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## PRESS RELEASE

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### Poverty in Belgium

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Poverty can be defined in many different ways. The rate of monetary poverty corresponds to the percentage of the population with an income below the poverty line. The European Union has conventionally set this threshold at 60 p.c. of the median income. Other approaches (such as that based on material deprivation and the subjective approach, subjective in the sense that it relies on the personal perception of the people being surveyed) contribute to a better understanding of the true nature of poverty but they are not a perfect match. The perceived rate of poverty is thus higher in Belgium and France than the poverty rate based on relative income, whereas the reverse is true in the United Kingdom.

The EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) surveys gives a harmonised source of data making it possible to get a good idea of inequality and poverty, at both the Belgian and European levels. The monetary poverty indicators calculated on the basis of the SILC surveys are given preference in this article, even though they are not immune to problems. In particular, disposable income as calculated from the SILC surveys does not take account of several components, including the imputed rent for households that own their home.

Disposable income distribution appears to be slightly more egalitarian in Belgium than the EU15 average, and around 15 p.c. of the population lives below the poverty line in our country, compared with 16 p.c. in the EU15 as a whole.

For households with members of working age, employment offers good protection against poverty, provided a high enough number of hours are worked at an adequate wage level. In Belgium, the minimum wage tends to limit the number of working poor. So, households with a full 100 p.c. work intensity rate in our country enjoy the lowest poverty rate in the EU15, regardless of whether or not they have children in the home.

The importance of employment status is notably illustrated in Belgium by the differences in poverty rates between the three Regions, even though other factors come into play such as differences in terms of demographic composition (type of household, etc.) or housing occupancy status.

Single parents make up the category of households at the highest risk of poverty. The proportion of retirees living below the poverty line is also higher than that among the population of working age. The situation as regards the elderly nevertheless needs to be put into perspective because proportionally more of these people own their home than among the rest of the population.

Education is a key factor for employment. A high level of education goes hand in hand with a lower likelihood of both falling into poverty and remaining poor for long periods of time. Ensuring access to quality education for all is thus essential for promoting equal opportunities. Longitudinal data show that, at any given moment, a large number of people are falling into or getting out of poverty. By comparison with other European countries, Belgium has a very low poverty entry rate, but it also has a fairly low poverty exit rate.