

Interview with Assessora Mrs. Chiara Marciani:

Roberto Di Matteo: What was the role of the Metropolitan City of Naples in implementing the baby-sitting bonus funded by Cohesion Funds?

Assessora Marciani: Well, let's say that, as you know well, within the management of European funds and therefore Cohesion Funds, there are a series of lines of action that are then entrusted to municipalities and metropolitan cities to issue public calls, because whenever there are these actions, we always assign them through the so-called public procedures, so that all citizens are aware that there are tools available to them. In this specific case, the role was precisely to propose a call — a public call — aimed at all potential beneficiaries, making this financial allocation available and giving them the possibility to benefit from these bonuses.

Roberto Di Matteo: Okay.

Assessora Marciani: I don't know if I'm using terms that are not... let me know.

Roberto Di Matteo: No, no. Okay. How did you collaborate with INPS in informing and supporting beneficiary families?

Assessora Marciani: INPS plays a very important role because they are the ones who always provide us with very up-to-date data on not only the social situation of beneficiaries, but also on who might be in need. As you know, maternity benefits, for example, are paid through INPS, and likewise — although it no longer exists now — during the period we are talking about there was a tool that was widely used in our city, namely the citizenship income, which you have certainly heard about. INPS therefore provided us, for example, with data on all recipients of the citizenship income, on the mandatory activities that recipients and their families had to carry out. So it was important not only to follow the individual person, but also the family units that were part of the people taken in charge by INPS, so to speak.

Roberto Di Matteo: Mm. Were help desks or support services provided to assist families in submitting applications?

Assessora Marciani: Not a physical help desk. Let's say that when initiatives of this kind are launched, the administration always provides telephone numbers that are available, as well as email addresses. So not a physical desk, but rather, in all municipalities and throughout the territory, there are local offices that, for all initiatives, can also help citizens fill in the application form and understand how they can benefit from a specific service.

Roberto Di Matteo: How many families in your area of responsibility benefited from the baby-sitting bonus, and what requirements were needed?

Assessora Marciani: Well, on this point I had a specific table prepared, which I will bring to you later, where all the data are included. So, in order not to say anything inaccurate, if that's fine with you, I will provide you later with a detailed table so that you have all the information on the beneficiaries of the initiative and all the details.

Roberto Di Matteo: In this regard, we would be grateful if you could put us in contact with INPS Naples so that we could obtain these and other data directly from them.

Assessora Marciani: Of course, absolutely. It will be done.

Roberto Di Matteo: Thank you.

Morena Pinto: Have you collected any data or feedbacks on the actual use of the bonus and on families' satisfaction?

Assessora Marciani: Well, no, we did not collect that... and it's true, it's something that is often missing. Also because, if I may make a brief digression, you should know that before taking on this role I worked for many years in the Campania Region specifically on European funds; that is, let's say, my area of specialization.

What the European Union always requires—and this is something important for your own path—is documentation that is often seen as a kind of bureaucratic burden, but which is actually very important in order to obtain the data you are talking about. There are two types of documents in particular: one is called the Annual Implementation Report, through which the European Union wants to know every year which projects have been funded, how they are being implemented, what stage of implementation they are at, whether there have been problems, and how they are being monitored; and then the most important document comes at the end, with an evaluation that is not only about results—that is, the outcomes achieved—but also about impact, meaning the impact that these initiatives have had on the reference territory. So, in that specific case, this was certainly not done. However, I can tell you that we later proposed a similar initiative, and it would be important to collect feedback not only from families, but also from how the project was managed by the territory itself. This is therefore an important aspect that we want to take into account and make good use of, so that it can be applied to the new projects we are currently implementing.

Morena Pinto: Okay. If the bonus were to be reintroduced, what changes would you suggest to make it more effective or fairer?

