

2004-2009
*Government Action Plan
to Combat Poverty
and Social Exclusion*



YEAR TWO REPORT

October 2006

This report was produced 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, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine, the Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation, the Ministère du Travail, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, the Société d'habitation du Québec and the Secrétariat à la jeunesse.



MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



Today we are releasing the report on the second year of implementation of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*. This anti-poverty action plan, introduced in April 2004, is based on the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion and arises from the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, legislation that provides direction for government action and engages all of Québec society in the great ten-year challenge of placing Québec among the world's industrialized states with the least poverty and social exclusion.

This objective is feasible but very demanding. It requires the mobilization of every member of our society every day. It is based on the right to live with dignity, decency, and respect, the right to equal opportunity, and on the individual and society-wide responsibility and obligation to do all we can to develop our human potential and our talents so as to overcome life's difficulties.

This Year Two Report describes the main existing measures as well as those instituted between April 2005 and March 2006 by the Government of Québec departments involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Our government is continuing its action aimed at eradicating and preventing poverty, assisting children, countering student disengagement, or dropping-out, acknowledging the value of work, and strengthening partnerships at the service of those unable to enter the labour force in the short-term. We want to help immigrants, women, members of visible minorities and persons with functional limitations to grow and thrive. They too want to live with dignity and aspire to have a hand in developing their community in a manner commensurate with their ambitions.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to this document, the result of a determined and systematic approach aimed at finding lasting solutions to these complex phenomena that are unacceptable in a modern and democratic society.

Michelle Courchesne

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Courchesne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity

SUMMARY

Presented in April 2004 by the Government of Québec, the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion is composed of a set of measures to be implemented within a five-year timeframe in order to meet the objectives enshrined in the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*. The action plan hinges on government and intersectoral involvement that brings together all the players concerned.

Under this Act, the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity must table an annual report on the activities carried out within the framework of the action plan.

This Year Two Report describes the second year of implementation of the action plan.

FORMATION OF THE COMITÉ CONSULTATIF DE LUTTE CONTRE LA PAUVRETÉ ET L'EXCLUSION SOCIALE AND OF THE CENTRE D'ÉTUDE SUR LA PAUVRETÉ ET L'EXCLUSION

Formation of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and of the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion figures among the milestone achievements of Year Two. These new deliberative forums will enable social dialogue that should foster the emergence of innovative solutions for waging an effective battle against poverty and social exclusion and contribute to more closely allying the various socioeconomic players in this sizeable challenge.

The Comité consultatif, a group that represents stakeholders from all sectors of civil society, is a place of exchange, deliberation, and joint and coherent action targeting complex issues in the fight against poverty. Its main mission is to advise the Minister on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the action introduced under the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. This advisory committee is made up of 17 members appointed by the government, five of whom represent anti-poverty groups or organizations. At least three of these five members must also be people with whom these groups or organizations work. Ten members are from various sectors of Québec society, and the remaining two members are civil servants.

In addition to the advisory component of the Comité consultatif's mission is its mandate to monitor government policies that have an impact on poverty and social exclusion. It is also empowered to follow developments in the communities affected by those problems. The Comité consultatif therefore maintains ongoing contact with the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion in order to have access to the indicators required in tracking the progress made under the National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion is an observation, research and discussion centre entrusted with providing reliable and objective information on poverty and social exclusion. Its main purpose is to provide the Minister with a series of indicators to be used for measuring poverty and social exclusion, and social and economic disparities, such as income, as well as other determinants of poverty. The Centre will follow up on the indicators chosen by the Minister to measure the strides made, particularly with regard to improving the economic and social situation of people and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Under the aegis of the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion is managed by a steering committee composed of members of the government, academic and research communities whose knowledge of poverty and social exclusion is recognized, as well as two workers in the field of poverty and social exclusion.

Changes to employment assistance

Assented to in June 2005, the *Individual and Family Assistance Act* favours incentives rather than coercion by more strongly supporting social integration and labour market participation efforts. This piece of legislation has made it possible to institute many action plan measures:

- a basic benefit that abolishes decreases enforced for failure to take steps leading to employment, including refusing or giving up a job
- more flexible eligibility conditions governing temporarily limited capacity for employment in order to broaden access to families with dependent children with a disability, even if the children are full-time students
- the Devenir program, aimed at providing recipients with individualized support in helping them to undertake initiatives leading to their active participation within society and to adequately prepare for an employability assistance measure.

In light of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, certain rules governing employment assistance were changed or relaxed:

- allowable savings of up to \$5000 in an individual development account earmarked for a specific project
- increases in the allowable exemptions for certain assets, notably, the net value of a residence, which rose from \$80,000 to \$90,000
- exemption of child-support income of \$100 a month for all eligible families with dependent children
- benefits indexed by 2.43% in January 2006 for recipients with a severely limited capacity for employment and by 1.21% for persons fit to work.

