

Québec's Combat Against Poverty

Government Action Plan for
SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
2010-2015



Gouvernement du Québec
Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale

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To contact the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, call:

Telephone: (418) 643-4721

Toll free: 1 888 643-4721

To consult this document online, go to:

www.mess.gouv.qc.ca

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A PLAN THAT REFLECTS QUÉBEC VALUES



Jean Charest
Premier of Quebec

Worldwide, nations are organizing to fight poverty and social exclusion. In keeping with our values of solidarity and humanism and our cherished principles of social justice and the redistribution of wealth, Québec has made choices to ensure the well-being of all its citizens.

Collectively, we have made the commitment to figure among the industrialized States with the fewest number of individuals in situations of poverty. Based on a sustainable development approach that blends economic growth and social progress, the ultimate goal is to ensure that no Québécois is left behind.

Under the first Action Plan, deployed from 2004 to 2010, significant strides were made of which all of us can be proud. The choices we made enabled us to protect low-income earners and jobless individuals, to support them as they strive to enter the labour market and to join the mainstream of society, and to act to prevent situations of poverty. Thanks to the measures implemented for all of Québec, this plan made us a model of what can be done.

Today, with this second government Action Plan, we are opting to make our social safety net even stronger and our solidarity more effective through congruity and mobilization. How? By aligning resources with regional and local needs through the creation of new alliances with established joint action groups given greater means and latitude. With the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, we will become a model of what can be done at the State, regional and local level.

This means that openness and engagement is required of one and all—the community and associative movement, the private sector, unions, and education. Every government department and agency is invited to roll up its sleeves. We must pool our efforts so that poverty can be defeated and so that Québec can be more inclusive.

Let's work together so that more and more Québécois have access to a better future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jean Charest". The signature is fluid and cursive.

NEW MOMENTUM WITH AN ACCENT ON MOBILIZATION



Sam Hamad
Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity, Minister of Labour, and Minister responsible for the Capitale-Nationale region



Lise Thériault
Minister for Social Services

Fighting poverty and pooling and better coordinating all action to help the least fortunate Québeckers—this is the goal of the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion.

This second Action Plan builds on existing initiatives and was also inspired by the ideas expressed by the nearly 2,500 individuals and Québec and regional organizations consulted during the Rendez-vous de la solidarité.

Based on the progress made under the first plan that made it possible to improve the living conditions of individuals in situations of poverty, we want to continue working with our partners engaged in the fight against poverty to establish the best public policies possible for those who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in dire straits.

To achieve this goal, the Action Plan comes with a budget of close to \$7 billion over five years, \$1.3 billion of it in new investments.

The results thus far include improved income for individuals and families, better access to affordable housing, a more sustained effort to foster success in school, and greater support for people striving towards employment. These results show that poverty can be made to retreat through unified action by all civil society partners. We share these first successes with everyone who makes this purpose part of their daily life.

But there is still work to be done, and, as a government, we intend to continue to fully assume our responsibilities. Structuring measures such as Child Assistance and the Work Premium have been maintained. Training and access to employment remain two core premises in combating poverty and social exclusion.

Additional efforts are also being deployed to, among other things, improve the disposable income of individuals on low incomes, support local and regional social initiatives, and increase access to social housing. Also, in order to protect the purchasing power of less privileged households, a generous refundable Solidarity Tax Credit has been introduced. We must also act sooner in terms of prevention and step up measures to integrate within the community individuals in situations of destitution and isolation. Now, more than ever, action must converge.

In keeping with the consensus witnessed at the Rendez-vous de la solidarité, we are giving fresh momentum to the offensive against poverty and social exclusion by supporting local and regional players and accentuating their mobilization and pooled action. The alliances we want to establish with each of the regions are new rendez-vous to which all are summoned.

Fighting poverty and social exclusion is a collective responsibility. By more unity and coordination of our forces and by maximizing the fit between the actions to be undertaken and real life, we can make further inroads for solidarity and social inclusion in every region of Québec.

Giving new momentum to the society-wide movement to combat poverty and social exclusion by pooling and better coordinating action for solidarity and social inclusion—this is the reason for the Québec government’s Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010 2015. The purpose of this second generation of measures is to place Québec among the most inclusive and just societies, one where economic self-sufficiency and personal fulfilment are within the reach of all.

Since 2002, Québec’s efforts have been based on the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* and on the first anti-poverty plan that provided a template for action in the past six years. Thanks to these initiatives and to a sturdier economy mid-decade, Québec moved ahead and continued to further the well-being of its citizens. Québec’s choices, notably those with regard to its social safety net, also made it possible for Québec to weather the economic crisis more successfully than other Canadian provinces¹.

With its Strategy and its Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, Québec became a source of inspiration. The path it has trod has set an example for other provinces that followed its lead, notably Newfoundland and Labrador and, more recently, Ontario and New Brunswick. Québec still stands a head above the rest by the nature of its legislation and its incentive-based approach to labour market integration.

Québec’s advances stem from the daily efforts of thousands of individuals dedicated to this cause, people whose activities are aimed at fostering equal opportunity for every individual. This is why the work of volunteers must be acknowledged, people who, year after year, give of their time to build a better society on many levels.

Another reason for the improved situation in Québec is the daily determination of individuals who work together to improve their lot and that of their family. By bettering their own living conditions, these men and women, more than anyone else, contribute to crafting a brighter future for our society in its entirety.

The government recognizes that in an inclusive society such as ours, everyone has the right to live with dignity and with a sufficient standard of living according to international standards, and it intends to do everything in its power to attain this goal. However, combating poverty is a long-term endeavour that involves more than countering a lack of income or insufficient income. It also has to promote the social integration of all individuals, ensure their health and education, and exert pressure on many other determinants of poverty. The Québec government’s firmly resolves to continue its action on these fronts because it acknowledges that this action benefits each and every Québecker, but with a proviso: it must carry out this mission

1. Ministère de l’Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion – Year Five Report*, 2010, p. 46.

in keeping with our society's ability to absorb the costs thereof². Ultimately, the objective is still to empower Québeckers in situations of poverty to find an escape route and, by extension, improve the living conditions of the generations to come and influence their situation for the better.

To achieve this goal, the government cannot act alone. It must be able to rely on the support and commitment of Québec society as a whole. Every individual, whether in a situation of poverty, or part of the community, philanthropic, social or economic sector, holds part of the solution in this collective project that will re-instate the individual as the focus of action. To that end, a sizable portion of this Action Plan proposes to give fresh impetus to action rooted in every one of Québec's communities and to support for partnerships so that action is more coherent and efficient. Development and strengthening of a preventive approach to poverty and exclusion will benefit from this new way of working in tandem. This is why the vision conveyed by this second Action Plan calls resolutely for solidarity.

To bolster this society-wide project, the Action Plan is structured around four thrusts:

- 1 Review our standard practices and make regional and local communities key players in the decision-making process
- 2 Acknowledge the value of work and foster the self-sufficiency of individuals
- 3 Support the income of disadvantaged individuals
- 4 Improve the living conditions of low-income individuals and families.

These thrusts, which dovetail with those of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* and of the first Action Plan, derive from the experience acquired in recent years and from the comments from the round of consultations carried out in 2009, called the *Rendez-vous de la solidarité*. These guidelines for action enable decentralization of decisions towards those with a stake in them so that the needs of individuals and of communities are better taken into account. The thrusts also factor in the recommendations of a vast array of people and organizations deeply involved in achieving our common goal of placing Québec among the industrialized States with the least number of individuals in situations of poverty by 2013.

The second plan therefore emphasizes efficiency, protection of the purchasing power of individuals, and renewed support for local and regional action.

2. Article 2 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which Québec endorsed under Order-in-Council 1438-76, April 21, 1976.

1 THE INSPIRATION FOR BUILDING A MORE JUST FUTURE

The movement against poverty is rooted in the history of Québec. In every chapter of this history, individuals and civic, private and government organizations have acted to improve the living conditions of Québeckers. With the unanimous adoption of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* in 2002, all of Québec affirmed its commitment to make this issue a priority.

Driven by the constant need to innovate in the field of social action and to enhance its effectiveness, today Québec is embarking on a new era of social advancement by drawing inspiration from a multitude of sources.

1.1 BUILDING ON OUR COMMON VALUES

QUÉBEC: A UNIFIED SOCIETY

Québec's dedication to its citizens in situations of poverty bespeaks strong societal values. Québec history is steeped in freedom, but also in solidarity. On the one hand, Québec society respects the right and freedom of all individuals to make the choices they deem the wisest for their personal growth and that will influence their development and progress. On the other hand, together we all do whatever we can so that everyone can realize his or her full potential and improve his or her living conditions. This balance between liberty and solidarity, that coloured the first Action Plan, is also part of the values promulgated in the second Action Plan.

Québec society is just and equitable. It is capable of discernment when it is time to measure the possible contribution of individuals to its development and it displays creativity in the ways of including them.

By allying solidarity, equality and equity, Québec continues its construction of a society within which social justice remains an immovable pillar. The second Action Plan aligns precisely with this perspective.

VOLUNTEER ACTION: AN INVALUABLE CONTRIBUTION

The fight against poverty and social exclusion would not be as effective without the outstanding dedication shown every year by citizens in every region of Québec. More than 2.3 million volunteers give generously of their time, energy and creativity for the well-being of all, thereby contributing to forging ties between individuals from all segments of society and to creating solid communities where citizens enjoy living and growing. Their action is an expression of the importance they ascribe to their fellow citizens and their community.

Volunteers donate nearly 400 million hours of their time annually. There must be collective recognition of the value of this work. The contribution of volunteers is essential today and will be tomorrow because civic involvement is a staple of a healthy society.

By strengthening the regional and local action it proposes, the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion could offer new regional partnership opportunities for volunteering and could engage the existing solidarity network.

RESPECT OUR INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND THE QUÉBEC CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

In 1976, the Québec government embraced the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights³, adopted in 1966 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. This Covenant arises from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This Action Plan is one of the many ways in which Québec has pledged to abide by the commitment to progressively provide all citizens with the conditions required for them to live with dignity and with a sufficient standard of living according to international standards, while respecting our society's ability to absorb the costs thereof⁴.

This international commitment has a legal counterpart in section 45 of the *Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, which states that «every person in need has a right, for himself and his family, to measures of financial assistance and to social measures provided for by law, susceptible of ensuring such person an acceptable standard of living.»

Adoption of the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion contributes specifically to implementation of the rights enshrined in the Québec Charter and in various international instruments that Québec lives by.

A FORWARD-LOOKING PROCESS

The process described in the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion seeks to produce positive short- and long-term economic and social outcomes, one of which is to ensure profitable sustainable development that makes it possible for every individual to shape the society of the future. The fight against poverty and social exclusion undertaken in Québec is aimed at promoting the adoption of behaviours and values conducive to the full participation of all individuals within the society, while respecting the diversity proper to the men and women who comprise and build our society, each in their own way.

SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE SITUATION OF MEN AND WOMEN

The *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* stipulates that the actions envisaged in the legislation must in their conception and implementation, take into account realities specific to women and men, in particular through gender-based analysis (GBA) which makes it possible to foresee the distinct effects that the projects designed and introduced may have on men and women. This means that GBA can steer the actions of society's decision-makers on the local, regional and Québec level, which will promote gender equality.

As part of the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, the government departments and agencies in charge of measures bearing the logo(GBA) commit to, when possible, using gender-based analysis and to distributing gender-differentiated information as to the effects of measures on men and women.



3. Order-in-Council 1438-76 of April 21, 1976, published by the Ministère des Affaires internationales, *Recueil des accords internationaux du Québec, 1984-1989*, 1990, p. 809.
4. Articles 2 and 11 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*.

1.2 CONTINUE AN APPROACH THAT PRODUCES RESULTS

Covering the period from 2004 to 2010, the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion generated direct investments of more than \$4.5 billion. The main measures of the first Action Plan were aimed at:

- offering better income support to families;
- fostering the economic self-sufficiency of individuals;
- improving the living conditions of individuals in situations of poverty;
- supporting the emergence of territory-based strategies against poverty and social exclusion.

