



PUBLIC ENTITIES AND POLICIES

THE ACTIVE SOLIDARITY INCOME

Executive Summary

Thematic public report

Evaluation of a public policy

January 2022

Introduction

Public policy evaluation in relation to the RSA continues and expands on the previous work of financial jurisdictions as regards combating poverty and social inclusion and, in particular, the interim ruling of November 2015 devoted to basic welfare benefits, the observations of 2017 on monetary benefits intended for low-income households and the public report of November 2019 on the disabled adults' allowance. Involving one Chamber of the Court and ten Regional Chambers of Accounts, the evaluation work, which benefited from regular feedback from a support committee, was based on national investigations, as well as on territorial surveys in nine departments illustrating the diversity of situations (Allier, Aude, Bas-Rhin, Gironde, Ille-et-Vilaine, Martinique, Pas-de-Calais, Réunion, Seine-Saint-Denis).

Established by the law of 1st December 2008, the active solidarity income (RSA) replaced the minimum integration income (RMI) and the single parent allowance (API). A little more than ten years after its widespread implementation in metropolitan France in 2009, followed by overseas departments in 2011, the financial jurisdictions decided to proceed with an evaluation of it.

The RSA is currently the main instrument for combating poverty, with annual expenditure of €15 billion. It is granted to nearly two million households, which are home to more than four million people. Despite its scale in social and financial terms, the scheme has not been evaluated in its entirety since the work of the national evaluation committee, which was specifically established for this purpose by the law of 2008 and submitted its final report in 2011.

Given the upward trend in the number of beneficiaries since the creation of the RMI, which continued after 2009 with the RSA, as well as the increased risks of job insecurity associated with the covid-19 crisis, a new evaluation had become essential. It should help determine the extent to which the RSA is meeting its objectives and how its results could be improved¹. As part of the national strategy for preventing and combating poverty of September 2018, the government has also announced several reforms, which may transform the scheme in the months and years to come: this evaluation aims to contribute to these reforms.

The RSA is one of the so-called “activation” schemes for welfare spending instituted in many OECD countries since the end of the 1990s. While the benefits intended to provide a minimum income for people in difficulty gave rise to fears of an attitude of opting-out of work (“unemployment traps”), it was a matter for the advocates of the RSA of ensuring that “work pays” in all circumstances. Therefore, the aim of the 2008 law was for the RSA to safeguard more of the incentives to work, while guaranteeing a minimum level of income and individual support like the RMI. This concern is reflected in the three established objectives of the scheme: *“to provide its beneficiaries with suitable means of existence in order to combat poverty, to encourage beneficiaries to undertake or return to work and to assist the social inclusion of beneficiaries”*.

¹ The particular characteristic of the evaluation process is that it focuses on the actual results of a scheme or policy. Therefore, unlike other work undertaken by the financial jurisdictions, it is not a question, in this case, of examining the performance of the management of the RSA by those responsible for it, but rather of assessing the extent to which the RSA meets the objectives assigned to it.

As regards these objectives, the financial jurisdictions have endeavoured to provide answers to four questions, which shape the evaluation, beyond analysis of the institutional and financial framework:

- **Does the RSA actually benefit the people for whom it is intended?**
- **To what extent does the RSA make it possible to escape poverty?**
- **To what extent does the RSA facilitate access to employment?**
- **Is the support real and effective?**

This evaluation was supervised by an interjurisdictional body bringing together the Court of Accounts and ten Regional and Territorial Chambers of Accounts. In addition to traditional evaluation methods, which led to an in-depth analysis in nine territories², unprecedented work making use of numerous databases³ was undertaken in order to quantify and assess the results of the RSA. This quantitative component was supplemented by two targeted studies, one on related support from local authorities and the other in the form of a survey of recipients and former recipients of the RSA.

The characteristics of the RSA and its general framework

The law of 1st December 2008 established the RSA with the aim, according to the terms of its explanatory memorandum, of making income from work “*the main safeguard against poverty*”. To this end, it reformed the two components of the RMI: the benefit intended to guarantee a minimum income and the support for beneficiaries designed to help them integrate socially and into employment.

In terms of its benefit component, what was novel about the RSA was that, in the case of work, the person no longer sees their benefit decrease on the basis of their total income from work but only on a proportion of it. The proportion of the benefit maintained despite returning to work originally represented the Employment RSA, which was added to the so-called “base” RSA. In 2016, this Employment RSA was incorporated into the employment bonus, which nevertheless has a broader spectrum as it also benefits “low-paid workers”, who are paid around the minimum wage.

The support component itself has also been transformed in line with the principle of “rights and obligations”: in return for the monetary assistance and support received, the beneficiary must undertake to take steps with a view to improving their social and professional integration. These commitments are formalised in a contract signed by the beneficiary with his support organisation.

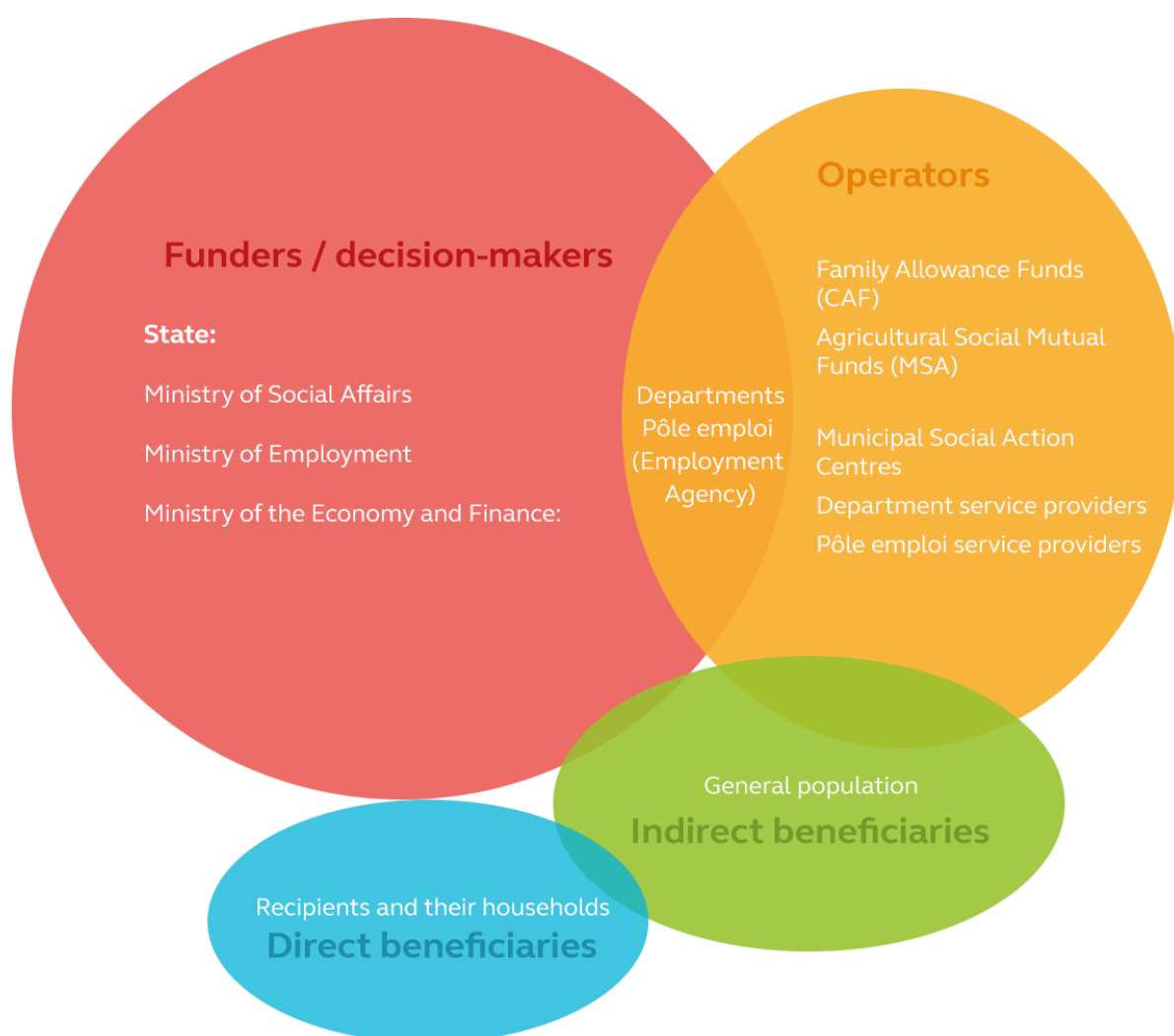
² A sample of nine departments was established in order to account for the differences in situations between territories: Allier, Aude, Bas-Rhin, Gironde, Ile-et-Vilaine, Pas-de-Calais, Seine-Saint-Denis, Martinique and La Réunion.

