

## Releasing FGTS withdrawal for daycare has limited effect – 05/06/2022 – Market

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The decision by the Jair Bolsonaro (PL) government to release the use of the FGTS (Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço) to pay for children's daycare should have a limited impact on the school inclusion of children up to three years old. In this age group, only one in four are in families whose head has a formal contract. The measure also encourages the enrollment of children in private daycare centers, using worker savings, at a time when Bolsonaro reduces public investments in the construction of daycare centers. Proinfância, the main federal program on this front, had its funds cut by 85% during the current administration. Investments increased from BRL 472 million in 2018, in values adjusted for inflation, to BRL 68 million last year. The release of the FGTS for parents with children up to five years old (age group referring to early childhood education, which includes daycare and preschool) was announced last Wednesday (4th) as a way to increase the employability of women. With no one to leave their children with, many of them are at a disadvantage in the dispute for a place in the job market or are even prevented from looking for a job. In the last quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate for women was 13.9%, against 9% for men, according to IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics). The participation rate of women is also lower, which indicates their unavailability to look for work. Despite recognizing the problem, experts criticize the option made by the government. They see a heavy, but not necessarily successful, bet on a system similar to the so-called voucher, in which there is a transfer of money directly to families to enroll their children in private daycare centers. The model was implemented in Auxílio Brasil, through the Auxílio Criança Cidadã, which pays from R\$200 to R\$300 for families with children up to four years of age without a place in public or private day care. The initiative is viewed with reservations by experts because the vast majority of children queuing for day care are in poor regions, which lack private schooling. The values would still be insufficient to guarantee quality schools, amplifying inequality. In the case of the FGTS, the money comes out of the worker's own pocket, since the fund is a private savings account. In addition, not everyone has access to the FGTS, as it is a benefit provided for workers with a formal contract. Analysis of Todos Pela Educação, made at the request of the Sheet, shows that only 25% of children up to three years out of school belong to families whose head has a formal job. Another 5% are primarily responsible for military personnel or statutory servants, who are also formalized, but do not have FGTS. The survey considers a cut of the educational profile based on the Continuous 2019 Pnad (National Household Sample Survey), the latest available data. Of the total of 6.6 million children up to three years out of school, 27% are in families whose parent is outside the workforce — that is, neither working nor looking for a job. In the speech, early childhood education would be a priority of the Bolsonaro government. This, however, is not reflected in reality. When questioned, the MEC did not respond. In the first quarter of this year, for example, expenses with daycare centers were lower than those directed towards the purchase of robotics kits from a company allied to the mayor, Arthur Lira (PP-AL), as shown by the Sheet. International research has reinforced the importance of early childhood education. The lack of places in day care centers, however, is one of the main educational bottlenecks in the country. Brazil still needs to enroll 2.2 million children up to three years of age in day care centers to reach the goal of the National Education Plan of having at least half of this age group enrolled. At the press conference to announce the measure, the executive secretary of the Ministry of Labor and Pensions, Bruno Dalcolmo, acknowledged that the release of the FGTS has a limited effect. "We understand that, given the volume of workers, the measure will not cover all the demand for federal daycare centers," he said. According to him, the measure may be an additional option to the provision of daycare centers by the government. "But obviously the effort is quite big to increase the employability of women, and for that we need alternatives", affirmed Dalcolmo. The president of Todos, Priscila Cruz, says she does not identify anything positive in the authorization to use the FGTS for families to pay for private day care. "It's not even a public resource directed to the private network [como ocorre com o voucher ou redes conveniadas]. It's as if the woman is paying for a private daycare, she doesn't have any public policy benefits, she's just rescuing her money", says Cruz, who emphasizes the greater importance of daycare the poorer the family. Economist Marcelo Neri, director of the Center for Social Policies at FGV (Fundação Getúlio Vargas), states that the measure is correct in the diagnosis that access to day care improves and preserves women's employment, but inadequate in design and operation. "There is a strong belief in daycare vouchers, and this is an optimistic, not to say unrealistic, vision," says Neri. "Instead of giving [as vagas] via state, the voucher is given and the family can choose. The paper accepts this well, but in practice it is not so simple, having the money in your pocket and this will guarantee a good daycare for your child." The specialist says that the offer of places in day care centers is not flexible in the short term. Even if the increased purchasing power of parents encourages the private sector to build new daycare centers, this is not done overnight. "As important as launching is monitoring and evaluating the policy", warns Neri. Under the Bolsonaro government, total enrollment in public daycare centers had the first drop in 20 years, according to data from 2020, prior to the pandemic. The public network had a 2.3% drop in enrollments when comparing data between 2019 and 2021. "The government only bet on raising education flags on topics of electoral interest to Bolsonaro's base, such as home education, militarization of education, identity and gender issues. Cross. The country has an average of 37% of children up to three years old in day care, according to the Statistical Yearbook of Basic Education of the Todos Pela Educação Movement. By segregating families by income level, schooling at this stage is 54.3% among the richest 25%. At the other extreme, for the poorest, the rate is 28%. The level of enrollment in preschool, from four to five years old, is higher: 94.1% of children of that age are in school.