The first Action Plan made it possible to review the support offered to local communities through the introduction of integrated territory-based projects⁵. These projects yielded interesting results, paving the way for one of the thrusts for the five years ahead.

ABOUT EXISTING TERRITORY-BASED ACTION

In 2009, the partners of more than 60 local employment centre territories where there are high concentrations of poverty entered into an agreement to combat poverty and social exclusion.

The RCMs of Témiscouata and of Haute-Gaspésie were behind the first pilot projects designed according to the integrated territory-based approach. In the Capitale-Nationale region, five local projects were approved by the Conférence régionale des élus.

The Ville de Montréal has been engaged in a similar process since 2003. The agreement between the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale and the city has been renewed several times, with highly positive effects in terms of joint action by communities. On the financial level, hefty leverage was created for stimulating other development more mindful of all stakeholders.

The purpose of the projects devised using this approach was to empower communities with high concentrations of poverty to craft and implement local strategies to eradicate poverty and social exclusion. This consisted of giving communities the power and means to improve their socioeconomic environment. These experiences produced promising initiatives. Today the government proposes to make further inroads.

With the first Action Plan, Québec moved ahead⁶ and continued to further the well-being of its citizens. The results culled from the main indicators point to significant progress:

- The low-income rate for all individuals in Québec using the Market Basket Measure (MBM)⁷ has been dropping since 2003, going from 9.9% to 8.5% in 2007. Québec continues to be the province with the lowest MBM low-income rate.
- The low-income rate using the MBM posted decreases for several types of family units (see Appendix 1). For example:
 - The low-income rate of children and youths (individuals under age 18) declined sharply (from 9.6% to 7.3% between 2003 and 2007). In 2007, Québec was the Canadian province that posted the lowest low-income rate for individuals under age 18, ahead of Alberta's 9%;
 - Sizable decreases were also recorded for single mothers (from 41.6% in 2003 to 21.7% in 2007), even though their rate remained higher than that of single fathers (14.1% in 2007). However, it bears pointing out that the low-income rate of single mothers was lower in Québec than in the other provinces;
 - Were it not for the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, which contributed to increasing the disposable income of individuals with meagre means, in 2005 some 147,000 more individuals would have found themselves below low-income cut-offs using the Market Basket Measure. Without Action Plan measures, approximately 119,000 more men and women would have been below low-income cut-offs in 2006⁸.
- Between March 2003 and March 2009, the social assistance rate went down by a full percentage point (8.4% to 7.4%).

5. The integrated territory-based approach (sometimes called integrated local development) hinges on joint action and better harmonization of initiatives by the various stakeholders (e.g. government departments and agencies, social players, citizens and businesses) within a given geographical area with a view to improved living conditions for individuals in situations of poverty and social exclusion. Different spheres of life may be involved, including training and education, the family, transportation, employment, recreation and the economy.

6. The annual reports for the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion (2004-2010) are available online at www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/grands-dossiers/lutte-contre-la-pauvrete/plan.

7. The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is the yardstick recommended by the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion for monitoring poverty in terms of coverage of basic needs. The MBM corresponds to the value of commodities and services that enable individuals to have the following: food that meets Health Canada standards; clothing and footwear; rental housing; transportation; and other goods and services for personal care; household needs; furniture; basic telephone service; recreation; and school supplies.

8. Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, *Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion: Year Five Report*, 2010, p. 37.

- For the same period, there was a 9.6% decrease in the number of Social Assistance Program recipients (children and adults)⁹, moving from 544,229 individuals in March 2003 to 491,729 in March 2009, for a total of 52,500 fewer individuals.
- There are roughly 25,000 fewer children on last-resort financial assistance, an 18.2% decrease (from 139,869 recipients in March 2003 to 114,436 in March 2009).

Furthermore, minimum-wage earners and social assistance recipients saw their disposable income rise between 2003 and 2010, and more so for households with children. For all households, these increases were markedly higher for workers, as indicated in Table 1.

The measures of the first Action Plan did not have as much impact on single individuals and childless couples, and they did not fare as well as other groups in terms of the increase in disposable income (Table 1). This is why the second Action Plan includes measures that benefit them more directly, notably an increase in the Working Income Tax Benefit, and the Solidarity Tax Credit, presented later in this document.

Table 1

Variation in disposable income by household type, 2003 to 2010

Type of household	Variation in disposable income in constant dollars		Variation in disposable income in constant dollars (%)
	(\$)	(%)	
Single-parent families (with one child under age 5)			
Social assistance recipient	3 706	26.0	11.4
Minimum wage earner (35-hour work week)	5 785	29.6	14.6
Two-parent families (with one child under age 5)			
Social assistance recipient	4 529	27.8	13.0
Minimum wage earner (35-hour work week)	5 902	25.9	11.3
Childless couples			
Social assistance recipient	896	8.5	-4.1
Minimum wage earner (35-hour work week)	5 704	39.5	23.3
Single individuals			
Social assistance recipient	576	8.3	-4.3
Minimum wage earner (35-hour work week)	3 838	30.7	15.5

According to a simulation based on a 35-hour work week at the minimum wage in effect as of May 1, 2010 (\$9.50 an hour).

Parameters: April 2003 and May 2010.

Source: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, Direction des politiques de prestations.

9. Financial assistance programs consist of the Social Assistance Program, the Social Solidarity Program and the Youth Alternative Program.

The most recent analyses based on available data also enabled gauging of the effects of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* and of the first Action Plan that stemmed from it. The more daunting economic context of 2009 put Québec's social security system to the test. A comparison of trends in the number of last-resort financial assistance recipients in Québec, Ontario and Alberta between April 2008 and December 2009 indicates that the rise in the number of recipients was significantly less steep in Québec than elsewhere in Canada (Table 2).

Employment Pact Plus has played an important role in this regard. Implemented at a time of economic crisis and the world-wide recession of 2009, Employment Pact Plus cushioned the negative impact on employment in Québec and laid the groundwork for economic recovery. Its action upstream of events for individuals and businesses meant that thousands of workers kept their jobs and others were given better training opportunities so that they could fully reap the benefits of the economic upturn.

Table 2

Trends in the number of last-resort financial assistance recipient in Québec, Ontario and Alberta between April 2008 and December 2009

Month	Québec		Ontario		Alberta	
	Total	var.	Total	var.	Total	var.
April 2008	487 903	–	711 159	–	90 211	–
March 2009	486 282	-0.3%	757 022	6.4%	101 214	12.2%
August 2009	486 158	-0.4%	798 105	12.2%	107 405	19.1%
September 2009	486 071	-0.4%	799 539	12.4%	108 751	20.6%
October 2009	483 063	-1.0%	796 578	12.0%	108 452	20.2%
November 2009	483 190	-1.0%	799 150	12.4%	111 071	23.1%
December 2009	485 114	-0.6%	808 345	13.7%	113 118	25.4%

The variations are established in relation to April 2008.

Sources: **Québec** – Direction de la statistique et du soutien aux expérimentations, *Rapport statistique mensuel sur la clientèle des programmes d'assistance sociale*, December 2009. **Ontario** – Statistics and Analysis Unit, Policy Research & Analysis Branch, *Ontario Social Assistance. Monthly Statistical Report*, February 2010. **Alberta** – Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *Social Assistance Statistical Report - Number of Beneficiaries*, February 2010.

Note: While Alberta does not take the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Program into account in establishing its social assistance rate, for the purpose of comparison, we have included the recipients of this program.

1.3 BANKING ON THE MOBILIZATION THAT UNDERPINS THE SECOND ACTION PLAN

To draft the second Action Plan, the government summoned citizens and numerous organizations to a broad-based consultation. Several government bodies also provided input on the courses of action that should be favoured. The observations that came out of this exercise of mobilization helped to shape the thrusts, targets and actions that were chosen.

A SOCIETY ENGAGED IN ACTION

In order to take into account the experience and knowledge of as many people as possible in drafting the 2010-2015 Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, consultations, collectively called *Rendez vous de la solidarité*, were organized. In all, nearly 2,500 citizens and groups from all sectors of society had the opportunity to exchange viewpoints and express themselves (see Table 3).

- At the **Rendez-vous national de la solidarité**, held in June 2009, Québec-wide organizations from the full spectrum of social sectors—unions, community groups, volunteers, charitable organizations, management, representatives of individuals in situations of poverty—voiced their opinion on various themes (employment, income, education, living conditions, social inclusion, citizen participation and territory-based action). **At the regional Rendez-vous de la solidarité**, an array of people and organizations gathered in each of the regions of Québec in the autumn of 2009, where they discussed the features specific to life in their region, and the tools that would empower them to act more effectively to achieve significant results in improving social inclusion and territory-based action.
- In order to reach individuals currently in situations of poverty or who had been in the past, **focus groups** were conducted in five regions reflecting Québec's diversity. Last-resort financial assistance recipients and persons in or who had been in situations of poverty were part of this consultation designed to enable the circumstances and opinions of persons directly concerned by poverty to be taken into account.
- The government also held discussion meetings with organizations representing several segments of the **Aboriginal population**: the First Nations, Inuit people, Aboriginal people living in urban communities, and Aboriginal women. This exchange made it possible to identify specific problems and to provide food for thought about possible courses of action.
- In order to open discussion to all Québeckers, an **online citizen consultation**, in which more than 1,500 individuals participated, took place in the summer of 2009. A number of **briefs** or other documents were submitted throughout the consultation period. This highly valuable content was taken into consideration in drafting the second Action Plan.

Various government bodies also joined forces to produce this Action Plan. The **Comité interministériel de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale**¹⁰ was an important instrument for the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale in its task to coordinate government action in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The Advisory Opinions of the **Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale** (CCLP) were also used to draft this Action Plan. The role of the CCLP is to advise the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity in crafting, implementing and evaluating action against poverty and social exclusion. The subjects of its Advisory Opinions are public rate increases, income-improvement targets, the persistent poverty of certain groups, and support for local action¹¹.

The Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion also has a solid scientific foundation thanks to the collaboration of the **Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion** (CEPE), an observation, research and discussion centre on poverty and social exclusion issues. Its report on low income in Québec, published in 2008¹², and its document recommending indicators of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, released in 2009, were taken into consideration¹³ in drafting the Action Plan.

10. The Comité interministériel consisted of 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, des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire, the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, the Ministère du Travail, the Société d'habitation du Québec, the Secrétariat à la jeunesse, the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, the Ministère des Finances, the Secrétariat aux aînés, the Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation, the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine and the Ministère des Transports.

11. The Advisory Opinions of the CCLP are available at www.cclp.gouv.qc.ca/publications.

12. Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, *Le faible revenu au Québec : un état de situation*, 2008. Available online at www.cepe.gouv.qc.ca/publications/publications.

13. Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion, *Taking the Measure of Poverty. Proposed Indicators of Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion to Measure Progress in Québec*, 2009. Available online at www.cepe.gouv.qc.ca/publications/publications.