³ Specifically, management data from CAF (*family allowances funds*) and MSA (*agricultural social mutual funds*), Pôle emploi (*the French Employment Agency*) and departments was used, sometimes for the first time.

The institutional framework

Management and funding of the RSA are entrusted to departments, territorial welfare leaders, as the RMI had been since 2003. However, this decentralisation remains incomplete: the state defines the legal and regulatory framework of what remains a national solidarity mechanism, the networks of family allowance funds (CAF) and agricultural social mutual funds (MSA) are responsible for processing applications, calculating entitlements and paying the benefit and support is shared between multiple organisations: Pôle emploi and its partners for professional support, the department and its agencies for social support.

Schéma n° 1 : sociogram of those involved in the RSA scheme



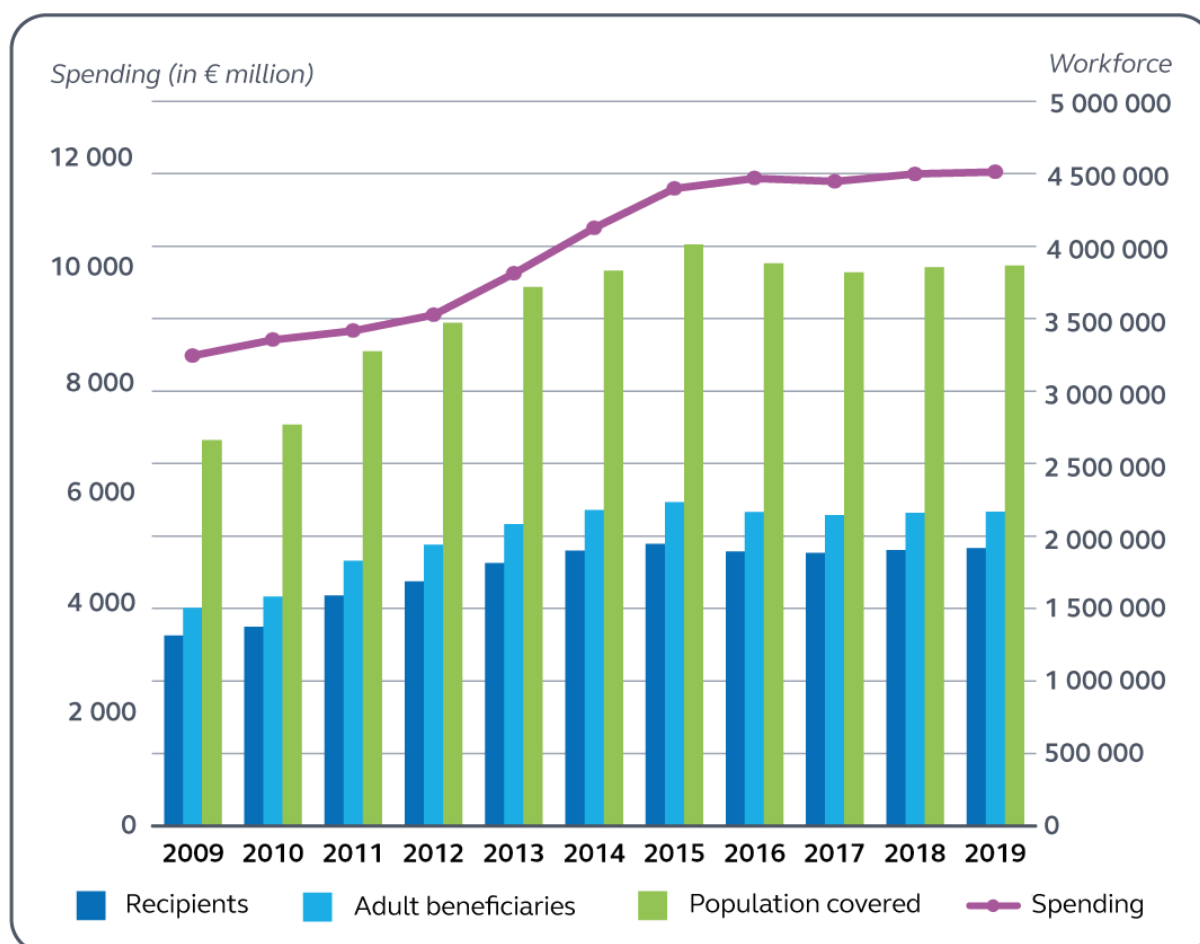
Source: Financial jurisdictions

This dispersal of roles poses problems. It raises a comprehension issue for beneficiaries of the RSA, who face an indistinct juxtaposition of several agencies. For those involved, coordination is complex, which results in very real shortcomings. The lack of harmonisation of information systems is a clear example of this, which seriously compromises the ability to supervise and monitor the pathways of beneficiaries and ensure that they meet their needs.

