

**Ministère de l'Emploi
et de la Solidarité
sociale**

Québec 

Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion

FOURTH-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

October 2008

This report was prepared by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale in collaboration with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, the Ministère du Travail, the Ministère de la Justice, the Ministère des Finances, the Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, the Société d'habitation du Québec, the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, the Secrétariat à la jeunesse and the Secrétariat à la condition féminine.

A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

It gives me great pleasure to present this fourth-year progress report on the implementation of the 2004–2009 Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*. This action plan is based on the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion and stems from the application of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. This law guides the government's efforts in this area and sets Québec society as a whole the formidable challenge over the next 10 years of making Québec one of the industrialized nations in the world with the least number of people living in poverty and social exclusion.

Over the past four years, thanks to the synergy of all the partners involved, be they community, institutional or governmental, we have been able to innovate and decompartmentalize actions to support the efforts of individuals and families grappling with poverty and social exclusion to attain a better quality of life. I am proud to remind the reader that, within the framework of the action plan, more than \$3.3 billion has been invested over five years to combat poverty and social exclusion in Québec.

The big winners of the action plan are low-income families, which have seen a clear improvement in their disposable income. In fact, even when inflation is factored in, single-parent and two-parent families with young children recorded a 10.6% to 12.7% gain in their disposable income since 2003. Persons living alone and childless couples who work full-time at minimum wage also saw an appreciable gain, ranging from 7% to 12.9%. Moreover, it should be noted that the minimum wage rose to \$8.50 an hour in May 2008, which represents a jump of 6.3 %.

The client groups for last-resort financial assistance programs are constantly shrinking. Between March 2003 and March 2008, the number of recipients of such programs decreased by 16.9% in the case of children, 8% in that of adults, and 17.8% in respect to heads of single-parent families. There were also fewer women than men receiving last-resort financial assistance: in March 2008, the proportion was 48.8% women versus 51.2% men.

Employment continues to represent an important lever in escaping poverty and social exclusion. This is why I proudly mention the implementation of the Commitment for Employment in March 2008, and the National Strategy for Labour Market Integration and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons in May 2008. These initiatives stem from the very spirit of the action plan and constitute answers adapted to the needs of a potential workforce for whom access to employment cannot always be immediate.

In spite of these substantial gains, there still remains a great deal to do. I am well aware, for example, of the persistent fragility of persons living alone who are enrolled in the Social Assistance Program and the hardships experienced in many neighbourhoods in our major cities, as well as certain regions of Québec. It is necessary, therefore, to pursue concerted action. This is why I invite all of the action plan's partners to display the same determination in preparing a second Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

In conclusion, I would like to extend special thanks to those who make a contribution within their communities on a daily basis to bettering the condition of people living in poverty and social exclusion. Every victory, whether big or small, in large measure belongs to them.

Sam Hamad
Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity

SUMMARY

This fourth-year progress report on the implementation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion focuses on the consolidation of the action plan's measures established by all partners since 2004 and new initiatives that meet the vision and objectives of the first plan.

1 A FOURTH YEAR OF STRUCTURING ACHIEVEMENTS

1.1 MEASURES AIMED AT IMPROVING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

Improving the income of individuals and families

- Increase in the minimum **hourly wage** to \$8.00 on May 1, 2007 and to \$8.50 on May 1, 2008
- Assistance to more than 870,000 families through the **Child Assistance** measure in 2007
- Support to 569,000 households through the **Work Premium** in 2006
- Full **indexation** of social solidarity benefits and partial indexation of social assistance benefits as at January 1, 2008
- Partial exemption for **support payments** granted to 11,815 adult recipients in January 2008
- **Minimum benefit** sheltered from any reduction related to failure to take steps to enter the labour market
- **Easing** of the asset accounting rules for recipients of last-resort financial assistance programs

For specific client groups

- Implementation of social assistance and support programs: **Interagir**, on April 1, 2007, and **Réussir**, on September 1, 2007
- Improvement in the **tax credit for an on-the-job training period** for people with disabilities and immigrants
- Increase in the number of **employment integration contracts (CITs)** and jobs in **adapted companies**
- Implementation of a new **Adapted Work Premium** for people with a severely limited capacity for employment
- Continuation of the **interdepartmental agreement to encourage entry into the labour market** of immigrants and people belonging to visible minorities

- Increase in the number of participants in the **Programme d'aide à l'intégration des immigrants et des minorités visibles en emploi (PRIIME)**
- Signing of agreements, in 2007–2008, to ease **access to regulated professions and trades** for foreign-trained workers
- Within the framework of the **Targeted Initiative for Older Workers**, the carrying out of projects involving more than 600 workers

Improving housing conditions

- Announcement of an increase in the number of social, community or affordable housing units to 24,000
- Between January 2007 and March 2008, investment of \$61.5 million to encourage initiatives aimed at **improving the quality of private, public and community housing**
- Implementation of the **Plan québécois des infrastructures** that provides for major investment in the maintenance and renovation of the social housing stock
- Between January 2008 and March 2009, financial assistance given to 250 projects within the framework of the **2007–2009 Homelessness Partnership Initiative**
- **Adaptation of housing units** for people with disabilities
- Sustained support for **community actions**, especially through the new Cadre de référence sur le soutien communautaire en logement social, as well as the Assistance Program for Community Housing Organizations and the Assistance Program for Community and Social Initiatives in Low Rental Housing

Additional measures to improve the living conditions of individuals and families

- Annual investment in **food security** of \$3.4 million, \$200,000 of which is earmarked to support the Regroupement des cuisines collectives du Québec and the Association québécoise des banques alimentaires et des Moissons
- Renewal of the agreement with the **Quebec Breakfast Club** in 2007–2008, which helps more than 14,000 young people in 225 schools
- **Free medication** for persons aged 65 and over who receive 94% or more of the Guaranteed Income Supplement, as well as recipients of social assistance programs (July 1, 2007)
- Increase in **legal aid eligibility thresholds** January 1, 2008
- Increase in the amount granted to the **Réseau québécois de crédit communautaire**, from \$1.5 million in 2006–2007 to \$2.2 million in 2007–2008

- Growth in the amounts invested as part of the **Politique gouvernementale en matière d'action communautaire**

1.2 PREVENTING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION BY DEVELOPING THE POTENTIAL OF INDIVIDUALS

Supporting parents and early childhood development

- In 2007, support to 113,449 persons through the **Québec Parental Insurance Plan**
- Extension to 2010 of the agreement concerning the **Autonomie Jeunes Familles** organization
- For the year 2007–2008, 5,568 women reached through the **Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services Program**, including 1,776 women under the age of 20
- In March 2008, agreement reached between, on the one hand, 474 early childhood centres and 16 daycare centres and, on the other hand, 82 health and social services centres to ensure that **educational childcare services are available for the most underprivileged**

School success and student retention

- Since 2004–2005, major investments have been made to better **support students experiencing difficulties** in primary and secondary schools. In 2007–2008, \$133.3 million was invested to this end.
- Expansion of the **Agir autrement** program in 2007–2008 to reach twice as many students (229,400)
- In 2007–2008, successful pursuit of the following programs' missions: **Famille, école et communauté : Réussir ensemble, Aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture dans les milieux défavorisés, Aide aux devoirs, Wellness-Oriented School** and **Supporting Montréal Schools**

Measures aimed at young people under 25

- Implementation of **Engagement jeunesse** in all 17 regions of Québec in 2007–2008
- The **Qualification des jeunes** project offered in five new youth centres in 2007–2008
- In April 2007, implementation of the **Alternative jeunesse** program in all local employment centres, along with the **Jeunes en action** support measure
- Implementation of the new **Découvrir** initiative in November 2007.
- Continuation in 2007–2008 of the measures designed for young people of the **Programme pour favoriser le retour en formation des jeunes âgés de 16 à 24 ans, IDEO 16-17** and **Québec pluriel**

Measures for seniors

- The **Du cœur à l'action pour les aînés du Québec** program encouraged projects designed for financially vulnerable seniors to be carried out during 2007–2008. One hundred projects were subsidized during the year

1.3 ENCOURAGING THE INVOLVEMENT OF SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

- In 2007–2008, \$7.9 million was invested by the **Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales** to carry out projects tied in with the action plan
- In March 2008, agreements with 53 local employment centre areas to combat poverty and social exclusion within the framework of the **Integrated Territorial Approach**
- Publication of the advisory opinion *Rates that Exclude... Solutions that Unite* by the **Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion**

1.4 ENSURING CONSISTENT, COHERENT ACTION

- Continuation of the work of the **Interdepartmental Committee on the Combat against Poverty and Social Exclusion**, especially in respect to drafting the next action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion
- Publishing of *Le faible revenu au Québec : un état de situation* by the **Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion**

2 OTHER SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONS

- Announcement of the **Commitment for Employment** in March 2008, a comprehensive strategy whose goal is to equip Québec with a better-trained, more effective workforce
- **Advertising campaign** created **especially to combat prejudices against people with a limited capacity for employment** and highlight the desire of people to find a job
- **Creation of a \$400 million fund** over 10 years to finance actions and projects that encourage the development of children up to the age of 5 who are living in poverty
- Adoption in May 2008 of the **National Strategy for Labour Market Integration and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons**

3 HIGHLY ENCOURAGING RESULTS SINCE 2003

3.1 DISPOSABLE INCOME¹

The disposable income of individuals and families increased between 2003 and 2008. When the adult or one of the two adults in a couple worked full-time at minimum wage, disposable income, in current dollars, rose by:

- 22.9% for a single-parent family with a child under the age of 5;
- 22.4% for a two-parent family with a child under the age of 5;
- 25% for a childless couple;
- 18.5% for a person living alone.

