

INTERNATIONAL DAY  
**17** FOR THE **ERADICATION**  
OCT. **OF POVERTY**

# ERADICATING POVERTY THROUGH LOCAL & NATIONAL STRATEGIES

## BELGIUM

# POVERTY WATCH 2025



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK



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**EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK**



**Belgian Anti-Poverty Network**

# Poverty Watch - Belgium

# 2025

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## About BAPN

The Belgian Anti-Poverty Network (BAPN) aims to combat the structural causes of poverty and social exclusion throughout Belgium. BAPN focuses on advising, supporting and influencing federal and European policy, always based on the experiences of people living in poverty.

In order to represent the voice of people living in poverty in federal and European policy, BAPN works closely with its members, the four regional anti-poverty networks and their affiliated associations where people living in poverty take the floor. These networks are:

- Vlaams Netwerk tegen Armoede (NTA)
- Réseau Wallon de Lutte contre la Pauvreté (RWLP)
- Forum – Brussels contre les Inégalités (Le Forum)
- Brussels Platform Armoede (BPA)

Through this close cooperation with the regional networks and local associations in Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia, BAPN keeps its finger on the pulse of what is happening on the ground and develops collectively supported positions at national, federal and European policy level. This enables BAPN to provide policy analyses, advices and recommendations that reflect what is happening on the ground and enjoy broad support among people living in poverty.

Cooperation with regional networks has been established to ensure the effective and efficient participation of people living in poverty in federal and European policy-making. The regional networks and their affiliated local associations are in direct contact with people experiencing poverty themselves. They prepare people experiencing poverty<sup>1</sup> so that they can participate in the consultations organised by BAPN on federal and European policy issues. BAPN coordinates these meetings, establishes the necessary links with federal and European policy processes and ensures that a common position is developed on the basis of the exchanges. If information on a particular topic is already available from one or more regional networks, which may be the case for matters that are federal, regional and/or local, BAPN brings this information together and checks it with the other networks in order to arrive at a national position.

In addition, BAPN works in partnership with other civil society organisations on its policy dossiers. This not only allows us to exchange information with our partners, but also enables us to assess which positions are widely supported by different groups in our society and to communicate these effectively to policymakers together with our partners.

Finally, BAPN is also part of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), the largest network defending the interests and rights of people in poverty at European level. Together with the other members of EAPN, consisting of national members across Europe and a number of European organisations working with

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<sup>1</sup> For example, through training in participation, assisting people to create a safe environment for dialogue, reaching out to and supporting those who are furthest removed from society, etc.

specific target groups, we advise the European Union (EU) on policy through EAPN. It also enables us to closely monitor European policy work and its implementation in Belgium and to advise Belgian authorities on this.

## Introduction

This edition of EAPN's European Poverty Watch focuses on national and local poverty plans. The reason behind this choice is that the European Commission will adopt its first ever European poverty strategy in January 2026. Together with its members, EAPN will examine how this European poverty strategy and national and local poverty plans can be coordinated and reinforce each other.

In order to contribute to the European Poverty Watch, but also to keep a finger on the pulse of Belgian poverty policy, the Belgian Poverty Watch will focus this year on the federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality.

We begin in the first chapter by outlining the current situation and recent trends in poverty and social exclusion in Belgium. In the second chapter, we describe the history of the federal poverty plans. In chapter 3, we focus specifically on the 2023 law to strengthen federal poverty policy. This law is an important milestone, as it makes it compulsory to draw up a federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality and attaches a number of conditions to it, such as consulting people living in poverty (via BAPN) and relevant stakeholders (via the Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion). In Chapter 4, we zoom in on the drafting of the new – fifth – federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality, which is currently underway. Chapter 5 provides an overview of how the participation of people living in poverty in the plan has evolved and explains why the direct participation of people living in poverty is important in order to achieve an inclusive and high-quality plan. Finally, we conclude with our recommendations for the future fifth plan in Chapter 6.

## 1. Poverty and social exclusion in Belgium

### 1.1. Current situation

The latest official poverty figures were published by Statbel, the Belgian statistical office, on 29 January 2025.<sup>2</sup> These are the results of EU-SILC 2024, which means that they relate to the income situation in 2023 and living conditions as surveyed in 2024.

In Belgium, 2,121,000 people live in poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), which corresponds to 18.2% of the population.

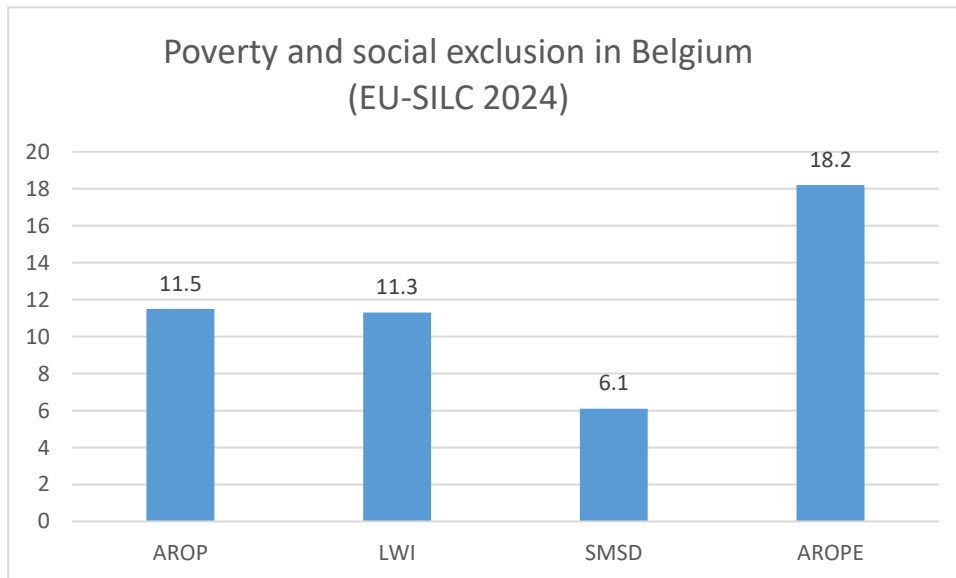
When we look at the sub-indicators of the AROPE indicator, we see the following results:

