

Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion

FIFTH-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

February 2010

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WORD FROM THE MINISTER

I am proud to present the fifth-year progress report on the deployment of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. Entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*, the Action Plan is part of an approach launched in 2002 with the adoption of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. Québec has made progress in fighting poverty since 2002 and is continuing to work toward its goal of becoming one of the industrialized nations with the least number of persons struggling with poverty and social exclusion by 2013. Québec is a forerunner in this area and its efforts are singled out as an example in other parts of Canada.

The measures implemented under this initial Action Plan have improved the quality of life of thousands of people in Québec living in poverty, including families, whose disposable income grew by more than the rate of inflation between 2003 and 2009. The real income of single-parent families with a child under age 5, for example, rose appreciably over this period. If the family received last-resort financial assistance the increase was 11.6%. If the parent worked full-time for the minimum wage, the family's real income grew by 13%. The significant increase in the minimum wage in recent years, from \$7.30 in 2003 to \$9.00 in 2009, has allowed low-income households to improve their situations. Enhanced housing conditions for many households are also among the Action Plan achievements.

As employment remains one of the most effective ways to fight poverty, in March 2009 our government unveiled the Employment Pact *Plus*, aimed at people able to enter the labour market. It complements the Commitment for Employment adopted in March 2008. These stimulating strategies encourage closer collaboration between all labour market partners, with a view to softening the impact of the recession. The Employment Pact *Plus* has allowed thousands of workers to keep their jobs and avoid poverty. Our government is thus active in a variety of areas, both upstream and downstream, in order to curb poverty in all its forms.

The initial Action Plan has allowed us to pave the way to better living conditions for people afflicted by poverty. Despite the substantial progress that has been accomplished, much remains to be done. Among other things, we need to improve the quality of life of people with low incomes and reduce poverty in certain neighbourhoods and regions of Québec. We have to maintain our efforts in order to consolidate the achievements of the past few years, and continue to work toward our objective of a Québec with less and less poverty. Work on preparing a second Action Plan therefore got under way in 2009. This preparatory work emphasizes inclusive, impelling consultations in partnership with all concerned groups, in all regions of Québec. It is important to mobilize all players who, in a spirit of solidarity, can work together and deploy joint, ongoing efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion.

We owe this progress report to all those who have made the combat against poverty and social exclusion a daily priority. Their commitment and conviction have shown that efforts by all members of society, combined with government measures and investments, can generate tangible results in response to all-too-real problems. On behalf of the population of Québec, I offer them our sincere thanks.

Sam Hamad
Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity

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1. INTRODUCTION

With respect to the measures set forth in the initial Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, this fifth-year progress report points to ongoing efforts to prevent hardship and improve the living conditions of people struggling with poverty and social exclusion. Evaluations of programs and services are under way in order to support deployment and achieve the desired effects.

Work on the second Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, scheduled for implementation in the spring of 2010, continued in 2008-2009.

The fifth year of the current Action Plan was dominated by the global economic recession. In response to this crisis, the Québec government launched a variety of economic-support measures, including the Employment Pact *Plus*, in order to combat poverty and prepare for recovery.

Despite the economic slowdown, Québec's economy grew by 1% in 2008, compared with 2.6% in 2007. The 2008 data also point to positive results in terms of job creation. The main labour market variables for the first quarter of 2009, however, show a deterioration in the situation.

2. QUÉBEC'S APPROACH TO COMBATING POVERTY

At the start of the new millennium, Québeckers emphasized the importance of ensuring proper living conditions for all citizens. The combat against poverty became a collective priority.

Québec passed a law in this area in 2002. The members of the National Assembly unanimously adopted the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* — a “first” in Canada. In 2004, in order to implement the Act, the government launched an initial Action Plan built around four main objectives. The measures created to achieve these objectives are in addition to the existing services, initiatives and programs designed to meet Québec society's diverse needs.

Québec is continuing to work toward its goal of being one of the industrialized nations with the least number of persons living in poverty by 2013. Until recently, Québec's legislation was unique in Canada. Ontario followed Québec's lead by passing a similar law in May 2009, and Newfoundland and Labrador adopted a poverty-reduction strategy in 2005.

Entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*, Québec's Action Plan is aimed at improving citizens' well-being, preventing

poverty, promoting the involvement of all members of society and ensuring coherent, steadfast efforts. The initial Action Plan took the form of an array of measures in the various areas where poverty is present. The Québec government initially planned to invest \$2.5 billion over five years. This investment and the length of the Action Plan were subsequently enhanced: all told, \$4.5 billion has been earmarked to combat poverty and social exclusion over a six-year period.

As the initial Action Plan draws to a close, the results so far are encouraging. This is not the end, however, of collective efforts to create a fairer, more inclusive society where the rights of all citizens are respected. A second Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion will soon be adopted to confirm the government's commitment and enable all stakeholders to continue to work to prevent poverty and improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable members of society. The new Action Plan is being prepared in a spirit of collaboration with national, regional and local partners. It will thus be the fruit of collective efforts devoted by the government and its partners involved in combating poverty and social exclusion. The second Action Plan will consolidate the progress achieved since 2004 and upgrade the support offered to people who are struggling with or at risk of poverty.

3. UPDATE ON THE VARIOUS MEASURES

3.1. Improve the lives of people living in poverty

3.1.1. Increase the income of individuals and families

In 2008-2009, increasing the income of individuals and families remained a key focus of the government's efforts. Various types of measures had an impact on the income of low-income households during this 12-month period. They were aimed in particular at the groups most vulnerable to poverty.

Given the expected increase in manpower needs in the medium term and the imperatives of the combat against poverty, Québec took vigorous action in the area of employment, which remains the government's preferred means for increasing household income. In this context, a variety of measures designed to ease labour market entry and job retention were enhanced in 2008-2009, among other ways via the Commitment for Employment and the Employment Pact *Plus*.

All targeted households

Increase in the minimum wage

On May 1, 2009, the minimum wage was set at \$9.00 an hour, a \$0.50 increase over the minimum wage set on the same date a year earlier. Québec's minimum wage is one of Canada's highest (see the comparative table on the next page), and this means that working households benefit from better living conditions, given the lower cost of living in Québec.

Generally speaking, the current minimum wage enables households to earn enough income to meet their basic needs. Indeed, households with income from year-round, full-time employment at the minimum wage generally have higher disposable income than the Market Basket Measure thresholds.¹

1. The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is recommended by the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion (CEPE) for monitoring poverty from the perspective of coverage of basic needs. See the disposable income simulations on pages 46 to 51 of *Taking the Measure of Poverty: Proposed Indicators of Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion to Measure Progress in Québec*, published by the CEPE in 2009.

**Minimum hourly wages in Canada for adult workers, by jurisdiction,
May 1999 to May 2009²**

	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MN	SK	AB	BC
May 1999	5.25	5.40	5.50	5.50	6.90	6.85	6.00	6.00	5.65	7.15
May 2000	5.50	5.60	5.60	5.75	6.90	6.85	6.00	6.00	5.90	7.15
May 2001	5.50	5.80	5.70	5.75	7.00	6.85	6.25	6.00	5.90	7.60
May 2002	5.75	6.00	5.80	5.90	7.00	6.85	6.50	6.35	5.90	8.00
May 2003	6.00	6.25	6.00	6.00	7.30	6.85	6.75	6.65	5.90	8.00
May 2004	6.00	6.50	6.50	6.20	7.45	7.15	7.00	6.65	5.90	8.00
May 2005	6.00	6.80	6.50	6.30	7.60	7.45	7.25	6.65	5.90	8.00
May 2006	6.50	7.15	7.15	6.50	7.75	7.75	7.60	7.55	7.00	8.00
May 2007	7.00	7.50	7.60	7.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	7.95	7.00	8.00
May 2008	8.00	7.75	8.10	7.75	8.50	8.75	8.50	8.60	8.40	8.00
May 2009	8.50	8.00	8.60	8.00	9.00	9.50	8.75	9.25	8.80	8.00

From November 2007 to October 2008, Québec was home to an average of 150,500 women and 99,500 men paid at the general minimum wage rate or lower.³ Together, these men and women accounted for 7.5% of employees. Less than half of them (46.3%) had a postsecondary education and 40% of them were attending an educational institution. Just over a third of these workers (36.3%) were aged 25 or over. People paid at the general minimum wage rate or lower worked an average of 25 hours per week, compared with an average of 34.5 hours per week for all workers combined. It should be noted, however, that these figures include a large number of people enrolled in educational institutions.

Increased financial support for families with children

In force since January 2005, the refundable tax credit for child assistance enhances the disposable income of low- and medium-income families. Paid to all households with children under age 18, the tax credit is substantially higher than the support provided under previous measures. In 2009, for example, a single-parent family could receive an annual amount of up to \$2,924 if the household included one child, and up to \$4,007 if the household included two children.

In 2008, close to 870,000 families claimed this tax credit, including payments received within the framework of the supplement for handicapped children. For

2. Source: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Processing: Institut de la statistique du Québec.

3. These data include people paid at the minimum wage rate or lower. People paid at less than the minimum wage rate include gratuity workers, whose minimum remuneration is lower than the general minimum wage.

the 2008-2009 year, new investments linked to the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion increased the financial support provided to low-income families⁴ by \$221 million.

Work incentive premium

Since January 2005, low- and medium-income workers have had access to a work premium. This refundable tax credit is aimed, among other things, at easing labour market entry and job retention for individuals. For 2009, the work premium can be up to \$530.18 for a person living alone, \$819.98 for a couple without children, \$2,272.20 for a single-parent family and \$2,928.50 for a couple with children.

The most recent available data show that over 514,000 households benefited from the work premium in 2008,⁵ for a total government outlay of \$321.3 million.

Recipients of last-resort financial assistance

Fully indexed benefits for all recipients

In November 2008, the Minister of Finance of Québec announced that as of January 1, 2009, and each following year, benefits granted under the Social Solidarity Program and the Social Assistance Program would be fully indexed according to the rate used for the personal income tax regime.⁶ In January 2009, the benefits granted to all 331,287 households receiving last-resort financial assistance were therefore fully index-adjusted by 2.36%. Prior to this, since the deployment of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, benefits paid under the Social Assistance Program had been index-adjusted at half of the rate used for the personal income tax regime.

Indexing of all benefits on January 1, 2009, required an investment of \$16 million for the remainder of the 2008-2009 fiscal year and \$66 million for the 2009-2010 fiscal year.