When the household received benefits from the Social Assistance Program, disposable income, in current dollars, rose by:

- 23.1% for a single-parent family with a child under the age of 5;
- 24.8% for a two-parent family with a child under the age of 5;
- 5.6% for a childless couple;
- 5.4% for a person living alone.

3.2 DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CLIENT GROUPS FOR LAST-RESORT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Client groups for last-resort financial assistance are shrinking. Between March 2003 and 2008:

- the rate of social aid² dropped from 8.4% to 7.5%;
- the number of adult recipients of last-resort financial assistance decreased by 8% (32,465 adults), from 404,360 to 371,895 adults.

1. Parameters as of April 2003 and July 2008. Full-time work corresponds to employment of 37.5 hours per week.

2. Social aid programs include social assistance and social solidarity programs and the Alternative jeunesse program.

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

During the year 2007–2008, an initial series of meetings held between the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and Interdepartmental Committee member departments and agencies identified what would be the major issues in coming years. These concern, in particular, the new workplace realities and the needs of individuals and groups that have benefited less from the advances of recent years, especially people living alone in poverty and exclusion, people with disabilities, First Nations people, immigrants and visible minorities. The situation of seniors will also be closely examined.

The intention is to link the work currently under way with the new study, discussion, observation and research initiatives established in recent years, especially the Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion and the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	13
A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER	
SUMMARY	
1 REMINDER OF THE MILESTONES OF A SHARED APPROACH	13
2 A FOURTH YEAR OF STRUCTURING ACHIEVEMENTS	14
2.1 Improving the lives of people living in poverty	14
2.2 Preventing poverty and social exclusion by developing the potential of individuals	25
2.3 Encouraging the involvement of society as a whole	31
2.4 Ensuring consistent, coherent action	32
3 OTHER SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONS	33
1.1 Commitment for Employment: a societal project	33
3.2. Creation of a fund to encourage the development of children up to the age of 5 living in poverty	34
3.3. National Strategy for Labour Market Integration and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons	35
4 ENCOURAGING RESULTS	35
4.1 Market basket measure (MBM)	35
4.2 Work and employment	36
4.3 Growth in the disposable income of individuals and families living in poverty	37
4.4 Ongoing decrease in client groups for last-resort financial assistance programs	41
4.5 Evaluation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion	41
4.6 Gender-base analysis	42
5 TOWARD A SECOND GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN TO COMBAT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION	43
CONCLUSION: QUÉBEC AT THE FOREFRONT	45

INTRODUCTION

This fourth-year progress report on the implementation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion focuses on the consolidation of the action plan's measures established by all partners since 2004. It also features the new initiatives that meet the vision and objectives of the first plan. Before presenting these actions, below is a brief reminder of the major milestones that have marked this shared approach.

1. REMINDER OF THE MILESTONES OF A SHARED APPROACH

From the outset, the fight against poverty and social exclusion was recognized in Québec as one of the great challenges of the new millennium. As the 1990s drew to a close, a broad-based citizens' movement advocated on behalf of people living in poverty and exclusion. In 2001, the Québec government adopted this cause as its own and initiated a massive consultation process, beginning with the document *Don't Leave Anyone Out!* This orientation document was widely disseminated and garnered comments from numerous local, regional and national stakeholders, including people living in poverty.

Québec then set an ambitious goal that it put on record in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*: "strive towards a poverty-free Québec" (section 1). This act, adopted unanimously by the National Assembly in December 2002, placed Québec at the forefront of nations that have made greater social justice an asset in their development. A consensus was reached: in 10 years, make Québec one of the industrialized nations in the world with the least number of people living in poverty and exclusion.

The 2004–2009 action plan, entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*, stems from the application of this act and is based on the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. It encompasses all the structuring measures for which the Québec government initially planned to invest \$2.5 billion over five years. This investment has been revised upward several times and, at March 31, 2008, amounted to more than \$3.3 billion.

An interdepartmental committee made up of the main government departments and agencies called upon to combat poverty and social exclusion was set up in June 2004 and reports to the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. The ongoing work of the committee involves evaluating the 2004–2009 action plan and drafting a second action plan.

2. A FOURTH YEAR OF STRUCTURING ACHIEVEMENTS

This section reviews the 2007–2008 achievements of the Québec government and all its partners, based on the four objectives of the action plan: improving the lives of people living in poverty, preventing poverty and social exclusion by developing the potential of individuals, encouraging the involvement of society as a whole, and ensuring consistent, coherent action.

2.1 Improving the lives of people living in poverty

2.1.1 Improvement in the incomes of individuals and families

During 2007–2008, several government initiatives encouraged income growth for individuals and families.

For all households concerned

Increases in the minimum wage

For several years now, the minimum wage has been increasing in Québec. Minimum hourly remuneration rose from \$7.75 to \$8.00 on May 1, 2007 and to \$8.50 on May 1, 2008. This latest increase (\$0.50) is the biggest since that enacted in 1975. It should be noted that, in comparison with the average salary, the minimum wage in Québec is one of the highest in Canada. In August 2008, 233,786 people (135,550 women and 98,236 men) were remunerated at the general minimum wage rate or below.

Improved financial support for families with children

Introduced in January 2005, Child Assistance provides improved financial support to low- or middle-income families. This credit, which is paid to all households with children under the age of 18, is substantially higher than past measures. In 2008, for example, the support given to a single-parent family was \$2,857 per year for a household with one child and \$3,915 per year for a household with two children. In 2007, \$2.1 billion was paid out to more than 870,000 families, including supplementary payments for a child with a disability. The portion of this measure intended for low-income households (based on the pre-tax low-income measure) totalled \$214 million for the 2007–2008 fiscal year.

A work incentive premium

Since January 2005, low- and middle-income workers have had access to the Work Premium. This reimbursable tax credit is intended to encourage individuals to enter and remain in the labour market. For the year 2008, the premium can amount up to \$517.72 for a person living alone, \$801.08 for a childless couple, \$2,218.80 for a single-parent family, and \$2,861 for a couple with children.

The most recent available data reveals that 568,974 households benefited from the Work Premium in 2006, for a total of \$353.7 million.

For recipients of last-resort financial assistance programs

Annually indexed benefits

Social Solidarity Program benefits (for people with a severely limited capacity for employment and their spouses) are indexed annually, based on the rate used for personal income tax. In January 2008, 126,299 households received fully indexed benefits. For their part, the 205,130 households receiving benefits from the Social Assistance Program (people without a severely limited capacity for employment according to the regulations in effect) saw their benefits indexed by half.

It is worth noting that Québec is the only Canadian province, along with Newfoundland and Labrador, to have agreed to index the benefits of last-resort financial assistance programs. The indexation of benefits on January 1, 2008 represents an investment of \$6.3 million for the first three months of 2008 and \$25.1 million for the 2008–2009 fiscal year.

Partially exempted support payments

The partial exemption of support payments, up to a maximum of \$100 per month, was extended in 2006 to all families receiving last-resort financial assistance with one child under the age of 18. In January 2008, 11,815 adult recipients (11,205 women and 610 men) benefited from this exemption. In 2007–2008, the estimated cost of this measure rose to \$14 million.