The financial framework

The almost uninterrupted increase in the number of beneficiaries of the RSA since its establishment has rapidly weakened this institutional framework as well as its financial component. Between 2008 and 2015, the number of beneficiaries increased from 1.3 to 1.9 million, i.e. a rise of almost 45%, before stabilising and then reaching a new peak of 2.1 million in November 2020. This increase, combined with a revaluation of the amounts paid, explains why benefit spending has increased sharply. It reached €11.7 billion in 2019 and exceeded €12 billion in 2020. When the employment bonus, spending on support (€2.3 billion) and administrative management are added, total annual public spending on the RSA was €15 billion in 2019.

Graph n°1: changes in the workforce and spending on the RSA



Scope: Metropolitan France in 2009 and 2010, followed by the whole of France.

Benefit spending (RSA, RMI, RSO and Christmas bonus).

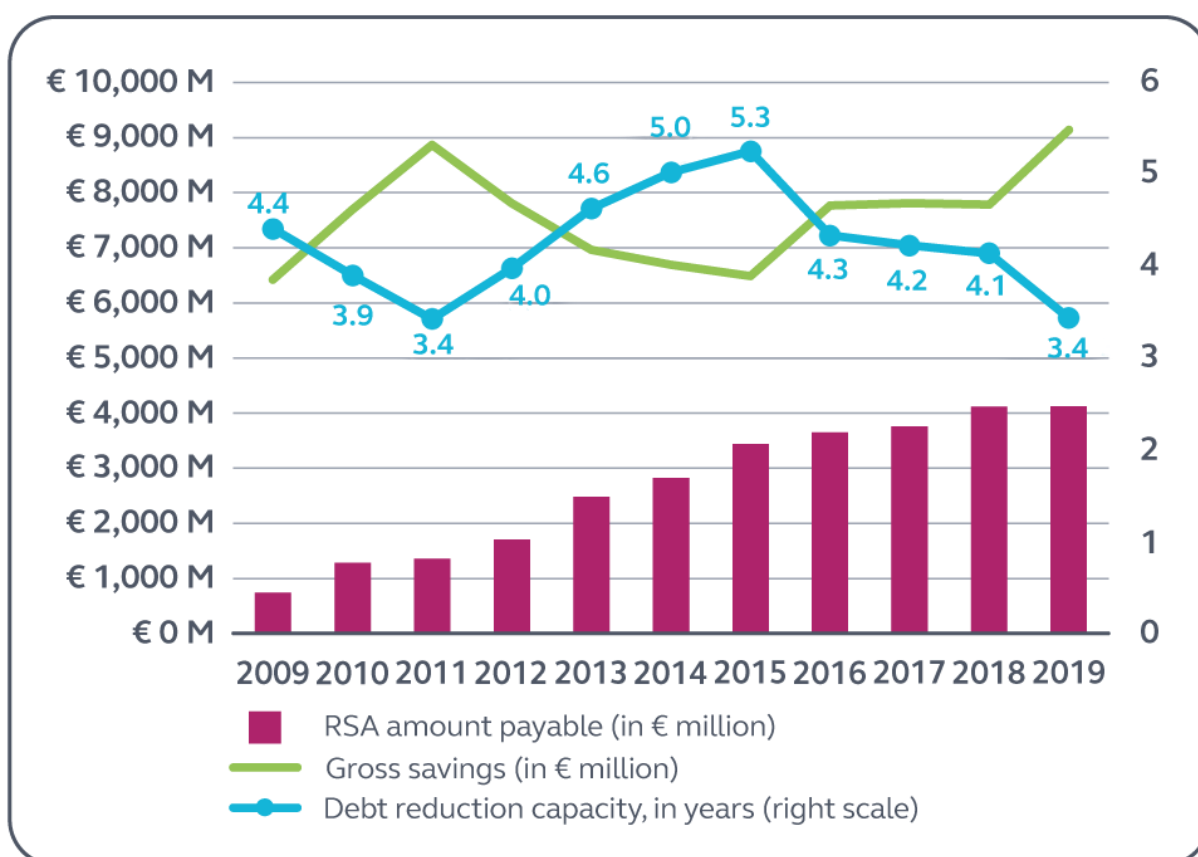
Sources: Drees – Spending on basic welfare benefits since 2009 and the RSA and employment bonus: departmental data

The proportion of domestic duty on petroleum products (TIPP), which became domestic duty on consumption of energy products (TICPE), allocated in 2003 to the departments to fund the RMI and then the RSA, rapidly proved to be insufficient. Complementary funding mechanisms originating from the state gradually stacked up (five equalisation funds were established in this way between 2006 and 2015), but these mechanisms never kept pace with the momentum of spending.

The result was a scissor effect caused by the growing gap between the increase in revenue (+20 %) and that in expenditure (+69%) borne by the departments since 2009. There has thus been a more than four and a half-fold increase in the difference between the two. In 2019, the proportion transferred from TICPE represented €5.8 billion and other funds €1.1 billion, i.e. €4.2 billion less than the spending to be funded.

This gap is felt very differently by departments. In the nine territories studied, it varies from 100% to 400% and is particularly significant in Réunion and Seine-Saint-Denis, two departments in which it triggered decisions to renationalise the present or future benefit, after Mayotte and French Guiana.

Graph n°2: gross savings, RSA amount payable (excluding DMTO) and departmental debt reduction capacity since 2009



Source: Financial jurisdictions, on the basis of DGCL data

However, the "à la carte" recentralisation of benefit funding borne by the state does not provide a global and sustainable response to an issue that affects all departments, while also weakening the "decision-maker = funder" identity, which lies at the heart of the decentralisation of the RMI.

Does the RSA actually benefit the people for whom it is intended?

This first evaluative question leads to two additional questions: do the people for whom the RSA was designed actually benefit from it (the issue of non-take-up)? And likewise, are there beneficiaries who should not be (the issue of rightful payment)?

Those for whom the RSA is intended

While other basic welfare benefits are targeted, such as the disabled adults allowance (AAH) for disabled people or the solidarity allowance for the elderly (ASPA) for retired people, the RSA, a mechanism under common law, applies to the entire working-age population.

In addition to the condition of nationality, which requires non-Europeans to have had a regular residence permit for at least five years, the main legal restriction relates to the minimum age of 25. Like the RMI, in this respect the RSA is consistent with the idea that until that age, it is the family solidarity mechanism that should apply, before the national solidarity mechanism takes over. Specific schemes exist for young people encountering particular difficulties. These schemes, such as the “Garantie jeunes” (*Youth Guarantee*) or the “RSA jeunes actifs” (*Young Workers RSA*) provide them with an income close to the RSA – however, the latter appears to be largely inoperative due to its restrictive conditions, as it only had 734 beneficiaries in 2019.