Table 3

Les Rendez-vous de la solidarité : Consultation process

Activities carried out	Participation
On-line consultation	
Held from June 8 to July 10, 2009, this consultation made it possible to take the pulse of citizens from different walks of life.	1,552 citizens
Focus groups	
In June 2009, 10 focus groups were conducted in five cities, namely Montréal, Drummondville, Saguenay, Québec and Gaspé.	87 people (10 groups)
Rendez-vous de la solidarité, Québec-wide component	
On June 15, 2009, representatives of Québec-wide organizations came together to share their observations and determine action priorities.	155 people representing Québec-wide organizations
Rendez-vous de la solidarité, regional component	
Throughout the autumn of 2009, Rendez-vous de la solidarité were held in each of the regions of Québec.	563 people representing regional organizations
Discussion with Aboriginal groups	
Throughout the autumn, meetings were held with representatives from various organizations.	18 people representing Aboriginal organizations
Total : 2 375 people and representing organizations	

THE MAIN OBSERVATIONS TO EMERGE FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

Certain courses of action were deemed to be fundamental by a majority of consultation participants and social rights groups:

- continue to consider employment as one of the main instruments in an effective offensive against poverty and in fostering economic self-sufficiency;
- act against dropping out and nurture academic perseverance;
- pursue the development of the social economy;
- encourage corporate social responsibility;
- act to improve the income of individuals, whether last-resort financial assistance recipients or low-income earners;
- adjust certain social assistance parameters;
- compensate for the impact of public rate hikes on less fortunate Québeckers;
- step up action on the issue of homelessness;
- fight the prejudice surrounding individuals in situations of poverty;
- continue efforts in response to the need for social, community and affordable housing;
- improve the slate of mass transit services;
- reduce red tape and eliminate silo approaches through better joint action and coordination among organizations;
- enhance the effectiveness of government and institutional action, notably with a view to making programs and measures more flexible so that they are better tailored to regional and local specificities;
- encourage regional and local responsibility for action to fight poverty and social exclusion.

At meetings with Aboriginal organizations, their representatives reaffirmed the extent of the need for social housing and for action to make staying in school a viable option for young Aboriginals.

2 FOUR THRUSTS AS GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

In order to update the fight against poverty and social exclusion for 2010-2015, while counting on tried-and-true practices and a preventive approach, four thrusts that factor in the observations culled from the consultations were chosen:

- Review our standard practices and make local and regional communities key players in the decision-making process.
- Acknowledge the value of work and foster the self-sufficiency of individuals.
- Support the income of disadvantaged individuals.
- Improve the living conditions of low-income individuals and families.

2.1 THRUST 1: REVIEW OUR STANDARD PRACTICES AND MAKE LOCAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES KEY PLAYERS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

STRENGTHEN TERRITORY-BASED ACTION

To advance even further in the offensive against poverty and social exclusion in Québec, increasing our efficiency and bringing decision-making closer to the community level have become crucial. In addition to deploying Québec-wide measures as in the first Action Plan, we must also revisit how we orchestrate our priorities and back the action of our territorial partners.

The evidence is plentiful and the viewpoints expressed are shared by the government, organizations and individuals on the front line. The Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (which authored an advisory opinion on the best means of supporting local action against poverty and social exclusion), government departments and agencies, along with many of the individuals consulted during the Rendez-vous de la solidarité, came to the same conclusions. To strengthen local and regional action, we need to:

- break the silos that exist between various organizations so as to ensure harmonized action and create a continuum of person-centred services;
- make the criteria for certain programs and measures more flexible so as to better meet the needs of communities;
- give regional and local players ways of better carrying out their mission by supporting their joint action and mobilization conducive to promising projects;
- ensure the continuity of existing initiatives, such as integrated urban revitalization and an integrated territory-based approach.

As part of the second Action Plan, the government suggests making the community the locus for decision-making and reviewing the way we work together. To achieve this, society as a whole must get involved. Local and regional communities must be able to rally all players to the cause and come up with promising projects that will give added value to current action by the partners concerned, including the government. For their part, provincial players will be prompted to find innovative solutions and to be constantly mindful of their effectiveness and efficiency in the action they undertake to produce tangible results.

Far from withdrawing, the State seeks to recognize the importance of putting the players from the local community, philanthropic, economic, social, and union sectors at the core of any solution-seeking action. The government's purview will be to adjust its action to the specific needs expressed by the regions.

Furthermore, the government will give fresh impetus to regionally and locally based action to counter poverty and social exclusion through Solidarity Alliances with every region of Québec (**Q^QGBA**) aimed at inducing mobilization and joint action and at providing the required flexibility for redefining the role of communities in the social and economic inclusion of every citizen. These Alliances will lead progressively to the production of action plans by the regional players rooted in knowledge of the needs of their territory and of the various resources at their disposal. The Alliances will make it possible to forge a common vision of the efforts to deploy locally and regionally in order to ensure the best outcomes possible in the regions and communities according to the priorities they set and in keeping with their specificities. The purpose is therefore to enable communities to better plan and coordinate their efforts.

The government plans to sign Solidarity Alliances with every region of Québec in order to induce mobilization and joint action.

The Conférences régionales des élus (regional councils of elected representatives-CRÉs) and the Ville de Montréal will be responsible for bringing together the partners of their region so as to establish a broad-based joint action mechanism that can rally community organizations, businesses, unions, philanthropic organizations, individuals in situations of poverty, and numerous other stakeholders. The CRÉs and the Ville de Montréal will be asked to build upon the structures already in

place in their regions and communities. Their network, contribution and insight into their communities make them essential.

The regional partners will be tasked to together :

- provide funding for developing and disseminating knowledge about community needs and resources;
- rally the players and support joint action;
- determine their region's priorities, plan the required action and establish means so their regional projects can be carried out;
- bolster local or intralocal action against poverty and social exclusion in their territory, notably in terms of funding;
- submit proposals to Conférences administratives régionales (CARs) aimed at optimizing government action against poverty and social exclusion.

The local players may also work together to determine priorities and then go on to submit proposals to be analyzed on the regional level, which would bring financial management and the decisional process closer to the grassroots level.

Better financial support and flexibility (QGBA)

The *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, adopted in December 2002, enabled creation of the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS), aimed at providing financial backing for projects, actions and measures to achieve the goals enshrined in the Act. The FQIS is the main vehicle for financial support to local and regional communities other than sector-based measures by government departments and agencies.

Under the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, the government will press the FQIS into service in order to support local, regional and Québec-wide action in the following areas:

- mobilization of and joint action by the players;
- enhanced knowledge of community needs and resources, evaluation of the action undertaken, and sharing of information;
- support for initiatives to fight poverty and social exclusion.

The standards governing the Fonds were amended to extend eligibility to a wider range of partners, notably to CRÉs and certain organizations that represent Aboriginals.

The FQIS is therefore the main financial instrument for the action plans and Solidarity Alliances to be progressively ratified with the CRÉs, the Ville de Montréal and the Aboriginal organizations. The Fonds could also fund prospective research and projects of Québec-wide scope.

The 2010-2011 Budget provides for a total of \$115 million for the Fonds for the five years of the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion.

These amounts, combined with those invested by the different partners, including government departments and agencies, will enable genuine support to communities and to their projects. This could dovetail with the action underway in the regions.

Means for better support for Aboriginal initiatives

With the renewal of territory-based action, the government could, among other things, improve what it does to support the fight against poverty and social exclusion of Québec Aboriginals. Following the model to be established gradually across Québec, Aboriginal organizations will be invited to enter into Solidarity Alliances. As was the case for the regions, these Alliances will come with FQIS funding and will have the same objectives as those described earlier.

The Forum de la solidarité of the Table Québec-régions

With a view to strengthening local and regional implementation of measures to combat poverty and social exclusion, a Forum de la solidarité will be integrated within the Table Québec-régions (TQR), which brings together CRÉ Chairs mandated to advise the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Regions and Land Occupancy on any question he submits to it. The Minister chairs the TQR and the Minister responsible for the

Capitale-National region is an ex officio member. The Forum de la solidarité, which will take place annually, will be headed by the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity and will include the Minister for Social Services and the Ville de Montréal. The Aboriginal organizations that have entered into a Solidarity Alliance will also be convened. The purpose of the Forum is to rally communities around the fight against poverty and social exclusion and spark their commitment to the cause, with a view to sustainable development, and to foster action that is more coherent.

The standards governing the FQIS were amended to extend eligibility to a wider range of partners.

Table 4

Breakdown of annual monies for the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (millions of dollars)

2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
17	23	25	25	25

Formation of the Groupe des partenaires pour la solidarité

The Groupe des partenaires pour la solidarité will be established under the Action Plan. By virtue of its composition, representativeness and its members' pledge to support government efforts, the Groupe will make it possible to mobilize society as a whole, increase the coherence of action by a slate of partners, and support local and regional deployment of initiatives against poverty and social exclusion. More specifically, the Groupe will be empowered to:

- advise the Minister on any matter related to implementation of the Government Action Plan and of regional agreements against poverty and social exclusion;
- advise the Minister on annual budget allocation among the provincial and regional level and the designated Aboriginal organizations;
- make recommendations to the Minister regarding awarding of funding to Québec-wide projects to combat poverty and social exclusion;
- make recommendations to the Minister concerning implementation of the most promising action in terms of combating poverty and social exclusion with a view to a better fit between needs and means.

Through its work, the Groupe will also foster the dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of regional experiences so that promising initiatives in certain regions (e.g. 211 service in the Capitale-Nationale region and the Chaudière-Appalaches region¹⁴ and Collectif Quartier¹⁵ in the Montréal region) can be analyzed by other regions that, in turn, may be inspired to introduce similar initiatives.

The Groupe des partenaires pour la solidarité will be composed of individuals from :

- social development and community organizations (3 members);
- organizations that represent the various territories (3 members);
- organizations that represent Aboriginal groups (2 members);

The Groupe des partenaires pour la solidarité will make it possible to mobilize society as a whole, increase the coherence of action by a slate of partners, and support local and regional deployment of initiatives against poverty and social exclusion.

- organizations that represent individuals in situations of poverty and citizen groups (2 members);
- the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (CCLP) (1 member);
- the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion (CEPE) (1 member).

In addition, representatives of the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the Ministère des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux will sit as observers.

Ensure coherent and efficient government action

The government's will to improve the effectiveness and coordination of its action will be expressed through a number of strategies, policies and action plans that call for synchronized efforts by the government and its agencies, and for broader partnership with those on the front line of initiatives.

The different government departments and agencies will continue efforts to make their action more coherent. This objective will be the responsibility of the Comité interministériel pour une action concertée en milieu défavorisé¹⁶, which will create a common vision and shared direction in terms of action in underprivileged communities in order to guide the local, regional and Québec-wide endeavours of each of the government departments and agencies represented, to ensure harmonization of these undertakings, and to increase their efficiency for the individuals and the various partners involved.

To support local and regional communities, Conférences administratives régionales (CARs), composed of the regional directors of each government department and agency whose action has an impact on the development of the region, will be mandated to ensure the unity of regional government action on the anti-poverty and social inclusion front. The CARs will be responsible for forging ties between the different government bodies and the partners brought together by the Conférences régionales des élus or the Ville de Montréal.

14. 211 is an information and referral service that points individuals to the community organizations and resources available in the Capitale-Nationale region and the Chaudière-Appalaches region.

15. The brainchild of the Ville de Montréal, the Collectif Quartier brings together partners from various fields that involve local development and is a showcase for the local development experiences and know-how of the Montréal region. Its *Atlas des quartiers* is a novel tool that inventories and maps data that influence local development.

16. The committee will consist of the Assistant Deputy Ministers of the following: Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, Ministère des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire, Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles and the Secrétariat à la jeunesse.

Lastly, the Ministère des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire has taken on the task of overseeing completion of the underprivileged municipality support initiative and territory-based action to combat poverty and social exclusion in order to foster efficient action under the Plan d'action gouvernemental à l'intention des municipalités dévitalisées, launched in September 2008 and aimed at giving the players in communities with daunting economic, social or demographic challenges tangible means of further stimulating growth in their territory. The CARs could be the anchor points for this action.

Establish a Solidarity Week

A Solidarity Week will be established and every region in Québec will be invited to mount mobilization and awareness activities. Solidarity Week, timed to coincide with the International Day for the Elimination of Poverty (October 17), will be aimed at creating public awareness of the plight of individuals in situations of poverty and social exclusion, at acting against the prejudice to which they are subject at times, at highlighting their potential, and at ensuring that they, like all other citizens, are respected regardless of their circumstances. This will encourage and foster the engagement of communities, individuals and businesses and thus, attest to a social alliance based on the responsibility of all in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Pursue Engagement jeunesse so as to create better service continuity in every region

Engagement jeunesse is an inter-departmental agreement under the responsibility of the Secrétariat à la jeunesse (SAJ) and signed by the Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Employment and Social Solidarity, Health and Social Services, Education, Recreation and Sports, and Immigration and Cultural Communities, in partnership with the Ministère des Affaires municipales, des régions et de l'Occupation du territoire (MAMROT). By means of this agreement, instituted under the 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy, the government acts to improve the seamlessness and dovetailing of health services, social services, and qualification and employability assistance services in order to make them more efficient and coherent.