Minimum benefit and some easing of the asset accounting rules

Since 2005, the minimum benefit principle protects the benefit amount from any reduction related to the failure to take steps to enter the labour market or the refusal of a job. This principle also ensures that the amount of the benefit is not reduced by more than 50% through withholding in payment of a debt to the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale.

In addition, there has been easing of the regulations regarding last-resort financial assistance programs for several years. In October 2007, new provisions went into effect that made it possible, under certain conditions, to exclude amounts taken out of a registered retirement savings plan within the framework of the Home Buyers' Plan.

2.1.2 Measures aimed at specific client groups

The government action plan targets certain specific client groups, especially people with a limited capacity for employment, immigrants and workers aged 55 and over. Specific measures have been implemented for these people.

For people with a limited capacity for employment

Implementation of assistance and social coaching programs

Social assistance and support programs have been implemented to enable participants, through structured assistance and support, to find solutions that will allow them to remove barriers that prevent their social and professional advancement.

An initial program, DEVENIR, was put in place on May 1, 2006 for recipients of last-resort financial assistance who have problems that prevent them from considering entry the labour market, if not for a process undertaken within the public employment services. However, this kind of process needed to be undertaken within 12 months of beginning to participate in Devenir. In 2007–2008, two other social assistance and support programs were added to DEVENIR. INTERAGIR, set up on April 1, 2007, addresses a client group for whom entry into the labour market is only possible in the longer term. RÉUSSIR was implemented in September 1, 2007 to meet the needs of people with a severely limited capacity for employment who are involved in a training process and cannot comply with the normal timeframe required to be entitled to the Loans and Bursaries Program of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS).

In 2007–2008, 6,983 people began taking part in one or another of these programs, which represents an investment of \$14.6 million.

Initial results following the implementation of these social assistance and support programs are promising. A survey carried out among people who took part in DEVENIR during 2006–2007 revealed high levels of activity following their participation for 79% of them. These individuals were able to engage in various activities successively or concomitantly, whether they consisted in finding a job (29%), returning to school (26%), taking part in a measure or program (40%) or becoming involved in the community (37%).

Improved tax credit for companies

The tax credit for an on-the-job training period for people with disabilities aims at encouraging companies to participate in workforce training and enabling students to complete the necessary internships to obtain a diploma. In March 2008, the Québec government improved this measure, raising tax credit rate for companies from 30% to 40%. It should be noted that the maximum number of hours of supervision afforded a person with a disability also doubled.

Increased accessibility to employment integration contracts (CITs), as well as jobs in adapted companies

Within the framework of the Commitment for Employment, the government announced the addition of 550 employment integration contracts per year. This measure, which aims to encourage the hiring and retention of workers

with disabilities, enables employers, if they comply with certain conditions, to receive a subsidy to compensate them for the cost of any necessary arrangements. In 2007–2008, 3,914 adults were able to take advantage of this program.

The Programme de subvention aux entreprises adaptées is designed to support companies that offer quality jobs meeting the needs of people with disabilities. This program thus funds salaries and reimburses the expenses undertaken to implement the measures required to adapt the workplace for the needs of such people. Between now and 2013, 825 new supplementary positions in adapted companies will be gradually created for severely disabled people. In 2007–2008, 3,740 people benefited from this program.

A new Adapted Work Premium

A new Adapted Work Premium for people with a severely limited capacity for employment, as well as for people with disabilities, was implemented in 2008. This measure recognizes that these individuals must often overcome major hurdles when entering the labour market. It is estimated that 10,000 households could annually benefit from this measure, for an investment of \$3 million per year.

For immigrants and members of visible minorities

Improved complementarity of services

An interdepartmental agreement to encourage the entry of immigrants and people belonging to visible minorities into the labour market was signed in May 2004. Prior to its termination date in May 2007, the agreement was extended to June 2008. It was especially instrumental in improving the complementarity of services between the various partners to ease the transition into the labour force for immigrants.

An even more accessible program to assist entry into the labour market

The Programme d'aide à l'intégration des immigrants et des minorités visibles en emploi (PRIIME) was set up in May 2005 to motivate employers to hire people from the cultural communities and to create conditions within their companies that would encourage the retention of these workers once the period of subsidy ended.

Between June 2005 and March 2008, close to 2,500 people benefited from this program, which involved an investment of \$15 million, including close to \$7 million in 2007–2008. Moreover, the government announced that, under the Commitment for Employment, the number of participants in this program would double as of 2008.

It should be noted that the participation of women in the program is increasing every year. Between 2005–2006 and 2007–2008, the number of women among new participants rose from 31% to 40%.

Actions to ease access to regulated professions and trades

Some actions taken by the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles and its partners are intended to ease immigrants' access to regulated professions and trades. In 2007–2008, this government department, which allocates \$4 million annually to projects and activities aimed at easing access to the regulated professions for people trained abroad, announced that it had signed 15 agreements with professional orders.

Emploi-Québec also carried out projects in certain regions to support the training and support of immigrants in order to facilitate their entry into the Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec and the Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec.

Improved tax credit for companies

Similar to the tax credit intended for people with disabilities, the tax credit for an on-the-job training period for immigrants rose, in March 2008, to 40% for companies.

For older adults

Access to improved employment assistance measures and activities

People aged 55 or over have continued to benefit from the services of Emploi-Québec designed for them. Between 2003–2004 and 2007–2008, there was an increase of 40.3% (from 15,786 to 22,146 participants) in the number of adults aged 55 and over who took part in at least one measure or activity. Between 2006–2007 and 2007–2008, this number rose by 4.7% (1,001 more participants).

In keeping with the upward trend observed in recent years, people aged 55 to 64 continue to occupy an important place in the labour market. These workers represented 34.9% of employment gains in 2007, while their workforce participation rate rose from 49.9% in 2003 to 53.6% in 2007.³

Specific projects for older workers

The Québec and Canadian governments have joined forces to implement the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, whose aim is to meet the short-term employment needs of older workers. Effective as of April 2007 for a two-year period, this initiative allows for the creation of projects intended mainly for workers aged 55 to 64 who have lost their jobs, do not have all the skills needed to find new employment, and who reside in an eligible

3. Data from the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

community (one with serious unemployment problems, reductions in job activities, closures of essential industries, or a remote area without employment services). Between April 2007 and March 2008, \$3.4 million was invested in the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers and 634 workers benefited from the program.

2.1.3 Appreciable investments to improve housing conditions

24,000 social, community or affordable housing units

The Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion provides for measures to meet the housing needs of people and families living in poverty and exclusion. Investments totalling \$765.8 million, more than the \$329 million initially set aside in the action plan, will enable the completion of 24,000 new social, community or affordable housing units under the AccèsLogis Québec and Affordable Housing Québec programs. As of June 30, 2008, 14,109 new housing units had been built, 4,906 housing units were on their way to being delivered and 1,759 were being studied or were in development.

Concrete actions to improve the quality of housing

The Québec government is investing in initiatives aimed at increasing the quality of private, public and community housing. Measures within the private sector mainly address low-income households and are especially intended to correct major problems threatening the integrity of the housing or the health of its occupants, as well as revitalizing run-down residential areas. Between January 1, 2007 and March 31, 2008, \$61.5 million was set aside to support measures targeting 13,752 housing units.

Implementation of the Plan québécois des infrastructures

As part of the Plan québécois des infrastructures, the Québec government will agree to invest unprecedented amounts to help maintain and renovate the social housing stock. An additional \$410.4 million will be injected over five years to maintain low-income housing units (LIH). The government is demonstrating once again the importance it places on improving the housing conditions of low-income households or people with special housing needs. It should be noted that, through the investments by the Québec government and the contributions of the federal government and municipalities under current agreements, almost \$1.2 billion will be invested in maintaining the social housing stock in good condition and reducing the maintenance deficit between now and 2012.

Measures to reduce homelessness

The 2007–2009 Canada-Québec Homelessness Partnership Initiative Agreement, signed in January 2008, aims at carrying out projects intended for the homeless and people at risk of becoming homeless. Between January 2008 and March 2009, 250 projects were completed for nearly \$38 million.

During the year 2007–2008, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux drafted, in collaboration with various partners, the “Cadre de référence en itinérance au Québec”. The objective of this initiative was to better identify the phenomenon of homelessness in Québec and propose structuring and concerted actions to better prevent homelessness and meet the needs of the homeless. This framework will constitute the first milestone in efforts to develop an interdepartmental action plan to combat homelessness in Québec and to help the homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless.