Partial exemption for support payments

The partial exemption of up to \$100 per month in support income was extended in 2006 to all families receiving last-resort financial assistance with a child under age 18. This means an increase of up to \$1,200 per year in the disposable income

4. According to the pre-tax Low Income Measure.

5. According to the data compiled as at July 21, 2009, excluding households that received the adapted work premium. The data for these households are provided farther on in this document.

6. Ministère des Finances, *Le point sur la situation économique et financière du Québec*, November 4, 2008, page 85.

of these families. The extension of the exemption required a government investment of \$14 million.

In March 2009, 11,347 recipient households declared support income. Of this number, 10,720 households had a female family head (10,307 unattached women and 413 women who were part of a couple) and 627 had a male family head (443 unattached men and 184 men who were part of a couple).

More flexible rules for taking assets into consideration

With the coming-into-force of certain sections of the *Individual and Family Assistance Regulation* on December 1, 2008, the rules for taking income into account for benefit-calculation purposes were made more flexible for certain recipients of last-resort financial assistance. The changes were aimed at encouraging individual autonomy. Lifetime payments made for the benefit of an adult from a registered disability savings plan, up to a maximum of \$300 per month for an independent adult or a family composed of only one adult and \$340 per month for a family composed of two adults, are now excluded for benefit-calculation purposes. The same applies to lifetime payments made for the benefit of a dependent child from a registered disability savings plan.

Tax credit to help former long-term recipients remain employed

In effect since April 1, 2008, the supplement to the work premium is a tax credit designed to ease job entry for long-term recipients of last-resort financial assistance and encourage them to remain employed. Eligible individuals may be entitled to advance payments of \$200 per month, for a maximum of 12 months, to cover certain expenses related to their return to work.

Since April 1, 2009, participation in the Youth Alternative Program has also been taken into account for the purpose of determining eligibility for the supplement to the work premium. People who leave the Youth Alternative Program because of their work income may thus receive additional support for 12 months. Part of the Employment Pact *Plus*, this tax measure is designed to make work more attractive by boosting the initial remuneration of young low-income workers.

For the 2008 fiscal year, over 3,000 households took advantage of this refundable tax credit, which required a government investment of close to \$2.6 million.⁷

7. Including payments further to the processing of tax returns and advance payments.

3.1.2. Measures for groups at risk of persistent poverty

Certain measures adopted under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion are aimed at supporting efforts by specific groups to become socioeconomically self-reliant. The target groups include people who face the greatest obstacles to employment, immigrants and workers aged 55 and over.

People facing the greatest obstacles to employment

Social assistance and support programs

Social assistance and support programs were implemented in 2006 and 2007 to enable people to participate in a customized approach to overcome obstacles to their socio-vocational success, by providing them with assistance and support adapted to their situations.

The Devenir program was created for recipients of last-resort financial assistance who are experiencing problems that prevent them from entering the labour market in the short term or from productively availing themselves of public employment services. It helps participants prepare themselves to take part in a public employment service measure within a 12-month framework.

The Interagir program is aimed primarily at people for whom job entry is necessarily a long-term objective. It is designed to develop and maintain skills, attitudes and behaviours that facilitate social integration and involvement.

The Réussir program is a joint initiative deployed by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) and the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). It is aimed at meeting the needs of people with a severely limited capacity for employment, in order to facilitate their access to secondary, vocational and postsecondary studies and provide them with stable financial support better adapted to their pace of learning and individual situations.

For the 2008-2009 fiscal year, a total investment of \$18.4 million enabled 6,430 new enrolments in the various social assistance and support programs, broken down as follows:

- 2,083 new enrolments in Devenir, by 1,951 different adults;
- 4,158 new enrolments in Interagir, by 3,783 different adults;
- 189 new enrolments in Réussir, by 171 different adults.

The target of 4,000 new enrolments was thus reached and exceeded.

Employment integration contracts

The Contrats d'intégration au travail (CIT) measure is designed to favour the hiring and retention of people with handicaps. Subject to compliance with certain conditions, it allows employers to receive a subsidy to compensate for costs incurred to adapt the workplace. Increased funding for this measure under the Commitment for Employment enabled the creation of 350 new employment integration contracts (CITs) in 2008-2009, boosting the number of participants in this measure to over 4,250. The CIT measure required an investment of \$25.8 million.

Subsidies for adapted enterprises

The Programme de subventions aux entreprises adaptées (PSEA) supports enterprises that offer people with disabilities high-quality jobs while taking into account their abilities. PSEA provides funding to cover the wages of disabled people and compensation for the expenditures required to employ individuals in this target group. In 2008-2009, further to the deployment of the Commitment for Employment, funding for the program was increased and 195 new jobs were created in adapted enterprises. A total of \$55.8 million was devoted to PSEA last year.

Adapted work premium

The adapted work premium is a refundable tax credit that can be paid in advance. It provides support for people with a severely limited capacity for employment and handicapped persons, who often have to overcome major obstacles to labour market entry. For the 2008 fiscal year, 5,944 households, including 3,080 persons living alone, claimed this tax credit, which cost the government close to \$4.2 million.

Immigrants and members of visible minorities

More complementary public services

Following an interdepartmental agreement signed in 2004 aimed at favouring labour market entry for immigrants and members of visible minorities, a new three-year agreement was finalized in September 2008. While focusing on the same objectives as the initial agreement, the new text updates these targets and breaks them down into four broad categories:

- recruitment and selection of applicants for permanent or temporary immigration and linkage with Québec labour market needs;
- job entry for newcomers and members of visible minorities;
- support for and sensitization of employers in order to promote job entry and job retention for newcomers and members of visible minorities;

- regionalization of immigration.

Among other things, the agreement is aimed at ensuring more complementary services in order to facilitate job-entry efforts by immigrants and members of visible minorities.

PRIIME

One of the measures adopted under the interdepartmental agreement is the Programme d'aide à l'intégration des immigrants et des minorités visibles en emploi (PRIIME). Implemented in May 2005 by the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC), PRIIME is an incentive program designed to support businesses that hire immigrants and members of minorities to fill available regular positions and create favourable conditions for retaining these employees at the end of the subsidized period. It is part of the array of measures offered by Emploi-Québec, which manages the program. Funding for the program has been increased under the Commitment for Employment.

Between June 2005 and the end of March 2009, 3,425 people benefited from PRIIME, which required an investment of over \$7 million in 2008-2009 alone. A total of 1,008 new participants took part in PRIIME in 2008-2009. Of this number, 390 were women and 618 were men. It should be noted that the percentage of new female participants has grown since the program launch, from 31.2% in 2005-2006 to 38.7% in 2008-2009.

Easier access to regulated occupations and trades for immigrants

Access to regulated occupations and trades in Québec can be difficult for immigrants, as witnessed by the 4,200 applications registered by Québec professional orders in 2008. To improve this situation, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC), which is responsible for efforts to improve the recognition of immigrants' studies and skills, earmarks \$4 million per year for projects and activities aimed at facilitating access to regulated occupations for people trained abroad. In 2008-2009, ten new agreements with professional orders were ratified in this area.

The Service d'information sur les professions et les métiers réglementés (SIPMR), offered by the MICC, welcomed and helped close to 1,900 individuals during the most recent fiscal year. In the same spirit, in 2008-2009, over 16,000 comparative assessments of education outside Québec were issued to individuals, most of whom intended to use this document to find a job.

Older workers

Projects for older workers

The Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW) flows from an agreement between the governments of Québec and Canada. It is aimed at favouring job re-entry for older workers affected by dismissals. Initially scheduled to end in March 2003, the agreement was recently extended until March 2012. It allocates Emploi-Québec an envelope of close to \$59 million for the period in question.

TIOW enables the creation of projects for workers aged 55 to 64⁸ who have lost their job, do not have all of the necessary skills to find a new job in the short term and live in a vulnerable community (affected by high unemployment, downsizing or closures of essential industries or located in a remote region lacking employment services).⁹ In 2008-2009, there were 1,472 enrolments in TIOW projects.

Adapted employment-assistance measures and activities

In 2008-2009, participation in Emploi-Québec measures and services for people aged 55 and over continued to grow. Indeed, the number of participants in this age group grew by 75.1% (from 15,786 to 27,635) between 2003-2004 and 2008-2009. Between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 alone, the increase was 5,489. It should be noted that the Manpower Training measure guidelines had been relaxed during the previous years in order to make the pace of training more flexible and take into account the needs of groups such as older workers.

People aged 55 to 64 are still a major group on the labour market. Their participation rate grew from 49.9% in 2003 to 54.1% in 2008¹⁰ (48.8% for women¹¹ and 59.6% for men¹²).

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8. Eligible participants may also be 50 to 54 years old or age 65 or over provided that their participation does not lead to the exclusion of workers between the ages of 55 and 64 and that the majority of the project participants are aged 55 to 64.
 9. Municipalities with over 250,000 inhabitants (Laval, Montréal and Québec) are excluded from TIOW projects.
 10. Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Taux d'activité selon certains groupes d'âge, moyennes annuelles, Québec, Ontario, Canada, de 1976 à 2008*, February 17, 2009.
 11. Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Taux d'activité des femmes selon certains groupes d'âge*, February 17, 2009.
 12. Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Taux d'activité des hommes selon certains groupes d'âge*, February 17, 2009.

3.1.3. Better housing

Construction of new social, community and affordable housing

Easier access to affordable housing for individuals and families struggling with poverty is part of the measures presented by the government in 2004. A total of \$1.041 billion has been earmarked between 2003 and 2010 to deliver 27,000 new social, community and affordable housing units under the AccèsLogis Québec and Logement abordable Québec programs. As at March 31, 2009, 16,002 new units had been delivered, 5,041 were on the way to delivery, 1,186 were at the analysis stage and 1,542 were under development.

The AccèsLogis Québec program targets two types of households vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, namely seniors with slightly diminishing independence and people with special housing needs due to social problems.

Improvement of existing private housing

The Québec government is working to improve the quality of private housing, primarily by means of the Rénovation Québec and RénoVillage programs. The Rénovation Québec program enabled work on 8,341 housing units in 2008-2009 (5,907 units in 2007-2008). It focuses on revitalizing rundown residential areas in participating municipalities. The other program, RénoVillage, provides financial support for low-income owner-occupants in rural areas who want to correct major home defects. In 2008-2009, a total of 2,567 homes in this category were improved thanks to this program (2,369 homes in 2007-2008). Another initiative, the Emergency Repair Program, targets the same people as RénoVillage but is designed to eliminate major defects that pose an immediate threat to the health or safety of the occupants. In 2008-2009, 465 homes were repaired thanks to subsidies under this program (401 homes in 2007-2008). All told, close to \$55 million was invested in these three programs in 2008-2009.

