

## Report to the federal Parliament: Second federal plan against poverty



**Unless Belgium pays more attention to its policy and uses much more means, it will not be able to meet the EU2020 Strategy objective of reducing poverty. Indeed, the risk of poverty in Belgium has been stagnating around 21 % since 2008. The number of people at risk of poverty is increasing and is higher than in the neighbouring countries. At the request of the House of Representatives, the Court of Audit analysed the quality, the implementation, the monitoring and the evaluation of the second federal plan against poverty. It also examined whether the recommendations of its 2012 report regarding the first federal plan against poverty were taken into account.**

The multiple power levels, stakeholders, instruments and public policies strengthen the risk of fragmentation and inefficiency of public action against poverty. In the current governance system, the Interdepartmental Conference on Social Integration is the only instrument for coordinating policy guidelines related to poverty alleviation. Nevertheless, it is underused and has not met since June 2013.

Our social protection system and the social security benefits provide an important leverage to fight financial poverty. However, they are insufficient because of the structural gap between the poverty line and the lower lying benefits granted.

The elaboration of the second plan against poverty mobilized the whole government, but did not enough involve administration departments. Moreover, the plan does not specify its contribution to achieving the national objective and contains no implementation deadlines. There is also no reference to any general budget and to the estimated cost of the objectives or actions. The second plan against poverty is more a list of measures than a public policy instrument.

As it did after examining the first plan, the Court of Audit recommends setting a measurable objective and assessing through preliminary studies to what extent each measure contributes to reaching this objective. The administration departments should be involved in the whole process. Qualitative and quantitative indicators should be provided to monitor and evaluate the achievement of the objectives.

Additional provisions are needed to successfully implement the planned actions. For the most important ones, the Court of Audit recommends the establishment of a specific mechanism with a particular emphasis on responsibilities and deadlines.

The monitoring of the second plan against poverty resulted in several improvements to the first plan. The Federal Ministry for Social Integration played a key role in this regard. However, the information provided by the responsible authorities are often incomplete and there is no validation process to show the actions performed.

The Court of Audit therefore recommends improving the plan's steering process and enhancing the role of civil servants in charge of poverty-related matters.

Finally, the plan has not been subject to an overall assessment. No more than eight of the 118 actions listed in the plan were evaluated. The so-called poverty barometer, which is the only instrument of evaluation mentioned in the plan, is merely aimed at raising awareness on the problem of poverty. Because of the discrepancy between the plan's actions and the barometer's indicators, it is impossible to identify the impact of the plan against poverty.

The Court of Audit recommends that the actions intended to change a behaviour or a situation be assessed.

In his response, the president of the Federal Ministry for Social Integration subscribes to the findings of the Court of Audit. His department is ready to implement the decisions that the Government will take to comply with the Court's recommendations.

The Secretary of State in charge of the Fight against Poverty agrees with the recommendations of the Court of Audit but will not give her opinion on the factual findings as the second plan was developed and implemented prior to her appointment. She further explains that initiatives have already been set up, particularly in the context of the preparation of the third federal plan against poverty.

The report *Second Federal Plan against Poverty* is now available (in either French or Dutch) on the Court's website ([www.courttofaudit.be](http://www.courttofaudit.be)).