Adaptation of housing units for people with disabilities

The Residential Adaptation Assistance Program provides financial assistance to people with disabilities to defray the cost, which is often high, of the work required to adapt their dwellings. Between January 1, 2007 and March 31, 2008, the Société d’habitation du Québec allocated \$12.3 million to the adaptation of 901 housing units.

This program benefits from a recurring budget of \$4.2 million. In August 2007, the Québec government announced the allocation of an additional \$26.6 million over two years to enable the completion of 1,700 additional adaptations.

Sustained support for community actions

The new Cadre de référence sur le soutien communautaire en logement social was launched in November 2007. An annual recurring budget of \$5 million was granted to health and social service agencies to support the implementation of this framework and boost local and regional initiatives. This new reference framework enables a very valuable form of social and community support to improve the well-being of individuals and families living in social housing to be provided right within the community.

The government also supports two programs aimed at encouraging the development of community housing initiatives.

The first, the Assistance Program for Community Housing Organizations, provides funding to organizations that are particularly involved in stimulating development and concerted community efforts to improve housing or that encourage citizen management of housing conditions. In 2007–2008, 45 organizations were able to benefit from this financial support. In the same year, \$1.4 million was allocated to the General Mission Support component of the program.

The second, the Assistance Program for Community and Social Initiatives in Low Rental Housing provides financial support for one-off low-income housing (LIH) community action projects. The goal of these programs is to encourage residents to take charge of their community and create family, community and social environments that are adapted to their needs and

foster the bridging of generations and cultures. Since 1998, projects under this program have reached out to members of cultural communities, older people, families, and individuals living alone. In 2007–2008, \$460,000 was allocated to this program and 78 projects received financial support.

2.1.4 Additional measures to improve the living conditions of individuals and families

Increasing food security

Some investments are intended to support concerted action food security projects in Québec communities. The approach advocates the exploration by communities of alternative solutions to food distribution, while taking into account emergency food assistance needs. In 2007–2008, under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, \$3.2 million was earmarked for food security, 75% of which went to actions encouraging food autonomy and 25% to emergency food assistance. Certain regions also invested additional funds in this program.

Moreover, an investment of \$200,000 enabled the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux to provide support to the Regroupement des cuisines collectives du Québec and to the Association québécoise des banques alimentaires et des Moissons.

Renewed agreement with the Quebec Breakfast Club

In summer 2007, to meet the immediate food assistance needs of children, four government departments⁴ renewed a \$2 million agreement with the Quebec Breakfast Club for one year. This organization's mission is to ensure that children who attend a primary or secondary school in a neighbourhood with a high disadvantage index have an equal chance of achieving personal success.

More than 14,000 young people in 225 schools benefited from a daily serving of breakfast. The effects of this initiative go well beyond nutritional support. It also has an impact on children's success in school and their socialization.

Free medications for the most disadvantaged

Since July 1, 2007, people aged 65 and over who receive partial benefits (94% or more) under the Guaranteed Income Supplement, as well as recipients of social assistance programs, benefit from free medications. They join those aged 65 and over who receive maximum GIS benefits, as well as Social Solidarity Program recipients who already benefit from this measure. The annual cost of this improvement, which affects 279,000 people, is \$22 million.

Legal aid is now more accessible

4. The departments involved were the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, and the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport.

The legal aid eligibility thresholds have been raised three times since 2006, with the last increase taking place on January 1, 2008. The year 2006 marked the first increase in eligibility thresholds for people living alone since 1982, and for families since 1996. In 2007–2008, this improvement represented an investment of \$5 million.

Increase in financial assistance granted to the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire

Community credit is a social and economic development tool. It supports the development of specific approaches and practices aimed at encouraging the creation and maintenance of small businesses, especially through sustained support and loans or loan guarantees. This specific approach meets the needs of people with business projects that are usually excluded from traditional private and public funding networks. In 2007–2008, the Réseau québécois de crédit communautaire benefited from \$2.2 million, up from the \$1.5 million of the previous year. During 2007–2008, 21 community credit organizations provided support for 1,136 people, 55% of whom were women.

Growth in the amounts invested as part of the Politique gouvernementale en matière d'action communautaire

Actions by community organizations contribute to improving the living conditions of Quebecers. Community organizations provide a means for people to get involved and from which emerge innovative actions and ways of doing things. The mission of community organizations, while not only limited to it, contributes in a concrete way to combating poverty and social exclusion, whether through clothing banks, shelters for various client groups, socio-occupational integration services, measures to counter students dropping out of school, or others.

It should be noted that the Québec government, through its commitments within the framework of the government policy entitled *Community action: A crucial contribution to the exercise of citizenship and social development in Québec*, provides substantial and growing funding to these initiatives. The financial support provided by the Québec government to community organizations rose from \$587.1 million in 2003–2004 to \$726.9 million in 2007–2008. Of this amount, \$464 million went to support the mission of these organizations, i.e., alternative services. Finally, it should be noted that some 20 government departments and agencies contribute support to community organizations.

2.2 Preventing poverty and social exclusion by developing the potential of individuals

The Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion places emphasis on a whole range of preventative measures. In this way, the cycle of intergenerational poverty can be broken and young people, along with their parents, can be given the opportunity of a better life.

2.2.1 Support for parents and early childhood development

A more flexible and advantageous insurance plan

The Québec Parental Insurance Plan was implemented in January 2006 for parents of newborns or adoptive parents to help reconcile the needs of work and family. Compared with the former plan, the Québec Parental Insurance Plan is financially more generous and flexible, allowing parents to choose between two plans that differ in length and benefit rates. Again in comparison with the former plan, a greater number of parents are eligible for the new plan and it also offers fathers a benefit period. In 2007, 113,449 people were admitted to the program; of these 56.1% were women. Among recipients, 8,168 received a low-income supplement, for a total investment of \$11.1 million.

Measures to help from the youngest age

Thanks to the continued partnership between the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon and the Québec government, the agreement involving the Autonomie Jeunes Familles (AJF) organization, aimed at reducing poverty among children through prevention, has been extended to 2010. The organization's main objective is to ensure that children from underprivileged neighbourhoods are at the same stage of development as the Québec norm when starting school. Under this agreement, the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales committed \$1 million in 2007–2008 to supporting an initial project, Centre Premier Berceau. As of December 31, 2007, this project had welcomed 267 couples or female heads of single-parent families. Around 200 infants have been seen at the Centre since their birth and continue to visit it.

The Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services program, under the aegis of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, continued to provide support for vulnerable families with children aged 0 to 5. The goal of such support services is to decrease the intergenerational transmission of health and social problems, which often include abuse, negligence and violence toward children. They also aim to foster the optimal development of children aged 0 to 5, as well as support pregnant women and parents in developing and using good parenting skills.

For 2007–2008, 57.8% of women who delivered a baby during the year and met the criteria of this measure were enrolled in the program, which corresponds to 5,568 women of the 9,288 targeted. A breakdown of the women reached by client group shows that:

- 78.1% of 2,275 women targeted by the Jeunes parents (under 20 years of age) component of the program were reached;
- 51.2% of 7,013 femmes targeted by the Extrême pauvreté (20 years of age and over) component of the program were reached.

Educational childcare services available for the most underprivileged

The goal of educational childcare services, which have already existed for many years in Québec, is, among other things, to encourage the development of children from underprivileged neighbourhoods by facilitating access to their services. In March 2008, 474 early childhood daycare centres (CPEs) and 16 daycare centres concluded an agreement with 82 health and social services centres to achieve this goal. The cost of this measure was almost \$800,000 in 2007–2008.

2.2.2 School success and student retention

The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and its partners invested in a number of programs and services intended to encourage school success.

Mobilizing the community to help children succeed

The program Famille, école et communauté: Réussir ensemble was created for parents of children aged 2 to 12 to support school success in underprivileged neighbourhoods. By way of example, francization courses for parents, as well as adjusting municipal library schedules to enable elementary school groups to go to the library during normal class hours are projects that can find support under this program. To date, this measure has touched more than 6,000 young people and mobilized more than 300 partners. A budget of \$720,000 was allocated to the program in 2007–2008, bringing the total investment since 2003–2004 to \$3.5 million.

Help for promoting reading and writing awareness

The aim of the Programme d'aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture in underprivileged neighbourhoods is to support the lasting integration of reading and writing awareness activities within the practices of government departments and other agencies and institutions at the provincial, regional and local levels. These projects are undertaken in underprivileged areas and are aimed at families with children 5 and under, as well as organizations providing services to children and their families. In 2007–2008, some 60 projects, including seven new ones, received financial support and involved more than 11,000 children, over 9,000 parents and more than 3,900 organizations and stakeholders. In 2007–2008, an investment of \$720,000 was made, bringing the total investment since 2003–2004 to \$3.6 million.