Upgrade of public housing

Unveiled in 2007, the Québec Infrastructure Plan includes a public housing component enabling major repairs and renovations for low-rental housing units. The investment for 2008 was \$246.4 million, up significantly over the \$105 million granted in 2007. An update on the state of these dwellings is currently under way, with a view to setting priorities based on the scope of the required repairs and renovations.

Under the Québec Infrastructure Plan for 2008 to 2013 and various measures announced as part of the 2008-2009 Québec budget, \$1.4 billion in funds from the Québec and federal governments and certain municipalities will be invested in upgrading and renovating public housing by 2013.

Adaptation of housing for people with disabilities

In order to improve the living conditions of people with disabilities, the Residential Adaptation Assistance Program (RAAP) provides eligible persons with assistance for necessary housing adaptation work. Between April 1, 2008, and March 31, 2009, the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) earmarked \$15.1 million for the adaptation or upgrade of 1,073 housing units, \$1.5 million for repairs to specialized equipment (in order to meet 3,105 requests) and \$1.7 million to replace platform lifts for wheelchairs.

The RAAQ budget for the period from 2009 to 2011 totals \$40 million.

The program has an annual budget of \$5.1 million, and an additional \$26.6 million was allocated to this recurrent amount for a two-year period (2007-2008 and 2008-2009) to enable the adaptation of an additional 1,700 dwellings.

Over \$43.7 million has also been invested since 2004, and changes to the administrative process have eliminated the RAAP waiting list at the SHQ. Thanks to the additional budget allocated by the government and the administrative changes, the 4,440 applications for assistance on the SHQ waiting list were processed between May 2007 and March 2008. Certain problems that slow down the adaptation of dwellings once an application has been accepted by the SHQ, however, remain to be solved.

Combat against homelessness

The Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI) is a community-based federal program aimed at deploying projects to reduce and prevent homelessness. In Québec, the HPI is administered by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS).

Over 250 projects were deployed between 2007 and 2009 in order to better equip organizations involved in combating homelessness, reduce the pressure on shelters and increase the number of housing units with community support. The HPI has also enabled the launch of a new, collaborative approach and has raised awareness within the health system of the various facets of homelessness. The Canada-Québec HPI agreement has been renewed for 2009 to 2011.

Also within the framework of the HPI, the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) has provided support for the creation of social housing for people vulnerable to homelessness, via Part III of the AccèsLogis Québec program.

In September 2008, the MSSS released a framework document called *L'itinérance au Québec*. It describes avenues for helping people who are homeless and reducing the risk of homelessness among other citizens. The

National Assembly's Committee on Social Affairs held public hearings on homelessness in Québec in the fall of 2008 and March 2009. A total of 145 briefs were tabled and 105 individuals and groups were heard by the committee.

Support for community efforts in the area of social housing

Launched in November 2007, the framework document *Cadre de référence sur le soutien communautaire en logement social* was prepared to support and enhance the array of front-line community support services in the area of social housing, with a view to making them more complementary with the services provided by the public health and social services system. Projects generated by local and regional initiatives and deployed in collaboration with health and social services agencies receive funding from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS), which has budgeted \$5 million a year for this purpose. Certain agencies also add funds from their own budgets.

As at March 31, 2009, close to 165 agreements had been ratified in the various regions of Québec, with an impact on the tenants of 29,901 housing units. A total of \$5.6 million was invested by the MSSS and its agencies in 2008-2009 in order to create activities and deploy efforts aimed at improving the well-being of individuals and families who live in social housing.

Two other programs funded by the government also provide support for community initiatives in the area of housing.

The Programme d'aide aux organismes communautaires provides financial support for community organizations that contribute to social and community development in the field of housing or to citizen empowerment in the areas of housing conditions and living environments. In 2008-2009, a total of 44 community housing organizations received financial support for their global missions, from a budget of \$1.4 million.

The second program is called the "Programme d'aide à l'initiative communautaire et sociale en HLM." It enables the deployment of ad hoc community action projects in the area of low-rental housing. Projects funded under this program are aimed at favouring residents' empowerment and participation in their living environments. They are also aimed at the creation of stimulating family, community and social living environments conducive to intergenerational and intercultural relations. The projects funded by the program, which has existed since 1998, focus primarily on members of cultural communities, the elderly, and families and individuals grappling with poverty. In 2008-2009, the program provided a total of over \$465,000 in funding for 84 projects.

3.1.4. Better living conditions for individuals and families

Improved food security

Certain investments under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion are aimed at supporting organizations that focus on food security for people in situations of poverty. By means of these investments, the government favours the development of new approaches and training. Support is granted in particular to concerted action projects that increase food assistance and autonomy in the various regions of Québec. Public health branches allocate \$3.2 million to health and social services agencies. Four agencies invested additional amounts during the most recent year. The combined funding of \$3.4 million enabled the following initiatives last year:

- support for the global mission of the Association québécoise des banques alimentaires et des Moissons and the Regroupement des cuisines collectives du Québec;
- preparation of agreements with these national organizations for specific projects;
- support for concerted action projects aimed at developing food security in Québec communities.

In the latter case, the chosen approach favours community involvement in exploring alternative solutions for distributing food. Over the past year, 80% of the amounts granted by health and social services agencies for food security went to projects aligned with this approach. The other 20% of the budget went to food banks to meet ad hoc and emergency needs.

The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) also invested \$408,000 to:

- create hygiene and health training for organizations involved in food security;
- deploy this training in all regions of Québec;
- assess the cost of a nutritional food basket in three regions of Québec.

Meeting children's nutritional needs to help them succeed in school

To help meet the specific food needs of children in underprivileged areas, four Québec government departments¹³ have provided funding for the Québec Breakfast Club since 2004. The mission of the Breakfast Club is to make sure that

13. Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale; Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation; Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux; Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

children who attend primary and secondary schools in underprivileged neighbourhoods are provided with breakfasts, to help them succeed in school and society. Over 14,800 children in 225 schools benefit from daily breakfasts provided by the organization. For the period from July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009, \$1.7 million was invested to support the Québec Breakfast Club.

Free medication for people in situations of poverty

Since the implementation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, free access to medication under the Public Prescription Drug Insurance Plan has been expanded on two occasions, on July 1, 2005, and July 1, 2007. Free access is now provided to people aged 65 and over who receive benefits corresponding to at least 94% of the maximum amount of the Guaranteed Income Supplement and to social assistance recipients. An additional 313,460 people thus benefit from free medication, for an annual investment of \$29 million.

Higher legal aid income cut-offs

Legal aid allows economically underprivileged citizens to have free access to the services of a lawyer in order to defend their rights in court. The income cut-offs for eligibility for this aid have been raised three times since the adoption of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. In 2006, the income cut-offs for unattached individuals and for families were raised for the first time since 1982 and 1996, respectively. Annual increases in the cut-offs have been scheduled up to January 1, 2010. For 2008-2009, this enhancement meant an investment of \$7 million.

Renewed support for community credit

Community credit is an important tool for social and economic development. Unlike traditional credit, it enables the deployment of unconventional and innovative approaches and projects. Community credit favours the creation and preservation of small businesses, through customized support and the granting of loans and loan guarantees. It is hence a solution to the needs of people who launch business projects who would otherwise be excluded from sources of financing. In 2008-2009, the member organizations of the Réseau québécois de crédit communautaire (RQCC) received \$2.2 million in funding. Originally scheduled to end in March 2009, the funding agreement with the RQCC has been upgraded and extended to March 2010.

In 2008-2009, 21 community credit organizations provided support for 1,879 people. Sixty-one percent of these individuals went ahead with their projects, by preparing, launching or consolidating a business. Most of the people who received support during the year were women (56%). Young people also constituted a major share of this clientele (45% between the ages of 18 and 35).

A large percentage of the people who benefited from community credit support were low-income earners.

Government support for community organizations

Québec community organizations play an important role in maintaining and improving citizens' living conditions, particularly those of people affected by social and economic exclusion. As hubs of involvement, these organizations often propose new ways of doing things and innovative approaches in areas such as the combat against poverty and social exclusion. Their efforts and services are highly diverse. Among other groups, they target the most vulnerable members of society, such as young people in difficulty, seniors, people with disabilities, homeless people, immigrants and people who are intellectually challenged or suffer from mental health problems.

The government supports these initiatives within the framework of its community action policy, entitled *Community Action: A Crucial Contribution to the Exercise of Citizenship and the Social Development of Québec*. About 20 government departments and agencies granted \$794.7 million in financial support to community organizations in 2008-2009, compared with \$587.1 million in 2003-2004. Of the 2008-2009 amount, \$495.7 million was devoted to supporting community organizations' missions.

3.2. Prevent poverty and social exclusion by developing people's potential

A number of the measures deployed under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion are preventive. Targeting a variety of groups, they are aimed at ending the intergenerational cycle of poverty and enabling all citizens to improve their living conditions.

3.2.1. Support for parents and early childhood

A popular parental insurance plan

The Québec Parental Insurance Plan came into force in January 2006. It is designed to allow new parents to take a leave from work in order to care for their baby. Two payment options, with different coverage periods and benefit rates, are available to parents. The Plan is also accessible to people who are self-employed.

In 2008, 121,580 persons (67,426 mothers and 54,154 fathers¹⁴) received benefits under the Plan. Of this number, 4,597 individuals (2,712 mothers and 1,885 fathers) were self-employed. A total of \$1.562 billion was paid out in benefits in 2008 to support Québec parents and help their children get off to a good start in life.

The Québec Parental Insurance Plan also offers a supplement for low-income earners. In 2008, the low-income supplement was paid to 8,224 persons, for a total outlay of \$11.7 million.

A partnership for action as of early childhood

Autonomie Jeunes Familles (AJF), a non-profit corporation devoted to preventive efforts to bring about a significant reduction in child poverty, was created under a \$10 million financial partnership between the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation and the Québec government. Initially scheduled to end in 2009, the partnership has been extended to August 2010. The main objective of AJF is to ensure that children in underprivileged environments reach the same developmental stage as the Québec average when they start school. As at March 31, 2009, since the signing of the partnership agreement in December 2004, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) had committed close to \$4.3 million to projects supported by AJF. These projects include support for Centre Premier Berceau, which provides swift assistance for pregnant young women and underprivileged couples. As at December 31, 2008, this project had

14. People who began to receive benefits in 2007 are not included in these figures.

helped 319 couples and single-parent families. Close to 250 babies were born at and attended the Centre.