- **Monetary poverty risk (AROP):** 11.5% of the Belgian population, or 1,338,000 people in total, have a disposable income below the European poverty threshold. For a single person, this threshold is 18,235 euro per year, or 1,520 euro per month (compared to 1,450 euro the previous year). For a household consisting of two adults and two dependent children, this amounts to 3,191 euro per month (compared to 3,045 euro in the previous year).

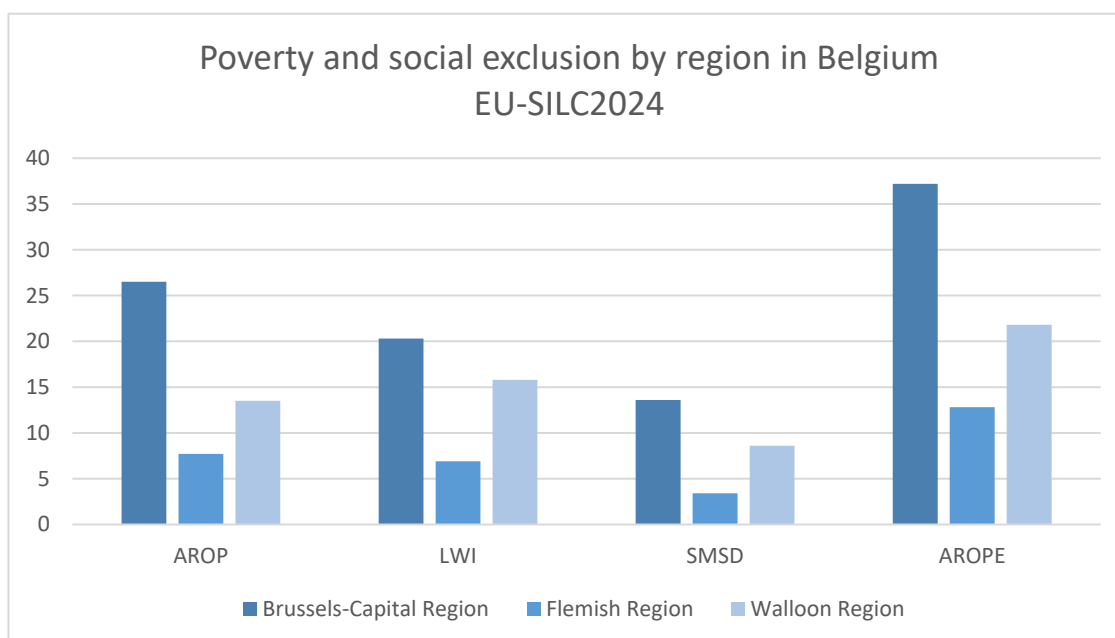
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<sup>2</sup> Statbel, [Risk of poverty or social exclusion | Statbel](#)

- **Low work intensity (LWI):** 11.3% of the population, or 1,014,000 people in total, live in a household where the adults of working age have worked very little in the past 12 months (i.e. less than 20% of their total potential).
- **Severe material and social deprivation (SMSD):** 6.1% of the population, or 711,000 people in total, suffer from severe material and social deprivation, i.e. they are unable to afford certain everyday expenses (paying bills, replacing worn-out furniture, going out regularly, etc.), which are considered necessary to maintain an acceptable standard of living.



There are significant regional differences in poverty rates. In the Brussels-Capital Region, no less than 37.2% of the population, almost 4 in 10, live in poverty or social exclusion. In Wallonia, the figure is 21.8%, more than 1 in 4 people. Although Flanders scores better, here too 12.8%, more than 1 in 10 people, live in poverty or social exclusion.



Some population groups are proportionally more affected by poverty and social exclusion than others. These are the following groups for which we show their risk of monetary poverty according to EU-SILC 2024<sup>3</sup> :

| Vulnerable group                                             | AROP (EU-SILC2024) (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Unemployed persons                                           | 43                     |
| Quasi-jobless households                                     | 45.3                   |
| Persons with a non-EU migration background                   | 28.3                   |
| Single parents                                               | 25.5                   |
| Tenants                                                      | 20.9                   |
| People with low levels of education                          | 23.5                   |
| People restricted in daily activities due to health problems | 14.7                   |

<sup>3</sup> FPS Social Security (2025), Analysis of the evolution of the social situation and social protection in Belgium, <https://socialsecurity.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/docs/en/publications/silc/silc-analysis-social-situation-and-protection-belgium-2024-results-en.pdf>

|                                         |      |
|-----------------------------------------|------|
| <b>Children (under 18 years of age)</b> | 14.5 |
|-----------------------------------------|------|

When we look at the AROPE indicator, it appears that women are slightly more affected by poverty or social exclusion than men, with 18.9% compared to 17.6%. However, these figures only reflect the difference between single men and women. The EU-SILC data assumes that a person in the same household is at the same risk of poverty as the rest of the household. However, the latest available statistics show that 70% of people experiencing individual poverty are women. Within the household, this situation of individual poverty leads to a high degree of financial dependence by women.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2. Developments

In the context of the European poverty target of the European Pillar of Social Rights, namely to lift at least 15 million people in the European Union (EU) out of poverty by 2030, including at least 5 million children, Belgium has committed to contributing to this by lifting at least 279,000 people out of poverty by 2030, including at least 93,000 children. This would mean that by 2030, the number of people in poverty and social exclusion (AROPE) would be reduced to 1,981,000 and the number of children to 461,000.

