necessary to have specific evaluation conditions that ensure that, apart from access to a formal (quality) childcare, there are no other systematic differences between the groups being compared. The research to be mobilized to answer these questions must therefore have a credible identification strategy, either based on randomized controlled trials or using credible quasi-experimental methods. Appendix 13 presents some results of studies of this type.

## Conclusions

The National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Poverty is fully in line with the social investment trend and aims to combat and prevent poverty by equipping individuals with human capital. The elements of the strategy relating to early childhood can be summarized in two sets: one aims to facilitate access to formal childcare facilities for disadvantaged children, the other aims to improve the quality of childcare facilities. With

these two types of actions, the strategy is betting that affected children will pursue a more favourable trajectory of cognitive and socio-emotional development and will be able, at the end of a complex chain of consequences and actions, to escape from a social reproduction pattern and thus be better integrated into society as adults.

This wager is based on a causal chain - which we have presented - for which a number of evaluation questions must be asked. All the evaluation aspects - relevance, coherence, utility... - must be mobilized because the question of impacts, although central to judging effectiveness and efficiency, is not sufficient to address all the evaluation questions.

## **Bibliography**

Case, Anne ; Fertig, Angela ; Paxson, Christina (2005), " The lasting impact of childhood health and circumstance ", *Journal of Health Economics*, vol. 24, n° 2, p. 365-389.

Duncan, Greg J. ; Magnuson, Katherine ; Kalil, Ariel ; Ziol-Guest, Kathleen (2012), " The Importance of Early Childhood Poverty ", *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 108, n° 1, p. 87-98.

Duncan, Greg J. ; Ziol-Guest, Kathleen M. ; Kalil, Ariel (2010), " Early-Childhood Poverty and Adult Attainment, Behavior, and Health ", *Child Development*, vol. 81, n° 1, p. 306-325.

Johnson, Rucker C ; Schoeni, Robert F (2011), " The Influence of Early-Life Events on Human Capital, Health Status, and Labor Market Outcomes Over the Life Course ", *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, vol. 11, n° 3.

Rico, Barbara Castillo; Leturcq, Marion; Panico, Lidia (2019), "La pauvreté des enfants à la naissance en France", *Revue des Politiques Sociales et Familiales*. 131-132: 35-49.

---