Preventive perinatal and early childhood action

In 2004, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) released a framework for integrated perinatal and early childhood services for vulnerable families. These integrated services target two groups:

- pregnant women and mothers under age 20, the fathers and their children aged 0 to 5 years;
- pregnant women and mothers aged 20 and over, the fathers and their children aged 0 to 5 years living in extreme poverty.

The services are designed to favour the optimum development of children aged 0 to 5 years, prevent child abuse, neglect and violence, and help pregnant women and parents build loving relationships with their children and fulfil their educational role. They are available in all regions of Québec. Health and social services centres (CSSSs) are the main players. The integrated services mean assistance for families in the form of home visits, support for early childhood educational efforts (deployed in collaboration with educational childcare providers) and backing for inter-sector efforts aimed at creating favourable environments (implemented mainly in collaboration with community organizations).

In 2008-2009, 69.7% of women who gave birth during the year and met the eligibility criteria for integrated perinatal and early childhood services benefited from the integrated services (5,557 newly registered women out of 7,969 new mothers considered to be potential participants). Broken down according to the two target groups indicated above, the figures show that 88.7% of the 2,139 women included in the first group (young parents) and 62.8% of the 5,830 women included in the second group (extreme poverty) availed themselves of the integrated services.

Educational childhood services accessible to the most underprivileged children

Educational childhood services in Québec are aimed, among other things, at child development. Children from disadvantaged environments are targeted specifically by one of the measures adopted under the Action Plan. In 2002, the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés (MFA) signed a framework agreement with the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS), the Association québécoise d'établissements de santé et de services sociaux (AQESSS) and national childcare centre representatives. Designed to promote reciprocal accessibility and continuity of services provided by health and social services centres (CSSSs) and childcare centres across Québec, the agreement allows childcare centres to set aside spaces for children under the responsibility of a CSSS, without being

penalized financially if a space remains vacant. Since April 1, 2005, the MFA has also authorized daycare centres to sign similar agreements with CSSSs.

In 2009, 504 childcare centres and 25 daycare centres had signed agreements with 85 CSSSs.

3.2.2. School success and persistence

Under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) and its partners invest in various programs and services designed to favour school success.

Mobilization of communities to improve school success

Prepared under the direction of MELS, a program called “Famille, école et communauté : réussir ensemble” has been created for parents of children aged 2 to 12, in order to support the school success of children from disadvantaged environments. The program is a five-year pilot project aimed at implementing “educational communities” in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with a view to favouring elementary school success. These educational communities emphasize partnerships between parents, social workers, teachers and other targeted community players, in order to ensure a preponderant role for educational activities (both institutional and non-institutional) in poor neighbourhoods. The trial period ended in June 2009 and evaluation of the program and knowledge transfer are under way.

The program includes francization courses for immigrant parents and adapted municipal library hours to enable children enrolled in a primary school to use the facility. An estimated 5,000 children in 24 schools have benefited from the program, which has mobilized over 300 partners.

Close to \$700,000 was invested in initiatives of this type in 2008-2009. The preliminary findings of the program evaluations point to positive effects in terms of students' feeling of school belonging and self-esteem, as well as a significant reduction in school absences and greater participation by parents in their children's studies and school life.

Awakening disadvantaged children's interest in reading and writing

The Programme d'aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture dans les milieux défavorisés is designed primarily to stimulate the implementation and continuation of sustainable projects to awaken interest in reading and writing. Deployed in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the projects target families with children aged 5 or under, as well as community and public organizations that

provide services for children and families. Approaches for encouraging interest in reading and writing are assimilated by both families and organizations.

Seventy-seven projects have been deployed in Québec's 17 administrative regions. Over 2,400 activities to awaken interest in reading and writing have been launched by partner organizations, in collaboration with parents and their children aged 5 or under and other bodies involved with young children. The projects have over 900 different partners. The amount of \$720,000 was invested in 2008-2009, for a total of \$4.3 million since 2003-2004. The program has been evaluated for the period from 2006 to 2009, and will be revised and improved.

Additional investments to support students in difficulty

Since the 2004-2005 fiscal year, support for students in difficulty has been provided via a budget envelope aimed, among other things, at hiring specialists to ensure early detection of problems and provide young people with appropriate follow-up. The initial targets were 600 more remedial teachers at the elementary school level and 600 more resource teachers at the secondary school level. The objectives also include retaining or hiring professional and support personnel.

According to the data provided by school boards for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008,¹⁵ the additional investments have enabled the creation of 543 new positions for elementary school remedial teachers and 518 secondary school resource teachers. The number of professional and support employees also grew over these two fiscal years. For 2008-2009, \$156.2 million was invested in these ongoing efforts.

Homework assistance

The Homework Assistance Program is designed to boost elementary school students' motivation to do their homework, improve parent-school relations and increase community interest in youth success. The activities funded by the program include homework help twice a week for students with problems and workshops to familiarize parents with classroom tools and methods so that they can help their children.

In 2008-2009, a total investment of \$19.6 million enabled 1,907 projects at 1,886 schools.

Developing healthy lifestyles

The Wellness-Oriented School Program encourages third-cycle elementary students and first-cycle secondary students to adopt healthy lifestyles including regular participation in physical activities and the development of a taste for healthy foods. Sports leagues, circus workshops and an array of other activities

15. The figures for 2008-2009 are not yet known.

have been created under the program. In 2008-2009, school boards were granted close to \$5 million to implement 2,165 projects submitted by over 2,000 schools.

New Approaches, New Solutions strategy to support school success

Agir autrement (New Approaches, New Solutions) is an action strategy that provides special support for schools that welcome highly disadvantaged students. It enables each targeted school to implement measures adapted to its students' needs in order to favour their educational success.

Intended initially for a small number of secondary schools, the strategy was expanded in 2007-2008 to elementary schools and other secondary schools in underprivileged communities. In 2008-2009, 253 secondary schools and 571 elementary schools were covered and \$43 million was invested in the strategy.

Initially scheduled to end in 2006-2007, the New Approaches, New Solutions strategy was extended for an additional two years, in a transitional perspective. An evaluation of the deployment and impact of the strategy is currently under way.

Support for schools in underprivileged sectors of Montréal

The Programme de soutien à l'école montréalaise, which has existed for over a decade, grants additional assistance to elementary schools that welcome students from the most underprivileged parts of the island of Montréal. It backs projects designed to support personal success and learning that take into account needs and contribute to the creation of a committed educational community. During the 2008-2009 school year, \$12.2 million was allocated to the program to fund activities in 163 schools with a combined enrolment of 50,000 students.

3.2.3. Measures for young people under age 25

The Action Plan includes specific measures designed to prevent poverty and social exclusion among at-risk young people under age 25.

Commitment to make services more complementary

A number of government departments and agencies that provide services for young people¹⁶ have signed the Engagement jeunesse agreement, which is

16. Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport; Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale; Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles; Ministère de la Santé et des Services

designed to make certain programs and measures more complementary in order to facilitate young people's transition to adulthood and provide a better response to youth needs. The Secrétariat à la jeunesse is responsible for and coordinates the implementation of the agreement, which is part of the Youth Action Strategy.

The Youth Action Strategy provides a framework for the array of government efforts targeting young people. It is aimed at providing youth with tools so that they can develop their abilities to the maximum. The main objectives of the strategy are to favour young people's educational success, improve their experience and training, enhance their living conditions and encourage their social involvement, and to support young people who are experiencing problems. The Youth Action Strategy was renewed a few months ago and the second edition will cover the period from 2009 to 2014, to the benefit of Québec and its upcoming generation.

The Engagement jeunesse agreement is currently being deployed in Québec's 17 administrative regions. Regional branches of government departments and agencies, particularly those involved in the combat against poverty and exclusion, are invited to work together with regional players such as regional councils of elected representatives (CREs), carrefours jeunesse-emploi, school boards, community organizations and the health system.

Twenty-one liaison officers were hired in 2008-2009 to deploy the Engagement jeunesse across Québec. Regional committees grouping together departmental and non-governmental partners have been created in all regions. All told, \$1.2 million was granted to the regions for the Engagement jeunesse for the 2008-2009 fiscal year.

Efforts to encourage young drop-outs to complete secondary school

The Programme d'aide pour favoriser le retour en formation des 16-24 ans enables the adaptation of training and support services to the needs of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who have dropped out of school and have a low level of education. At the local level, the program is a school board responsibility. It is implemented by local teams including school boards, local employment centres (CLEs), youth centres, health and social service centres (CSSSs), youth forums, employability organizations and regional businesses. Each team draws up a picture of the situation of young people without a secondary school diploma within the school board territory, and the members work together to identify directions and deploy shared means to encourage these young drop-outs to obtain their diploma or take steps to integrate into the community and join the labour market on a sustainable basis. Since January 2004, \$9.5 million has been invested in this program.

Developing the self-reliance of at-risk young people served by youth centres

The Qualification des jeunes project is aimed at preparing young people served by youth centres to make the transition to self-reliance and ensure their vocational qualification, through intensive efforts. The project is aimed at 16-year-olds who have been placed and are particularly vulnerable to situations of social exclusion and poverty upon reaching full age. To prevent this from happening, they are offered a variety of activities related to employment and the social skills they need to become self-reliant.

A \$3.8 million investment in 2008-2009 enabled the full deployment of Qualification jeunes at all youth centres. The target of helping 500 young people was reached. A new target focuses on involving 190 more young people in Qualification jeunes activities between 2010 and 2014.

Resources to support 16- and 17-year-olds with problems

Implemented in 2006, IDEO 16-17 is a customized support measure offered by carrefours jeunesse-emploi. The objective is to help 16- and 17-year olds in difficulty achieve social and occupational self-reliance. Depending on young people's needs, IDEO 16-17 can help them continue their secondary studies, find a job or acquire their first employment experience, or refer them to specialized services for help with personal problems (drug addiction, mental health problems, housing problems, etc.). The goal is to allow young people to avoid falling back on social assistance when they reach age 18 and enable them to continue their efforts to achieve social, vocational and personal autonomy.

The available participation data for 2008-2009¹⁷ show that 2,221 new young people aged 16 and 17 took part in the measure. The great majority of these participants signed up for the school persistence component. A total of \$3.9 million was allocated to the various *carrefours jeunesse-emploi* in 2008-2009.