Within the framework of this evaluation, the financial jurisdictions believe they have not gathered sufficient evidence to arrive at a definite position on the extension of the RSA to young people below the age of 25. Such an extension is a matter for political debate and decisions, as it revolves around issues of values. It is possible to estimate that beyond the young people already eligible for the Youth Guarantee, the additional number of potential beneficiaries would be between 1.7 and 2.4 million if the RSA was opened up to 18-24 year olds.

The intended beneficiaries are insufficiently covered

As regards the benefit, the last detailed study of non-take-up, dating from 2011, estimated that this phenomenon affected 30% of the target population. No recent study, nor any of the rare initiatives deployed on a local level to assess non-take-up, have led to an up-to-date revision of this estimate, which represents a consensus among those involved in the RSA. It therefore appears possible to estimate that the level of cover of the target population is 70%.

Conversely, fraud has little impact on the number of legitimate beneficiaries⁴. By contrast, its effects on the figures are significant with more than €190 million detected in 2019, resulting in a total estimate by the Cnaf of around €1 billion of potential fraud⁵. The majority of this fraud actually relates far more to the sums paid rather than the actual eligibility of people for the RSA scheme. Hence 70% of detected fraud cases relate to omissions or errors in declarations of resources. One major issue therefore relates to safeguarding payment of the RSA as regards beneficiaries' actual situations, by increasing the reliability of the data used and the detection of a greater number of errors.

⁴ As stated above, the purpose of this evaluation was not to verify proper application of the rule of law and, therefore, to analyse fraud, but to assess the extent to which the RSA meets the objectives assigned to it by law.

⁵ Indeed, nearly 12% of the sums paid under the RSA, i.e. €1.4 billion, were wrongly paid in 2019, mainly due to fraud. See *La lutte contre les fraudes aux prestations sociales (Combating welfare benefit fraud), communication from the Court of Accounts to the Senate Social Affairs Committee (September 2020)*.

As regards support, it is possible to estimate that 60% of beneficiaries subject to “rights and obligations” do not have a support contract. Although this rate is based on imperfect data, it highlights a serious failure of this component of the RSA. This poor outcome can be explained by the fact that only eight out of ten recipients were actually referred to a support organisation, and that among them, only half of those referred to social support signed a contract.

In response to the first evaluative question, the RSA does not sufficiently benefit the people for whom it is intended, with coverage rates of approximately 70% for the benefit component and 40% for the support component.

To what extent does the RSA make it possible to escape poverty?

The key objective established by law for the RSA is “*to provide its beneficiaries with a suitable means of existence, in order to combat poverty*”. To assess the effectiveness of the RSA in this respect, it is necessary to analyse its contribution to reducing poverty, by incorporating it into the overall landscape of social support and benefits, which are accessible to its beneficiaries.

The RSA alone does not make it possible to escape poverty

Since 2010, 65% of RSA beneficiaries have consistently lived below the monetary poverty line⁶, a proportion that is 4.4 times higher than in the general population, where this proportion is between 14% and 15%. 51% of RSA beneficiaries are also considered to have poor living conditions⁷, a proportion almost five times higher than for the rest of the population.

This situation is a direct result of the sums guaranteed by the benefit: for a single person, the RSA is 565 euros per month (on 1st April 2021), a level below the monetary poverty line (1,063 euros per month in 2018 according to the Insee). It reflects the choice made on establishment of the RSA that it is being in paid work that is intended to sustainably keep people out of poverty, with the national solidarity mechanism only acting as a safety net.

By contrast, the RSA protects its beneficiaries from extreme poverty

Although 46% of RSA beneficiaries still live below the poverty line at 50% of the median income, only 16% live on less than 40% of the latter. The effect of the RSA is even clearer on the intensity of poverty: although this is clearly much higher among RSA beneficiaries at the 60% threshold, the situation is reversed at the 40% threshold: the intensity of poverty at that level is twice as high for people who do not benefit from the RSA.

The RSA is thus the scheme which, within the entire socio-fiscal system, contributes the most to reducing the intensity of monetary poverty to 40 and 50% of the threshold, by ensuring on its own between 35 and 40% of this reduction, more than other monetary benefits (housing benefits, family benefits, local support, etc.).

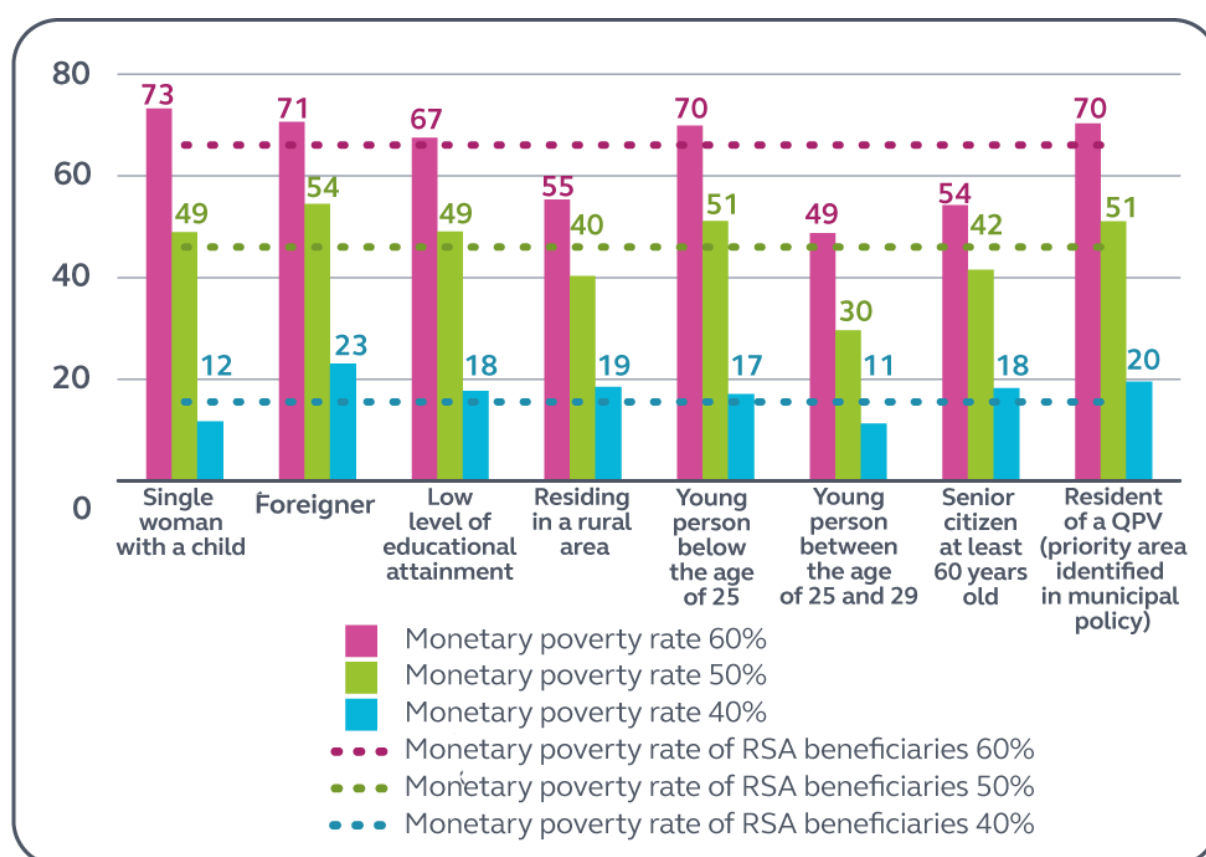
⁶ There is a standard statistical definition of the poverty line across Europe. It equates to 60% of the median income, i.e., in France, €1,063 per month for a single person in 2018, the last year for which it was published by the Insee.