NEW EFFORTS AND RENEWED EFFORTS

Financial assistance and housing assistance

- In May 2006, the minimum wage went from \$7.60 to \$7.75 an hour, and from \$6.85 to \$7 an hour for workers with income from tips.
- Advance payments under the Work Premium program meant that five times more families benefited than under the Parental Wage Assistance (PWA) program in 2004. In 2005, 54,099 families received advance payments under the Work Premium program.
- From June 2005 to March 31, 2006, some 600 immigrants or members of visible minorities were assisted under the Programme d'aide à l'intégration des immigrants et des minorités visibles en emploi.
- In 2005-2006, 4,519 resource region workers who underwent collective dismissal were assisted. Furthermore, outside the resource regions, 1,931 textile and clothing sector workers who underwent collective dismissal were also assisted.
- \$3.4 million was spent on food security for certain segments of the population.
- During the 2006-2007 Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance announced the addition of new monies earmarked for constructing 1,400 housing units in addition to the 18,600 others planned under the AccèsLogis Québec and Affordable Housing Québec programs. The target for social and community housing is now 20,000 by 2008.
- In 2005-2006, approximately 4,100 emergency housing supplements were granted.

- Since July 2005, seniors who receive the maximum Guaranteed Income Supplement benefit receive free medication.
- More people now have access to legal aid.

Prevention of poverty and social exclusion


- Poor families now receive Integrated Perinatal and Early Childhood Services through two poverty-prevention components: Soutien aux jeunes parents (support for young families) and Soutien aux familles vivant dans l'extrême pauvreté (support for families in extreme poverty).
- Under the Assistance Program for Emergent Literacy in Disadvantaged Communities, more than 1,400 literacy activities were carried out with parents, children 5 years old and younger, and social groups.
- 6,299 students in 25 schools in disadvantaged communities and 12 adult education centres were reached under the Programme famille, école et communauté : réussir ensemble.
- The Homework Assistance program budget has been doubled (\$9.4 million in 2004-2005 to \$19.6 million in 2005-2006).
- The \$90 million cash injection used to provide students with disabilities or learning or adaptation disorders with better guidance and supervision and faster intervention brings the additional amounts dedicated to this clientele to \$120 million for 2004-2005 to 2008-2009.
- In the 2005 calendar year, nearly \$2 billion was paid out through a Child Assistance refundable tax credit, a \$550 million increase from 2004 figures. The average annual benefit for all eligible households was \$2274 and \$3176 for families with income of less than \$25,000.
- In 2005-2006, funds were allocated for training and maintaining youth intervention teams in every region of Québec.
- In order to offer training and support services tailored to the situation and needs of drop-outs and young people with a low level of schooling aged 16 to 24, 24 local teams bringing together nearly 300 organizations were formed.
- The Agir autrement intervention strategy for secondary schools in the most disadvantaged communities made it possible to reach nearly 114,000 students.
- In order to provide alternatives to last-resort assistance for young people under age 25, since May 2006 the Alternative jeunesse pilot project has been underway in nine local employment centres. The program is one of the centrepieces of the 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy made public in March 2006.

Involving society as a whole

- The Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions has committed to extending the Programme de renouveau urbain et villageois à Montréal until December 31, 2006.
- Pilot projects on local strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion continue in the regional county municipalities (RCMs) of La Haute-Gaspésie and Témiscouata and the City of Montréal (22 boroughs).

Consistent and coherent action

- When making proposals to Government, government departments and agencies must report on the direct and significant impacts of draft legislation on the incomes of individuals or families in situations of poverty. Where applicable, the report must be appended to the briefs presented to the Conseil des ministres.

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- Further to talks between the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador and the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, an agreement was signed in December 2005. Its purpose was to work with Native communities, in keeping with their culture, to craft and introduce means of combating poverty and social exclusion. The social development office of the health and social services commission of the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador was tasked to produce an action plan adapted to Native peoples.

YEAR THREE

Year three will focus primarily on the work of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale and of the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion. In early 2007, the Comité consultatif will produce a brief on updating of the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. For its part, the Centre, in collaboration with the Comité consultatif, will suggest a series of poverty and social exclusion indicators.

In addition, the work related to an integrated territorial approach will continue in order to help local and regional communities design anti-poverty strategies. Certain changes will also be made to employment assistance in the aftermath of the upcoming adoption of the *Regulation respecting individual and family assistance*. Lastly, the First Nations will continue working on the production of an action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion consistent with their culture.