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# EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE PROVENTION AND FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY :

## initial findings

PRESENTATION FILE

## INTRODUCTION

On 13 September 2018, Emmanuel Macron presented the National Strategy for the prevention and fight against poverty. According to INSEE's estimate<sup>1</sup>, the monetary poverty rate in metropolitan France in 2019 was 14.5%, which equates to 9.1 million people living below the poverty line. Although the figures for 2020 are not yet known, it is already clear that the public health crisis is having and will have very significant economic and social consequences.

It is in this context that the Evaluation Committee of the the National Strategy for the prevention and fight against poverty, chaired by Louis Schweitzer and led by France Stratégie, is publishing its 2021 report. The report presents new conclusions on the implementation of the Strategy and the first available elements concerning its evaluation, reviews the points the Committee wishes to bring to the attention of the public authorities concerning their anti-poverty policy, and makes recommendations.

The Evaluation Committee consulted, as it has done since the start of its work in autumn 2019, the "college" of persons in poverty or precarious situations (5<sup>th</sup> college) of the "Conseil national des politiques de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (CNLE)" (National council against poverty and social exclusion) and the citizen's panel. It also relied on hearings with experts and the administrations and public bodies concerned by the Strategy.

This report follows a methodological progress note published in March 2020<sup>2</sup>, in which the Committee specified that the evaluation would have a dual strategic and analytical dimension and that it would be carried out at two levels:

Monitoring the implementation of the Strategy's measures and evaluating their effects.

Assessing the national strategy as a whole against the broad objectives of the Strategy, incorporating in this assessment other policies that may have an effect on poverty.

The evaluation is based on three main objectives. The first two objectives are set out in the Strategy: to avoid the social reproduction of poverty, and to enable people to escape poverty. The third objective, added by the Committee, has been the subject of a commitment by France to the United Nations since 2015: to leave no one in a situation of extreme poverty.

**The Evaluation Committee published a note in October 2020<sup>3</sup> on the expected effects of the coronavirus crisis on poverty. It will publish a further note in the autumn 2021 to provide a progress report on this topic.**

1. BURESI, Gabriel, CORNUET, Flore, 'In 2019, inequalities and the poverty rate should decrease', INSEE Analyses n°60, 18/11/2020

2. Comité d'évaluation de la stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté (2020), "Évaluation de la stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté", note d'étape, France Stratégie, April.

3. Comité d'évaluation de la stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté (2020), "La lutte contre la pauvreté au temps du coronavirus : recommandations du comité d'évaluation de la stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté", note d'étape, France Stratégie, October 2020



## STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY'S MEASURES

The vast majority of measures have been launched, although there are delays in some, partly linked to the coronavirus crisis and the fact that central, and local administrations have had to make managing the crisis their priority, and in some cases are still doing so.

However, in the view of the Committee and the citizens' panel, the monitoring of implementation is not satisfactory, and does not provide an overview of the implementation of the Strategy at its midway point, nor a clear vision of its deployment in the territories.

Monitoring and evaluation of the seven measures agreed under contracts with the *départements* requires the production of reliable and relevant indicators, which the *départements'* information systems do not currently allow.

Of the 35 measures identified by the Committee, based on the information available to date, the Committee notes that:

- Four measures have been fully implemented: the increase of the employment bonus (*prime d'activité*); the implementation of the complementary health insurance scheme; the renewal of the complementary health insurance scheme for recipients of the guaranteed minimum income (*revenu de solidarité active – RSA*); and the deployment of 400 budget advice points.
- Two were abandoned: support for local authorities in 60 priority districts for urban policy (*Quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville – QPV*) with two adults per kindergarten class (merged with the *Cités éducatives* scheme) and experiments to diversify the operators and methods of use of the Youth Guarantee, which was based on an initiative of the Skills Investment Plan.
- The remaining measures have been launched but their progress is very uneven (e.g. the 2022 target set for the 'gender mix' bonus was almost reached in 2019; however, none of the training planned by the Strategy has yet been implemented for social workers or early childhood professionals).