An evaluation of the measure in 2008-2009 showed that out of the 1,170 young people who had completed their participation in 2007-2008, 592 were still in school and 351 had entered the labour market.

IDEO 16-17 will be renewed for the period from 2009 to 2014.

Program to prevent young people under age 25 from falling back on social assistance

Implemented in April 2007, the Youth Alternative Program offers young people under age 25 an alternative to last-resort financial assistance programs. It is aimed at supporting socioprofessional integration for young people, among other ways through incentive measures. The array of services is variable, and is adapted to individual situations within the limits of certain parameters.

In order to make the program more attractive and do a better job of meeting young people's needs, the government has raised the youth allowance. Since January 1, 2009, independent adults have been eligible for \$155 per week and heads of single-parent families have been eligible for \$180.

There were 7,852 enrolments in the program as at March 31, 2009, compared with a 2008-2009 target of 7,500. All told, the program required an investment of \$36.8 million for the 2008-2009 year.

17. Figures as at June 2, 2009, based on the data compiled as at that date (95% complete).

Resources to support 18- to 24-year-olds in difficulty

The carrefours jeunesse-emploi are also participating in the deployment of Jeunes en action. Part of the Job Preparation Projects measure, it was launched in April 2007 by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS). Jeunes en action targets young people aged 18 to 24 who are experiencing serious socioprofessional problems that prevent them from entering the labour market in the short or medium term. This support measure is aimed at helping participants develop their personal, social and vocational autonomy.

Two pilot projects were also carried out in 2008-2009, one of them in collaboration with the Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre and the other with the La Tuque Native Friendship Centre. The projects will be renewed for 2009-2010. Two new projects will also be deployed this year, with the native friendship centres in Québec and Chibougamau, respectively.

As for results, the target of 2,939 enrolments for 2008-2009 was reached. Indeed, 3,225 young people took part in Jeunes en action. Over the past year, \$14.4 million was granted to carrefours jeunesse-emploi, partner organizations such as native friendship centres and young participants in Jeunes en action.

Internships to explore the labour market

The Découvrir program was implemented in 2007. Offered by the Ministère de l'Emploi de la Solidarité sociale (MESS), it opens employers' doors to young adults facing serious obstacles to entering the labour market, who are offered workplace observation and exploration internships lasting up to four weeks. These internships help young people validate their vocational choices and allow them to make themselves known to potential employers. In 2008-2009, 581 young people took part in Découvrir internships.

Mentoring to help young members of visible minorities and cultural communities

The Québec pluriel measure is part of the 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy. It existed prior to the deployment of the Strategy as a pilot project in the Montréal and Capitale-Nationale regions. Since 2006, Québec pluriel has been implemented in six regions where needs are present.¹⁸ Québec pluriel is a support measure built around mentoring in order to help young members of visible minorities aged 16 to 24 and members of cultural communities aged 16 to 35 return to school or enter or re-enter the labour market. The originality of the measure lies mainly in the pairing of young people with mentors, which allows the latter to share their labour market experience, passion for their work and

18. Montréal, Capitale-Nationale, Estrie (Sherbrooke), Laval, Montérégie (Longueuil), Outaouais (Gatineau).

knowledge of Québec society. Québec pluriel thus provides personalized support with an emphasis on mentoring.

In 2008-2009, an investment of \$543,195 enabled 222 mentor-youth pairs in the target regions. These mentorships led to the labour market entry or return to school of 163 young people.

3.2.4. Support for initiatives to promote seniors' social participation

In order to reduce the isolation of seniors, who sometimes find themselves in situations of social exclusion, a program called “Du cœur à l’action pour les aînés du Québec” (PCAAQ) provides financial support for ad hoc community projects. These projects take various shapes. Among other objectives, they are aimed at encouraging the creation of intergenerational relations, supporting natural caregivers and countering the isolation of seniors. The program has a budget of \$1.6 million. Eighty projects were subsidized in 2008-2009, in all regions of Québec.

3.3. Involve society as a whole

Mobilizing all social stakeholders is one of the keys to achieving the objective set by the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. Indeed, the spirit of the Act calls for the involvement of all members of society in preventing poverty and improving the living conditions of people suffering from socioeconomic exclusion.

The Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion features a financial tool for funding local and regional projects conducive to greater involvement of community players. The Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS) has enabled an array of original, innovative efforts that have mobilized individuals and organizations to join the combat against poverty.

Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales

The FQIS was created as a catalyst and lever for the emergence of local and regional strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion. In 2008-2009, it enabled \$8.6 million in investments in the deployment of projects related to the Action Plan.

Support for the combat against poverty in Montréal

Via the FQIS, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) invested \$5 million in 2008-2009 in an agreement on social development and the combat against poverty and social exclusion, signed in the wake of the Contrat de ville, covering the period from 2003 to 2007. In March 2009, the MESS and the Montréal municipal administration renewed the agreement on social development and the combat against poverty and social exclusion. The MESS will invest \$24 million over the three years of the renewed agreement, i.e., \$7 million in 2009-2010, \$8 million in 2010-2011 and \$9 million in 2011-2012.

Montréal's efforts to combat poverty and improve the living conditions of residents of certain underprivileged neighbourhoods are based in part on integrated urban renewal, similar to the integrated territorial approach.

Over the past year, 242 projects were carried out and over 400 partners were mobilized in the combat against poverty and social exclusion. The projects focused on areas such as social and urban problems (prostitution and homelessness), social integration of young people, support for families and small children, preventing early school-leaving and helping 18- to 30-year-olds enter the labour market.

Mobilizing local players in the combat against poverty and social exclusion

By encouraging efforts based on the integrated territorial approach, the government, via the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) and its agency Emploi-Québec, wants to mobilize regional and local players to implement and support initiatives to combat community-rooted poverty. These initiatives tap into the knowledge of community issues of the local players who deploy them. When applied to the combat against poverty and social exclusion, the integrated territorial approach is thus based on a shared, global vision of the socioeconomic situation of a given region or community. The deployment of territorial efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion is therefore adapted to rural or urban contexts and emphasizes community perspectives. Exploratory efforts were deployed between 2004 and 2007.

Since then, various agreements based on the integrated territorial approach and taking into consideration the lessons learned from these initial efforts have been signed. In 2008-2009, the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS) was allocated a budget of \$832,672¹⁹ to support the implementation of local strategies for people struggling with poverty and social exclusion. As at March 31, 2009, a total of 62 territories covered by local employment centres (CLEs) with a high concentration of poverty had signed an agreement with the MESS aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion (i.e., nine more than the previous year). Investments in integrated territorial approaches are aimed at creating a leverage effect for launching projects designed by community players.

The efforts devoted by the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC), in collaboration with the MESS, to deploy projects as part of an integrated territorial approach for Québec Aboriginal communities also deserve attention.²⁰ The first steps enabled funding for a research-action (\$74,000 investment by the MESS). The final step of this research-action enabled the hiring of a professional to coordinate the creation of a multisector committee for each Aboriginal nation and the creation of an Aboriginal foundation called "Nouveaux Sentiers" to fund projects. The FNQLHSSC Social Development Office is the leader for the subsequent steps, aimed at creating an action plan for each nation or each community.

19. The Montréal region is excluded, given the annual investments by the MESS under existing agreements.

20. The projects do not cover the Inuit communities of Nunavik.

3.4. Ensure consistent, coherent efforts

Various means have been deployed under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in order to ensure consistent, coherent efforts.

Collaboration between government departments and agencies

Grouping together representatives of various government departments and agencies²¹ concerned by the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, the Comité interministériel de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale is a forum for collaboration and for coordinating efforts to combat poverty. This collaboration is also essential for the drafting of the next Action Plan.

Evaluating the impact on income of proposed statutes and regulations

Evaluating the impact on underprivileged citizens' income of bills and regulations proposed by government departments and agencies is one of the keys to ensuring the coherence of government efforts to combat poverty. Proposed bills and regulations are thus analysed in terms of direct and significant effects on the income of individuals and families who, according to specific indicators, are in a situation of poverty. If applicable, the findings are submitted to the government along with the proposed bills and regulations.

Advisory committee

The Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale is an advisory committee created under the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. It advises the minister responsible for the combat against poverty and monitors the effects of government policies on situations of poverty and social exclusion.

In carrying out its mandate, the committee issues opinions, based in part on targeted consultations, aimed at shedding light on various issues related to poverty and social exclusion. Since its creation, the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale has issued the four opinions described farther on in this document.

21. The interdepartmental committee is made up of the following government departments and agencies: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale; Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux; Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport; Ministère des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire; Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles; Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés; Ministère du Travail; Société d'habitation du Québec; Secrétariat à la jeunesse; Office des personnes handicapées du Québec; Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones.

CEPE

In 2008-2009, the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion (CEPE), an observation, research and discussion centre in the area of poverty, proposed a series of indicators for poverty, inequality and social exclusion to enable Québec to measure progress in combating poverty and social exclusion. Its recommendations are contained in a report called *Taking the Measure of Poverty*. The indicators proposed by the CEPE favour enlightened decisions.

3.5. Additional efforts

Commitment for Employment and Employment Pact Plus

The Commitment for Employment is a three-year strategy designed to ensure Québec of a better trained, high-performance workforce in a context of challenges in the areas of international competition, sustainable development and the imminent decline in the labour force. The Commitment also reasserts the fundamental importance that the government places on employment as a tool for combating poverty and social exclusion.

By means of the Commitment for Employment, with support from labour unions, employers, the world of education and the community sector, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) has expanded access to its services and measures in order to meet the needs of individuals and businesses, solve problems related to labour shortages and underqualification, and provide enhanced support for all persons available to work who make efforts to enter the labour market on a long-term basis.

The Commitment emphasizes efforts by all sectors of Québec society, with a view to boosting productivity through training and skills recognition and development. It is a means for helping people overcome obstacles to entering the labour market. Over a three-year period (from 2008-2009 to 2010-2011), the Commitment means close to \$1 billion in public and private investments, in addition to the investments already earmarked to encourage employment.

Among other objectives, the Commitment is aimed at:

- reducing the number of social aid recipients by 50,000 by 2011;
- increasing by 52,000 the number of persons who avail themselves of public employment services in order to enter the labour market or obtain training;
- reaching an additional 250,000 employed workers in order to upgrade their qualifications or recognize their skills;
- providing an additional 4,800 businesses with Emploi-Québec services in order to meet their needs in the areas of workforce training and skills recognition.