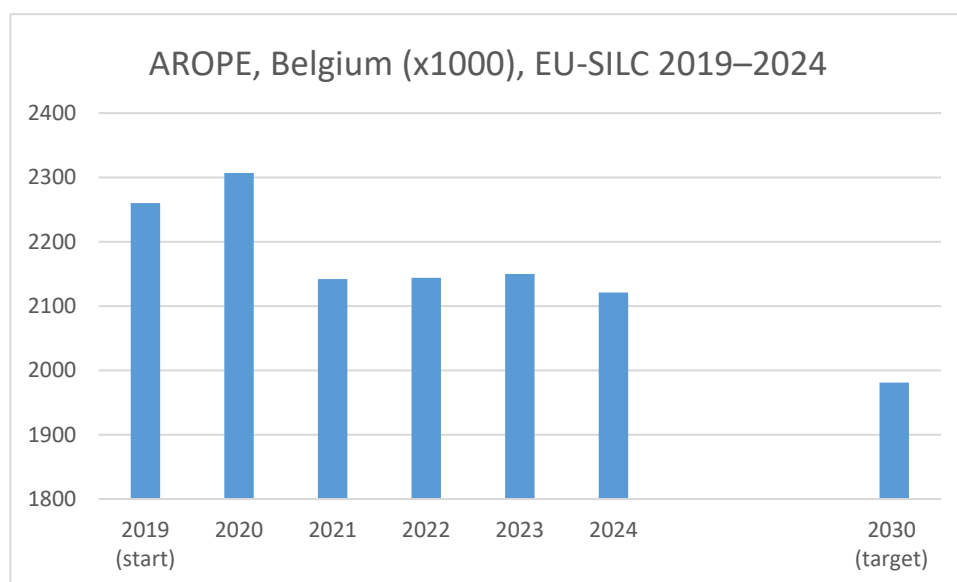
### *Cautious positive evolution over the last 5 years*

Although poverty figures have remained stubbornly stable for 30 years<sup>5</sup> and little progress has been made, we have seen a cautious positive trend in recent years.<sup>6</sup> When we compare the AROPE figures EU-SILC 2019 (start of the measurement to achieve the 2030 target) with EU-SILC 2024, we see a decrease from 2,260,000 to 2,121,000 people in poverty, which means that 139,000 people have been lifted out of poverty over the last 5 years. To achieve the 2030 target, another 140,000 people must be lifted out of poverty.

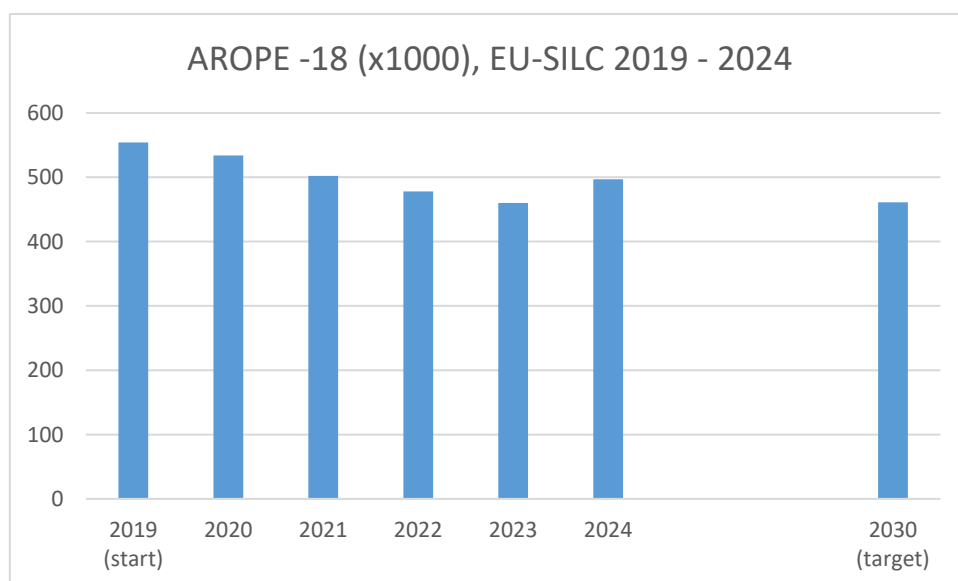
<sup>4</sup> Statbel (2019), Income inequalities between women and men and individual poverty, [https://statbel.fgov.be/sites/default/files/files/documents/Analyse/NL/7\\_NL\\_ongelijkheid\\_web\\_v3.pdf](https://statbel.fgov.be/sites/default/files/files/documents/Analyse/NL/7_NL_ongelijkheid_web_v3.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> University of Antwerp (2021), Yearbook on Poverty and Social Exclusion 2021, [6b9a2607-773a-4ce2-bc43-562a7c1b689c.pdf](https://www.uva-antwerp.be/sites/default/files/2021-12/6b9a2607-773a-4ce2-bc43-562a7c1b689c.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> FPS Social Security (2025), Analysis of the evolution of the social situation and social protection in Belgium, <https://socialsecurity.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/docs/en/publications/silc/silc-analysis-social-situation-and-protection-belgium-2024-results-en.pdf>



When we look at the figures for child poverty, we see that there was a positive trend from 2019 to 2023 and that the 2030 target of reducing the number of children in poverty by 93,000 was already achieved in 2023 (544,000 in 2019 compared to 460,000 in 2023). In 2024, however, the number of children in poverty rose again by 37,000 to a level of 497,000.