Major investments to support students experiencing difficulties

Since 2004–2005, the Québec government has freed up major sums in order to add resources ensuring the early detection and appropriate follow-up of children experiencing difficulties. Between now and 2008–2009, these amounts will enable, among other things, the gradual hiring of 600 remedial teachers at the elementary school level, 600 resource teachers at the secondary school level and the retention or hiring of

professional and support resources. In the year 2007–2008 alone, \$133.3 million has been invested in these additional services.

Help with homework to increase success

The aim of the Aide aux devoirs program is to increase elementary school students' motivation to properly complete their schoolwork, improve the quality of the relationship between parents and schools, and increase community interest in young people's success. In 2007–2008, \$19.5 million was paid out to ensure the completion of 1,890 projects in 1,854 schools.

Support for the development of healthy lifestyles

The goal of the Wellness-Oriented School program is to instil healthy lifestyle habits in young people in the third cycle of elementary school and the first cycle of secondary school, including regular physical activity and healthy eating. In 2007–2008, school boards were granted \$4.9 million to carry out 2,124 projects offered by 2,111 schools.

Agir autrement reaches twice as many students in 2007–2008

Agir autrement is an intervention strategy that provides specific support to schools that have students from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This strategy enables every targeted school to implement measures adapted to its needs in order to encourage the educational success of its students. Intended since its beginnings for certain secondary schools, the strategy was broadened in 2007–2008 to include elementary and new secondary schools in underprivileged neighbourhoods. Thus, in 2007/2008, twice as many students, or 229,400 young people, were able to benefit from this initiative, which cost a total of \$45 million.

Specifically for the most disadvantaged areas of Montréal

The Supporting Montréal Schools program provides additional assistance to elementary schools that have students from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods on the Island of Montréal. This program supports projects aimed at supporting personal success and learning while taking into account needs and contributing to putting in place an engaged educational community. During the 2007–2008 school year, \$12.2 million was allocated to the program for 162 targeted schools, of which 41 were schools new to the program that year.

2.2.3 Opportunities for young people under the age of 25

A number of initiatives aimed at preventing poverty and social exclusion are intended for young people under the age of 25.

The Engagement jeunesse program has now been set up

Thanks to Engagement jeunesse, the main government departments and agencies concerned are putting the emphasis on the complementarity of

certain programs and measures in order to facilitate the transition of young people to adulthood and better meet their needs. In 2007–2008, the agreement was implemented in all 17 regions of Québec.

Actions designed for young dropouts

The Programme pour favoriser le retour en formation des jeunes âgés de 16 à 24 ans enables training and support services to be adapted to the needs of young dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 with little education. These services were developed by school boards on the basis of the local needs of young people without a high-school diploma. In 2007–2008, \$2 million was invested in this program, bringing the total investment since January 2004 to \$9 million.

A measure targeting young people from youth centres

The intensive measures of the Qualification des jeunes project aim to prepare young people for the passage to independent life and ensure young people in youth centres acquire skills. This project addresses 16-year-olds who have experienced a period of placement, do not have a specific life project and present a rather worrisome prognosis in respect to their adulthood. In 2007–2008, the \$2.1 million invested enabled the program to be offered in five new youth centres and to reach, in total, 280 young people in Québec.

Coaching resources for 16- and 17-year-olds

Implemented in 2006 with the collaboration of Carrefours jeunesseemploi, the coaching measure known as IDEO 16-17 aims to help young people aged 16 and 17 in difficulty to undertake their life project and achieve social, personal and vocational self-sufficiency in order to prevent them from becoming dependent on last-resort financial assistance programs. In particular, this measure can help young people to continue their high-school studies, find a job or consult any required specialized services. In 2007–2008, \$4 million was invested and 1,968 young people took part in this measure (91% complete data).

Coaching resources also for 18- to 24-year-olds

Jeunes en action was implemented in April 2007 with the collaboration, once again, of Carrefours jeunesse-emploi. This measure addresses youth aged 18 to 24 who are experiencing serious social and vocational problems that prevent them from entering the labour market. This coaching measure helps participants develop their personal, social and vocational self-sufficiency. In 2007–2008, 2,546 young people began taking part in the measure, in which more than \$10 million has been invested.

An alternative to traditional income support programs

The Alternative jeunesse program was implemented in April 2007 to provide young people under the age of 25 with an alternative to last-resort

financial assistance programs and to prevent their entry into social assistance or social solidarity programs. Through incentives, Alternative jeunesse supplies the necessary tools to support the social and professional integration of youth. In 2007–2008, 6,554 young people took part in the program. The cost of the program rose to close to \$16.4 million (including the conversion of passive measures into active measures and the allocation jeunesse).

Découvrir—workplace experiences for learning about the labour market

The new initiative DÉCOUVRIR, implemented in November 2007, creates job shadowing and observation experiences in the workplace for a maximum period of four weeks. These workplace experiences, designed for young adults with a limited capacity for employment, enable them to both validate their career choices and show potential employers what they can do. In 2007–2008, 30 young people completed a workplace experience within the framework of DÉCOUVRIR.

Coaching young people from visible minorities or cultural communities

The Québec pluriel measure is designed to facilitate the social and professional integration of young people aged 16 to 24 from visible minorities and those aged 16 to 35 from cultural communities. In particular, this program provides ongoing personalized coaching focused on mentoring. Between May 2004 and March 2008, 595 mentors and 488 young people were recruited and 322 mentoring relationships were established. This measure has enabled 236 young people to find jobs or return to school since 2004.

2.2.4 Support to seniors living in social exclusion

In order to combat the social exclusion of seniors, the program Du cœur à l'action pour les aînés du Québec, with a budget of \$1.6 million, has as its goal to support the funding of innovative, individual community projects for seniors, such as “meals on wheels” or helping youngsters with homework. As part of the 2007–2008 edition of the program, organizations are encouraged to present projects intended for seniors who are financially disadvantaged. The organizations behind the 100 subsidized projects were each able to receive funding of up to \$30,000.

2.3 Encouraging the involvement of society as a whole

Involving society as a whole represents one of the keys to success in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In this respect, the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion has set up the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales, the Integrated Territorial Approach and the Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion.

A fund encouraging the fight against poverty

The Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales, created under the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, must act as a catalyst and lever to foster the emergence of local and regional strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion. In 2007–2008, the Fonds invested \$7.9 million in carrying out projects related to the action plan, in particular for the Integrated Territorial Approach. By way of example, through this fund the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale invested \$5 million in 2007/2008 in the Contrat de ville, an agreement made with the Ville de Montréal aimed at social development and fighting poverty and social exclusion.

Mobilization of local neighbourhoods to improve the condition of the most disadvantaged

Through the Integrated Territorial Approach (ATI), the government works closely with local neighbourhoods and regional communities with a high concentration of poor people in the fight against poverty and social exclusion by providing them with a major role in the planning, implementation and follow-up of actions in this area. In 2007-2008, the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales benefited from a budget of \$1.5 million to support the implementation of local strategies intended for disadvantaged and socially excluded people. In March 2008, 53 local employment centre areas had agreements aimed at fighting poverty and social exclusion within the framework of the ATI.

It should also be noted that a specific approach was undertaken with First Nations representatives. In fact, considering the specific nature of First Nations communities, as part of the Integrated Territorial Approach the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale established a partnership to combat poverty and social exclusion with the Social Development Office of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission. Using program-based research, the latter carried out a wide-ranging consultation in order to identify the issues and needs specific to First Nations communities. Since then, an innovative process has been initiated and it is expected that structuring projects that will generate social and economic activities will result from it shortly.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the review carried out by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale noted that major progress had been made in the processes to implement the Integrated Territorial Approach, especially in respect to joint action, leverage and multisectoriality.

Representatives from all communities to guide the action

The Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion (CCLP) is made up of 15 representatives from Québec's various socioeconomic communities. Its main function is to advise the Minister in relation to the development, implementation and evaluation of actions carried out within the framework of the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

During the year, the Committee made public an advisory opinion about rate increases. According to its work plan, it must also issue an advisory opinion about income targets and how they can be achieved, as well as about the minimum benefit. To do so, it must take into consideration the indicators proposed by the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion.

