

# The report on the state of poverty in Brussels 2011

## Social Barometer – Conclusions and summary

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### **Conclusions**

This 7<sup>th</sup> social barometer highlights, once more, that poverty is spreading in the Brussels region. By and large, the situation has not improved, especially concerning the number of Brussels inhabitants who are on welfare. The overall increase of the Brussels population is accompanied by an increase in the number of people living in poverty: with poverty affecting almost all life aspects: income, employment, housing, education and health.

### **All the age groups are stricken by poverty.**

**Child poverty**, which is typically an urban phenomenon, remains strong. In Brussels, one child out of four lives in a family with no earned income. This is twice as high as in Belgium and four times the figure for Flanders. Child poverty is a consequence of having parents with insufficient income. The protective effect of the CPAS/OCMW welfare benefits is weaker for families than for one-person households. In Brussels, long-term unemployment is more frequent among families with children, especially among the single-parent households, than it is in the rest of the country. Finding adequate housing is not easy for low-income households with children: if they can only rely on a CPAS/OCMW benefit, they have to spend more than half of their income on rent in the private housing market.

Poverty has important consequences on the children's development and on their health. Infant mortality is twice as high for babies born in families with no earned income than in two-income families. Inequalities in stillbirth rates are also increasing in Brussels. Poverty also affects schooling: In the poorest municipalities, more than one over five children is at least two years behind when entering secondary school. In Brussels, more than a quarter of the households with children have no internet connection, generally due to financial reasons.

**Poverty also concerns young adults.** The proportion of young Brussels inhabitants leaving school unqualified stays stable (18 %), but is significantly higher than in the rest of the country. The number of young adults registered as job seekers at Actiris (Brussels employment-finding agency) was stable over the last decade, despite an overall increase in the number of people belonging to this age group in Brussels. The unemployment rate of young adults remains high and even dramatically high in the poor municipalities with rates over 40 % in Molenbeek-St-Jean. The number and the proportion of 18-24 year-olds on welfare is also increasing: by the end of 2010, 9% of the population of this age group was dependent on the CPAS/OCMW.

**The Brussels inhabitants aged 50-64 years** are, in general, less affected by poverty than in the whole country: their activity rate is higher and they show a lower proportion of low educated people. However, the number of unemployed older than 50 continues to increase at an alarming rate.

While the absolute number of people aged 65 + decreases in Brussels, the number of elderly having a very low income increases. In 2010, 9.3% of the population aged 65+ benefits from the GRAPA/IGO (guaranteed income for the elderly).

### **Poverty affects women as well as men**

In terms of employment, the main gender difference is observed for the activity rate. Women are less present on the labour market. But when they are, women are as likely to have a job as men. Although the employment rate of women aged 50-64 does not reach the European 2010 target, it is higher in Brussels than in the rest of the country.

Among the youngest age groups, the unemployment rate is lower for women than it is for men in half of the Brussels municipalities. This observation must be put in regard with the fact that boys are more likely than girls to be two or more years behind in school. Boys also tend to leave school unqualified more often and are, therefore, more vulnerable on the labour market.

Compared to men, the proportion of women who depend on a CPAS/OCMW welfare benefit is slightly higher. The invalidity rate is also higher among women, especially among those belonging to the working class. Having a mental health problem is the main reason for invalidity for both genders.

**The observations made in this barometer highlight the many challenges to address if we want to reduce poverty in the Brussels Region.**

**The demographic evolution of the Brussels Region has a sizeable impact on poverty.** The important increase in the population of young adults translates into a much higher increase of poor than of rich young adults: the number of 18-24 year-olds on CPAS/OCMW welfare benefits has strongly increased.

The numerous Brussels inhabitants coming from the international immigration form a very heterogeneous population as to their socio-economic situation. Those coming from the EU have, on average, a better socio-economic situation, with a higher employment rate than the Brussels' average, and they show a lower proportion of low-qualified workers. The non-EU immigrants face more difficulties to enter the labour market: more than half of the adult has no certificate of higher secondary education, their employment rate is lower and the share of CPAS/OCMW welfare beneficiaries is higher.

International civil servants are usually not included in the statistics.

**The Brussels' inhabitants are not sufficiently protected against poverty.** Most of the income replacement benefits remain below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, and thus, do not insure a sufficient protection against poverty. Between 18 and 65 years, more than one Brussels inhabitant over five lives with a replacement income. The number of Brussels inhabitants in this situation increases year after year. The increasing number of low income households also

increases the pressure on the housing market. The lack of social or social-like housing becomes even more stringent, the waiting list lengthens and renting on the private housing market becomes less affordable. The large and increasing part of the budget which has to be spent on rent, partially explains why more than a quarter of the Brussels' households had to postpone or waive health care services due to financial reasons.

Having a low education level is a barrier for finding a job. A quarter of the population aged 25-34 must enter the labour market without a certificate of higher secondary education while the Brussels' labour market is characterized by highly qualified job positions. The absolute number of job seekers is increasing continuously.

**The socio-economic inequalities within the Region are also increasing.** The large increase in the absolute number of Brussels inhabitants living in a vulnerable socio-economic situation and the increasing needs in terms of employment and social assistance are mainly concentrated in the North-West municipalities of the Brussels Region.

For more information:

**Observatoire de la Santé et du Social de Bruxelles-Capitale / Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn van Brussel-Hoofdstad**

183 avenue Louise - 1050 Bruxelles

[observat@ccc.irisnet.be](mailto:observat@ccc.irisnet.be)

[www.observatbru.be](http://www.observatbru.be)

**Sarah Luyten**

phone : (+ 00 32) 02/552 01 55

[sluyten@ggc.irisnet.be](mailto:sluyten@ggc.irisnet.be)