⁷ “Poor living conditions” is, along with the poverty line, the second most widely used statistical indicator. It provides an indicator of deprivation by gauging private individuals on the basis of 8 items from a list of 27 items linked to a lack of resources.

RSA beneficiaries can also claim a range of related support, put in place by local authorities. Although this support is generally not taken into account in studies because it is poorly documented, it nevertheless helps to reduce poverty: the Equinoxe study carried out by a team from Gustave Eiffel University in partnership with the financial jurisdictions, the results of which are published in parallel with this evaluation, highlights the fact that in a sample of 20 municipalities, this support represents between 6.5% and 12.7% of all the resources of households with no earned income.

This protective role against extreme poverty is perceived and confirmed by the recipients themselves. When surveyed, 78% believe that the RSA has “*provided a minimum income*” and has “*prevented them falling into poverty*”. This is the aspect of the scheme most widely recognised by its beneficiaries.

Graph n° 3: poverty rate of RSA beneficiaries based on standard profiles



Scope: Metropolitan France, individuals living in a household whose declared income is positive or zero and whose reference person is not a student.

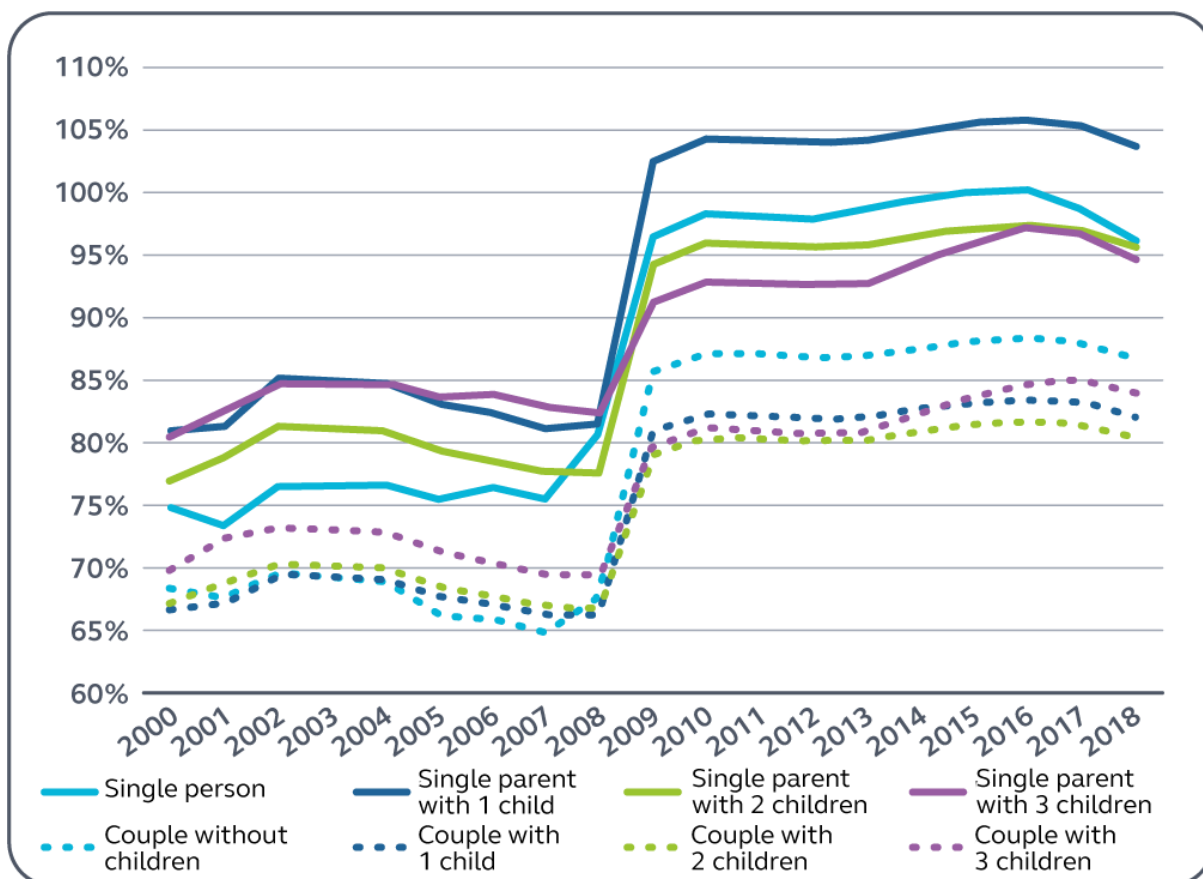
Source: Financial jurisdictions on the basis of ERFS 2018

Returning to work remains the preferred way out of poverty

The legislator’s choice to focus on work as a way out of poverty is borne out in practice. Although monetary poverty at the 50% threshold affects almost all recipients whose income consists mainly of the RSA, this proportion drops to only 20% for those whose benefit accounts for less than 10% of their income. Returning to work, even on a part-time basis, effectively makes it possible to cross the poverty line in most family and employment arrangements.

Scale simulations show that this has been the case since the introduction of the RSA, with the positive effect on income of returning to work having subsequently been enhanced by the sharp increase in the employment bonus in 2019.

Graph n° 4: standard of living of households with a member in part-time employment on the minimum wage, in proportion to the poverty line



Source: France Strategy, Universal income support schemes for low-income households: protection against poverty and the incentive to work since 2000. A typical case analysis, 2019

Thus, although it does not allow people to cross the monetary poverty line, the RSA does, however, make it possible to significantly reduce its intensity and provides effective protection against extreme poverty, while encouraging work in almost all situations.

To what extent does the RSA facilitate access to employment ?

This evaluative question echoes the second objective established by law for the RSA, namely “to encourage beneficiaries to undertake or return to work”. This gives rise to two areas of analysis: that of incentives to work and that of effective access to employment.

Monetary incentives to work are now guaranteed in the majority of situations

The major innovation of the RSA consists of its incentive mechanism: in the case of work, the beneficiary of the RSA no longer sees their benefit reduced on the basis of their total income, but only on 38% of it.