To do this, the government agencies and departments concerned decided on focuses for action as well as a framework for better coherence of the services offered to young people. Deployment of a mechanism enabling regional and local players in their respective territories to create a continuum of services for young people is underway.

Engagement jeunesse, applied in 17 regions of Québec, summons the regional directorates of the departments concerned to work hand-in-hand with the regional players, notably, CRÉs, youth employment centres, school boards, community organizations and the health network, which formed a regional steering committee tasked to implement the Engagement. The committee works closely with local youth issue tables.

In every region, there is a liaison officer (four in Montréal and three in Montérégie) who marshals the regional and local stakeholders around Engagement jeunesse and who ensures better continuity of youth services.

Engagement jeunesse makes it possible to focus more narrowly on people :

- age 16 to 24 who are under-educated or unemployed;
- from Youth Services;
- who are immigrants or from cultural communities;
- with disabilities and who are becoming integrated within the mainstream of society.

Québec intends to earmark \$3.4 million for continuing Engagement jeunesse under the 2010-2012 Youth Action Strategy.

Institute a socially responsible public procurement strategy

Everywhere in Québec, social economy businesses make it possible for more economically challenged communities to have access to goods and services (food, health, housing, energy, etc.) close to home. These businesses contribute to the vitality of these communities by encouraging citizen participation and individual and collective empowerment. With the introduction of a socially responsible public procurement strategy in 2010-2011, the government hopes to support the development of community businesses which, because of their social purpose and local affiliations, contribute to improving the living conditions of Québeckers.

The purpose of the strategy will be to promote the procurement of goods and services from social economy businesses by public, parapublic and municipal organizations. The idea here is that by encouraging this form of public procurement, the products and services provided by cooperatives and not-for-profit organizations will have a larger market and, therefore, contribute to more dynamic occupancy and better accessibility to services. One of the objectives of the strategy will be to ensure that government instances, education, health and municipal bodies in the regions are more aware of collective businesses which can supply them.

Over time, collective and adapted businesses will be able to improve and diversify their slate of goods and services, to the benefit of the communities where these businesses are located.

With the introduction of a socially responsible public procurement strategy, the government hopes to support the development of community businesses.

Establish territory-based plans for sustainable mobility

The Ministère des Transports du Québec (MTQ) intends to advocate a new vision of territorial transportation planning mindful of the principles of sustainable development. Integrated planning covering a ten-year period will occur for the movement of people and goods, with a view to social equity, environmental protection and energy efficiency. This goal will be achieved

through territory-based sustainable mobility plans. In terms of the offensive against poverty and social exclusion, the concept of sustainable mobility is aimed at responding to the needs of individuals for accessibility to a dynamic economy bolstered by transportation systems that are affordable, efficient, diversified, safe, compatible with the physical capacities of these individuals and that ensure equity among the individuals of the same generation and between the generations.

SUMMARY OF MEASURES (FIRST THRUST)

Review our standard practices and make local and regional communities key players in the decision-making process

1	Create Solidarity Alliances that enable local and regional communities to have greater responsibility in acting against poverty	MESS/Québec
2	Increase the financial capacity and flexibility of the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales so as to better support anti-poverty initiatives, notably at the local and regional level, including Aboriginal communities	MESS/Québec
3	Integrate the Forum de la solidarité within the Table Québec-Régions	MESS/Québec
4	Form a Groupe des partenaires pour la solidarité	MESS/Québec
5	Ensure the coherence of government actions	MESS/Québec
6	Institute a Solidarity Week	MESS/Québec
7	Improve the cohesion and dovetailing of the services offered to young people under Engagement jeunesse	SAJ
8	Establish a socially responsible public procurement strategy	MAMROT
9	Establish territory-based sustainable mobility plans	MTQ

2.2 THRUST 2: ACKNOWLEDGE THE VALUE OF WORK AND FOSTER THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF INDIVIDUALS

This thrust is the government's way of reiterating its conviction that employment is among the best ways of enabling individuals to escape from poverty for good and of improving their living conditions. Employment is the main lever in achieving economic self-sufficiency and is an important determinant in social exclusion. This is why in reviewing and improving its programs and measures, the government insists on work incentives.

The prevailing consensus at the consultations held in 2009 was that the value of work must be acknowledged. The encouraging results of the first Action Plan, thanks to which many more individuals were able to enter the job market, also militate in favour of continued effort by Québec on this front. The incentive-based approach crafted by Québec and implemented since 2005 has paid off. The premise is that every individual wishes to take charge of his or her life. The government intends to continue on this same road and develop its programs accordingly.

This choice of making employment one of the main avenues for action also arises from the current social context. Greying of the population is beginning to have a substantial impact on the labour market in certain sectors. Québec needs the talents of all.

In order to acknowledge the value of work and foster the self-sufficiency of individuals, there are two governing principals that must be continued and strengthened:

- **continue to make work more attractive and more profitable** for individuals with low incomes, one third of whom are low-income workers;
- **offer individuals the services and measures they need** to facilitate their personal growth and their integration within the job market and the life of the society.

WORK INCENTIVES: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Work Premiums: Staying the course

The **Work Premium** has been extended for the next five years. Since 2005, this refundable tax credit for low-income workers has provided more than 500,000 households with a financial supplement that is generous, simple and accessible. The amounts issued are indexed annually to cost-of-living increases. For example, in January 2010, a Work Premium amount of up to \$533 for single individuals, \$824 for childless couples, \$2284 for single-parent families and \$2942 for couples with children could be granted. Québec households with low incomes or modest means receive some \$320 million annually thanks to the Work Premium.

For persons with disabilities or individuals with a severely-limited capacity for employment who often face more challenging obstacles in attempting to enter the labour market, the Adapted Work Premium provides for a maximum premium of \$1025 for a single individual, \$1520 for a childless couple, \$2847 for a single-parent family and \$3377 for a couple with children. Nearly 6,000 households, most of them consisting of single individuals, receive the Adapted Work Premium. The Supplement to the Work Premium (refundable tax credit)

encourages long-term social assistance recipients to return to work. They may receive \$200 a month for a maximum of 12 months after they re-enter the workforce. This was the case for more than 3,000 households in 2008-2009. In order to support low-income households in their bid to work, the government foresees an investment of \$1250 billion for the Work Premium, the Adapted Work Premium and the Supplement to the Work Premium between 2010 and 2015¹⁷.

Employment is among the best ways of enabling individuals to escape from poverty for good and of improving their living conditions.

17. This does not include amounts to be issued to low-income households (based on the Low Income Measure after taxes).

Adaptation of a federal tax measure to life in Québec: Sizable gains for single individuals

Inspired by Québec's Work Premium, the federal government's **Working Income Tax Benefit** (WITB) was recently increased for single individuals and childless couples at Québec's express demand. This hike will be applied to work income declared in 2009 and from then on. By filing an income tax return for 2009, Québec residents will be able to receive a benefit of up to \$1553 for a single individual living alone and of \$2401 for a childless couple (increases of 74.9% and 162.3% respectively). In combining the WITB with the Work Premium, financial incentives of \$2000 or more can be granted to single individuals and of a little over \$3200 to childless couples.

Review the minimum wage annually

Québec's minimum wage increased incrementally under the first Action Plan. Between 2003 and 2009, there was a 23.3% gain, whereas the cost of living grew by 10.6%. In December 2009, the Québec government announced that the minimum wage would be \$9.50 an hour as of May 1, 2010. The minimum wage will continue to be reviewed annually. Note that revision of the minimum wage (based on the purchasing power of salaried workers, their contribution to collective wealth, the ability of businesses to compete, and employment and work incentives) now takes into account the effects of the minimum wage on poverty and low income. This new method of analysis evaluates the effects of minimum wage increases on a number of low-income individuals and families and on the low-income cut-off using the Market Basket Measure.

Minimum wage will continue to be reviewed annually.

Build on the efforts begun under the Commitment for Employment

Given that employment is the best tool in the offensive against poverty and social exclusion, a solid pact with players in the union movement, management, education and the community network remains essential. By pursuing the measures of the Commitment for Employment, those striving to enter the job market and to remain within it are given concrete support.

The Commitment is organized around four thrusts aimed at:

- 1 investing in the potential of individuals;
- 2 acknowledging the value of work;
- 3 providing better workforce training in order to boost business productivity;
- 4 establishing regional pacts that ensure a better response to the needs of businesses and individuals.

The Commitment fosters optimal use of all workforce pools, especially those composed of people far removed from the labour market. Thanks to a wide array of means, the Commitment motivates individuals and businesses to become agents of their own change:

- Individuals are encouraged to participate in developing their employability;
- Businesses are prompted to consider a more diversified workforce and to provide training opportunities.

Signature of a new Canada-Québec Labour Market Agreement in April 2008, with funding until 2014 in the amount of \$700 million over 6 years, will make it possible to continue what was started under the Commitment for Employment, primarily for people ill-prepared for or out of touch with the labour market.

Self-employment as an option

The **Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire** (RQCC) brings together 21 active member organizations in 11 regions of Québec which offer microcredit for business start-up or consolidation, as well as support for less privileged individuals, along-side traditional private and public funding mechanisms. In 2008-2009, 1,879 individuals were given support, most of them women (56%).

The action of community credit agencies is consistent with government goals in terms of combating poverty, but also in terms of developing entrepreneurship. Many individuals on low incomes see entrepreneurship as an opportunity to improve their social and occupational circumstances, while making a significant contribution to the economy. The support offered to them means sizeable socioeconomic spinoffs in addition to helping them avoid reliance on last-resort financial assistance. The Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation (MDEIE) intends to continue its support of the RQCC.

FOSTER THE LABOUR MARKET ENTRY OF THE MOST INDIVIDUALS POSSIBLE

Continue extra training that enables Québeckers to upgrade their skills, more particularly, immigrants

Three financial measures of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport make it possible for immigrants to receive extra vocational and technical training so that their degrees, diplomas and qualifications are recognized and that they are given support in their efforts to enter the labour market, remain within it or improve their prospects for career mobility. The measures respond to needs with regard to:

- 1 the training that is lacking for recognition of prior learning and competencies;
- 2 the extra training prescribed for immigrants by professional orders
professionnels aux personnes immigrantes;
- 3 part-time training to foster workforce mobility that does not include obtaining of a diploma or degree.

Under the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, the government hopes to increase the participation of immigrants, especially those seeking recognition of prior learning and competencies and those who want part-time training. Various promotional initiatives will be carried out for this purpose, notably promotion of services in connection with the recognition of prior learning and competencies.

Improve the socio-occupational integration of newly arrived immigrants (GBA) (GBA)

Immigration is one of the means that Québec has adopted to meet its development challenges stemming from its demographics and to enable it to mitigate the workforce shortages that exist in certain sectors. The labour market entry of newly arrived Québeckers is crucial to their full participation in society.

Introduction of a mechanism for integrated services for newly arrived immigrants will contribute to the achievement of these objectives. The mechanism consists primarily of better coordination among the various workers involved in service delivery to this clientele with the resulting improvement in coherence, effectiveness and speed. The purpose is therefore to reduce the time it takes for newly arrived immigrants to integrate within the job market and society as a whole and to increase their rate of employment.

Implementation of this new instrument will begin with the Plan Emploi Métropole, consisting of a suite of measures that are also intended for other groups.

The Plan, with total investments of \$30 million for 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, will be the first in a series of concrete actions towards better alignment of the services offered to new Québeckers in the regions where needs are the most pressing or urgent. The Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC) and the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) have joined forces to establish this measure.