While the objectives of two measures have been revised downwards since 2018 (refocusing the training of social workers on those in contact with people in precarious situations – i.e. 100,000 people as opposed to 700,000 announced in the strategy; reduction of the number of social centres to be opened in priority neighbourhoods from 300 to 260), other measures have been amplified in reaction to the coronavirus crisis. The objectives on budget advice points and the creation of places in temporary medical accommodation for the sick (*Lits halte soins santé – LHSS*) have been increased; and the measure on compulsory training for young people aged 16 to 18 has been complemented with a scheme called "*La Promo 16-18 ans*", which aims to support young people who do not comply with the training obligation. The Youth Guarantee (*Garantie Jeunes*) has been extended; additional money has been allocated to the Contractual Support Pathway to Employment and Autonomy (*Parcours contractualisé vers l'emploi et l'autonomie – PACEA*) in 2021; and additional measures have been taken to promote integration through economic activity (*Insertion par l'activité économique – IAE*). Two of the strategy's measures that had made little progress have been relaunched (automation of applications for social security entitlements and a measure on preventing eviction as part of the Housing First Plan), although their effects on the ground cannot be measured at this stage.

The consultation work on the universal activity income (*Revenu universel d'activité – RUA*), which was suspended during the first lockdown in 2020, has not been resumed. At this stage, only a report on the subject is planned for autumn 2021. The Public Service for Integration and Employment (*Service public de l'insertion et de l'emploi – SPIE*), another flagship measure of the Strategy, is currently being rolled out: a consultation was completed in 2020 in order to define its contours, and two calls for projects have been launched in order to extend the experiments in the regions in 2021 and 2022.

## EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF THE STRATEGY

It is still early to assess the effects of the measures: not all of them have been fully implemented and there will be a time lag before they produce effects and can be measured. In this respect, the Committee highlights the risk that the data needed for the indicators envisaged to assess the effect of the measures may not be available.

For the few measures that have been fully or almost fully implemented, no data are yet available, with the exception of the increase in the employment bonus, for which an estimate made by DREES and INSEE using the INES micro-simulation model concludes that there is a strong impact on the rate of poverty (-0.7 points). However, this reform only concerns people receiving income from work in excess of 50% of the monthly minimum wage. This estimate will be supplemented by an evaluation of the effects of the increase on working behaviour, carried out by the Institute of Public Policy of the Paris School of Economics (*Institut des politiques publiques-PSE*) at the request of the Evaluation Committee.

## EVALUATION OF THE GOVERNANCE AND TERRITORIAL COMPONENT OF THE STRATEGY

The planned governance structure for the Strategy has been put in place, despite some delays. The financial resources announced have been confirmed, thus making the State's commitment credible, particularly with regard to local authorities. However, the committee stresses an important note of caution: political support for the Strategy remains insufficient to give the delegation in charge of it the means to achieve proper interministerial coordination and steering and guarantee a level of implementation commensurate with the initial ambitions.

One of the innovations introduced by the Strategy was the implementation of some of the measures through contracts between the state and the *départements*. The hearings of 14 of the 18 anti-poverty commissioners (including 3 from overseas departments) revealed a rather positive assessment of such contracts with the *départements*: it appears to have enabled dialogue to be resumed on the objectives and resources associated with areas of policy that had been decentralised for many years. In the commissioners' view, the contractual framework with indicators, though it could be improved, sets the *départements* on a path to performance evaluation.

In the overseas territories, the local context in terms of poverty and the particularities in terms of governance call for greater flexibility in adapting the agreements in these territories, and a strengthening of transformative actions, such as the qualification of stakeholders, and support for local engineering.

Thus far, the level of participation of the people concerned has been lower than hoped for. The 5<sup>th</sup> college of the CNLE regrets a lack of involvement in work at local level, partly linked to the public health crisis.

A research project carried out by the ARENES research laboratory at the request of the committee, such as the mission on the effects of "contractualisation" between the State and the "*départements*" referred to the IGAS (Inspection générale des affaires sociales/Inspectorate General of Social Affairs) by the Minister of Solidarities and Health, should enable this initial assessment to be completed.

## POINTS OF ATTENTION RAISED BY THE COMMITTEE

### 1. Better understanding and monitoring of extreme poverty

There is a need for better knowledge and measurement of the extreme poverty that the French government has committed to eradicating by 2030. To do this, it is essential to have an indicator validated by INSEE. This indicator could, for example, combine a monetary dimension (resources below 50% of the median standard of living) with material and social poverty (defined as suffering from at least seven forms of deprivation from a list of thirteen). Such an indicator, though it would not take into account non-measurable dimensions of poverty, would constitute an important advance.

### 2. Combating the effects of the coronavirus crisis on poverty

As the committee highlighted in its October 2020 progress note, the coronavirus health crisis has and will have very significant economic and social consequences. While the government has put in place important measures since March 2020 to prevent people from falling into poverty, there is a high risk that a significant proportion of those currently benefiting from these measures will fall into poverty when they end. The Committee calls for particular vigilance to limit this risk and to support those who will fall into poverty so that they can be lifted out of it quickly, without neglecting those who were already in poverty before the crisis, often for a long time.

