

## SUMMARY

### Report to the federal Parliament: First federal plan to fight poverty



**In Belgium, one individual in five is at risk of poverty, i.e. more than 2,200,000 persons in 2010. Within the ‘Europe 2020’ growth strategy, Belgium has made a commitment to reduce this number to less than 1,814,000 by 2020.**

**In its report to the federal Parliament, the Court of Audit examines the quality, the implementation, the follow-up and the evaluation of the first federal plan to fight poverty. It makes recommendations to ensure that the plan’s contribution to poverty reduction is measurable. The Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty has committed herself to taking this report into account when the anti-poverty plan is updated as decided in the government agreement of 1 December 2011.**

The Council of Ministers adopted the first federal plan to fight poverty on 4 July 2008 in view of the European Year for Combating Poverty. This plan reflects the commitments taken by the federal government within the framework of the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It includes measures related to revenue, employment, health, housing, access to energy and public services.

This plan is a useful tool for communication and raising awareness. It takes into consideration the needs expressed by associations representing the poorest population groups. It mobilized all members of the federal government.

The Court of Audit notes however that the plan’s quality could be significantly improved. In order to be effective, the plan must aim at a measurable objective of poverty reduction. Furthermore, the extent to which the measures contribute to this objective must rely on preliminary studies and the public authorities in charge of implementing them must be involved in the decision-making process (goal-setting, programming, implementation, follow-up and evaluation).

However, the plan’s measures and objectives are formulated generally, without quantified targets, deadlines or budget estimates.

An investigation conducted in 2011 by the Court of Audit in seventeen federal public services has also shown that these services had hardly been called upon when the plan was drawn up. Moreover, they were little informed of the motivation and the logical course of action for the measures they were supposed to implement.

The ministers entrusted the public services with implementing the plan's measures without providing for a mechanism to translate the general measures into concrete actions. On the other hand, the quarterly monitoring imposed by the Council of Ministers does not meet the expectations, as its periodicity is not respected and its content is insufficient.

A network of « anti-poverty » officials was set up in order to improve this monitoring and to increase the public services' involvement. Its role should still be strengthened, notably through a better definition of its composition, of its operational framework and of its responsibilities.

The only form of evaluation provided for in the plan is the interfederal barometer of the fight against poverty. Owing to the general nature of its indicators, this barometer is a tool aimed rather at raising awareness than at assessing and learning lessons about the plan's impact.

No individual evaluation of the measures has been included in the plan and not a single minister has requested such an evaluation. The initiatives taken by some public services are more related to monitoring than to evaluation. There was no coordinated approach with the federal Department for Social Integration.

The Court of Audit is of the opinion that evaluation is a key element of the policy-making process. The plan's measures aiming at changing a situation or a type of behaviour should therefore be evaluated in order to enhance their success and to draw lessons from them.

Among the replies received from ministers, it should be noted that the Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty underscores the importance of evaluating a policy in an independent manner on the basis of results and effects. She states that « *the new anti-poverty plan will include among others strategic and operational objectives which will be clearly defined and supported and may be promoted* ».