Extend eligibility for the claim slip to Social Solidarity Program recipients

Currently, due to easing of conditions in 1997, last-resort financial assistance recipients who have a severely limited capacity for employment continue to qualify for the claim slip, making them eligible for free dental and pharmaceutical services and access to certain special benefits for a period of up to 48 months when they no longer qualify for financial assistance because of their earnings. However, gross earnings or, in the case of a self-employed worker, net earnings, cannot exceed \$1500 the first month or for a maximum period of three consecutive months. Couples that include an adult with a severely limited capacity for employment are not covered.

Since the right to keep the claim slip is an incentive for Social Solidarity Program recipients to enter the job market, thereby fostering the economic participation of as many individuals as possible, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale will amend the regulation governing the Social Solidarity Program so as to abolish the maximum threshold of \$1500 applied to work income as a requirement for eligibility for the claim slip, which will mean broader access to free services for persons with a severely limited capacity for employment when they get a job. The regulation will also be amended to maintain free services to couples composed of a person with a severely limited capacity for employment when an adult member of the family gets a job.

Continue social assistance programs and social support programs

Intended for individuals with weak employability, social assistance programs and social support programs empower them to access public employment services and possibly re-enter the labour market. The programs, which will be maintained for the next five years, offer customized assistance and

support which enables these individuals to develop skills that foster their self-sufficiency and socio-occupational integration. The services are offered by community organizations.

Better joint action for individuals with mental health problems (Q7GBA)

Pilot projects will be mounted in order to improve the seamlessness of inter-sectoral employment and health services. The projects will be designed to favour close collaboration between health and social services centres (CSSSs) and local employment centres (CLEs) in providing assistance and support for individuals with serious mental health problems who have the potential to develop their employability. This action will occur within the framework of the social assistance and support programs. MESS and the MSSS will work together to help individuals who voluntarily commit to work towards entering the labour market.

Analyze the measures that enable better support for persons with special needs in post-secondary studies, notably those with serious mental health problems (Q7GBA)

Individuals who have mental health problems, learning disabilities and associated disorders who are studying at the post-secondary level have special needs. In response to some of these needs, in recent years the government has introduced measures for persons with severe mental health problems. The Réussir component of MESS's social assistance and support programs gives individuals with a severely limited capacity for employment access to vocational or post-secondary training at a pace adapted to their situation. The government has also improved access to its Financial Assistance for Québec Students for individuals who cannot study full time because of a serious and episodic mental health problem.

The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has therefore begun work to produce a status report that sheds additional light on the needs of these individuals and that will enable it to determine appropriate support measures.

Attacking the problem of dropping out and buttressing academic perseverance are priorities and contribute directly to combating poverty and social exclusion.

This work will make it possible to:

- establish pilot projects in CEGEPs to test certain practices and gain better knowledge of the needs of these individuals;
- conduct research to enhance knowledge of the nature and extent of the services required by college students who have mental health problems or learning disabilities;
- conduct inter-sectoral work on persons with special needs in order to ensure the coherence of courses of action and programs.

The work underway, which includes consultations with community partners, will provide food for thought about the changes to make to existing measures in order to respond to the special needs of these students.

Improve the employment situation of members of the First Nations and of the Inuit

At the demand of the First Nations and the Inuit of Québec, a labour market advisory committee, recognized by the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail (CPMT), began work in February 2010. This new committee will strengthen relations between Aboriginals and labour market players and will have the ear of the CPMT and MESS so that policies, strategies, measures and services are geared to better labour market integration by Aboriginals and achievement of job parity by them.

COUNTING ON OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Employment is the most effective weapon against economic exclusion, so training and educating our young people are prerequisites in their bid to enter the labour market.

Needless to say, attacking the problem of dropping out and buttressing academic perseverance are priorities and contribute directly to combating poverty and social exclusion. Québec's goal in terms of its graduation rate is to achieve the 80% mark by 2010.

This is why a number of preventive measures have been or are being established to support student success and perseverance, as announced by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) in the **Action Plan to Promote Success for Students with Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Disabilities**¹⁸ (QJGBA) and in the **I Care about School. All Together for Student Success** intervention strategy.¹⁹ (QJGBA) Certain measures in the strategy have been adjusted for greater effectiveness, for example, the **New Approaches, New Solutions** intervention strategy for disadvantaged communities, which was improved, and its complement, the **Supporting Montréal Schools Program**. The same is true for the **Homework Assistance Program** and the **Wellness-Oriented School Program**, which will be maintained, as will the **Programme d'aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture dans les milieux défavorisés** to prevent illiteracy in young people from underprivileged areas. The MELS also intends to keep up its efforts to **support the academic success of immigrant students at risk** (QJGBA) in order to close the learning gap as tightly as possible and to put all the chances for success in the future on their side.

Then there is the creation of the **Fonds pour le développement des jeunes enfants**, a joint initiative of the Québec government and the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, which comes with investments of \$400 million over 10 years to offer children in situations of poverty every opportunity to successfully begin their life as a student and to continue their studies.

The **Youth Action Strategy 2009-2014**, announced by the Premier and undergirded by an investment of \$250 million over five years, also contributes to academic perseverance. The **IDEO 16 17** (QJGBA) measure of the Secrétariat à la jeunesse (SAJ) offers individualized coaching to 16- and 17-year-olds at risk for dropping out or who have already done so. The goal is to help them maintain or regain control of their life. **IDEO 16-17**, which works on perseverance in school and personal empowerment, enables young people to steer clear of last-resort financial assistance in favour of the labour market.

In addition to the preventive measures in education and academic perseverance, special support is offered to young people to enable them to enter the workforce and to stay there. The Youth Action Strategy also relies on the **Youth Alternative Program** (QJGBA), which provides last-resort

financial assistance applicants under age 25 who would like to begin the process of entering the labour market with customized and ongoing support as they journey towards self-sufficiency. The number of participants has been constantly on the rise since introduction of the program. In 2009-2010, there were 7,600 new participants²⁰. For 18- to 24-year-olds, there is **Jeunes en action**, which provides youth in this age group with support for developing their self-sufficiency.

Young people who exit Youth Services at age 18 also need help in many cases. Generally, they have a social network that is insufficient and in order to transit to self-sufficiency, there are skills that they must develop if they are to fit into society socially and professionally. A foot up before they leave Youth Services is highly useful and makes a difference in the long term. Hence, the **Qualification des jeunes** (PQJ) Program (QJGBA) under Youth Services, which helps 500 young people who were in the system and have not yet mapped out their future.

Under the Youth Action Strategy 2009-2014, this program will receive additional funding of \$10.5 million over five years to increase the number of young participants. An extra 190 places is projected along with a new intensive version of the program for young offenders. This formula will make it possible to reach out to 130 young people per year. Both components of the program will offer one-on-one support for the most vulnerable young people for up to three years, including one year after they are no longer in the Youth Services system.

Another goal of the same strategy is to **spark an interest in entrepreneurship** in young people from underprivileged communities in order to prevent them from slipping into poverty or to help them escape from it. Support for implementation of entrepreneurial projects in schools located in less affluent neighbourhoods helps to break the circle of poverty. A total of \$200,000 has been earmarked for this program for the next four years.

Lastly, the **Programme d'aide financière pour l'embauche et le suivi de coordonnateurs en sport et loisir, et d'implication communautaire et citoyenne**, aimed at improving the quality of life of young Aboriginals by encouraging them to adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle, is helping 15 Aboriginal communities.

18. Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *Conditions for Greater Success. Action Plan to Promote Success for Students with Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Disabilities*, 2008.

19. Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, *I Care about School. All Together for Student Success*, 2009.

20. Data as at March 23, 2010.

SUMMARY OF MEASURES (SECOND THRUST)

Acknowledge the value of work and foster the self-sufficiency of individuals

1	Maintain the Work Premium, Adapted Work Premium and Supplement to the Work Premium	Ministère des Finances
2	Channel the Working Income Tax Benefit towards single individuals and childless couples	Québec
3	Review the minimum wage annually by taking its effects on poverty into account	Ministère du Travail
4	Continue the efforts undertaken under the Commitment for Employment	MESS
5	Continue to support the Réseau québécois de crédit communautaire	MDEIE
6	Continue extra training so that Québeckers, and immigrants in particular, can upgrade their skills	MELS
7	Establish a mechanism for integrated services for newly arrived immigrants	MESS-MICC
8	Expand eligibility for claim slips to Social Solidarity Program recipients	MESS
9	Continue social assistance and social support programs	MESS
10	Implement pilot projects so that there is seamless inter-sectoral provision of employment and health services for individuals with mental health problems	MESS-MSSS
11	Analyze the measures that enable better support for post-secondary students with special needs, notably those with severe mental health problems	MELS
12	Continue the work of the Comité consultatif des Premières Nations et des Inuits relatif au marché du travail	CPMT-MESS
13	Continue the New Approaches, New Solutions intervention strategy	MELS
14	Continue the Supporting Montréal Schools Program	MELS
15	Continue the Homework Assistance Program	MELS
16	Continue the Wellness-Oriented School Program	MELS
17	Continue the Programme d'aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture dans les milieux défavorisés	MELS
18	Support the academic success of immigrant students at risk	MELS
19	Support projects that rally local communities through the Fonds pour le développement des jeunes enfants	Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés
20	Continue IDEO 16-17	SAJ
21	Continue the Youth Alternative Program	MESS
22	Continue the Jeunes en action Program	MESS
23	Continue and improve the Qualification des jeunes Program	MSSS-SAJ
24	Support implementation of entrepreneurial projects in elementary and secondary schools in underprivileged neighbourhoods	SAJ
25	Continue the Programme d'aide financière pour l'embauche de coordonnateurs en sport et loisir, et en implication communautaire et citoyenne in Aboriginal communities	SAJ-SAA-MELS

2.3 THRUST 3: FOSTER THE ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF UNDERPRIVILEGED INDIVIDUALS

As pointed out in the Advisory Opinion of the Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (CCLP),²¹ one of the most powerful ways of preventing and thwarting poverty is to improve the income of individuals and families of substandard means:

Québec's social safety net compares favourably with that of its North American neighbours and of a number of countries. This social protection has many permutations, including a baseline income for those who cannot meet their needs at the subsistence level, and reducing the expenses they must shoulder. With its Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, the government is intent on improving what it does in these two spheres of action, while ensuring that the measures are consistent with the idea of making work an even more attractive option.

ACTING ON THE INCOME FRONT

Automatic annual indexation of last-resort financial assistance benefits

Since January 1, 2009, the benefits of last-resort financial assistance recipients have been indexed annually. This improvement has been written into the *Regulation respecting individual and family assistance* so that indexation now occurs as a matter of course. This measure, in response to citizen concerns, among other things, will contribute to safeguarding the purchasing power of all last-resort financial assistance recipients.

Renewal of Child Assistance

By far the most effective measure in terms of family income from the first Action Plan is the refundable tax credit for child assistance, which will remain one of the main financial weapons against poverty over the next five years. It is granted to all eligible families with dependent children under age 18 so that their basic needs are covered. This measure enables the most vulnerable families to obtain regular amounts that have been substantially increased to compensate for their more difficult situation. With the renewal of Child Assistance, investments in the vicinity of \$1.2 billion for the next five years will be earmarked for low-income families.

Maintain and improve how child support is handled under social programs

In the wake of the consultations that took place in 2009, the government pledged to examine the question of how child support is handled under last-resort financial assistance programs.

Since January 2006, an exemption of up to \$100 a month on child support received has been applied to the benefits of last-resort financial assistance families. In 2009-2010 some 11,500 families were granted this exemption.

In response to the consultations, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) intends to proceed with a review of how child support is processed within the framework of last-resort financial assistance programs as of April 2011. Households that receive last-resort financial assistance benefits that declare child support income could have a monthly exemption of \$100 per child for benefit calculation purposes. This new exemption is made possible through an additional annual investment of roughly \$7.1 million. Approximately 5,700 families could benefit.

The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) will harmonize its Financial Assistance for Québec Students (loans and bursaries) accordingly as of the 2011-2012 school year.