Studies carried out since 2009 all concur that this “activation” of the basic welfare benefit, continued and subsequently enhanced by the employment bonus, has increased the level of monetary incentives to work. A positive effect was measured, when the RSA was introduced, on the behaviour of certain groups of recipients, such as young people aged around 25, single mothers with young children or women in a couple seeking to work part-time. Other studies covering all national benefits show the key role of the RSA in reducing the level of deductions for low wages and, consequently, in encouraging work and increasing working hours.

Moreover, the aforementioned Equinoxe study shows that in a sample of 20 municipalities, the RSA has engendered a reconfiguration of local support. While the latter created threshold effects on leaving the RMI and penalised a return to work (you would need to work for an extra 13 hours per week on the minimum wage to compensate for the loss of local benefits in the case of returning to work), their convergence with the RSA scale has resulted in the almost universal disappearance of unemployment traps.

Although a degree of caution should be exercised when analysing these results, which only relate to the scales of benefits and do not include certain costs associated with returning to work (childcare, transport, etc.), the RSA has fulfilled its established objective, except for certain residual arrangements relating specifically to young students and apprentices, working couples or some local support. The ability of beneficiaries to correctly assess and anticipate the gains associated with returning to work nevertheless remains an issue, with support organisations themselves sometimes experiencing difficulties in evaluating the combined effects of a salary, the employment bonus and future welfare support after returning to work.

Access to employment remains difficult for RSA beneficiaries

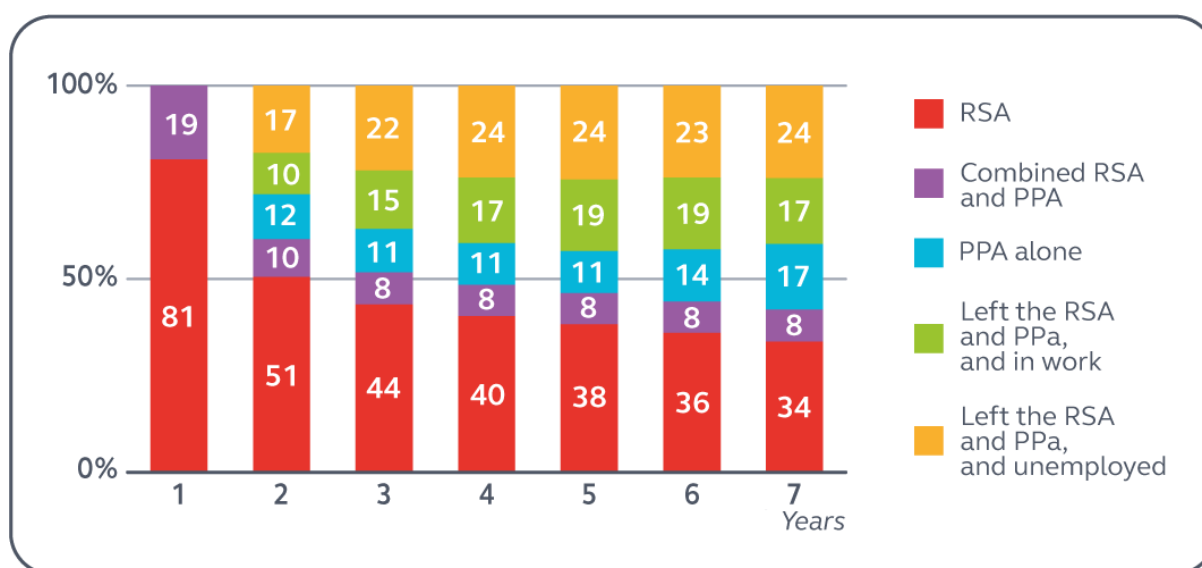
By contrast, in terms of effective access to employment, the difficulties for RSA beneficiaries remain very significant. Their rate of return to work, of 3.9% per month in 2019, is not only much lower than the average for job seekers (8.2%), but it is also lower than that of all other groups benefiting from specific schemes (long-term job seekers, residents of priority areas identified in municipal policies (QPV), people over the age of 50, etc.). Only disabled workers experience a lower monthly rate of return to work, but one that is still quite close, at 3.3% on average.

Moving into employment for RSA beneficiaries is also more precarious. In the event of a return to work, 68% of non-RSA beneficiaries gain access to long-term employment (i.e. for more than six months), whereas this is the case for only 56% of RSA beneficiaries. Leaving the RSA often takes place in chaotic conditions: within five years of leaving the RSA, although 30% of former recipients do not experience any work transition (either they remain in employment or they remain unemployed), two-thirds change position on average 3.8 times, which is equivalent to switching between employment and unemployment twice in five years.

This instability, which is expected given the general trend towards increasing alternation between unemployment and employment, is particularly pronounced for former recipients, 41% of whom return to the RSA after leaving it.

In total, seven years after a cohort of recipients first benefit from the RSA, only 34% have left it and are in work – and of these, only a third are in stable employment. 24% have left the RSA without work, of which a quarter (i.e. 6% of the cohort) are in receipt of the disabled adults allowance (AAH). Ultimately, 42% are still in receipt of the RSA. This proportion broadly corresponds that of the RSA “halo”, which the evaluation has identified, i.e. people who benefit from the RSA continuously over a long period or only leave it temporarily. Although the RSA is designed to be a temporary safety net facilitating access to work, it only fulfils this role in the long term for about a third of its beneficiaries, which raises the question of its adaptation to those people experiencing the greatest difficulties finding employment.

Graph n° 5: monitoring of a cohort of entrants to the RSA



Source: financial jurisdictions, on the basis of ENIACRAMS

These difficulties probably explain why access to employment is a secondary aspect in the perception that beneficiaries themselves have of the RSA. Only 29% believe that the RSA will allow them to obtain a fixed-term contract or a temporary job and 21% that it will allow them to obtain a permanent contract. However, only 15% of beneficiaries surveyed cite access to employment among the areas for improvement of the RSA that they would like to see. Contrary to the idea of a step towards employment highlighted when it was established, the RSA is primarily, and increasingly, seen by its beneficiaries and by those who support them as a minimum income. It is in view of this reality that the effectiveness of rights and obligations must be evaluated.

The answer to the third evaluative question is therefore very mixed: the fact that there are now almost no more “unemployment traps” can be considered as the main success of the RSA as regards the objectives set when it was established, but the difficulties encountered by its recipients in actually gaining access to employment remain very significant. This situation raises questions in a model where income from work is supposed to represent the main safeguard against poverty: the “promise” of the RSA is not kept for almost two thirds of its beneficiaries.

Is the support real and effective?