Despite the fact that the AROPE indicator for children rose again last year, we can observe a positive trend for this indicator in general over the past five years (for the population as a whole). The main driving force behind this trend is the evolution of the AROP indicator. In other words, the most significant progress was mainly achieved through a reduction in monetary poverty (a decrease of 3.3% or 332,000 people over the last five years).

The underlying factors responsible for this can be found in the substantial increase in minimum social benefits towards the European poverty threshold. Minimum pensions and minimum wages were also

increased. More stable and full-time employment was also achieved in families with little connection to the labour market.<sup>7</sup>

*The number of people in particularly vulnerable situations is increasing*

Despite this positive trend, it is still too early to celebrate. The number of people in particularly vulnerable situations is increasing. They are finding it increasingly difficult to connect with society and are at risk of falling completely behind:

- In this context, we are thinking of the increasing number of people experiencing homelessness in Belgium. According to the latest figures, 20,363 people are homeless in Flanders and 19,387 in Wallonia, which is higher than expected.<sup>8</sup> In 2024, 9,777 homeless people were counted in the Brussels Region, an increase of 24.5% compared to 2022.<sup>9</sup>
- The number of people who have to turn to food banks to survive also remains alarmingly high. Although there is a small decrease of 2% to 208,925 beneficiaries in 2024 compared to 2023, the strong upward trend continues (for example, in 2021 there were 177,238 beneficiaries, in 2000 there were 92,223).<sup>10</sup>
- Over the past 15 years, we have seen a doubling in the number of people claiming minimum income schemes<sup>11</sup> (169,212 people in April 2025). The minimum income scheme is the last safety net for those who have no or insufficient means of subsistence and have not accrued any or sufficient social rights to be able to live in dignity. This evolution can be explained by, on the one hand, tightening of social security and, on the other hand, social trends such as more single people, more young people studying on a minimum income scheme and migration.
- We note that the positive trend in monetary poverty does not apply to certain vulnerable groups, such as people who are unemployed. The number of unemployed rose to 43% in 2024 (compared to 41.3% in 2023).
- As mentioned above, the number of children living in poverty has risen again in the last year. It is important to monitor closely whether this decline will be confirmed or not. Child poverty is particularly problematic because it deprives children of their rights and reduces their opportunities in later life.

*Arizona government policy*

How the situation of people living in poverty and social exclusion will evolve and whether Belgium will achieve its 2030 poverty targets depends on the interaction between various factors, such as socio-

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<sup>7</sup> Van Lancker, W. (2024), Poverty and the lower middle class in Belgium and Flanders: an update. Study commissioned by Decenniumdoelen and Denktank Minerva, [VanLancker ArmoedeInBelgie actualisering\[42\].pdf](#); FPS Social Security (2025), Analysis of the evolution of the social situation and social protection in Belgium, <https://socialsecurity.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/docs/en/publications/silc/silc-analysis-social-situation-and-protection-belgium-2024-results-en.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Mertens, N., Demaerschalk, E., Marana, A., De Moor, N., Moriau, J., Wagener, M. & Hermans, K. (2025). Homelessness. Global report 2025. Leuven: LUCAS KU Leuven, [Global report on counts 2024](#)

<sup>9</sup> Bruss'help (2025), Increase in homelessness in the Brussels-Capital Region. What the 2022 census shows, [Increase in homelessness in the Brussels-Capital Region: what the 2024 census shows - Poverty and Social Exclusion](#)

<sup>10</sup> Belgian Federation of Food Banks (2024), Annual Report, [Presentation EN.indd](#)

<sup>11</sup> Leefloon in Dutch or Revenu d'Intégration Sociale (RIS) in French.

demographic developments, (international) economic developments and the policies of the various governments in our country.<sup>12</sup>

The new policy of the Arizona government, the federal government that has been officially in office since 3 February 2025, does not bode well in this respect. The government presents itself as a reformist government that wants to tackle major challenges (affordability of social security and social assistance, uncertainty of energy supply, migration, underfunding of security services, etc.) while at the same time putting public finances in order.

As explained above, the cautious decline in poverty rates can be explained by a combination of better income protection (increased minimum pensions, benefits and wages) and rising employment, mainly among families where there was little or no work.

These measures will not be continued by the current government. On the contrary, under the guise of increasing employment and providing social support to 'those who really need it', far-reaching restrictions are being imposed on social security and social assistance. Examples include measures such as limiting the duration of unemployment benefits, capping social benefits and allowances, phasing out family pensions and equalising periods of non-employment for pensions, further restrictions on integration benefits<sup>13</sup> for young people, the abolition of the welfare envelope and the restriction of social rights and support for newcomers.<sup>14</sup>

These measures will erode income protection for people on low incomes and vulnerable groups (instead of strengthening it, even though this has been an important factor in the recent decline in poverty rates). As a result of the increasing conditionality of social security and social assistance, people will also find it more difficult to access their social rights and assistance. Some will even be completely excluded. We expect that in the coming years more people will turn to the PSWC (Public Centre for Social Welfare), even though these services are already overburdened, and that the number of people receiving social assistance will increase even further. Furthermore, we are concerned that not only will there be a shift from social security (based on social rights) to social assistance, but that the group of people who can no longer even claim social assistance, the last social safety net, will become even larger, which in the long term will lead to more extreme poverty in Belgium.

