

INCOME INEQUALITY AND REDISTRIBUTION

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SPECIAL CHAPTER (LPD 7): POVERTY

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1. BASICS: WHAT IS POVERTY?

1.1 CASE-STUDY

Read the following text

Sarah is a 29-year-old single mother. She lives in a small flat with her two young children, Emma, aged six, and Lucas, aged four. The family is struggling financially.

There are various reasons for the difficult situation the family finds itself in. Sarah did not finish secondary school.





When she was younger, she found school difficult and left education early. Because of her low level of education, she now finds it difficult to find a well-paid and stable job.
She has had various temporary jobs in the past, for example in cleaning and in shops, but she is currently unemployed.

Furthermore, Sarah has been on her own since the father of her children moved out of the family home. As a single mother, she has to provide not only for the family's income but also for the upbringing and care of her two children. This makes finding a suitable job particularly difficult.

Childcare costs money, and her children need to be collected from school or the nursery at specific times. Due to this combination of unemployment, a low level of education and the fact that she is a single parent, it is difficult for Sarah to escape poverty.

Poverty has various consequences for the family's daily life.

For example, Sarah and her children live in an old and poorly maintained flat. There is little space, the windows are poorly insulated and in winter it is sometimes difficult to heat the flat adequately. Sarah would like to move to a better home, but the rents are too high. She also has to cut back on food. She tries to give her children enough to eat, but fresh vegetables, fruit, fish and other healthy foods are not always affordable. That is why she often opts for cheaper food that is less healthy.



The family's social life is also affected by poverty. Trips to an amusement park, the cinema or a restaurant are almost never possible. When Emma's classmates take part in activities that cost money, she cannot always join them.

Sarah sometimes feels ashamed of her financial situation and would rather not tell others that she cannot afford certain things. As a result, she meets up with friends and family less often. This leads to increasing social isolation. It can also be difficult for the children, as they notice that other children sometimes have more toys, nicer clothes or more opportunities.

The constant money worries also cause a great deal of stress. Sarah regularly lies awake at night because she doesn't know how she's going to pay all the bills.

When unexpected costs arise – for example, if the washing machine breaks down or a child needs new shoes – it immediately becomes a major problem. Nevertheless, Sarah tries her best to look after her children and provide them with a safe home.



What does poverty mean in the case of Sarah? (write-down 1 sentence)

What are the causes of poverty in this example?

What are the consequences of poverty in this example?



Her situation shows that poverty is often not caused by a single factor. Various problems, such as unemployment, a low level of education and single parenthood, can reinforce one another. At the same time, poverty has an impact on various areas of life, such as housing, nutrition, health and social contacts. As a result, it can be very difficult for a family to escape poverty without help.

1.2 DEFINITION OF POVERTY

Poverty is a situation in which a person or family does not have enough money or resources to meet their basic needs, such as food, clothing, housing, healthcare, and education.

According to the latest figures from Statbel, the Belgian statistical office, these are some of the most important key figures on poverty in Belgium:

16.5% of the Belgian population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025. That represents more than 1.9 million people.

10.9% had an income below the monetary poverty threshold.

The poverty threshold for a single person was **€1,565** per month.

For a family with two adults and two dependent children, it was **€3,287** per month.

2. CAUSES OF POVERTY

These are the most important causes of poverty:

1) Unemployment

Without a job, or with a poorly paid or insecure job, people may not earn enough to cover basic needs such as housing, food and energy

2) No or low level of education

People with few or no qualifications generally have fewer employment opportunities and are more likely to end up in low-paid or unstable jobs

3) Family situation

Single-parent families are particularly vulnerable because one parent has to combine earning an income with caring for the children, often on just one income

4) Health problems

Physical or mental health problems can make it difficult to work. At the same time, medical expenses can put additional pressure on a household's budget

5) Debt

Heavy debt can leave families with too little money for other necessities

3. CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

These are the most important consequences of poverty:

1) Poor housing

People may live in small, overcrowded or poorly maintained homes, sometimes with problems such as dampness, mould or inadequate heating

2) Poorer health

Poverty can negatively affect both physical and mental health. Financial stress, unhealthy living conditions and difficulties accessing certain healthcare can contribute to health problems.

Apart from physical problems, poverty can create mental problems as a result such as low self-esteem, depression, disillusionment, constant anger, ...