It should also be noted that the CCLP is closely involved in the development of the next Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. Moreover, the Committee has been consulted on certain specific issues related to the problems that will be focused on in the new plan.

2.4 Ensuring consistent, coherent action

Among the means implemented to ensure the consistency and coherence of actions should be noted the creation of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Combat against Poverty and Social Exclusion, as well as the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion.

Government departments and agencies joining in action

The Interdepartmental Committee on the Combat against Poverty and Social Exclusion provides an impetus for the joint action and coordination of government departments and agencies concerned by the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Government departments and agencies are together involved in the process that will lead to the next action plan.⁵

Experts to inform and follow progress

Established in 2005, the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion concentrates on monitoring, research and dialogue aimed at providing accurate and reliable information about poverty and social exclusion. This year, the Centre published *Le faible revenu au Québec: un état de situation*.

In 2007–2008, the Centre focused its efforts on formulating indicators for poverty, inequality and social exclusion that would enable Québec society to measure the progress achieved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

5. Members of the Interdepartmental Committee are: the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, the Ministère du Travail, la Société d'habitation du Québec, the Secrétariat à la jeunesse and the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec.

3. OTHER SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONS

Other actions were unveiled in 2008 to improve the situation of Quebecers, especially the most disadvantaged. The Commitment for Employment and the creation of a fund to encourage the development of children up to the age of 5, announced in March 2008, along with the National Strategy for Labour Market Integration and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons, adopted in May of the same year, all part of the Québec approach. Information about their implementation will be presented in upcoming reports.

3.1 Commitment for Employment: a societal project

In March 2008, the Québec government made public the Commitment for Employment, which reflects the Québec government's determination to combat poverty and social exclusion by ensuring that work is valued and a choice that pays off. This pact constitutes a comprehensive strategy whose goal is to equip Québec with a better-trained, more effective workforce able to meet the challenges that economic deregulation, aggressive international competition, sustainable development and the imminent decline in the working-age population pose for our society. Among the targeted client groups are people with a limited capacity for employment, including young recipients of social aid programs, people able to work who repeatedly enter and leave social aid programs, immigrants and people from visible minorities, people with disabilities, and the working poor.

The ambitious objectives of the Commitment for Employment, which has a budget of close to \$1 billion over three years, of which more than half comes from the government, will make it possible between now and 2011 to:

- reduce by 50,000 the number of recipients of last-resort financial assistance programs;
- increase by more than 52,000 the number of people provided support by public employment services in finding employment or undergoing training.

The success of the *Pacte pour l'emploi* rests mainly on the collaboration of various regional partners and on their ability to mobilize themselves around the objectives of this strategy. Partners therefore work together to ensure that its measures have the best possible impact on the social and economic development of communities.

A campaign to combat prejudices

In addition to building on such partnerships as a condition for success, a major advertising campaign has been orchestrated to specifically combat prejudices against people with a limited capacity for employment and highlight the desire of people to find a job. In 2007–2008, the government invested \$750,000 towards the production of a related TV campaign.

3.2 Creation of a fund to encourage the development of children up to the age of 5 living in poverty

The Québec government's 2008–2009 budget provides for the creation of a \$400 million fund over 10 years to finance actions and projects, undertaken within the framework of partnerships with local communities, which will encourage the development of children up to the age of 5 living in poverty. This fund aims, on the one hand, to increase early and sustained intervention with children to have a better influence on the later course of their lives from the earliest age and, on the other hand, to improve the support given parents, by giving them the tools to foster their children's development. The fund will receive \$40 million annually, \$15 million of which will come from the Québec government and \$25 million from the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon.

3.3 National Strategy for Labour Market Integration and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons

An extension of the Commitment for Employment, the National Strategy for Labour Market Integration and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons was adopted in May 2008 to improve the labour market entry and retention of people with disabilities.

The majority of the actions contemplated will be aimed at improving the employability of people with disabilities and encouraging their hiring, as well as providing support for employers in the hiring and management of such employees. The planned investment involves \$142.8 million. Government departments and agencies will allocate additional amounts to the strategy, within the framework of their current budgets.

4 ENCOURAGING RESULTS

Combined with a favourable economic situation, the measures that have been progressively implemented since the December 2002 adoption of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* have had an overall positive effect on the living conditions of individuals and families living in poverty and exclusion.

4.1 Market basket measure (MBM)⁶

For the years 2000 to 2004 (the last available year), the market basket measure shows that, as early as the first year the 2004–2009 action plan was applied, advances in the fight against poverty intensified, with Québec clearly setting itself apart from the conditions observed in most other Canadian provinces and territories.

Low-income rates for individuals based on the market basket measure (MBM), Canada and the provinces, 2000–2004

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Newfoundland	23.9	20.3	21.3	18.1	20
Prince Edward Island	16.1	15.4	13	10.7	12.5
Nova Scotia	17.4	17.4	16.4	16.1	13.8
New Brunswick	15.1	13.8	15.5	15.2	13.9
Québec	13.1	12.5	11	10.1	8.6
Ontario	12.6	11.5	12.3	12.3	12.5
Manitoba	14	12.2	13.7	12.6	11.5
Saskatchewan	15.9	14.2	13.2	13.4	14.3
Alberta	12.9	12.2	10.3	12.3	12
British Columbia	22.9	20.5	21.6	20	19.6
Canada	14.8	13.6	13.7	13.1	12.7

Source: Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). *Low income in Canada: 2000–2004 Using the Market Basket Measure*, SP-682-10-07E, 2008, 80 pp.; compilation of the DRES.

4.2 Work and employment⁷

The labour and employment markets continued to be rewarding for Quebecers in 2007. The unemployment rate⁸ continued to decline, reaching 7.2%, the lowest rate in the past 33 years. Moreover, the number of unemployed workers experienced its greatest drop since the end of the last decade.

6. The Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion recommends the MPC as a provisional measure, especially in considering the impact on the income of individuals and families living in poverty.

7. Data from the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

8. This refers to an annual average.

This upturn in the labour market was of particular benefit to women, who held 78% of new jobs in 2007 (67,300 of the 86,300 new jobs). Furthermore, the proportion of women in the overall labour market rose between 2003 and 2007, from 46.6% to 47.6%. It should be noted that the majority of jobs created in 2007 were full-time positions (66.5%).

4.3 Growth in the disposable income of individuals and families living in poverty⁹

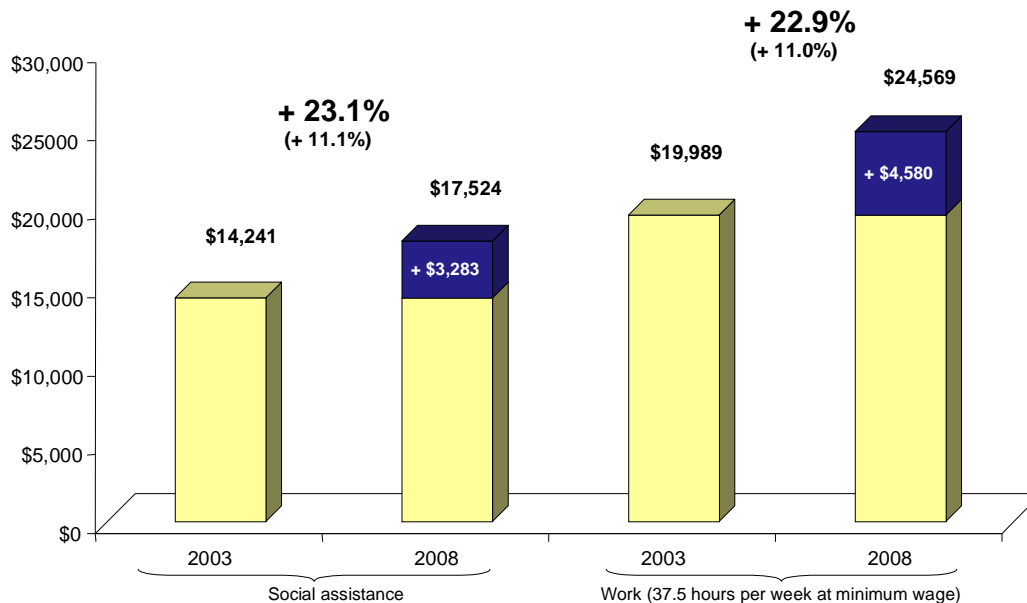
The measures put forward in the action plan contributed to improving the disposable income of individuals and families. It is worth remembering that the measures seen above sometimes addressed employed people, for example the increase in the minimum wage and the Work Premium, while others addressed all families, whether or not their members were active in the labour market. The effects of these measures therefore vary according to the household situation.

