

What is poverty?

According to the Council of Europe (1975, 2004), people are poor when: “their resources are so as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life of the member state in which they live”.

Poverty is about insufficient financial means to pay for the goods and services that are minimally needed in our society. This makes full social participation impossible and poses a risk of social exclusion.

Characteristics of poverty

Starting from the above definition, we can say that poverty is an **absolute concept** because it refers to having a shortage of resources. At the same time, it is important to see poverty in the context of the society in which we live. In order to be able to participate in that society, we need to have certain resources. The type of resources and the quantity of resources depends both on the society in question as well as on every individual's needs. It is therefore necessary to **measure** poverty in **relative terms** (see fact sheet 4).

At the same time, poverty is also **multidimensional**. In addition to a lack of income, people living in poverty often experience problems in various other areas of life such as housing, education or health. It is about the inability to participate and contribute (to a lesser extent), in the dominant activities and prevailing values in our society. As a result, poverty is not only ‘having’ less, but also experiencing ‘being’ less (see fact sheet 2).

A third characteristic of poverty is that it occurs in **different degrees**. There is no such thing as ‘the poor person’. Poverty relates to different situations.

It can refer both to living in difficult financial circumstances and to situations in which people live completely outside society because of a lack of money.

Participating in society

People in poverty indicate that they cannot live like ‘regular people’. They experience insufficient opportunities to realise their fundamental social rights. In addition, they often benefit less from public goods and services such as education, child care, culture, health care or legal aid.

Governments wishing to effectively combat poverty must focus both on preventing people from sliding into poverty and on improving the living conditions of poor families. This requires policies and actions that lead to a decent income and increase the accessibility of public goods and services, as well as commitment to aid trajectories. These social care programs can focus on strengthening personal competences such as self-confidence, self-direction or solution-oriented action.



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