3) Less healthy nutrition

Families with limited budgets may find it more difficult to regularly afford fresh fruit, vegetables and other nutritious foods

4) Social isolation

People may not have enough money for hobbies, sports, school trips or social activities. This can lead to loneliness and exclusion from society

5) Generational poverty

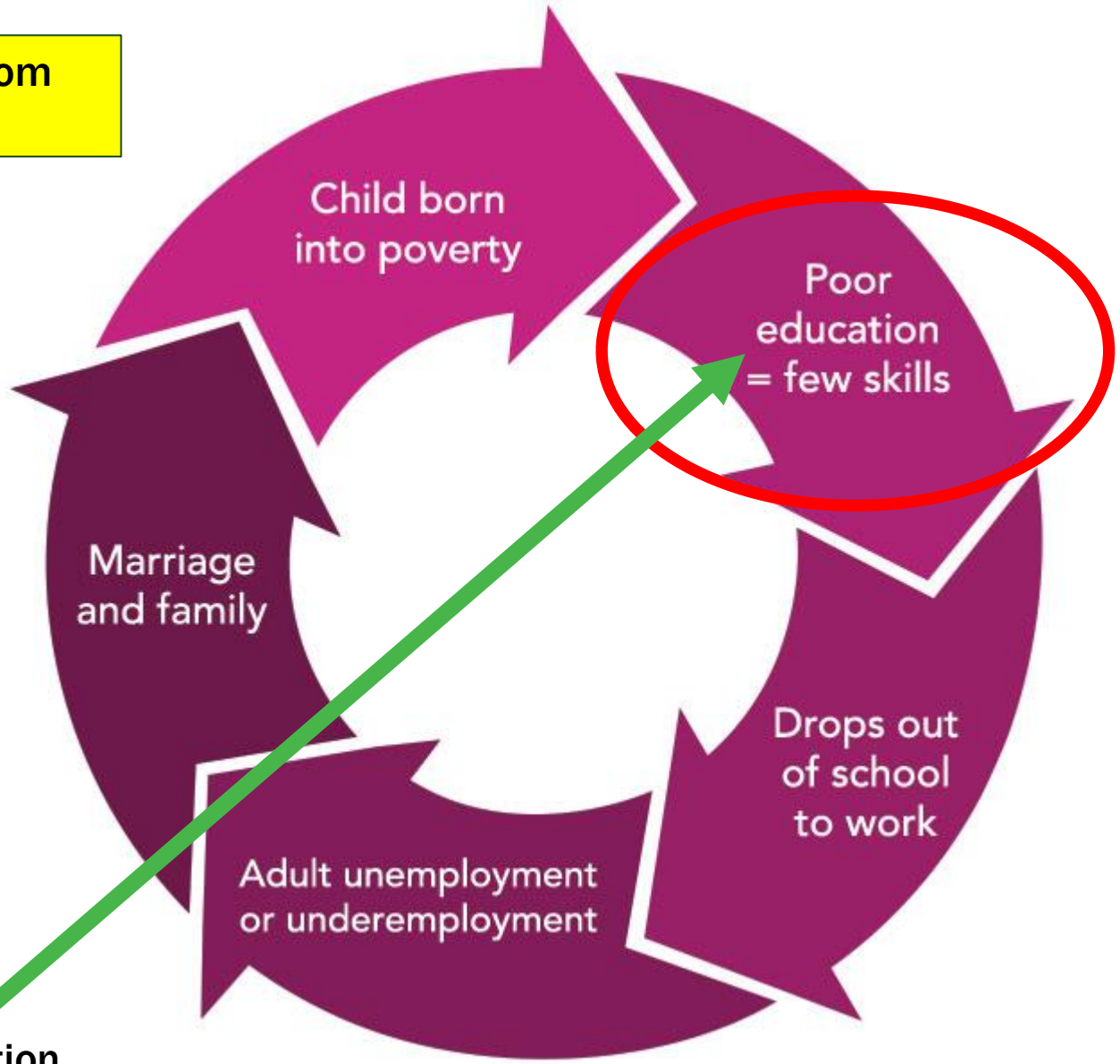
Children living in poverty may have fewer resources for school, a quiet place to study or access to extracurricular activities. This can affect their educational opportunities and increase the risk of generational poverty

Generational poverty means that poverty continues from one generation of a family to the next.

Children who grow up in a poor household may have a higher risk of experiencing poverty themselves as adults.

This can happen because poverty affects many parts of a child's life.
This can make it harder for children to get good educational results and later find a well-paid job and a stable life.