The available data for these targets show that:

- There were 484,566 social aid recipients in March 2009,²² i.e., 6,508 fewer than during the 2007-2008 reference year (April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2008);
- In 2008-2009, 43,286 people were helped by a job-entry or training measure offered by Emploi-Québec. This is an increase of 9,283 compared with the number of people served by the same measures during the 2007-2008 reference year (April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2008);
- In 2008-2009, 5,296 businesses received support from Emploi-Québec in the area of training (Manpower Training measure, business section). This is an increase of 1,240 compared with the number of businesses supported during the 2007-2008 reference year (April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2008);
- In 2008-2009, Emploi-Québec reached 114,123 workers on the job in order to enhance their occupational qualifications or recognize their skills. This is an increase of 2,745 compared with the number of workers reached during the 2007-2008 reference year (April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2008).

The repercussions of the U.S. financial crisis and the global recession have required government actions to limit the negative impact on employment in Québec and pave the way to economic recovery. The Employment Pact *Plus* is the government's response to this situation. Released in March 2009, it is the second part of the Commitment for Employment, designed to enhance support for people who lose their jobs. One of the chosen approaches is preventive action to help vulnerable businesses, among other ways via a measure called "Soutien aux entreprises à risque de ralentissement économique" (SERRE). The context-driven Employment Pact *Plus* adds \$518 million in public and private investments to the Commitment for Employment for the years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

22. Difference between the average number of social aid recipients from April 2008 to March 2009 and the number of social aid recipients from April 2007 to March 2008.

4. CONVINCING RESULTS AND A CHANGING SITUATION

4.1. Low income rates using the Market Basket Measure²³

Low income rates using the Market Basket Measure (MBM), for all persons, Canada and provinces, 2000-2007²⁴								
MBM	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Canada	14.6	13.5	13.6	13.2	13.1	12.4	11.9	10.1
Newfoundland and Labrador	24.7	21.0	22.2	18.5	19.5	16.9	15.4	12.3
Prince Edward Island	17.4	17.5	14.6	13.8	13.0	12.9	12.2	10.3
Nova Scotia	18.6	18.3	17.3	17.5	15.4	14.8	13.2	13.3
New Brunswick	16.2	15.3	16.6	16.5	15.7	16.6	15.9	13.3
Québec	12.7	12.1	10.9	9.9	8.9	9.7	9.8	8.5
Ontario	12.5	11.6	12.4	12.3	13.1	12.4	12.3	10.3
Manitoba	13.3	12.1	13.4	12.2	11.8	13.0	10.8	8.7
Saskatchewan	15.8	13.9	13.0	13.4	14.3	13.7	13.5	11.3
Alberta	13.0	12.3	10.8	12.5	12.6	10.0	7.8	7.4
British Columbia	22.6	20.2	21.6	20.3	19.7	16.9	16.3	13.4

For the years 2000 to 2007 (the last year for which figures are available), there was a generalized reduction in the low income rate using the MBM in all provinces. In Québec, the deployment of the economic measures included in the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, in a favourable economic context, reduced the low income rate to 8.5% in 2007. Without the Action Plan, which helped increase the disposable income of low-income citizens, the MBM low income rate would have been 2.0 percentage points higher in 2005 and 1.6 points higher in 2006. These numbers mean that approximately 147,000 more people would have been under the MBM low income threshold in 2005 and 119,000 more in 2006 if they had not benefited from the Action Plan measures. In 2007, Québec remained one of the provinces with the lowest MBM low income rates.

23. Low income rate: percentage of the population made up of households with total disposable income lower than the Market Basket Measure threshold.

24. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *Low Income in Canada 2000-2007 Using the Market Basket Measure*, SP-909-07-09E, 2009, 79 pp. Figures compiled by the Direction des politiques de sécurité du revenu, Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale.

The low income rate varies considerably depending on the type of family unit:

- The low income rate for children and young people (under age 18) shrank considerably, from 15.8% to 7.3%, between 2000 and 2007. For the latter year, Québec posted the lowest incidence of low income in Canada for people under age 18, ahead of Alberta, where the rate was 9%.
- The low income rate for lone-parent families also declined significantly over this period, from 37.9% in 2000 to 19.7% in 2007. While the reduction was significant for female lone-parent families (from 41.6% to 21.7% over the period), the low income rate remained much higher than for male lone-parent families (14.1% in 2007). The low income rate for female lone-parent families was nevertheless lower in Québec than in the other provinces.
- The low income rate for elderly people (all types of households) was the lowest, at 1.8% in 2007. The rate for unattached elderly people was also very low in Québec in 2007 (2.7%). Québec's figures for the elderly are among the best in Canada.
- The low income rates for unattached individuals remained the highest in 2007 (28.3% for unattached men of all ages and 31.4% for unattached women of all ages). It was especially high when compared with the rate for families consisting of at least two persons (6% in 2007).

The figures thus show that the public policies that had the greatest impact on reducing low income rates over the past few years were those that supported primarily families with children. Unattached individuals have benefited less from the measures implemented since 2004. On the other hand, while the low income rate for female lone-parent families remains very high, there has been an improvement for this group since the start of the decade.

**Low income rates using the Market Basket Measure (MBM) for all persons and families,
by family unit, age and sex, Québec, 2000-2007²⁵**

MBM	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
All persons	12.7	12.1	10.9	9.9	8.9	9.7	9.8	8.5
Under 18 years old	15.8	14.5	11.4	9.6	8.3	8.6	9.4	7.3
18 to 64	13.7	13.1	12.2	11.4	10.4	11.6	11.6	10.2
65 and over	1.9	2.6	3.3	2	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.8
Males	11.6	11.2	10.1	9.6	9	9.6	9.9	8.4
Under 18 years of age	15.2	13.9	12.2	10.3	9.1	8.7	9.3	8.4
18 to 64	12	11.6	10.4	10.8	10.1	11.2	11.4	9.6
65 and over	2.0	2.6	3.4	1.1	1.7	1.5	2.2	1.8
Females	13.7	13	11.7	10.1	8.7	9.8	9.8	8.5
Under 18 years of age	16.3	15.1	10.6	8.8	7.4	8.4	9.6	6.2
18 to 64	15.4	14.5	13.9	12.1	10.7	12	11.8	10.8
65 and over	1.7	2.5	3.2	2.6	1.6	1.8	1.0	1.8
All families	15.8	15.4	13.9	13	12.4	13.6	13.2	12.3
Economic families comprising at least 2 people	10.1	9.1	9	7.7	6.3	6.8	7	6
Elderly families	1.9	1.6	4.5	1.7	2.2	2.5	1.6	1.7
Elderly married couples	1.0	1.4	1.7	1.0	1.6	1.4	1.0	1.2
Other elderly families	5.0	2.1	12.4	3.6	4.2	6.3	3.9	3.5
Non-elderly families	11.5	10.4	9.8	8.6	7	7.5	7.9	6.7
Married couples	8.7	9	9	8.3	6.3	7.3	7	6.8
Two-parent families with children	8.5	8.8	6	5	4.4	4.6	5.7	3.2
Married couples with other relatives	3.9	3.6	3.5	2.3	4.7	4.1	0.5	1.6
Lone-parent families	37.9	30.8	32.1	26.6	22.7	21.6	21.6	19.7
Male lone-parent families	22	11.9	15	11.3	8.7	9.4	8.3	14.1
Female lone-parent families	41.6	35.3	37	30.5	27	25.4	25.9	21.7
Other non-elderly families	10.9	8	10.2	12.1	5.8	8.5	13.2	10.8
All unattached individuals	33.6	33.3	29	28.8	29.7	32.6	30.5	29.7
Unattached non-elderly males	28.7	28.7	24.4	26.8	28.9	31.5	30.2	28.3
Unattached non-elderly females	39.7	39.2	34.6	31.4	30.7	34.1	30.8	31.4
All unattached elderly	2.9	6.0	3.3	2.9	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.7
Unattached elderly males	4.3	8.1	4.2	2.3	3.8	2.4	6.6	2.6
Unattached elderly females	2.4	5.2	3.0	3.0	1.7	2.4	1.0	2.7

25. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *Low Income in Canada 2000-2007 Using the Market Basket Measure*, SP-909-07-09E, 2009.

Family unit: unattached individual or economic family of two or more persons according to the Statistics Canada definition.

4.2. Work and employment

Even though the fifth year of deployment of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion coincided with a period of economic recession, the labour market remained relatively accessible. Despite modest growth in jobs, employment reached a new peak, with an average of 3,881,700 jobs in 2008.

The unemployment rate²⁶ remained unchanged, at 7.2%, for 2008. There was nonetheless an increase in the rate for men, which rose from 7.9% to 8.2%. The rate for women continued to shrink (from 6.4% to 6.2%). The employment rate for people aged 15 to 64 was relatively stable between 2007 and 2008, dipping slightly from 74.3% to 74.2% for men and edging up from 68.8% to 69.1% for women.

The labour market benefited women in particular in 2008. Indeed, women obtained close to three-quarters of the new jobs during the year (22,400 of the 30,000 new jobs). The majority of the 30,000 jobs that were added in 2008 were full-time (70.7%). Of the new jobs added in 2008, 5,800 (19.3%) went to immigrants.

The situation has changed, however, since 2008. The figures for the first three quarters of 2009 show a rise in unemployment due to the economic crisis. Governmental efforts, including the deployment of the Employment Pact *Plus* and other measures included in the 2009-2010 budget, are aimed at maintaining the achievements of recent years in the areas of employment and the combat against poverty.

4.3. Improving disposable income

The economic measures implemented under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion brought about an increase in the disposable income of several types of family units in Québec between 2003 and 2009. The figures in the following simulations are comparable to the above-described variations in low income rates using the Market Basket Measure.