Single-parent families

Measures translated into an appreciable gain in disposable income for single-parent families. For example, for a family with one dependent child under the age of 5 and a parent working full-time for minimum wage, disposable income rose by 22.9% (from \$19,989 in 2003 to \$24,569 in 2008), an increase of 11% in constant 2003 dollars.

When the parent was a recipient under the Social Assistance Program, this income rose from \$14,241 to \$17,524 during the same period, an increase of 23.1%. Factoring in inflation, the increase was 11.1%.

CHART 1: Single-parent families with one child under the age of 5 (2003 to 2008)



The percentages in parentheses indicate the increase in disposable income, taking into account the increase in the cost of living during the targeted period. Parameters of April 2003 and July 2008.

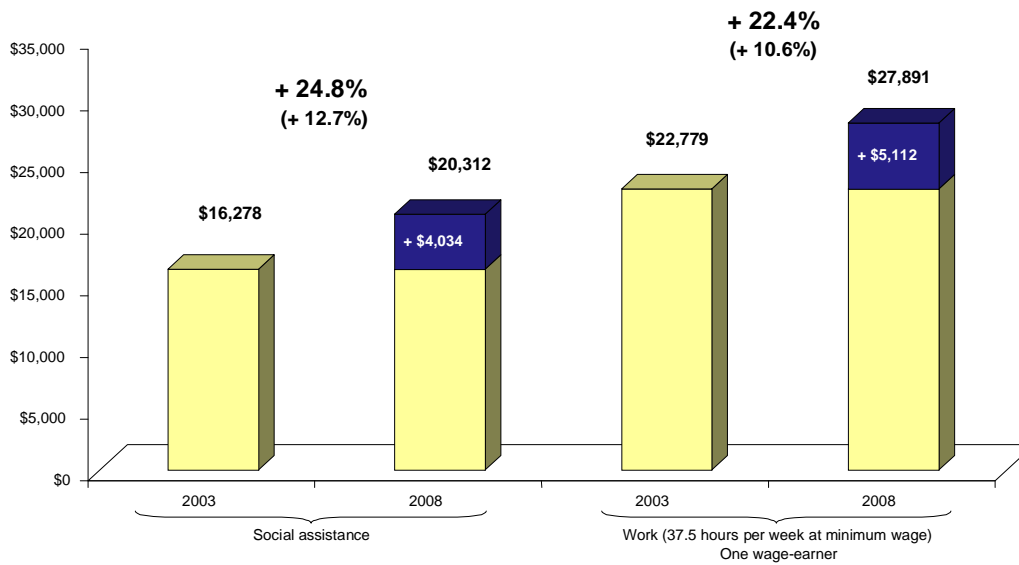
9. Parameters as of April 2003 and July 2008. Full-time work corresponds to employment of 37.5 hours per week.

Two-parent families

The situation of couples with children also improved. By way of example, a couple with a dependent child under the age of 5 benefited from a 22.4% increase (from \$22,779 in 2003 to \$27,891 in 2008) in disposable income if one of the parents worked full-time at minimum wage. This represents a growth of 10.6% in disposable income, taking into account inflation during this period.

For couples receiving benefits under the Social Assistance Program, this increase was 24.8% (from \$16,278 in 2003 to \$20,312 in 2008) and 12.7% when taking the increase in the cost of living into account.

CHART 2: Two-parent family with one child under the age of 5 (2003 to 2008)

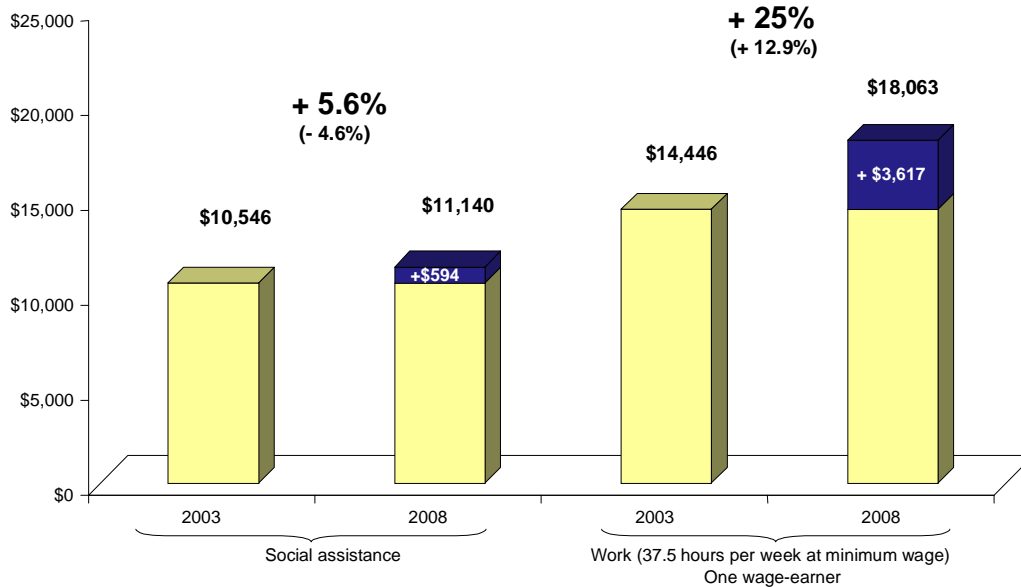


The percentages in parentheses indicate the increase in disposable income, taking into account the increase in the cost of living during the targeted period.

Childless couples

For their part, childless couples working at the minimum wage benefited from an increase of 25.0% (from \$14,446 to \$18,063), or 12.9% in constant 2003 dollars. For childless couples receiving benefits, this income increased by 5.6% (from \$10,546 in 2003 to \$11,140 in 2008). Factoring in inflation, however, these couples saw their disposable income drop by 4.6%.

CHART 3: Childless couple (2003 to 2008)



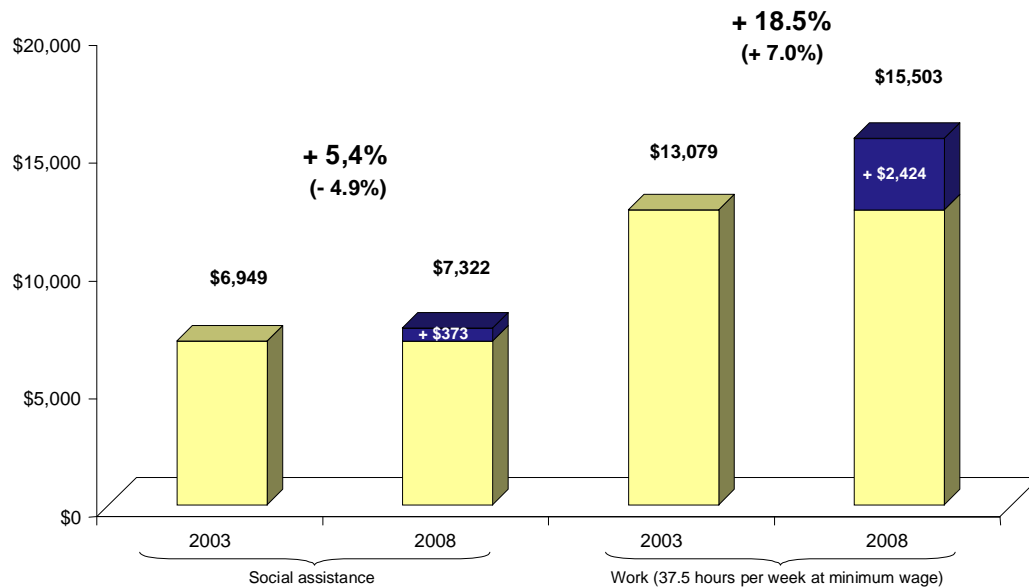
The percentages in parentheses indicate the increase in disposable income, taking into account the increase in the cost of living during the targeted period. Parameters of April 2003 and July 2008.

Persons living alone

Similar to childless couples, persons living alone who work for minimum wage saw an increase of 18.5% in their disposable income between 2003 and 2008 (from \$13,079 to \$15,503), for an increase of 7% in constant dollars.

For persons living alone receiving benefits from the Social Assistance Program, disposable income increased by 5.4% between 2003 and 2008 (from \$6,949 to \$7,322); however, when the increase in the cost of living is factored in, this corresponded to a drop of 4.9%.