*"The reduction in unemployment benefits will have serious consequences. Due to the cohabitation status, 140,000 people who are excluded from unemployment benefits will lose their income. They have nowhere else to turn. It is mainly women who will be affected."* Participant of the GPS group

Although the government claims to be committed to increasing employment, this seems to be achieved mainly by restricting access to social benefits and advantages and capping these incomes. In other words, responsibility for employment is reduced to the individual responsibility of the unemployed person, while ignoring the fact that the government and employers also have an important role to play in this (e.g. in terms of guidance, training, organising workable work, etc.). As a result, regional governments are not

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<sup>12</sup> FPS Social Security (2025), Analysis of the evolution of the social situation and social protection in Belgium, <https://socialsecurity.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/docs/en/publications/silc/silc-analysis-social-situation-and-protection-belgium-2024-results-en.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Inschakelingsuitkeringen in Dutch or allocations d'insertion in French.

<sup>14</sup> See federal coalition agreement

doing enough to increase employment opportunities and, in some regions, they are even cutting back on employment services.<sup>15</sup>

The rhetoric of offering help 'to those who really need it' and the strong focus on combating benefit fraud are mainly based on anecdotal evidence and a gut feeling that benefit fraud in Belgium is very high. Insufficient account is taken of studies and experiences in the field. To give a concrete example, the non-take-up rate for the living wage is around 46%, which means that almost half of those eligible for a minimum income scheme do not obtain this entitlement.<sup>16</sup> This contrasts sharply with the fact that social fraud among those entitled to the minimum income scheme is rather limited (4.59%).<sup>17</sup> In order to increase employment opportunities and combat poverty, efforts must be focused on combating the non-take-up of social rights, so that people have sufficient financial and mental space to, for example, look for work and follow training courses, rather than restricting social rights and excluding people. The current overfocus of policy makers combating social fraud leads to heavier and less efficient procedures, increases the distance between social workers and benefit recipients through more controls and sanctions (and less space and time for guidance and building relationships of trust) and makes access to social rights more difficult and even excludes people in poverty from their social rights altogether (including those who really need them!).

*"Do some people still deserve permanent benefits without additional obligations, knowing that they cannot find or get a place anywhere, not even within the education and labour markets, due to specific factors such as mental health labels, stigmas, compulsory medication, no paid work experience, gaps in their CVs, low education, and no or too little mobility in their unchosen places of residence in rural areas?"* Participant of the GPS group

The federal government justifies its reforms, including cuts in social security and social assistance, as a necessity to get public finances in order and to reduce the budget deficit. However, in a recent report on the budgetary impact of the government's policy<sup>18</sup>, Court of Auditors is critical of the government's budgetary work and warns that the calculations for return on investment are insufficiently substantiated and overestimated. It also points out that it is unclear how the government will finance the additional military expenditure promised to meet the NATO standard. Experts from academia and civil society already expect that the government will have to seek additional resources during the next budget review. We are concerned that the government will seek these resources through cuts in social security and welfare, thereby further affecting people living in poverty. Finally, we would like to emphasise that, in the short term, it may seem attractive to make savings on social policy and poverty reduction, but in the long term it will be much more expensive for our national budget to lift people out of poverty, and the costs will also be felt in social terms (education, employment, health, security, democracy, etc.).

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<sup>15</sup> ACV (2025), Why is Flanders cutting back on good career policy?, [Why is Flanders cutting back on good career policy?](#)

<sup>16</sup> KULeuven & UCLouvain (2024), Study on non-take-up of social assistance and derived rights (study commissioned by the POD Social Integration), [Report A4 ENGLISH-HIVA](#)

<sup>17</sup> PwC (2013), Study on social fraud at PSWC, Final report (study commissioned by the POD Social Integration), [final report social fraud 1.pdf](#)

<sup>18</sup> Court of Audit (2025), Comments and observations on the draft state budget for the 2025 financial year, [Comments and observations on the draft state budget for the 2025 financial year](#)

## 2. Federal poverty plans in Belgium

In Belgium, poverty plans are adopted at both federal and regional level. At local level, too, several cities and municipalities are taking the initiative to draw up local plans to combat poverty.

At federal level, four federal plans against poverty and inequality have already been adopted:

- [First Federal Plan to Combat Poverty](#) (4 July 2008)
- [Second Federal Plan to Combat Poverty](#) (14 September 2012)
- [Third Plan to Combat Poverty](#) (20 July 2016)
- [Fourth Plan against Poverty and Inequality](#) (15 July 2022)

The first federal Anti-Poverty Plan was an important step forward in the fight against poverty at federal level because it gave visibility to measures to combat poverty. However, the plan was open to improvement. For example, it was mainly a collection of actions from the coalition agreement that could be linked to the fight against poverty. No consultation or participation was organised in advance. The plan served primarily as a communication and awareness-raising tool. It did, however, support the development of a number of tools in the fight against poverty that still exist today (the poverty barometer, the service of experts by experience and the poverty reduction award). It also provided (financial) support to the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network to ensure that people living in poverty could participate in the Belgian Presidency of the EU in 2010.

Driven by the audits of the Court of Auditors<sup>19</sup>, the plan was professionalised through subsequent plans in terms of measurable objectives, monitoring and evaluation, the use of indicators, the involvement of the relevant administrations and the use of action sheets. The privileged partners, including BAPN in its capacity as representative of people living in poverty, were given more say in the development, monitoring and evaluation of the plan. Alongside this, there was also more scope to include new measures in the plan and implement them, in addition to the measures in the coalition agreement.