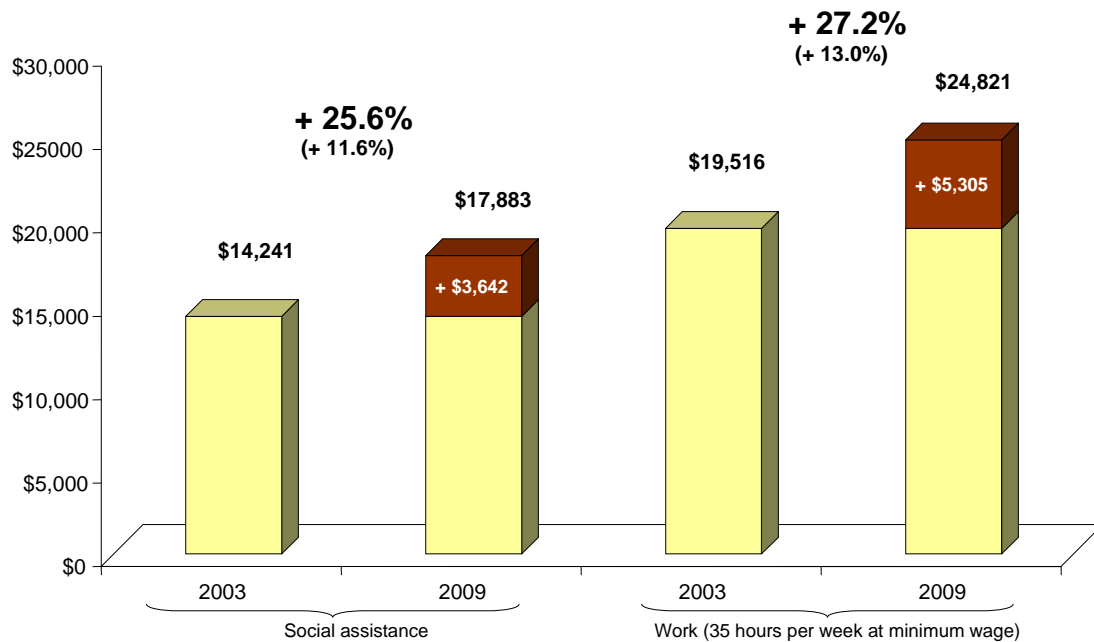
26. Data compiled by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (annual average).

Single-parent families

For single-parent families receiving benefits under the Social Assistance Program with a child under age 5, real income grew by 11.6% between 2003 and 2009. In current dollars, the variation was 25.6%.

In the case of single-parent families with a child under age 5, where the parent works full-time at minimum wage, disposable income grew by 13% (27.2% in current dollars).

Changes in disposable income, single-parent families with a child under age 5 (2003 to 2009)²⁷



27. According to a simulation based on a work week of 35 hours at the minimum wage in effect as of May 1, 2009 (\$9 an hour).
Parameters from April 2003 to July 2009.

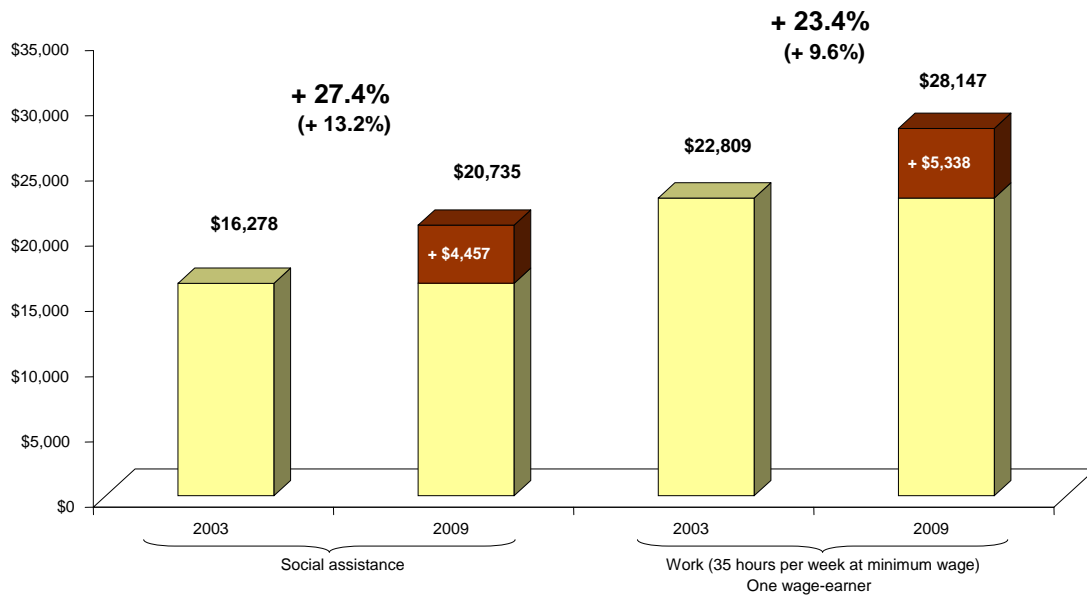
Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, Direction des politiques sociales. The percentages between parentheses are variations in disposable income taking into account the increase in the cost of living over the period.

Two-parent families

The Action Plan has also had a positive impact on the disposable income of couples with children. For example, between 2003 and 2009, the disposable income of couples with a dependent child under age 5 grew by 23.4% if one of the parents worked full-time at minimum wage. The increase was 9.6% once inflation for the period is factored in.

For couples receiving benefits under the Social Assistance Program, the corresponding increase was 27.4% (13.2% taking into account the increase in the cost of living).

Changes in disposable income, two-parent families with a child under age 5 (2003 to 2009)²⁸



28. According to a simulation based on a work week of 35 hours at the minimum wage in effect as of May 1, 2009 (\$9 an hour).

Parameters from April 2003 to July 2009.

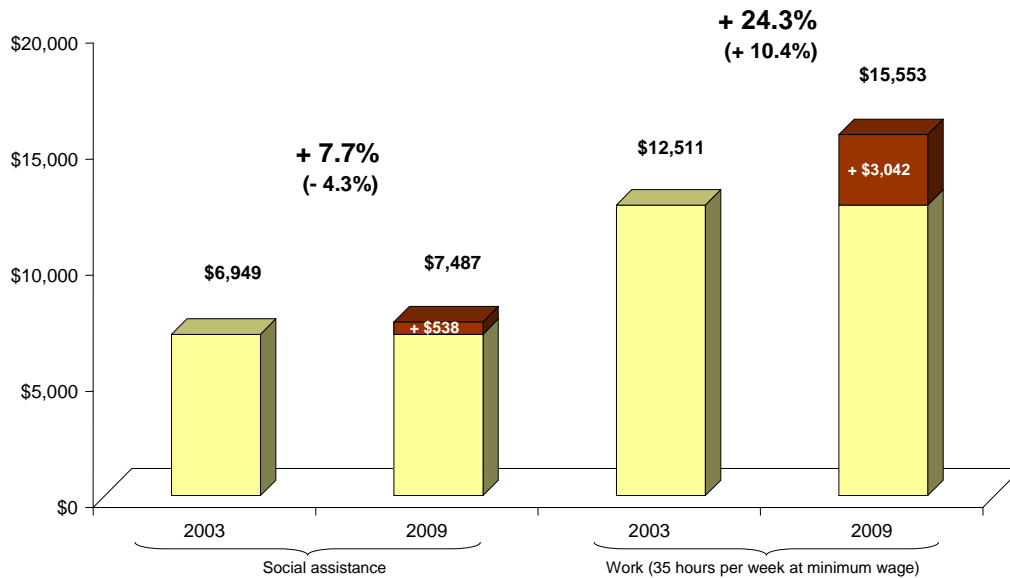
Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, Direction des politiques sociales. The percentages between parentheses are variations in disposable income taking into account the increase in the cost of living over the period.

Independent adults

While income support measures had a beneficial impact for families, the results were less positive for independent adults. Between 2003 and 2009, independent adults receiving benefits under the Social Assistance Program saw a 4.3% decline in their real income.

The real income of independent adults who work, on the other hand, grew by 10.4% between 2003 and 2009. Solving the problems of underprivileged independent adults is complex, and the solutions are not purely economic, as people in this category often have health problems that affect their social condition.

*Changes in disposable income, independent adults (2003 to 2009)*²⁹



29. According to a simulation based on a work week of 35 hours at the minimum wage in effect as of May 1, 2009 (\$9 an hour).

Parameters from April 2003 to July 2009.

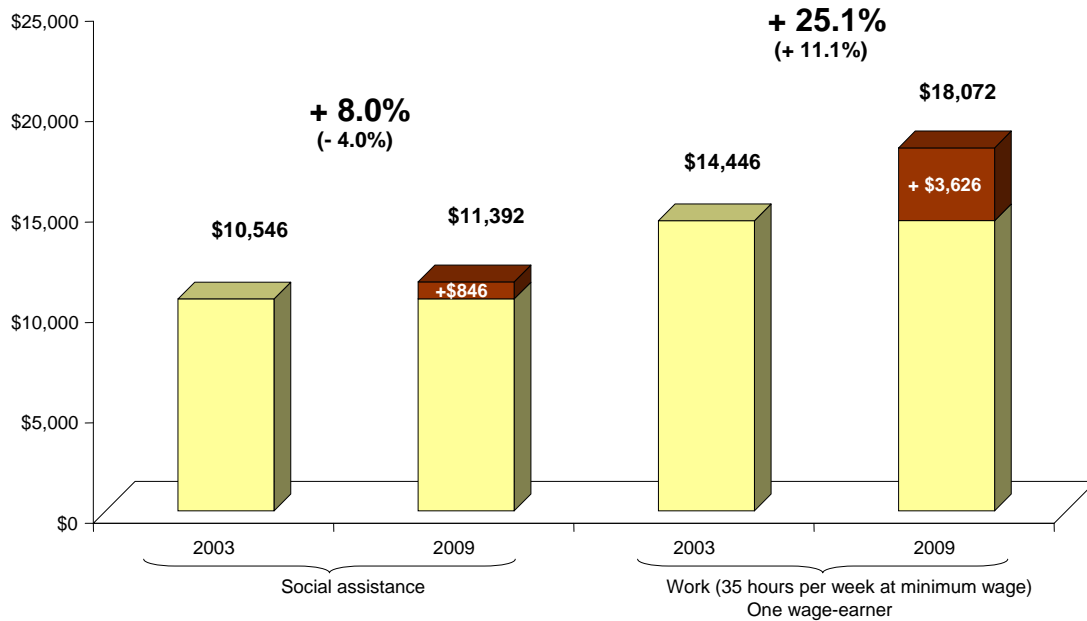
Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, Direction des politiques sociales. The percentages between parentheses are variations in disposable income taking into account the increase in the cost of living over the period.

Childless couples

Childless couples who worked for the minimum wage experienced a 25.1% increase in their disposable income between 2003 and 2009 (11.1% in 2003 constant dollars).

The situation for childless couples receiving benefits under the Social Assistance Program, however, was less positive. Their income grew by only 8% between 2003 and 2009. This is equivalent to a 4% decrease once inflation is factored in.