### 3. Working towards zero non-take-up of benefit entitlements

It is estimated that around one in three people entitled to social benefits do not receive them: this massive "non-take-up" raises the question of the effectiveness of public policies to combat poverty. To remedy this, we need to identify the measures that work and apply them more widely. This requires the systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of policies on access to entitlements and the ability to measure non-take-up.



#### *4. Setting up a support system for the most disadvantaged young people aged 18 to 24*

The situation of young people is very worrying. The current socio-fiscal system means that students, young people in low-paid employment and, in particular, young NEETs<sup>4</sup>, are dependent on family assistance and often precarious work income, with potentially deleterious and persistent effects on their education or professional careers. The current crisis has exacerbated this situation and shown how the difficulties of the labour market and the loss of parental income increase the vulnerability of young people.

France is one of the few European countries where the age of entitlement to minimum income is higher than the age of majority. No counterproductive effects of monetary compensation on job seeking are confirmed by existing empirical studies. A more ambitious youth policy is needed to overcome the logic of the current system, in which 18- to 24-year-olds are considered “social minors”.

#### *5. Assessing the effectiveness of guidance in its entirety*

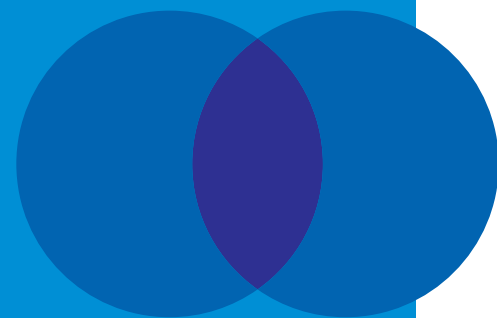
Guidance is at the heart of the Strategy. The effect of guidance on individual pathways to employment is generally positive, but depends on the nature of the guidance offered, the target group and its distance from employment.

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#### *6. Fully implementing the five-year “Housing First” plan*

Housing is a key issue in the fight against poverty. While France has one of the largest housing stocks in Europe, the relevant associations note that social housing is currently not very accessible to the most vulnerable households. The implementation of the “Housing First” plan must be scaled up so that housing becomes an effective lever in the government’s anti-poverty policy.



<sup>4</sup>. Not in Education, Employment or Training.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

*Develop the means to evaluate the Strategy and ensure continuity in anti-poverty policy*

- **Recommendation 1**

Rapidly establish a definition of extreme poverty that can be measured by INSEE to determine the number of people concerned, combining monetary poverty with other criteria

- **Recommendation 2**

Increase the resources of the Interministerial Delegation for the Prevention of and Fight against Poverty (*Délégation interministérielle à la prévention et à la lutte contre la pauvreté* – DIPLP) so that it can ensure adequate monitoring of a policy on the scale of the Strategy.

- **Recommendation 3**

Have the means to systematically monitor the Strategy's measures: firstly, have a "dashboard" with data on the state of progress, budgetary data and implementation mapping by territory, including in the Overseas Territories – two strong demands of the 5<sup>th</sup> College of the CNLE and the citizen panel; and secondly, set up a national plan aimed at the harmonisation, improvement and interoperability of départements' information systems.

- **Recommendation 4**

Ensure continuity in the fight against poverty and only question measures if experience, validated by a scientific study, shows that their effectiveness is not commensurate with the means implemented.

- **Recommendation 5**

Continue the evaluation beyond 2022 and fill in the data gaps to develop evaluation indicators, especially for measures concerning children and young people.

*Strengthen the fight against territorial inequalities*

- **Recommendation 6**

The anti-poverty commissioners are a factor in the successful deployment of the strategy, both through their symbolic dimension and through the desire to decompartmentalise and mobilise the stakeholders they embody. Their inter-ministerial positioning must be clearly affirmed and their administrative support strengthened.

- **Recommendation 7**

Since the budgetary constraints of the *départements* must not lead to limiting or calling into question the rights of people eligible for the guaranteed minimum income (*revenu de solidarité active - RSA*), the possibility of extending State financing of the RSA to *départements* facing financial difficulties should be examined rapidly, as has already been done in Mayotte, French Guiana, Reunion and Seine Saint-Denis, and as is provided for on an experimental basis by the bill "on differentiation, decentralisation, devolution and various measures to simplify local public action".