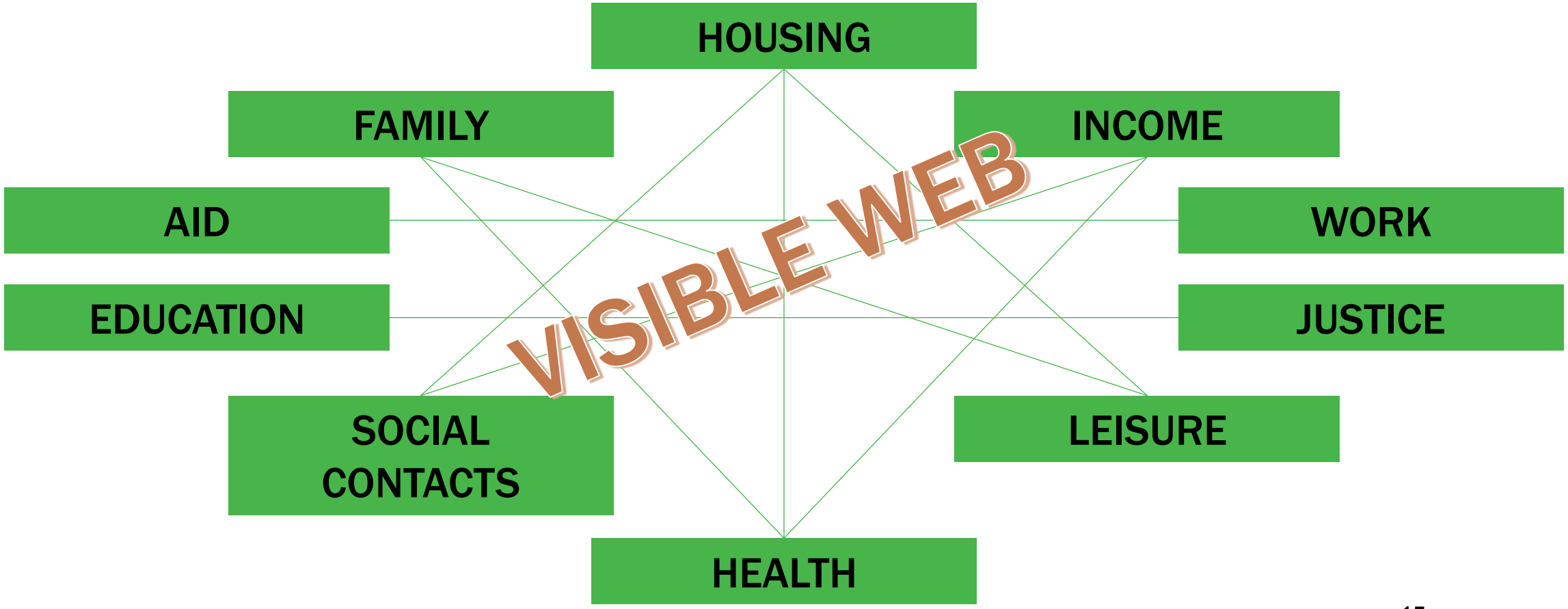
The challenge is to "break" this endless cycle of poverty.