Assessora Marciani: Well... the positive thing is that about a year and a half ago the Campania Region funded another project whose objective is to better reconcile working life and family life. In fact, it is a second edition—so to speak—of a project that I had already followed when I was working at the Region. This project was called “Territorial Gender Agreements”, meaning that each territorial area develops a project within its own territory aimed at better reconciling family life and working life. The idea was precisely to try to ensure—and this is a very important underlying concept—that the burden of care is not placed solely on mothers, but rather on families as a whole, enabling them to better reconcile family and working life. As I was saying, the Region has now funded this project again, and several lines of action are planned. One line of action once again involves babysitter vouchers, and in fact the call for applications should be issued within about a week at most—hopefully by the end of February at the latest—so this is very timely, given that we are in the process of issuing this call. Another strategic line included in the project is the opening of a kind of—well, not exactly a play center, but rather a summer camp, which is not limited to the summer period. The problem is that very often during school holidays parents are working and do not have the same holidays as those provided by the school calendar. Therefore, this call provides, for example, camps and activities to be carried out during the summer period or even during the Christmas holidays, precisely to make it easier to manage time for those who have children. These calls will therefore be issued shortly, and we hope that the initiative will be successful. We have also done something else, however, to protect both female and male workers. We have created a register: on the website of the Municipality of Naples there is a register where all babysitters can enroll. Very often, as you know better than I do, on social media there are groups where families in difficulty ask if there are babysitters available or people who can take care of elderly individuals. So, instead of relying on social media, we wanted to create a platform where babysitters can register, with the hope of exercising oversight on our part and ensuring a safer matching between labor supply and demand. So, also in relation to what we were saying earlier, I would say that this evolution compared to the previous call represents an improvement aimed at protecting workers as well. Because very often—and this is an issue we must not forget—female workers, babysitters, are not paid correctly and not paid in accordance with all applicable regulations. This was therefore also a way to regulate the existing rules and to make everything safer and simpler, not only for those offering a job, but also for those providing a service.

Morena Pinto: What were the main challenges encountered in implementing the measure at the local level?

Assessora Marciani: Perhaps a bit of what I was saying earlier. Basically, the limited time didn't allow us to think through all the necessary precautions, so it wasn't possible to properly address aspects such as labor protection and how a service should be delivered in the best possible way. We hope that this second phase, also thanks to the experience and time we've gained, and always working together with the European partners and the Region, will allow us to improve the issues we identified.

Nadia Carcatella: Why weren't all the funds used?

Assessora Marciani: Well, this also relates to the issues I mentioned earlier. It's a topic that local administrations, not just ours in my opinion, should reflect on. Often information doesn't reach all citizens. Even now, for example, when we publish a notice for families who want to use a voucher, the problem remains: how can I be truly sure that all the families who might need this service know that it exists and that they can use it? Of course, I can't go on TikTok and make a video like someone younger might do, or for less serious topics, but simply posting the news on the official public register, which even I might not check regularly, can limit access to initiatives that should instead be widely publicized. So, for example, we create videos for "Videometro," we work on the Municipality's social media, and we try in these ways to spread the information as widely as possible.

Nadia Carcatella: Did families with children with disabilities or in particularly vulnerable situations receive greater attention in the distribution of the bonus?

Assessora Marciani: This is always an important issue and is given even more protection. Families with children with disabilities or difficulties have certainly been taken into consideration. There are additional forms of support that can be provided. Drawing on the experience of my colleague Luca Trapanese, who preceded me, we are trying to continue providing school transportation for children with disabilities, as well as support for babysitting at home, which can present challenges related to transport or accompanying children to recreational activities. So we're also thinking about this type of assistance, which is certainly an extra service that can make life easier for families.

Nadia Carcatella: Did the bonus reach the city's most vulnerable neighborhoods evenly, or did territorial inequalities emerge?

Assessora Marciani: You know, paradoxically, in some of the more fragile areas such measure is used less, also because there is often a family support network that replaces the need for a babysitter. There may be many women or larger families who can step in instead of hiring a babysitter. Another issue is the lack of full awareness about this measure. So there definitely isn't territorial uniformity in how this initiative is used.

Nadia Carcatella: Beyond this project funded with Cohesion Funds, what economic policies does the Metropolitan City of Naples implement to be closer to families with children?

Assessora Marciani: More than speaking for the Metropolitan City, I'll answer as the Municipality of Naples, because I'm more familiar with that. For the past two years, first of all, we have been approving the budget. As you know, the Municipality approves a budget that includes all the budget items needed to plan revenues and expenditures — in other words, spending and the money that comes in, whether from taxes paid by citizens or European funding. In addition to approving the budget, we have also approved what is called the social budget, meaning we have analyzed the impact of the budget on certain groups. So the resources allocated to young people and families have been carefully considered. There is certainly a lot of attention given to families with children. One critical issue remains, and we are working on it, but it takes time to resolve: housing. Rental costs are often still very high for

young families who want to get married or start out on their own, and many families struggle to find housing. So this is definitely a complicated issue for those who want to build their own family and independence. We have focused our attention on it and hope to keep improving, also by making more housing available for vulnerable groups. We are also working on social projects, making assets available. This is another important topic related to cohesion funds: properties confiscated from the mafia, on which many socially oriented projects are developed. The Municipality of Naples is implementing many of these projects, for example youth centers. So there are many activities we are trying to carry out, with particular attention in our budget to these issues.

Everyone: Thank you.

Assessora Marciani: Thank you. Any other questions or doubts?