There are also regional poverty plans at the level of the communities and regions. The Interministerial Conference is responsible for coordinating between the different levels. Local poverty plans are also drawn up several the municipalities at the local level.

## 3. Act to strengthen federal policy against poverty and inequality

### 3.1. Legal anchoring of the federal plan and instruments in the fight against poverty

The Act of 9 October 2023 to strengthen federal poverty policy represents an important step forward in the fight against poverty and inequality in Belgium. Poverty is, after all, a multidimensional problem over which the federal policy level also has important competences that are indispensable for a structural approach to poverty and social exclusion. Examples include social security, social integration, the fight against debt, consumer protection, employment, health, justice, migration, taxation, climate, energy, etc.

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<sup>19</sup> See, among other things, the Court of Audit's comprehensive audit of the second federal poverty plan: Court of Audit (2016), Second Federal Poverty Reduction Plan. Report in implementation of the resolution of 17 December 2015 of the Chamber of Representatives, [Second Federal Poverty Reduction Plan](#).

We base this on the definition of poverty that has been refined by scientific research over decades and has been in use since 1992: "Poverty is a network of social exclusions that extends across multiple areas of individual and collective existence."<sup>20</sup> Visually, this can be represented as a poverty web consisting of different areas of life that are intertwined<sup>21</sup> :



The Act of 9 October 2023 further elaborates on Article 23 of the Belgian Constitution, which guarantees the right to a dignified life, including:

- the right to work,
- the right to social security, health protection, and social, medical and legal assistance,
- the right to decent housing, protection of a healthy environment, and cultural and social development.

Poverty reduction was already an essential part of federal policy before the law was passed. As described above, the federal government had adopted various poverty plans in the past, poverty reduction was described as one of the issues to be addressed in various federal coalition agreements, and various secretaries of state or ministers were responsible for the fight against poverty. The follow-up, decision-making and implementation of European and international social and poverty policy, including the Belgian

<sup>20</sup> See, among other things, the most recent edition of the 'Yearbook on Poverty and Inequality', <https://medialibrary.uantwerpen.be/files/99421/bde80ea4-a228-4f5a-9bfe-c6e02b231f80.pdf> p.409

<sup>21</sup> Source: PSC Open House, association where poor people have their say, [Training offer – PSC Open House](#)

Presidency of the EU, was also coordinated by the federal government. Instruments were also created to combat poverty, such as the establishment of the Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Inequality as an actor and forum for federal and European poverty policy, the network of federal civil servants responsible for poverty and the support of stakeholders involved in the fight against poverty, in particular the federations of the PSWCs, BAPN and the inter-federal Service to Combat Poverty.

Thanks to the Act of 9 October 2023, the federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality is now enshrined in law. This means that from now on, every new federal government is obliged to adopt an anti-poverty plan and that this plan must comply with certain principles and formal requirements (see below). The above-mentioned instruments have also been given a legal basis.

### **3.2. Principles and formal requirements of the federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality**

The Act of 9 October 2023 stipulates that the federal plan must pursue an inclusive and participatory poverty reduction policy based on the following principles:

- Guaranteeing every citizen access to the economic, social and cultural rights enshrined in Article 23 of the Constitution;
- Preventing, reducing and resolving poverty, precariousness and social exclusion;
- Pursuing a cross-cutting policy;
- Determining targeted actions based on a partnership between all actors involved

The plan must be approved by the federal government one year after it takes office and will remain in force throughout the entire legislative term. The plan sets out the measures that each minister and state secretary at federal level must take to achieve the objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The plan must be the result of joint efforts by all ministers and secretaries of state and is therefore the responsibility of the entire government. However, the minister responsible for combating poverty has a special role to play. This minister ensures the overall coordination and sets the timetable for the implementation of each measure in the plan in consultation with the competent minister or state secretary. Monitoring and evaluation are carried out by the minister responsible for combating poverty in conjunction with the Social Integration Administration. The regions should primarily be consulted via the IMC in order to seek synergies with regional plans.

Each measure in the federal plan must include a quantitative target and budget estimate, as well as the deadline for implementation of the measure. Where necessary, the gender and disability dimensions must be specified for each measure.

During the drafting of the plan, prior consultation must take place with the Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, the privileged partners, including BAPN, and the network of federal civil servants responsible for poverty. Once the plan has been approved by the federal government, it must be submitted to the Chamber of Representatives. The implementation of the actions is monitored by the FPS Social Integration and the network of civil servants responsible for poverty within the federal government on the basis of a detailed monitoring system. An annual evaluation of the strategic and operational objectives of the plan will be carried out. The annual evaluation report will include a description, analysis

and evaluation of the poverty policy pursued and will be submitted to the competent ministers, the Belgian Platform and the privileged partners, including BAPN. It will also be presented to the Chamber of Representatives. The final evaluation is carried out by the Federal Planning Bureau within six months of the plan's conclusion and is sent to the government and the Chamber. The Belgian Platform and the privileged partners, including BAPN, are invited to submit a final evaluation as well.