*Changes in disposable income, childless couples (2003 to 2009)*³⁰



The initial Action Plan, with its emphasis on families, thus enabled substantial gains for certain types of households, particularly those with children.

30. According to a simulation based on a work week of 35 hours at the minimum wage in effect as of May 1, 2009 (\$9 an hour).

Parameters from April 2003 to July 2009.

Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, Direction des politiques sociales. The percentages between parentheses are variations in disposable income taking into account the increase in the cost of living over the period.

4.4. Variations in the social aid rate since 2003

The impact of efforts to combat poverty can also be measured by means of other indicators. The social aid rate — that is, the number of people receiving financial help under social aid programs³¹ as a percentage of the overall Québec population under age 65 — is one of these indicators. The gradual reduction in this rate between 2003 and 2008 meant that the number of people reliant on social aid programs was declining. Between March 2003 and March 2008, the social aid rate shrank from 8.4% to 7.4%. In March 2009, the rate was identical to that for the previous year, as the economic context was less favourable for reduced reliance on social aid. It should be noted that larger percentages of last-resort financial assistance recipients were male (51.8% in March 2009 compared with 49.8% in March 2003) and independent adults (68.4% in March 2009 compared with 64.0% in March 2003).

Between March 2003 and March 2009, the number of last-resort financial assistance recipients (adults and children) shrank by 10.6%, from 544,229 to 486,282 (i.e., a decrease of 57,947). Similarly, the number of children whose parents received last-resort financial assistance declined by 18.2%, from 139,869 in March 2003 to 114,436 in March 2009. The number of adults receiving last-resort financial assistance was also down by 8.0%, from 404,360 to 371,846 (a decline of 32,514).

The decline in the number of adult recipients was more significant for certain groups, including adults with an unlimited capacity for employment (–15.2%, or 25,670 fewer adults), childless couples (–23.3%, or 9,484 fewer adults), couples with children (–15.2%, or 7,502 fewer adults), women (–11.8%, or 23,910 fewer adults), young people under age 25 (–23.1%, or 9,998 fewer young adults) and people who have received last-resort financial assistance for less than 12 consecutive months (–20.6%, or 17,696 fewer adults). There has hence been a significant change in the profile of recipients of the various last-resort financial assistance programs since 2003. This also applies to the percentage of long-term recipients, i.e., people who have received last-resort financial assistance for a combined period of ten or more years, which grew from 50.0% in March 2003 to 54.6% in March 2009.

31. In the Québec context, the term “social aid programs” applies to the Social Assistance Program, the Social Solidarity Program and the Youth Alternative Program.

4.5. Interprovincial comparison of households receiving last-resort financial assistance

The current global financial crisis is creating problems for many Canadian households, forcing them to fall back on last-resort financial assistance.

**Changes in the number of recipients
of last-resort financial assistance in Québec, Ontario and Alberta,
April 2008, March 2009 and August 2009**

Month	QUÉBEC		ONTARIO		ALBERTA	
	Total	Var. ⁽¹⁾	Total	Var. ⁽¹⁾	Total	Var. ⁽¹⁾
April 2008	487,903	–	711,159	–	90,211	–
March 2009	486,282	–0.3%	757,022	6.4%	101,214	12.2%
August 2009	486,158	–0.4%	798,105	12.2%	107,405	19.1%

⁽¹⁾ Variation compared with the month of April 2008.

Sources:

Québec – *Rapport statistique mensuel sur la clientèle des programmes d'assistance sociale*, Direction de la statistique et du soutien aux expérimentations, September 2009.

Ontario – *Ontario Social Assistance Monthly Statistical Report*, Statistics and Analysis Unit, Policy Research and Analysis Branch, Social Policy Development Division, Ministry of Community and Social Services, August 2009.

Alberta – *Rapport sur le nombre de prestataires par provinces et territoires, septembre 2009*, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Although Alberta does not include its Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program in the calculation of its social aid rate, we have taken the AISH beneficiaries into account for purposes of comparison.

In this context, a comparison between the number of last-resort financial assistance recipients in Ontario, Québec and Alberta between the months of April 2008 and March 2009 tends to show that Québec's social safety net has helped soften the impact of the recession in Québec. Indeed, during the period in question, the number of recipients varied considerably less in Québec than in the other two provinces. The data for August 2009 confirm the positive effect of Québec's policies to combat poverty, including the Commitment for Employment and the Employment Pact *Plus*, which have enabled more people to remain employed.

5. TOWARD A SECOND GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN TO COMBAT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Preparation of the second Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion is currently under way.

Work of the Comité interministériel de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale

Created under the first Action Plan, the Comité interministériel de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale is a committee made up of representatives of the government departments and agencies that play an essential role in combating poverty and social exclusion. It is both a forum for sharing information about measures that have been deployed or that are under consideration, and a catalyst for concerted government action in favour of people in situations of poverty that ensures the establishment of the necessary links to implement the Action Plan and the coherence of the approach. The committee also enables monitoring of processes and efforts.

As part of the preparation of the next Action Plan, the committee's main role is to analyse, propose and prepare new or enhanced measures. These measures are based on or take into consideration consultations, opinions and documents from various sources.

Opinions issued by the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale

The Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) has involved the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale in the preparation of the next Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. To this end, the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity asked this advisory committee to issue two opinions in 2009.

The first opinion deals with a strategy for preventing persistent poverty among at-risk groups such as recent immigrants, people with disabilities and homeless people.³² Issued on April 2, 2009, the opinion takes into account consultations that highlighted various problems. Certain population groups are struggling with or are at greater risk of persistent poverty requiring sustained intervention by the government and its partners. According to the advisory committee, the means deployed to support the most vulnerable members of society could be enhanced in order to reach and effectively help people in these groups. In its opinion, the committee proposes ways to adapt general public services to the needs of people

32. Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, *La prévention de la pauvreté persistante*, 2009.

in this category, upgrade specific existing measures and implement other measures to improve the situation.

The second opinion features recommendations concerning a strategy for supporting efforts by underprivileged communities, aimed at facilitating local responsibility for actions to combat poverty and social exclusion, including public transportation issues in remote regions.³³ This opinion was issued on June 11, 2009. According to the advisory committee, the territorial approach stimulates efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion. Instead of focusing on fixing individual problems, the approach positions the combat against poverty and social exclusion in a local or regional development perspective that takes into consideration community characteristics. It also emphasizes local resources and greater community empowerment in the area of social and economic development. In addition, the advisory committee recommends that the government replace the overly compartmentalized approach that characterizes some of its services by an approach based on greater interdepartmental collaboration.

These two opinions are in addition to an opinion specified in the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, concerning revenue targets and the means to attain them to improve the financial situation of persons and families living in poverty,³⁴ and an opinion issued in 2008 concerning the effects of rate increases.³⁵ Both of these opinions contain recommendations for increasing the income of people struggling with poverty, including the full indexing of benefits granted under last-resort financial assistance programs.

The issues and recommendations covered by all four opinions issued by the advisory committee will be taken into account in the preparation of the next Action Plan.

Rendez-vous de la solidarité

The first Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion was extended for an extra year to allow the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity and the Minister for Social Services to consult stakeholders in all sectors and regions in order to prepare the second Action Plan. Announced on November 3, 2008, these consultations got under way in June 2009 and continued during the fall of 2009.

33. Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, *Le soutien à l'action locale de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale*, 2009.

34. Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, *Les cibles d'amélioration du revenu des personnes et des familles, les meilleurs moyens de les atteindre ainsi que le soutien financier minimal*, 2009.

35. Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale. *Les répercussions des hausses tarifaires sur les conditions de vie des personnes à faible revenu*, 2008.

The results of the consultations, held under the banner “Rendez-vous de la solidarité,” will be taken into account during the preparation of the measures included in the next Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Work of the CEPE

Among other things, efforts by the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion (CEPE) enable enlightened decisions with respect to the preparation of the next Action Plan.

In February 2008, the CEPE released a report on low income in Québec, called *Le faible revenu au Québec : un état de situation*. It provides a detailed profile of unattached adults and recipients of last-resort financial assistance. The CEPE plans to publish annual updates of this overview of low income in Québec.

The CEPE also prepared an opinion called *Taking the Measure of Poverty: Proposed Indicators of Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion to Measure Progress in Québec*, in compliance with one of the provisions of the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. Approved by the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity, this document was released in May 2009. The CEPE recommends the use of the Market Basket Measure (MBM) along with existing indicators, as the main benchmark for measuring progress in Québec from the viewpoint of coverage of basic needs. The MBM has thus been retained as a monitoring tool in Québec.

In addition, the CEPE launched a concerted research-action during the 2007-2009 period. This research-action flows from a partnership with the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS), Ministère des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire (MAMROT), Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ), Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation and Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC). Seven research projects, a knowledge synthesis project and three doctoral research scholarships have received \$1.27 million in funding. The reports generated by the concerted research-action will be taken into consideration in the preparation of the next Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

6. CONCLUSION

In 2002, the Québec government launched a combat against poverty and social exclusion that has transformed public action in favour of people affected by or at risk of poverty, among other ways by favouring collaboration between various government players. This new way of planning and deploying efforts to help target populations means more coherent orientations by the various government authorities involved in the combat. It should be noted that the participation of government departments and agencies has increased since the adoption of the first Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. This trend is aligned with citizens' desire to break down walls between the various government bodies.

The government is not the only player in the combat against poverty and social exclusion. An array of partners in the community, private, municipal, labour-union and numerous other sectors are working on a daily basis to help underprivileged and excluded members of society. Thanks in part to their efforts and those of simple citizens, Québec renewed its approach in 2002 for helping the underprivileged. Their work is essential and recognized.

The results of the fifth year of implementation of the Québec government's approach for combating poverty and social exclusion show that we are on the right track. The combined effects of income support measures for low-income households and an economy that, in 2008, was still thriving, are visible in the reduction in the low income rate using the Market Basket Measure. Québec remains one of Canada's leading provinces in this area. Initiatives that are less easily measured have also generated positive results in helping certain groups of citizens take their rightful place in society. It should also be stressed that Québec's social safety net has played a major role in limiting the effects of the recession. The measures contained in the Commitment for Employment and the Employment Pact *Plus* have helped reduce the impact of the crisis and maintain the living conditions of the most vulnerable citizens.

This fifth-year progress report on the combat against poverty and social exclusion helps us identify our strengths and weaknesses. It shows that we can look to the future with confidence and continue to build the best solidarity and social inclusion policies, with the collaboration and participation of all Québec society stakeholders.