crucial role of education

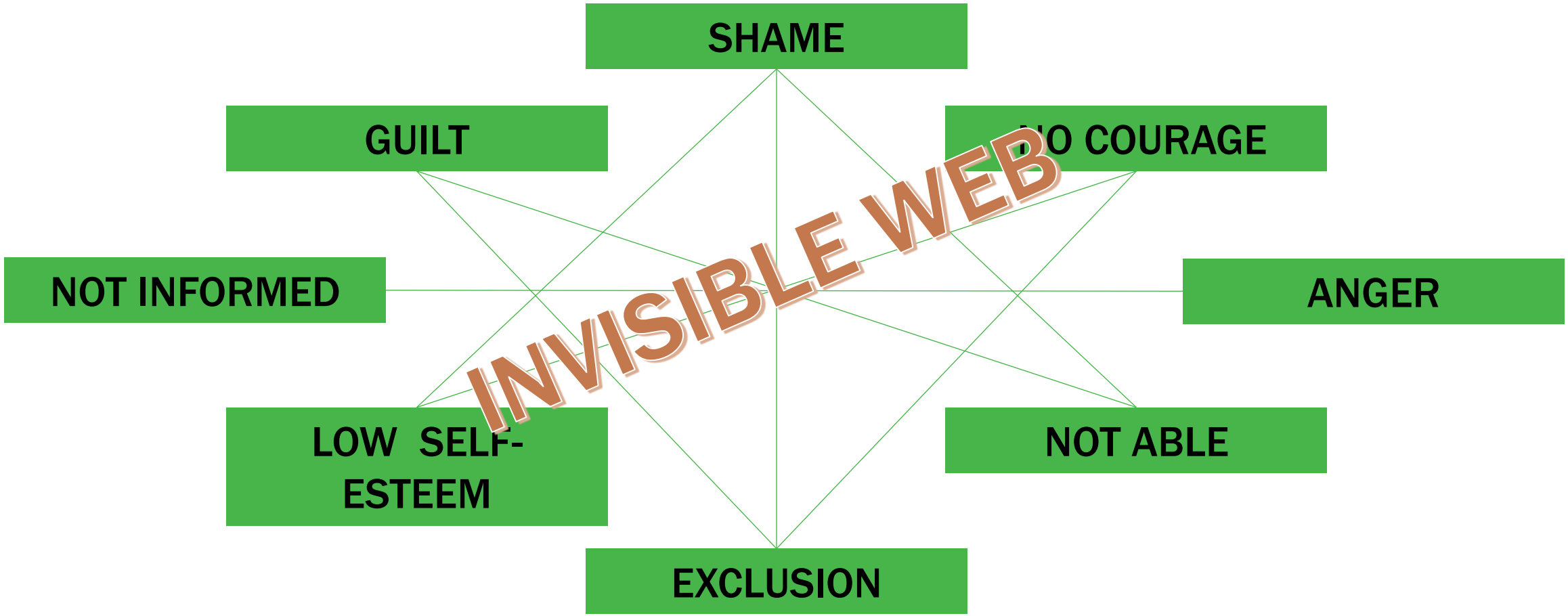
4. POVERTY WEB

Poverty has both a visible and an invisible dimension. Both can be represented by a web. All the elements of the circle are interconnected, making poverty a highly complex problem.



The invisible dimension of poverty means that poverty is often hidden and goes unrecognized.

This makes tackling poverty even more difficult.



5. HOW TO COMBAT POVERTY?

These are the most important policies to combat poverty:

Cause	Policies to combat poverty
Unemployment	Governments can help people find stable jobs through training and employment programmes Social economy organizations help people who are distanced from the labour market Minimum wages, unemployment benefits and other types of financial support (ex: “leefloon”) can help ensure people have enough money for basic needs







Cause	Policies to combat poverty
No or low level of education	Good-quality education and vocational training give people better opportunities to obtain qualifications and find stable, well-paid work Supporting disadvantaged children can also help break generational poverty



Federatie Tweedekans onderwijs Vlaanderen vzw

Cause	Policies to combat poverty
Health problems	Affordable healthcare, mental-health support and childcare are especially important for people with low incomes

CAW maakt sterker

Kind & Gezin

Cause	Policies to combat poverty
Low income	Governments can invest in social housing, housing allowances and measures that keep rent and energy costs affordable This reduces the risk of homelessness and poor living conditions Measures such as child benefits, affordable childcare, school support and targeted assistance for single-parent families can reduce poverty among groups at particularly high risk Social workers can also help families access benefits and manage financial difficulties

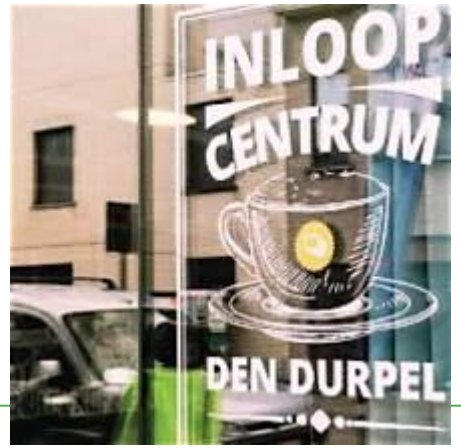




GROEI PAKKET

And apart from the government policies to combat poverty, we must emphasize that a large number of organizations and volunteers are working every day at all levels to combat poverty:

netwerk tegen armoede



despringplank
welzijnsschakel

volXkeuken

VOEDSELBANK

welzijnszorg vzw
samen tegen armoede

6. IS THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY SUCCESSFUL?

The answer to this question is complex:

YES	NO
Poverty has decreased in recent years. The share of Belgians at risk of poverty or social exclusion fell from 20.1% in 2019 to 16.5% in 2025 Statbel says the decline between 2019 and 2025 is statistically significant	Poverty is still widespread. In 2025, 16.5% of Belgians—more than 1.9 million people—were still at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Certain groups remain much more vulnerable: unemployed people, people with low levels of education, people living alone and single-parent families There are large regional differences. Poverty and social exclusion are highest in Brussels, lowest in Flanders, while Wallonia is in between but above the Belgian average