CHART 4: Person living alone (2003 to 2008)



The percentages in parentheses indicate the increase in disposable income, taking into account the increase in the cost of living during the targeted period. Parameters of April 2003 and July 2008.

When calculated in current dollars, these simulations thus show that disposable income rose between April 2003 and July 2008 for all low-income households. When inflation is factored in, it can be seen that disposable income increased for all households, except for those people living alone or childless couples receiving benefits. Full-time work, even at minimum wage, therefore remains an excellent way of increasing the disposable income of households.

This conclusion is especially true for persons living alone, since the disposable income of those working full-time at minimum wage is more than double that of those who are recipients of the Social Assistance Program (\$15,503 compared to \$7,322). However, a slighter decrease in the number of recipients of last-resort financial assistance living alone than in the number of those with children or childless couples can be observed. There is, therefore, reason to wonder about the difficulties experienced by people living alone who remain recipients in spite of the clear financial advantages related to entry into the labour force.

4.4 Ongoing decrease in client groups for last-resort financial assistance programs

The combination of concerted efforts and ongoing improvement in the Québec economy has made it possible to reduce the number of people receiving last-resort financial assistance.

In fact, between March 2003 and March 2008, the social aid rate, i.e., social aid program recipients¹⁰ as a proportion of the Québec population as a whole under the age of 65, dropped from 8.4% to 7.5%. During this period, the number of adults who received last-resort financial assistance benefits declined by 8.0% (-32,465 adults, or from 404,360 to 371,895 adults). This decline was more pronounced for certain groups of recipients, including adults with no limitations to their capacity for employment (-15.6% or -26,414 adults), childless couples (-20.9% or -8,490 adults), couples with children (-17.0% or -17,745 adults), women (-10.7% or -21,735 adults), young people (under the age of 25: -22.2% or -9,609 adults), adults aged 35–44 (-19.3% or -19,240 adults), as well as those who have received last-resort financial assistance for less than one consecutive year (-24.6% or -21,137 adults).

As a result, these variations have changed the profile of the recipient client group over the years. Thus, it can be observed that in March 2008, in comparison with March 2003, a higher proportion of adult recipients had serious limitations to their capacity for employment (35.3%, compared to 31.3%) and received last-resort financial assistance for longer periods of time (for cumulative periods of at least 10 years: 55%, compared to 50%). Furthermore, men (51.2%, compared to 49.8%), persons living alone (67.9%, compared to 64%), older adults (at least 45 years of age: 50.9%, compared to 45.7%) and people born outside Canada (19.4%, compared to 18.2%) are represented in higher proportions. It should be noted that these groups were studied as part of the work conducted to develop the next action plan in order, to the extent possible, that measures adapted to their situations be implemented in the next few years.

4.5 Evaluation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion

Initial results of the evaluation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, conducted by an interdepartmental committee, demonstrates government departments and agencies' desire to improve programs and adapt measures in order to better meet the needs of targeted client groups. The measures implemented target the main aspects of poverty identified at the outset in the Act and National strategy and the results available at the moment focus mainly on their implementation. It can be noted in a general way that the measures of the action plan are developing in partnership and invite various players to work together on their implementation. These results indicate a

10. Social aid programs include social assistance and social solidarity programs and the Alternative jeunesse program.

resolve to decompartmentalize services and show that efforts in that direction are to be continued.

In the area of employment measures, evaluations have shown the meaningful effects that these measures have had on social aid recipients' entrance into the labour market, as well as their obvious efficiency. This process also underscored the importance of evaluating each of the measures implemented, as well as of more general reviews. The completed process will serve to energize thinking and the ongoing work to develop the second action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion.

4.6 Gender-based analysis

According to the terms of section 7 of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, the actions taken within the framework of this fight “must also, in their conception and implementation, take into account realities specific to women and men, in particular through gender-based analysis”

A number of measures implemented as part of the current action plan were intended for couples with children. While it is not possible at this time to measure the effect of these actions, they may have been of greater benefit to women, because they more often than men are in households with children, especially as heads of single-parent families.

Moreover, government practices, as well as those of regional and local authorities, have gradually incorporated gender-based analysis. Given this, the second government action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion will take the different realities and needs of women and men into consideration to a greater extent. This will enhance the action plan, since it will make it possible to provide public services that are even better adapted to the specific realities experienced by men and by women, implement better-targeted policies, foster optimal use of public funds, and prevent or reduce the inequalities between the women and men targeted by a project.

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

The fight against poverty and social exclusion, initiated by the Québec government in 2002, led to a first government action plan whose implementation from 2004–2009 enabled Québec to move closer to its goal of being one of the industrialized nations with the fewest people living in poverty in 2013. A second action plan must, however, follow to confirm the commitment of the government and allow all its partners to continue in their concerted efforts toward this target, particularly by strengthening measures aimed at the most vulnerable groups.

During the year 2007–2008, an initial series of meetings between the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the government departments and agencies that are members of the Interdepartmental Committee identified what would be the major issues in the coming years. These concern, in particular, the new workplace realities and the needs of individuals and groups that have benefited less from the advances of recent years, especially people living alone in poverty and exclusion, people with disabilities, First Nations people, immigrants and visible minorities. The situation of seniors will also be closely examined.

The work under way provides for the consultation and contribution of several government departments and agencies in respect to specific problems, as well as linkage with the new study, discussion, observation and research initiatives established in recent years, especially the Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion and the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion. Moreover, in view of the development of another action plan, the Minister has asked the advisory committee for two additional advisory opinions: one on a strategy aimed at supporting the efforts of poor communities to encourage their management of local actions to combat poverty and social exclusion, including that related to transportation issues in remote regions, and one on a strategy to prevent persistent poverty among groups at risk, especially persons living alone, recent immigrants, people with disabilities and those who are homeless. These two advisory opinions must be sent to the Minister in November 2008. The work to develop the second action plan will also take into account the evaluation of the first action plan.

CONCLUSION: QUÉBEC AT THE FOREFRONT

It is widely recognized in Canada that Québec is at the forefront when it comes to the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In the face of the worrisome facts that were then known about poverty (for example, more than 550,000 people receiving social assistance in 2002) and following a wide-scale mobilization of its citizenry, in 2002 Québec enacted the first law through which a North American government committed the state to the broader goals of reducing the social exclusion, prejudice and inequalities that harm the social fabric.

Quebec's resolve to succeed in this fight has been demonstrated in a real way through the implementation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, whose proposed initial investment of \$2.5 billion over five years has been increased to more than \$3.3 billion.

Québec has set itself apart from most of the other Canadian provinces in this endeavour by the many adjustments made on behalf of last-resort financial assistance recipients (indexation/semi-indexation, partial exemption for support payments, and so on), as well as by the measures targeting low-income families and workers.

The market basket measure is revealing in this respect. Although the last year for which data is available is 2004, it should be noted that Québec then recorded low-income rates for individuals and families that positioned it at the top of the list of provinces with the lowest proportion of people living in poverty. Thus, in 2004, the percentage of children living in low-income situations in Québec was 7.9%, which made it the only province to have a rate lower than 10% in this category. Since the economic situation has generally been favourable in all Canadian provinces since the mid-1990s, the explanation for the progress seen in Québec seems instead to come from various initiatives that have basically consisted of supplementing working incomes and making new social investments, many of which target low-income people.

The Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion implemented in 2004 has therefore strengthened and enhanced a set of initiatives that had already been proven. A number of these measures facilitate access to the labour market for the most disadvantaged and contribute to improving the living conditions of less well-off workers. New initiatives that were added to the action plan in 2007–2008, such as the Commitment for Employment and the National Strategy for Labour Market Integration and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons, are specially designed responses to the needs of a potential workforce for which access to employment may not always be immediate.

On the cusp of a second government action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion, it must be recognized that, in spite of positive achievements, Québec must continue its approach in order to be one of the industrialized nations in the

world with the least number of poor people by 2013. In addition, in the coming years Québec will have to face international competition within an unprecedented demographic situation that will create a labour shortage. As of today, therefore, Québec must take action to ensure the availability of a labour force and boost the productivity and competitiveness of its companies in order to enable Quebecers to improve their standard of living and quality of life.

The next government action plan will, therefore, carry on the measures already undertaken by Québec to combat poverty and social exclusion. Government departments and their partners are working in close collaboration so that actions will be implemented in the next few years that will help Quebecers meet these challenges.