#### 4. Fifth Federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality

During the preparation of the FPS Social Integration for the fifth federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality (in the autumn of 2024, when no federal government had yet been formed), BAPN, as a privileged partner, completed the POD Social Integration files to identify the biggest challenges in terms of poverty and social exclusion in the medium and long term and to formulate proposals for action. BAPN also contributed to the joint opinion of the Belgian Platform in preparation for the fifth federal plan.<sup>22</sup>

Work on the fifth federal plan will then resume after the federal government takes office in February 2025. An important anchor point is the policy note "Poverty Reduction"<sup>23</sup> of 24 April 2025 from the Minister for Poverty Reduction. This confirms the law of 9 October 2023 and outlines a number of important principles in the implementation of the fifth federal plan:

- The PPS Social Integration is tasked with organising bilateral consultations with the relevant federal ministers and administrations, as well as with the partners recognised by law (including BAPN).
- These partners will be involved in the various stages of the Plan (drafting, follow-up, evaluation). As provided for in the anti-poverty Act, support will be granted to these privileged partners to carry out these tasks.
- It is also very important to hear directly from people living in poverty when drawing up the plan. To this end, in 2025, the Minister will organise a direct dialogue with people living in poverty.
- The Plan must be consistent with other federal and regional plans in order to ensure coherence between the various types of poverty reduction policies. The PPS Social Integration must also organise consultations with the federal government administrations responsible for other relevant federal action plans.
- Each measure mentioned in the plan will be accompanied by a budget estimate, an ex-ante impact analysis and a numerical target that will make it possible to measure the impact. Preference will be given to an evidence-based policy approach.
- In addition, the structural poverty indicators should be complemented with the reference budgets developed by the 'Expertise Centre for Budget and Financial Well-being' (CEBUD). These reference budgets will form an additional indicator in the federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality.

On 23 and 25 June, the PPS Social Integration organised four working groups on the four main themes of the fifth federal plan, namely debt, health, purchasing power and social integration, on behalf of the

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<sup>22</sup> Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Inequality (2024), Preparation of the fifth federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality, joint advice, [\(NL\) Preparation of the Federal Plan against Poverty Reduction – joint advice Belgian platform.docx](#)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.dekamer.be/doc/FLWB/pdf/56/0856/56K0856010.pdf>

Minister for the Fight against Poverty. BAPN participated in these working groups with people living in poverty and representatives of the regional anti-poverty networks. In the autumn of 2025, based on the input from the working groups, the consultation between the Minister for the Fight against Poverty and the other ministers responsible for these themes, and the input from the federal civil servants responsible for poverty, a memorandum will be developed that will form the basis for the fifth plan. This memorandum will be submitted for discussion to the above-mentioned partners. The fifth federal plan is scheduled to be adopted on 3 February 2026 (one year after the federal government takes office, as required by law).

In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at the participation of people in poverty during the fifth federal plan.

## 5. Participation of people living in poverty

*"It is not motivating for people if their contribution is not valued. A bit of consultation is not enough. In this way, people eventually drop out and politicians miss the opportunity to learn from experiences that can help them develop a good anti-poverty policy. In fact, we believe that the presence of experts by experience at decisive moments is highly desirable. So, please give us a say in the whole policy process, please give us hope, we have had enough of despair."* Participant in the BAPN GPS group

During the first four federal plans against poverty and inequality, BAPN, in its capacity as representative of people living in poverty, closely monitored them. To illustrate how BAPN has contributed to the plan in the past, we can take the fourth plan as an example. At the request of the Minister for the Fight against Poverty, BAPN made its proposals and recommendations for the plan<sup>24</sup> and explained them during a consultation with the Minister, her cabinet and the Federal Public Service Social Integration.<sup>25</sup> During the follow-up and monitoring, several consultations were organised between the Minister, BAPN and the other privileged partners. BAPN also participated in the meetings of the Belgian Platform and contributed to the recommendations on the fourth plan that were written within this platform. Furthermore, BAPN organised two consultations between the Minister for the Fight against Poverty and people living in poverty themselves in order to establish a direct dialogue on the fourth plan.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned above, the role of the privileged partners and the Belgian Platform was formalised by the Act of 9 October 2023, which was an initiative within the framework of the fourth plan. Finally, BAPN also completed a questionnaire to evaluate the fourth federal plan<sup>27</sup> and several recommendations were included in the evaluation report of the PPS Social Integration.

One of the most important recommendations made by BAPN in the context of the fourth federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality is that people living in poverty should be able to participate directly in the various phases of the fifth federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality. Due to the short time frame for formulating proposals for the plan, there was insufficient scope for this. Although BAPN's

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<sup>24</sup> BAPN (2021), Fourth federal poverty reduction plan: BAPN proposals for concrete measures, [Federal poverty reduction plan proposals BAPN.pdf](#)

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2021), Joint advice FPA, [Joint advice BP FPA.pdf](#)

<sup>26</sup> Report of the meeting on 31/01/23: [BAPN | Report](#); Report of the meeting on 24/10/24: [BAPN | Report](#)

<sup>27</sup> BAPN's responses to the evaluation questionnaire for the fourth federal poverty plan: [Evaluation questionnaire on civil society involvement BAPN.pdf](#)

recommendations are always developed in a participatory manner together with people living in poverty, the direct involvement of people living in poverty in all phases of the plan would nevertheless constitute an important added value, as it would strengthen democratic values and offer the opportunity to test and adjust proposals and measures on the basis of practical experience in the field.

During the preparation of the fifth federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality, we were able to make progress in terms of direct participation, in agreement with the PPS Social Integration and the cabinet of the Minister for the Fight against Poverty. For example, BAPN set up its GPS group, whose mission is to monitor the fifth federal plan during the legislative period. This group consists of around 25 people living in poverty from the three regions (Flanders, Brussels, Wallonia) and takes into account representation in terms of age, gender and origin. Thanks to our close cooperation with regional networks and local associations where people living in poverty take the floor, there is preparation with and feedback to a larger group of people living in poverty. Depending on the theme, people with relevant experience join our meetings. The group meets every four to six weeks. Because the people have the ambition to guide the federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality, like a GPS, they have chosen to call themselves the GPS group.