Better inform seniors about available programs

The federal government is responsible for the income security of people age 65 and over. Unfortunately, many seniors in Québec go without this extra income, for example the Guaranteed Income Supplement for Low-Income Seniors, simply because they do not know about it.

Under the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, the Secrétariat aux aînés will approach the Conférence des tables régionales de concertation des aînés in order to keep it abreast of the programs and services that exist for low-income seniors. The Conférence can then deploy its network of regional round tables to get information about the programs and services for seniors out to the organizations that represent them. It can also urge seniors to file an income tax return in order to access all of the financial assistance for which they qualify.

21. Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, *Prevention of Persistent Poverty – Rethinking our Approach: A Wise and Human Choice*, March 2009.

Increase the refundable Tax Credit for Home-Support Services for Seniors

The refundable Tax Credit for Home-Support Services for Seniors is offered for individuals age 70 and over who live at home or in a private residence for seniors. Thirty per cent of eligible expenses are reimbursed, including individual assistance, nursing care, housework, or meal preparation. In 2009, nearly 150,000 households received the tax credit, for an investment exceeding \$210 million.

However, access to the credit is limited by rules that establish a baseline of seven hours a day for nursing care and once a week for housework. To expand eligibility for this credit, easing of these rules occurred under the 2010-2011 Budget, namely, 3 hours a day for nursing care and once every two weeks for housework. This new flexibility should benefit 12,000 individuals, for an additional \$5 million a year and a total of \$25 million over five years.

Index the allowance for personal expenses of adults entrusted to intermediate resources

This measure is for adults who are last-resort financial assistance recipients and who are entrusted to intermediate²² resources because they cannot return home in the short term.

The allowance, which had not been indexed since 1983, enables these individuals to acquire the goods and services not covered by the institution or the resource.

On February 1, 2002, the allowance was indexed and will be every year from now on, for an investment of over \$8 million for the period from 2010 to 2015.

MAINTAIN AND INCREASE PURCHASING POWER

Compensate for tax hikes and public fee increases with a Solidarity Tax Credit

Announced in the 2010-2011 Budget, the new refundable tax credit for low-income households or households of modest means is an expression of the government's will to mitigate the effect of tax increases on less affluent Québeckers.

The Solidarity Tax Credit enhances and combines three tax measures, namely:

- the refundable tax credit for the Québec Sales Tax (QST);
- the property tax refund; and
- the refundable tax credit for individuals living in northern villages.

Currently, these three credits provide the low- and modest-income households concerned with tax assistance of \$840 million. In comparison, the Solidarity Tax Credit rings up at \$1350 million, or \$10 million more a year.

For the 900,000 households whose disposable income is below the Market Basket Measure's income cut-off, as of 2012-2013, this new investment will provide \$155 million more in financial support than former tax credits.

22. Intermediate resources are private residential facilities under contract to a health and social services facility so that the users referred by the latter facility are provided with a home adapted to their needs and with the support or assistance warranted by their condition.

In concrete terms, the tax credit will mean financial gains for several thousand households which, on average, will have \$174 more a year in tax assistance. For a couple with two children, the maximum in 2011 and 2012 will be \$1194 and \$1375 respectively. The maximum in 2010 according to the parameters of the three credits is \$958. Tables 5a and 5b highlight the financial advantages stemming from the Solidarity Tax Credit which, in relation to the credits it replaces, offsets the new tax increases (Compensation column in the Tables).

Furthermore, when combined with the improved Working Income Tax Benefit and the increased minimum wage presented earlier, the Solidarity Tax Credit is a measure that favours single working individuals and childless couples in the workforce when their income is equivalent to the Market Basket Measure's income cut-off. In addition, last-resort financial assistance recipients will benefit fully. Nearly 2.7 million eligible households, including **200,000 additional households**, will see their lives improved because of the tax assistance made possible by the Solidarity Tax Credit.

The Solidarity Tax Credit will be issued monthly for a better fit with the needs it was designed to address, notably housing. The first payment is slated for July 2011.

The Solidarity Tax Credit has three components:

- 1 one to compensate for the QST;
- 2 one for households with housing costs; and
- 3 one for the inhabitants of northern village.

By and large, the eligibility requirements will be the same as those for the present-day refundable tax credit for the Québec Sales Tax and the property tax refund.

All in all, the Solidarity Tax Credit will be better adapted to the circumstances that prevail because it will take into account household income and the changes in household status (e.g. births, unions, separation) in the course of a year. In addition, the fact that it is issued monthly will mean greater liquidity for the households that qualify.

Table 5a

Impact of the Solidarity Tax Credit for a single individual – 2012 (dollars)

Tax credits replaced by the new tax credit						
Earnings	Disposable income	Property taxes	QST	Total	Solidarity Tax Credit	Compensation for tax increases
0	7 961	315	316	631	908	277
10 000	12 494	315	316	631	908	277
20 000	18 083	315	308	623	908	285
30 000	24 349	315	308	623	908	285
40 000	29 942	80	73	153	475	323

Source: Ministère des Finances.

Table 5b

Impact of the Solidarity Tax Credit for a couple with two children and two work incomes – 2012 (dollars)

Tax credits replaced by the new tax credit						
Earnings	Disposable income	Property taxes	QST	Total	Solidarity Tax Credit	Compensation for tax increases
0	27 863	350	376	726	1 375	649
10 000	32 617	350	376	726	1 375	649
20 000	35 966	350	366	716	1 375	659
30 000	40 609	350	366	716	1 375	659
40 000	42 226	146	162	308	1 007	699
50 000	44 895	–	–	–	407	407

Source: Ministère des Finances, 2010-2011 Budget, Economic and Budgetary Action Plan, Table 35.

Improve the management and delivery of income assistance to the First Nations

The Québec government is poised to enter into a framework agreement with the First Nations and the federal government to help First Nations communities in Québec find solutions to certain problems in connection with the management and delivery of income assistance. The agreement should make it possible to carry on with action to improve the living conditions of the Aboriginals in Québec.

Determine better ways of improving income assistance to the Inuit

Given the remoteness of the villages, the lack of roads and the severe climate and the direct effect on the cost of goods and services in northern communities, the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones (SAA) coordinates the work of a task force on reducing the cost of living and takes its recommendations into consideration. The work of the task force, aimed at improving the current standard of living of the residents of Nunavik, will involve all the governments concerned.

Form an interdepartmental committee on compensation for additional costs due to impairments, disabilities or handicapping situations

In June 2009, the policy entitled *Equals in Every Respect: Because Rights Are Meant to Be Exercised* was adopted by the Québec government. The goal of this crosscutting policy, intended as a complement to the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration*, is to within a ten-year period increase the social participation of all handicapped persons irrespective of their sex, age, disability, impairment or place of residence.

Further to adopting this policy, the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ) committed to heading a committee to come up with solutions aimed at compensating for additional costs associated with impairments, disabilities and handicapping situations and for reducing the disparities in this regard, with a view to equity among individuals with disabilities. The Ministère des Finances, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) are part of this work.

SUMMARY OF MEASURES (THIRD THRUST)

Support the income of disadvantaged individuals

1	Establish automatic annual indexation of last-resort financial assistance benefits	MESS
2	Renew Child Assistance and the Supplement for Handicapped Children	Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés
3	Under last-resort assistance, increase the child support exemption to a baseline \$100 per child	MESS
4	Align how child support is handled under Financial Aid for Québec Students (loans and bursaries) with last-resort financial assistance	MELS
5	Better inform seniors about the programs available to them, especially those involving financial assistance	Secrétariat aux aînés
6	Increase the refundable Tax Credit for Home-Support Services for Seniors	Ministère des Finances
7	Index the allowance for personal expenses of adults entrusted to intermediate resources	MSSS
8	Compensate for tax hikes and public fee increases with a Solidarity Tax Credit	Ministère des Finances
9	Improve the management and delivery of income assistance to the First Nations through a framework agreement with the federal government	MESS
10	Continue the work of the Groupe de travail sur la réduction du coût de la vie au Nunavik	SAA
11	Establish an interdepartmental committee on compensation for the additional costs incurred due to disabilities, impairments or handicapping situations	OPHQ

2.4 THRUST 4: IMPROVE THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

The fourth thrust contains an array of measures that make it possible to exert pressure on the determinants of poverty and social exclusion that have an impact on the living conditions of individuals in situations of poverty. Housing, transportation, health services and childcare are areas where positive change can be effected for individuals and families. Some of the actions are aimed at bettering the living conditions of individuals in the short term, while others are preventive. Whatever the purpose, the fact of fostering access to improved commodities and services is seen as a way of enhancing the quality of life of individuals and families in situations of poverty and social exclusion or at risk for it.

SOCIAL HOUSING: AN ENVIRONMENT FOR ACTION ON THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION FRONT

Social housing and community housing are often an effective point of convergence for public and community action to support households as they work towards social and occupational integration. Numbers of experiences observed in Québec and elsewhere show that multi-sector action blending housing with the slate of support services for employability development and labour market entry is a powerful combination. This makes housing both a tool and a springboard for action.

Several projects have been set in motion by social housing and community housing network administrators partnering with the employability system with a view to action that cuts across a number of sectors. Cases in point are projects that encourage tenants in low-cost housing to acquire maintenance skills (e.g. Multi-Boulot projects in Trois-Rivières; work co-op in Drummondville; occupational qualification in Québec), and other projects in which housing is the centre of a life plan that covers a predetermined period of approximately five years. Other projects focus on young single mothers or young girls in difficulty who continue attending school or receiving training (e.g. Centre communautaire et résidentiel Jacques-Cartier; Jeunes mères en action; Mères et monde; Mères au pouvoir), all of which highlight and prove that the development of social housing and community housing has numerous advantages.

This broad issue, in particular, the need for social housing and affordable housing, was on many minds during the consultations. For people in situations of poverty, finding decent housing at a cost they can absorb is especially difficult, and even more so in cities, where housing costs are higher than in outlying regions. Given this context, government support for increasing the number of social housing units becomes doubly important because not only does it provide individuals in situations of poverty with a place to live, but also because social housing is the natural setting for preventive action to improve their circumstances.

Needs in terms of food security, health, and social services were also identified as important at the consultations. The effects of poverty on child development are major. Action starting in early childhood, especially when young children are victims of neglect, is seen as an inarguable necessity. Access to quality educational childcare contributes to the proper development of children from disadvantaged milieus. Mass transit is a critical resource in fostering social inclusion and economic self-sufficiency and must be approached through strategies tailored to the very different needs of urban and rural communities.

Certain segments of the population remain extremely vulnerable to social exclusion. Poverty and social exclusion are phenomena that feed off each other. Sometimes it is poverty that causes exclusion, and, at other times, it is exclusion that leads to poverty. This is why there are special courses of action for empowering certain groups at higher risk for poverty above and beyond specific support measures for their pursuit of financial self-sufficiency. These actions take them that much closer to genuine participation in the society.

DEVELOP AND IMPROVE COMMUNITY HOUSING AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Construct new community housing (Q³GBA)

The **AccèsLogis Québec** (ACL) Program enables community housing projects for low- to modest-income households. Housing cooperatives, municipal housing bureaus and not-for-profit organizations can create and lease quality housing at an affordable cost. The government has announced the construction of 3,000 new community housing and social housing units in 2010-2014 under ACL. In all, \$476 million, including the amounts already earmarked for housing projects in recent years, will be invested in the coming four years. There could be further announcements of this kind during the period covered by the Action Plan.

ACL is aimed at three groups in particular :

- 1 families, single individuals and independent seniors;
- 2 seniors with slightly diminished autonomy;
- 3 people with special permanent or transitional housing needs (e.g. homeless individuals, youth in difficulty, women who are victims of violence, and individuals with substance abuse or mental health problems).