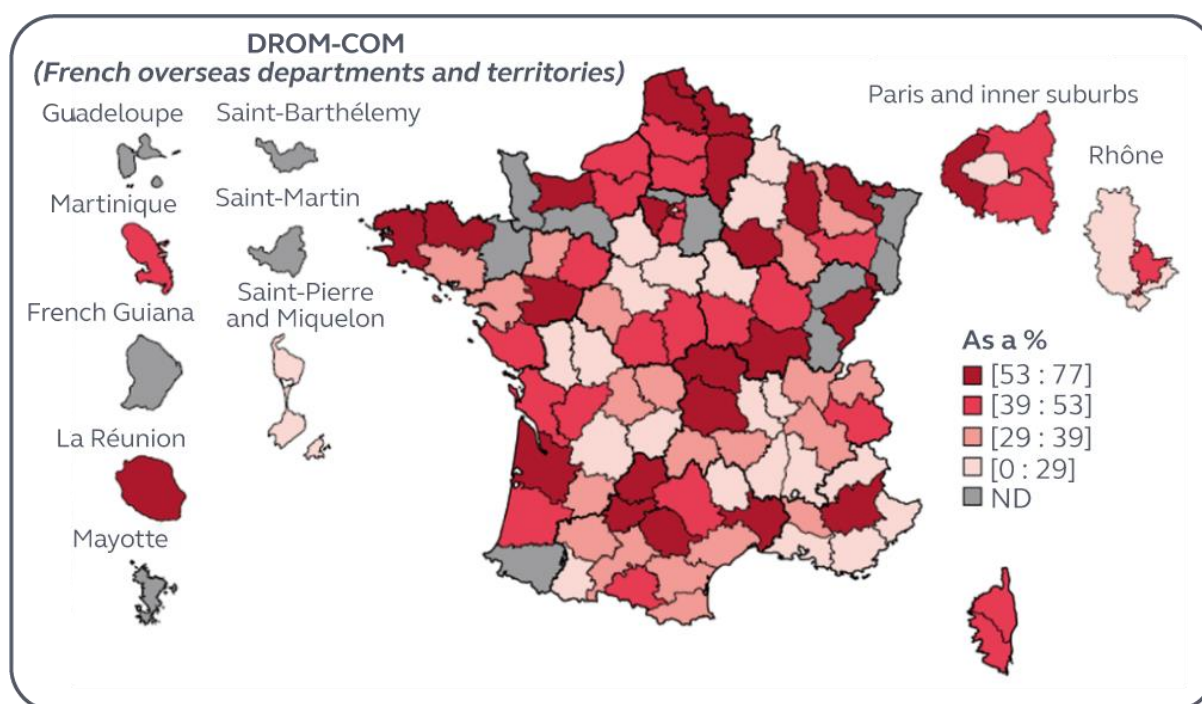
The third and final objective of the RSA is social and professional integration by means of appropriate support, intended as a right and an obligation for the beneficiary and for their support organisation. Two questions arise from this: first, what is the reality of the support and what is its content? The answer to this question is a necessary prerequisite; analysis can only be pursued if the consistency of the support is sufficient to measure its effects. Once the reality of this support has been assessed, what can be said of its *effectiveness*, i.e. the social and professional integration of its beneficiaries?

Referral to support organisations: major shortcomings

The first stage of individual pathways, referral to a support organisation does not happen for 18% of recipients – a proportion that remains at 12% for those in receipt for more than five years. The referral period itself is a long way from the objective established by law (two months), as well as by the national strategy for combating poverty presented in 2018 (one month): it is 95 days on average.

The quality of referral is more difficult to assess, but there appear to be notable inconsistencies on both a national and departmental level. The respective proportions of professional support, provided by Pôle emploi, or social support provided by the department and its agencies, vary to a considerable extent from one region to another, without it being possible to explain this disparity on the basis of the economic and social reality of departments or the specific difficulties of beneficiaries. In 2019, although, on average, 41% of RSA beneficiaries were referred to Pôle emploi, this proportion varied from 0% in Corrèze and 4% in Marne and Var, to 65% in Allier and 71% in Réunion.

Map n°1: proportion of people with Pôle emploi as the sole referral organisation among RSA beneficiaries referred (end of 2018)



Source: Drees (Directorate for Research, Studies, Evaluation and Statistics), OARSA 2018

In other words, depending on their department of residence, the same beneficiary is likely to be supported by Pôle emploi or by organisations whose core activity is different. This situation raises the issue of the appropriate balance between individual needs and the responses provided. In fact, Pôle emploi confirms that a significant proportion of the people referred to its agencies are in reality not prepared for employment and would rather warrant social support.

These failures in terms of the initial referral are not corrected by subsequent re-referrals, as these are rare. Therefore, only 5% of people experienced a change in the type of support (from “professional” to “social” or vice versa) during the course of 2018, the last year for which this detailed data can be reliably used. The compartmentalisation of different types of support may therefore contribute to locking people into pathways that are not suited to their needs for many years.

The serious shortcomings of social and socio-professional support

While the reciprocal commitment contract (CER) is supposed to be the central tool for social support and the condition for monitoring it, only 50% of RSA beneficiaries referred to this type of pathway actually have one. Although the contract is initially signed within 53 days on average, it is subsequently not widely monitored as only 20% of people have a valid contract.

Analysis of the content of contracts also reveals a lack of substance: the number of actions proposed is very low (often less than two actions per contract), these are often relatively intangible and may relate to simple behavioural precepts. Ultimately, 76% of the CERs do not contain any actions geared towards preparation for seeking employment.

Moreover, although the precise quantification of support proves difficult due to the lack of information systems, a very clear lack of intensity can be observed. The number of people monitored by each social worker varies from 55 to 144 in the departments studied, and the RSA is often only a secondary priority in comparison to child protection or violent or emergency situations, which are brought to the attention of those social workers who are not specialists. The frequency of support interviews is even less well known, but it is almost systematically less than three per year, with an average of 1.4 in one of the departments studied.

Ultimately, in several departments and as part of hearings organized by the financial jurisdictions, a sometimes ambivalent position of social workers as regards the principle of rights and obligations has been reported, with them expressing reservations about the need to take notice of the content of contracts and to punish failures to fulfil the commitments contained therein.

These findings, based on an analysis of several hundred contracts selected at random in the nine departments studied, strongly suggest that the CER is currently only a formality without any real bearing. This weakness in terms of social support appears to be out of step with the finding that a large number of beneficiaries have been stuck in the system for many years: for these people, the very relevance of the defined framework of the RSA benefit, and the notion of rights and obligations in particular, is called into question.

In the opinion of beneficiaries, support is therefore the first component of the RSA, which needs to be improved: 35% of them expect better monitoring, compared to only 12% who are asking for an increase in the benefit.

Professional support from Pôle emploi

The first stages of the process are more structured at Pôle emploi than in the departments: systematic completion of an individual assessment within an average of 21 days after registration, signing of the individual job-seeking plan (PPAE), in lieu of a support contract, for all RSA beneficiaries and a distinction of four types of support with increasing levels of intensity, between which people are divided.