*"Participation is not spending money but an investment. I participate to make a better world, also for my daughter. Politicians are the drivers and are at the wheel, but they have to follow the GPS, and that is people living in poverty."* Participant in the BAPN GPS group

As part of the preparations for the 5th Federal Plan to Combat Poverty and Inequality, BAPN has already organised two meetings between the PPS Social Integration and the GPS group:

- Meeting of 13 November 2024 with the PPS Social Integration: In the autumn of 2024, the PPS Social Integration mapped out the challenges relating to poverty and social equality in preparation for the federal plan for a future federal government. During the meeting with the PPS Social Integration, the GPS group contributed to this by answering the question 'What keeps me awake at night?'. An article summarising the main points of the meeting can be found here: [BAPN | Message.](#)
- Meeting of 24 June 2025 with the Minister's cabinet and the PPS Social Integration: The first meeting with the PPS Social Integration revealed a lack of income as an underlying problem in many challenges (debt, climate justice, access to essential services and digitisation, etc.). This meeting therefore focused on the theme of income in relation to the plans in the federal coalition agreement, which had been adopted on 12 February 2025.

In addition, the BAPN team, together with people experiencing poverty, participated in the working groups preparing the fifth plan. A meeting with the Minister for Poverty Reduction and the GPS group is scheduled for 28 October.

## 6. Recommendations from BAPN

Since 2008, Belgium has had several federal plans against poverty and inequality at the national level. We note a number of positive developments over the years:

- The 2023 Act to strengthen federal poverty policy gave the federal plan a legal basis and requires each federal government to approve a plan within 12 months.

- The Act also ensured that BAPN, in its capacity as representative of the voice of people in poverty, is recognised as a privileged partner and must be consulted at the various stages of the plan. It is positive that, in the context of the drafting of the fifth federal plan, BAPN is being given the opportunity to organise the direct participation of people in poverty.
- The Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion consults with the wider civil society, academics and other interested stakeholders.
- The plan is more than a collection of measures from the federal coalition agreement; there is also the possibility of proposing new measures.
- Over the years, the plan has become more professional (for instance due to an improved monitoring and evaluation system).
- In the fourth federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality, raising the lowest benefits was one of the priorities. Unlike previous poverty plans that also included this measure, during the previous legislative period there was sufficient budget to bring the minimum benefits closer to the European poverty line. This was one of the measures that led to a decline in poverty rates for the first time in 30 years.

With regard to the fifth federal Plan against Poverty and Inequality, BAPN would like to make the following recommendations:

**1. Strengthen the participation of people living in poverty in the various phases of the plan:**

- Continue to support and embed the direct participation of people experiencing poverty in order to achieve a widely supported, inclusive and effective federal poverty plan.
- Provide the necessary support and resources to BAPN through a royal decree to enable it to organise the participation of people living in poverty in a qualitative manner.
- Ensure that people living in poverty are treated as actors in the process. Give them the opportunity to advise and support relevant government departments on measures where they have relevant expertise. Provide regular feedback on why certain policy choices are or are not being made.
- Consult the Belgian Platform at the various stages of the plan, as provided for in the 2023 Act.

**2. Ensure an integrated plan with a clear vision and impactful measures that will achieve the poverty targets:**

- Include in the plan a strong vision on the fight against poverty that is based on tackling the structural causes of poverty (and therefore does not fall into an individual blame model or fragmented policy).
- The coalition agreement contains measures, including in the chapter on poverty reduction, which experts fear will increase poverty rather than reduce it. Before implementing these measures, carry out a poverty test involving scientists, civil society organisations and people living in poverty. Where necessary, adjust these measures (or their implementation) to prevent an increase and deepening of poverty.
- Poverty is a multidimensional problem. Other areas, such as employment, energy and climate policy and the fight against social fraud, have a significant impact on the fight against poverty. It is therefore important not only to coordinate the federal plan with other policy areas, but also to place the plan on an equal footing (and that poverty is not an afterthought).

- Unlike previous plans, the fifth plan will focus only on a limited number of themes and actions with the aim of ensuring that they are actually implemented (rather than being a kind of 'wish list' of measures, only some of which are implemented). However, this should not prevent a number of measures that are important in the fight against poverty, but do not fall under the selected themes, from being included in the plan.

### 3. Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the plan:

- Ensure clearly formulated, concrete measures, with a timeframe and a budget, which are monitored and evaluated on the basis of quantitative and qualitative indicators. For each measure, it must be specified how it will contribute to the eradication of poverty.
- Plan annual evaluations with follow-up actions and a general discussion that can lead to adjustments and additional actions. Involve the Belgian Platform and people experiencing poverty themselves via BAPN.
- Ensure that the independent evaluation of the plan by the Federal Planning Bureau is carried out effectively, as provided for in the 2023 Act. Also involve the privileged partners in the evaluation, including BAPN as the representative of people experiencing poverty, and the Belgian Platform. Communicate transparently about the results of this evaluation, including the achievement of poverty targets and which measures have had a significant impact (positive and negative). This evaluation should be the subject of discussion in the Chamber of Representatives.

### 4. Strengthen coordination with regional poverty plans:

- As already mentioned, poverty is a multidimensional problem, which means that coordination between the federal and regional levels is essential in order to actually reduce poverty. Coordination between the federal government and the communities and regions is therefore essential. Regularly convene the Interministerial Conference (IMC) to coordinate federal and regional policies against poverty.
- Work together in the IMC on a number of specific areas or measures (e.g. debt, limiting the duration of unemployment, etc.) to develop effective policies to combat poverty. Involve people living in poverty, scientists and relevant actors in this process.
- Report transparently on the outcomes of the IMC.