Generally speaking, the subsidy awarded under ACL is somewhere in the vicinity of 50% of the cost of construction. The program requires a community contribution of at least 15% of admissible production costs. The rent for such housing cannot exceed 95% of the median rent in the market recognized by the SHQ. In order to encourage economic and social heterogeneity, the program also provides for rent supplements over a period of five years for a portion of tenants on low incomes.

Modify AccèsLogis Québec for two years

In response to the special needs of certain regions, temporary changes will be made to AccèsLogis Québec (ACL) standards in order to facilitate project delivery, notably in the following regions: Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Côte-Nord, Nord-du-Québec and Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. Thanks to a financial contribution aimed at putting less of a financial onus on communities and by upping admissible costs, more rental units will be planned to meet the needs of the region. A total of \$14 million has been marked for this purpose in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

Build more low-rental housing in Nunavik

The Québec government has undertaken various courses of action to rectify housing shortages in Nunavik. For example, at the Katimajit Conference in 2007, it pledged to construct 50 new low-rental housing units and authorized the 2010-2015 renewal of the Agreement concerning the implementation of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement in the housing field in Nunavik, which will make it possible to build 340 low-rental dwellings. Accordingly, Québec has set aside investments of \$99.2 million for 2010-2015.

The governments of Québec and Canada and Inuit representatives are working together to produce a catch-up program in order to add more low-rental housing units in Nunavik.

Continue renovating low-rental housing (HLMs)

The **Québec Infrastructure Plan (PQI)** is the Québec government's way of restoring and refurbishing its low-rental housing stock. The public housing component of the plan enables major renovations and repairs to be made on tens of thousands of low-income dwellings. Since 2006, status reports on the condition of the various buildings and rental units have been ongoing. This makes it possible to rank the work to be done according to its degree of urgency. With the PQI, the Société d'habitation du Québec was granted hefty budget increases to replace, improve and modernize low-rental units, going from \$105 million in 2007 to \$263 million in 2008, reaching \$278 million in 2009 and levelling off at \$276 million in 2010.

To support the action of the organizations responsible for housing, notably with regard to the status reports, the Société d'habitation du Québec established a service centre network. It also finances the Fédération des locataires d'habitation à loyer modique, whose purpose is to encourage and foster the widest consultation possible of HLM tenants concerning the work undertaken in their environment.

Carry out one-off action to renovate certain low-rental housing units in Nunavik

Lastly, the 2006 status report on social housing in Nunavik revealed a glaring need for renovation and upkeep of existing units. In response, the government set aside monies for this work under the Québec Infrastructure Plan. These investments made it possible for the Société d'habitation du Québec to increase its budget to replace, improve and modernize low-rental apartments in Nunavik. For the 2008-2010 period, this budget rose from \$53 million to \$135 million. Projected budgets for the coming years (2010-2012) are in the region of \$50 million per year.

Implement a special home renovation program in the Algonquin Community of Kitcisakik

The Algonquin Community of Kitcisakik, one of the most underprivileged communities of Québec, grapples with major housing problems that endanger the health of their occupants. There are 365 inhabitants of this community, where the dwellings often consist of a single room and are not connected to the power grid and have no sewage system or water main system. Data from the most recent census indicate that 87.5% of the houses in Kitcisakik are in dire need of major repairs, compared with 7.7% for Québec as a whole. This is why the Société d'habitation du Québec provides for special financial assistance for the Algonquins, in this case, through a program established for the renovation and enlargement of nearly 40% of the housing stock (some 35 homes) in this community so that the inhabitants can live under healthier conditions. A total of \$1 million over three years has been dedicated for this project.

Help persons with disabilities be more autonomous and remain in their homes for longer

Two Société d'habitation du Québec programs help persons with disabilities be more autonomous and remain in their homes for longer. The first, the **Residential Adaptation and Assistance Program (PAD)**, provides financial assistance for residential adaptation so that architectural barriers are removed or lessened and the disabled person can perform his or her everyday activities in the home.

Under the second, the **Home Adaptation for Seniors' Independence Program (LAAA)**, low-income individuals age 65 and over are given financial assistance to make minor adaptations to their home so that they can live there safely and independently.

Since 2007, there have been numerous PAD measures, including adoption in the autumn of 2009 of new standards to reduce application processing delays and to better respond to the needs of persons with disabilities.

The government has announced investments of \$40 million for PAD and of \$3.5 million for LAAA for the period from 2009 to 2011.

In a similar vein, a committee composed of representatives of the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec and of the Régie du bâtiment du Québec will be tasked to propose regulatory adjustments to Québec's Building Code, outside the standard timetable for amendment, in order to improve building design requirements with a view to minimizing obstacles for persons with disabilities. The idea here is to be able to make changes to construction regulations in pace with the changing needs of these Québeckers. Among the committee's priorities is built-in adaptation in new housing, notably in the area of community housing.

Continue to establish and develop community support in social housing

The *Cadre de référence sur le soutien communautaire en logement social*, which covers 2008-2013, was released by the Société d'habitation du Québec and the MSSS in November 2007. This framework document is an acknowledgement that the housing network and the health and social services system share responsibility for the clients who use the services of both providers. The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux contributes a recurrent amount of \$5 million a year to support implementation of this joint initiative. So far, health and social services agencies have given \$6.1 for community support, for a budget overrun of 22%.

This crosscutting measure recognizes the importance of community support in keeping vulnerable individuals or individuals at risk of becoming so, especially those with diminished autonomy, persons with disabilities, or individuals with multiple problems, within the community. The community support offered encompasses a wide range of actions (e.g. intake; public service referral and support; management of tenant disputes; and crisis intervention). The goal is to give individuals with problems that impinge on their autonomy and quality of life options in terms of social assistance and support. To date, more than 220 agreements involving 25,000 clients have been signed under the *Cadre de référence*.

OFFER ADEQUATE AND ADAPTED HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Maintain food security efforts and better equip the people who work in this field

The Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) helps to increase food security in Québec through various measures, including support for food banks and other like-minded projects such as community kitchens. Under the new Action Plan, there will be a new measure to ensure that food safety agency volunteers and staff receive training in food hygiene and safety. This MESS-MSSS partnership stems from the 2006-2009 government action plan to promote healthy lifestyles and the prevention of weight-related problems entitled *Investir pour l'avenir*.

Intervene in matters of parental negligence

The *Programme d'intervention en négligence*, implemented by health and social services centres (CSSSs), in collaboration with youth centres, is intended for families with children age 0 to 12. It consists of a combination of multidimensional, diversified, ongoing and structured interventions that take into account the material, emotional and social needs of children and parents, as well as needs in terms of parenting. Parents may be struggling with physical or mental health problems or addictions or have a family history of negligence and abuse. In most cases, the family is underprivileged and has a narrow social network. The new measure is backed by the 2009-2014 Youth Action Strategy, which allocates a budget of \$4.1 million for the program over five years, with the ultimate goal of establishing the program in all CSSS territories by 2014.

Continue establishing the crisis intervention and assertive community treatment program

The breakdown of parent-child relations in certain families can sometimes lead to serious crises which require the removal of the child or young person from the family environment. This observation led to the CSSS's introduction of a crisis intervention and assertive community treatment program.

The program applies to young people and families in crisis situations and, more particularly, young people with behavioural problems. The objective is to decrease the number of referrals to the Directeur de la protection de la jeunesse because of behavioural problems and to decrease the number of out-of-home placements for the same reason. The program is offered by health and social service centres, in collaboration with youth centres. Currently, roughly half of CSSS territories are covered by the program and Québec-wide coverage is projected for 2012.

Continue integrated perinatal and early childhood services.

Within the framework of the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux will continue helping and supporting families through integrated perinatal and early childhood services (SIPPE). These services are designed for families in vulnerable situations and are aimed at providing them with support as of the twelfth week of pregnancy until the child reaches age five. The services are aimed in particular at:

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

The services, present in every region of Québec, are dispensed primarily by health and social services centres (CSSS) in the form of family support consisting mainly of home visits, group activities, support for early childhood education (in collaboration with early childhood education services) and support for inter-sector actions to create positive environments, with the participation of community organizations.

QUALITY EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED QUÉBECKERS

Ensure access to childcare services for underprivileged Québeckers

The target the Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés (MFA) has set for reduced contribution educational childcare is 200,000 places by the end of 2010. In the projects being developed, priority has been given to the ones geared to the intake of children from disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, the government has committed to adding 15,000 new places from now to the end of its term of office.

The government sees childcare as a preventive measure because it enables young children to socialize and develop positive relationships that could stand them in good stead for the future.

Other than the creation of places in reduced contribution educational childcare, certain measures have been carried over from the first Action Plan so that children from less fortunate families can access these services.

A measure for a parental contribution exemption for poorer households is planned so that Social Assistance Program or Social Solidarity Program families with children under age 5 have free access to educational childcare for up to 23.5 hours a week²³. On the recommendation of a health or social services establishment, free childcare can be extended for up to 5 days a week over several weeks for children with adaptation problems or special needs.

23. This is equivalent to two and a half days or five half-days of childcare.

In connection with this measure, childcare centres (CPE) and subsidized daycare centres also receive an allowance to cover the extra costs involved in serving a clientele predominantly from disadvantaged communities.

Lastly, under agreements between health and social services centres (CSSS) and CPEs or daycares, up to 5% of the places in the signatory institutions can be reserved for children with a file at the CSSS due to personal or family difficulties, including poverty.

DEVELOP TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Offer government assistance for regional mass transit (Q³GBA)

The Programme d'aide gouvernementale au transport collectif régional, which is under the jurisdiction of the Ministère des Transports du Québec (MTQ), has three components:

- mass transit in rural communities: the Ministère's subsidy is double that of the financial contribution of the regional county municipality (RCM), in an amount of up to \$100,000 a year;
- regional planning of mass transit: the Ministère's contribution is equivalent to that of the Conférence régionale des élus (CRÉ), for a maximum of \$100,000;
- interregional bus service: the Ministère's subsidy is double that of the financial contribution of the regional county municipality (RCM), in an amount of up to \$100,000 a year.

This program comes with a budget of \$18.3 million for the period between April 2010 and December 2011. Future development of the program could take poverty issues into account.

Ensure the development of mass transit in Nunavik and of safe trails for off-road vehicles

There have been adapted and public transportation services in Nunavik since 2005. Each of the 14 northern villages is equipped with an adapted mini bus and is responsible for the transportation of persons with disabilities and seniors. The Kativik Regional Government (KRG) manages all of the adapted and public transportation services offered in Nunavik. The Ministère des Transports recently granted KRG new financial assistance to improve the services introduced in 2005. More specifically, the purpose of this financial assistance is to increase the slate of transportation services because the capacity of certain vehicles already lags behind demand. The hiring of a regional coordinator will also be covered in order to standardize the services and ensure their quality.

The Ministère des Transports has mandated the Conférences régionales des élus to form regional joint action tables on the use of off-road vehicles. In the Nord-du-Québec region, the Kativik Regional Government and the Cree Regional Government have been given an extended mandate in order to take the specificities of their respective territory into consideration. Currently, both organizations are documenting the use of off-road vehicle trails, proposing legislative and regulatory amendments and distributing information on the safe use of off-road vehicles. The Kativik Regional Authority has also begun identifying the off-road vehicle trails that need maintenance or clearer signage. At present, the Ministère is consulting with some 30 other Aboriginal communities on the same topic. The ultimate goal is to provide solutions to certain transportation problems in the regions that are not served by a road network.

ESTABLISH AND CONTINUE ACTION TO FOSTER THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL

Foster the social inclusion of homeless persons

Stemming from the will of the government to enhance the synergy and coordinate the joint action of its partners on the issue of homelessness, in December 2009 the Québec government launched its interdepartmental action plan on homelessness (Plan d'action interministériel en itinérance), covering 2010 to 2013. At the centre of the plan are five priorities (prevention; residential stability; improvement; adapted and coordinated action; tolerant and safe cohabitation between the various citizens; and research) that guide action at the Québec, regional and local level²⁴. The Action Plan is based on the work of the Commission de la santé et des services sociaux which held consultations in several parts of Québec²⁵.