The results are more mixed in terms of the actual content of support, as can be seen from the highly developed information system operated by Pôle emploi. Despite their particular difficulties, RSA recipients derive little benefit from the differentiation of mechanisms put in place by the operator: almost 70% of them receive the least intensive types of support (compared to 77% on average for job seekers), while services and training are rare, even in the case of so-called “enhanced” support, with 0.6 services per year on average. Paradoxically, within the same type of support, RSA beneficiaries have fewer interviews with their referral advisor than other job seekers (-17% to -24%). The rights and obligations attached to the RSA are not monitored, unlike monitoring of job seeking linked to unemployment insurance.

Only “global” support, set up in partnership with the departments, really makes it possible to reinforce support and have a positive impact on the return to work. With a limited capacity (69,000 people at the end of 2019), it was only of benefit to 4% of RSA recipients before its ramp-up in 2021.

More generally, the limited capacity to provide the most intensive types of support may result in a form of reverse selectivity, by excluding the beneficiaries in the greatest difficulty from it. As a result, the intensity of support decreases with the length of unemployment, and for a large number of RSA beneficiaries who are very long-term unemployed, Pôle emploi no longer really has a solution.

This last focus of evaluation relating to support highlights the most significant shortcomings of the RSA. In practice, support for beneficiaries is virtually indistinguishable from support under common law, either social or professional, which is likely to be offered to everyone and, where it exists, it is inconsistent with needs from the referral stage, there is a marked weakness in terms of support actions, often merely token conclusion of contracts and almost non-existent individual monitoring of “rights and obligations”.

Conclusion

On conclusion of the work carried out by the financial jurisdictions, the results for the RSA appear to be mixed. It has two major successes to its credit: the protection of recipients against extreme poverty and the removal of unemployment traps. However, three major weaknesses are identified: a failure to sufficiently reach the intended beneficiaries, which allows precarious situations and exclusion to persist, a weakness in terms of support and the conclusion of contracts, which compromises the prospects for inclusion and adopts as the default the principle of rights and obligations sought by the legislator and, *ultimately*, a difficulty in accessing employment, which compromises the scheme’s core commitment to make income from work the main safeguard against poverty.

In view of these findings, the financial jurisdictions have formulated seventeen specific recommendations, which are based on three general guidelines:

Guideline° 1: An increase in coverage of the target population: beyond the useful and necessary improvement of current tools intended to facilitate payment of the benefit, a further step must be taken by embarking on tests to automate the notification of eligibility for the RSA. The financial jurisdictions believe that automation of the payment of entitlements (rights) themselves would only be plausible if these were separated from an obligation to provide support, which is not the current philosophy of the RSA and is not in line with guidelines proposed herein.

Guideline° 2: The full implementation of reciprocal rights and obligations: a core principle of the RSA but currently misdirected, the rights and obligations of the recipient, as well as the support organisations, must regain their full meaning, in accordance with what is established by law. This involves strengthening rights (improving and securing payment of the benefit, improved adaptation of support and its intensity to individual difficulties) as well as actual monitoring of obligations. Formalisation of the support organisation's and the beneficiary's commitments must be systematic, as must the punishment of proven shortcomings. Finally, the pathways must be better adapted to people's changing needs, to avoid long-term entrenchment in the RSA and to better take account of the situation of recipients who are permanently "stuck" there and experiencing difficulties obtaining work.

Guideline n° 3 :Increased accountability of departments and a reform of funding: although the departments, the welfare leaders, are expected to continue to be responsible for the RSA and social inclusion policy, additional measures must be taken in order to ensure that the changes recommended herein are possible and properly supervised in accordance with the principle of "funder = decision-maker" (exchange of data between those involved, establishment of statistical monitoring of individual pathways, coordination of partners and reform of RSA funding).

In the absence of a strong commitment from all those involved, for a growing number of people, the RSA risks becoming a simple survivors' benefit, reflecting a failure to fulfil the aims stated in 2008 when it was established.

Recommendations

On payment of the benefit

Intended for the state, departments, the Cnaf and the CCMSA

1. Simplify, accelerate and secure payment of the benefit by improving all the tools, including the online procedure, simulations and automation of the quarterly declaration, as well as the exchange of data between public authorities and operators.
2. Complete the job of simplifying and harmonising regulations relating to the RSA and other solidarity benefits, particularly with regard to the income taken into account when calculating entitlements.
3. Test the automation of information on probable eligibility for the benefit, in order to measure the impact on non-take-up and the quality of service, and to identify the prerequisites for a possible roll-out.

On support and pathways

Intended for the state, local authorities, Pôle emploi and all referral organisations

4. Include in the Territorial Employment Pacts (PTI), set out in Article L. 263-2 of the Social Action and Family Code, the definition of guidelines relating to the referral system for beneficiaries, including in particular the main criteria for choosing the pathway that is best suited to their needs.
5. Conduct a precise and complete assessment of the situation of people and their needs before enrolling them for types of support with a different duration and intensity.
6. Make best use of greater differentiation of support methods to intensify the content of the contract and the specified actions for people in the greatest difficulty.
7. Re-examine the assessment and referral of people between support organisations on the expiry/renewal date of the contract (CER and PPAE), in order to better meet their needs.
8. In order to prevent excessive and entrenched periods in receipt of the RSA, systematically offer enrolment on a training or employment pathway no later than two years after entering the system, by making use of all forms of subsidised employment, if necessary.
9. Remove the last arrangements disincentivising work caused by the scales for determining support.
10. Improve knowledge of related local support in order to identify the existence of possible dissuasive effects as regards employment within territories.

On rights and obligations

Intended for departments, Pôle emploi and all referral organisations

11. Systematically establish in contracts the support organisation's and the beneficiary's commitments, in the form of specific, measurable and enforceable actions.
12. Make the contract the real tool for monitoring pathways by making its content, as well as monitoring of its execution, accessible to the beneficiary and to all the institutions involved at all times.
13. Systematically punish proven breaches of contractual obligations binding the beneficiary and their support organisation.

On governance and funding of the scheme

Intended for the state, departments, Pôle emploi, the Cnaf and the CCMSA

14. Enhance coordination under the authority of the department by merging the PTI and the departmental integration plan into a single supervision and programming document, and by involving at least the state, the CAF, the region and Pôle emploi.
15. Establish a departmental body bringing together the signatories to this new single document in order to monitor it and examine its annual review, as well as the results originating from statistical monitoring of individual pathways.
16. Continue and expand the implementation of statistical monitoring of individual integration pathways by matching the databases of all those involved, thereby facilitating the standardised monitoring of individual referrals and re-referrals, the types of support and support actions used, the results of support and the resources devoted to it.
17. Reform the RSA funding mechanism by focusing on the transfer of sustainable resources, the nature of which is consistent with that of spending, to departments.