*Strengthen the fight against non-take-up*



- **Recommendation 8**

Several conditions for moving towards zero non-take-up of welfare benefits are known: clarity, active outreach procedures, automated procedures, identification of potential beneficiaries (data mining), and offering several services in a single location (such as in the France Service centres). These same conditions also underpin several of the measures in the Strategy. The fight against non-take-up must be continued by systematically evaluating the effectiveness of policies for access to entitlements, by rapidly extending schemes whose effectiveness has been demonstrated (this is the case, for example, for the 'extended entitlements appointment' trialled by the CNAF – France's family benefits authority – in 2017), and by rapidly and widely mobilising the possibilities opened up by Article 82 of the Law on the Financing of Social Security (LFSS) for 2021 (which proposes to entrust social security organisations with a general mission to combat non-take-up and, to this end, to experiment with a system for exchanging and processing personal data between organisations in order to identify the rights of potential benefit recipients. After three years of experimentation, if the results are convincing and significantly reduce non-take-up of benefit entitlements, this approach will be rolled out more widely.)

- **Recommendation 9**

Resume consultations on the universal activity income (*Revenu universel d'activité – RUA*) so that a benefit of this type can be introduced as soon as possible.

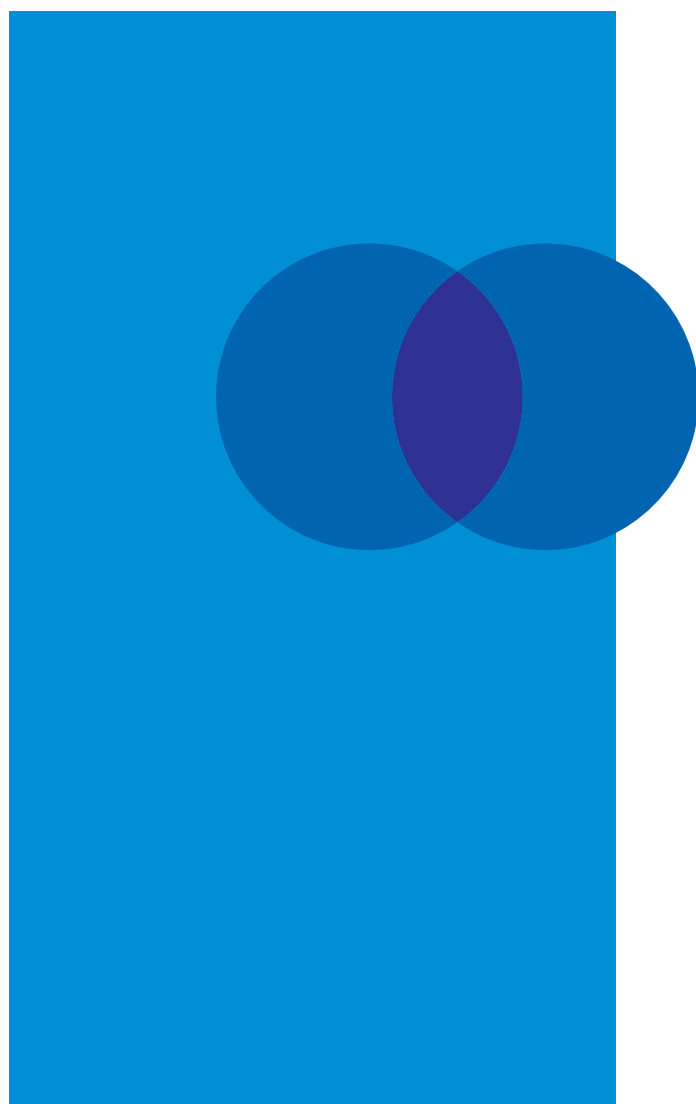
*Experimenting with a basic income for the poorest 18- to 24-year-olds*

- **Recommendation 10**

The public health crisis has highlighted the limitations of the current system of parental support and income from odd jobs for students, young job seekers and the most disadvantaged young people in employment. In the view of the Evaluation Committee, the evidence already available is sufficient to recommend that the introduction of a cash benefit for these young people should be tested without delay. It recommends that the introduction of a cash benefit for the most disadvantaged young people aged 18 to 24 in education, in low-paid employment or seeking work be tried out without delay, in order to observe the real effects of such a policy and to inform public decision-making on its possible relevance.

This basic income **would be means-tested and take into account family support, provided that the young person can benefit from it.** It would be similar in amount and subject to the same conditions regardless of the young person's education or employment status. It is important to offer **quality guidance to young people receiving it. This basic income should be a national benefit. It will be tested at national level if a national decision is taken quickly. In the absence of such a decision, it will be carried out at departmental level in volunteer départements.**

When introducing the universal activity income (*Revenu universel d'activité-RUA*) (RUA) or a similar benefit, if the basic income experiment is successful, the coherence between the two schemes should be ensured.





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