It stands to reason that the Plan d'action interministériel en itinérance 2010-2013 and the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010-2015 must be closely connected. The homelessness action plan will benefit from the advances contained in the Action Plan, particularly progress in terms of renewal of territory-based action in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The \$14 million investment tagged for support for action on the issue of homelessness will bolster the action already undertaken by local and regional organizations that work with homeless persons.

With the renewal of territory-based action against poverty and social exclusion, the government will see to it that matters related to homelessness are among the issues addressed within the framework of the alliances signed with the regions, where applicable.

24. Gouvernement du Québec, *Plan d'action interministériel en itinérance 2010-2013*, 2009.

25. Commission de la santé et des services sociaux sur l'itinérance au Québec, *Itinérance : agissons ensemble - Rapport de la Commission de la santé et des services sociaux sur l'itinérance au Québec*, 2009.

DRAW UP AN ACTION PLAN FOR MORE INSIGHT INTO THE LIVES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN QUÉBEC

In order to foster the participation of one and all in the growth of Québec, in 2008 the government adopted a policy and action plan entitled *Diversity: An Added Value*. This is how the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones (SAA) became entrusted with the task of drawing up an action plan specifically for the Inuit and the members of the First Nations, notably to shore up their social and economic inclusion.

A 2006 poll by the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador revealed that 67% of Québeckers know very little about the First Nations and the situation specific to them. The main cause of the exclusion experienced by Aboriginal peoples is this lack of knowledge and the persistent prejudice to which they are exposed. The projected action plan will make it possible to craft an approach for reducing the marginalization of Aboriginals in Québec and for enabling the development of a positive perception of their identity by all of society and by Aboriginal peoples themselves.

ESTABLISH QUÉBEC-FIRST NATIONS AND QUÉBEC INUIT JOINT ACTION COMMITTEES (OAGBA)

In order to maintain dialogue, foster collaboration and undertake action against the acute poverty and social exclusion for all Aboriginal nations, Québec-First Nations and Québec-Inuit committees will be formed and coordinated by the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones and the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. The work of these committees will make it possible to determine action priorities and establish the necessary links with the various levels of government.

Document the state of social participation of persons with disabilities as part of the work to assess *Equals in Every Respect* (OAGBA)

The *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* stipulates that the mission of the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ) is to assess, on a collective basis, the social, school and workplace integration of persons with disabilities. Therefore in 2009 the government gave the OPHQ the mandate to evaluate the policy entitled *Equals in Every Respect: Because Rights Are Meant to Be Exercised*.

This policy contains a series of expected outcomes with regard to the living conditions and the social participation of persons with disabilities. To measure achievement of these outcomes, a reporting table of the indicators of social participation and its determinants (e.g. personal income of persons with disabilities; members of households below the low-income cut-off; education; and food insecurity) will be updated regularly as data becomes available.

Craft solutions for establishing structured accompaniment services

To make Québec society more mindful of the choices and needs of persons with disabilities and of their families, as advocated in the *Equals in Every Respect* policy, the OPHQ will spearhead cross-sectoral initiatives to lay the groundwork for solutions by 2014 in order to:

- make structured accompaniment services available to persons with disabilities and to their families;
- ensure that needs in terms of accompaniment are recognized in customized and coordinated service planning, and develop support services across Québec;
- foster the harmonization of accompaniment practices;
- improve the training and salary of attendants.

Increase the active participation of seniors

By empowering seniors to remain active, they have the opportunity to continue to thrive and to enjoy good health. Their protection and dignity is secured when their needs are met and their rights respected. Active ageing means an active personal, family, social and professional life. It also means conditions more conducive to their ability to thrive, by, among other things, acting against abuse and mistreatment, prejudices, stereotypes and ageism, as well as against poverty and social exclusion. The Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés will continue its offensive on the social exclusion front by:

- deploying the program to support *Municipalité amie des aînés*, an initiative to adapt municipal policies, services and local structures for an ageing population and by ensuring that seniors participate in the process every step of the way;
- within the framework of Secrétariat aux aînés funding programs, support projects to combat the poverty and social exclusion experienced by certain seniors.

Give better support to initiatives to respect seniors and improve the slate of services for natural caregivers

The Support for Initiatives to Promote Respect for Seniors (SIRA) Program offers funding to community organizations whose clientele are seniors. The projects within this program must promote respect for seniors and improve their living conditions and ability to age actively.

The government will invest \$5.6 million in 2010-2011, \$5.3 million in 2011-2012 and \$5 million thereafter for SIRA, with an additional \$2 million annually, and another \$2 million per year for introducing a component for natural caregivers in 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013.

This new component will assist organizations that work with the natural caregivers of seniors with diminished autonomy to introduce and better organize their slate of services, including active listening, respite and accompaniment.

This amount, which is in addition to Société de gestion pour le soutien aux proches aidants funding, makes it possible to better support the organizations during fund operations.

SUMMARY OF MEASURES (FOURTH THRUST)

Improve the living conditions of low-income individuals and families

1	Construct 3,000 new community housing and social housing units	SHQ
2	Provide financial support aimed at reducing the community contribution and at increasing admissible costs under the AccèsLogis Québec Program for two years in certain regions	SHQ
3	Construct 340 low-rental housing units in Nunavik	SHQ
4	Continue the renovation of low-rental housing	SHQ
5	Carry out one-off action to renovate certain low-rental housing units in Nunavik	SHQ
6	Implement a special home renovation program in the Algonquin Community of Kitcisakik	SHQ
7	Help persons with disabilities be more autonomous and remain in their homes for longer	SHQ
8	Continue introducing and developing community support in social housing	SHQ-MSSS
9	Offer training in food hygiene and safety to organizations and individuals in the field of food safety	MESS-MSSS
10	Continue action against parental negligence	MSSS
11	Continue crisis intervention and assertive community treatment with young people and families in difficulty	MSSS
12	Continue integrated perinatal and early childhood services	MSSS
13	Grant an allowance to childcare facilities or daycares dealing predominantly with a clientele from disadvantaged communities	MFA
14	Ensure greater communication and collaboration between the educational childcare system and health and social services institutions	MFA
15	Ensure free access to educational childcare for families receiving last-resort financial assistance	MFA
16	Offer assistance for regional mass transit	Ministère des Transports
17	Ensure the development of mass transit in Nunavik and of safe trails for off-road vehicles	Ministère des Transports
18	Foster the social inclusion of homeless people	MSSS-MESS
19	Draw up an action plan for more insight into the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Québec	SAA
20	Establish Québec-First Nations and Québec Inuit poverty joint action committees	SAA-MESS
21	Document the state of social participation of persons with disabilities	OPHQ
22	Craft solutions for establishing structured accompaniment services	OPHQ
23	Increase the active participation of seniors	Secrétariat aux aînés
24	Support initiatives to respect seniors	Secrétariat aux aînés
25	Improve the slate of services for natural caregivers	Secrétariat aux aînés

3 INVESTMENTS AT THE SERVICE OF SOLIDARITY

To deploy the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, the government has upped its investments to nearly **\$7 billion** for the period from 2010 to 2015, \$4.5 billion more than initially tagged for implementing the 2004-2009 Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion

Action Plan 2010-2015 builds on the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. Most measures and programs introduced under the first Action Plan have been extended by five years and hence, the massive investment that enabled the principal measures of the first Action Plan to be implemented between 2004 and 2010 will be repeated, which represents an amount of **\$5.6 billion** over five years.

Furthermore, the government will contribute an extra **\$1.3 billion** over five years.

Table 6 presents the amounts earmarked for the measures and programs indicated, grouped under the categories «renewed», «improved» or «new» investments.

The amounts for implementing many of the measures of the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010-2015 written into the budgets of the various government departments and agencies are added on to the figures in the Table.

Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion
2010-2015 investments (in millions of dollars)

Table 6

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Over 5 years
New investments						
Solidarity Tax Credit ⁽¹⁾		75	155	155	155	540
Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales	17	23	25	25	25	115
Investments in housing						
– Construction of 3,000 social housing units ⁽²⁾	166	100	107	103		476
– Construction of 340 units in Nunavik ⁽³⁾	18	19	21	23	24	105
– Additional assistance for AccèsLogis projects	7	7				14
– Other housing measures ⁽⁴⁾	46					46
Increase in the Tax Credit for Home-Support Services for Seniors	5	5	5	5	5	25
Increase for the Support for Initiatives to Promote Respect for Seniors (SIRA) Program	4	4	4	2	2	16
Subtotal	263	233	317	313	211	1 337
Investments for renewal of Action Plan 2004-2010 measures						
– Child Assistance	239	243	248	253	258	1 241
– Work Premium	230	234	239	244	248	1 195
– Supplement to the Work Premium	7	7	7	7	7	35
– Adapted Work Premium	4	4	4	4	4	20
– Indexation of social assistance benefits	245	320	408	489	565	2 027
– Partial exemption for child support income ⁽⁵⁾	14	14	14	14	14	70
– Continuation of a baseline last-resort financial assistance benefit	10	10	10	10	10	50
– Free prescribed drugs	33	34	35	36	36	173
– Higher cut-off line for Legal Aid	35	37	39	40	42	194
– Early childhood development fund	40	40	40	40	40	200
– Other measures under Action Plan 2004-2010 ⁽⁶⁾	273	39	39	39	39	431
Subtotal	1 131	982	1 083	1 176	1 264	5 636
TOTAL	1 394	1 215	1 400	1 489	1 475	6 973

(1) The supplementary support (over former tax credits) for low-income households (households in which disposable income is below the low-income cut-off using the Market Basket Measure (MBM)).

(2) Includes construction to be delivered in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 announced in the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 Budgets.

(3) Includes Québec government investments (\$99.2 million for operating grants for these units for 15 years) and residual amounts from a \$91.1 million investment from the government of Canada.

(4) RénoVillage Program, Residential Adaptation Assistance Program, Rent Supplement Program, Emergency Repair Program, Home Adaptation for Seniors' Independence, and hikes in the costs for the upkeep and renovation of social housing. Includes investments announced in the Budgets prior to the 2010-2011 Budget.

(5) Does not include investments for the \$100 per family exemption established under Action Plan 2004-2010.

(6) Social assistance and social support programs, tax credit for enabling seniors to remain within their home, measures to help low-income households put money aside, Commitment for Employment and Employment Pact Plus.

4 BASIC TENETS IN THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST POVERTY

Québec society cares greatly about ensuring that its less fortunate citizens have a decent standard of living. The 2004 Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, a first for Québec, involved financial commitments that totalled \$4.5 billion over six years.

However, this amount is but a fraction of the total investments because it only includes expenditures for the new measures announced in 2004 and those added subsequently.

Thanks to the solidarity displayed by the citizens of Québec, the least affluent among them have access to a panoply of programs and measure. Without being officially written into the anti-poverty agenda, a number of measures attest to the will of Québeckers to support in particular low-income households and individuals in situations of poverty in all spheres of endeavour. The reference year 2008-2009 provides examples of these recurrent investments.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

In 2008-2009, the cost of last-resort financial assistance, consisting primarily of Social Assistance and Social Solidarity benefits, reached \$2.7 billion, including, however, indexation—\$41.1 million for 2008-2009—considered Action Plan investments. In addition to this is the Youth Alternative Program, which, taken singly, represents an investment of \$36.5 million in the same year.

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

For this same reference year, monies for the various employment measures offered to individuals by Emploi-Québec through the Labour Market Development Fund topped \$750 million. These investments were used to finance measures and services for employability assistance, skills development, or labour market entry, through, for example, wage subsidies. For 2009-2010, a little over \$1 billion was similarly spent.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The action engaged in by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) with low-income individuals is major because its mission is based on the principle of universal access to services. Other more specific programs for destitute individuals and families take the principle one step further. The MSSS's contribution towards these programs alone is estimated at more than \$1 billion for 2008-2009.

SOCIAL HOUSING

Easier access to decent and affordable housing for individuals and families in situations of poverty was the focus of core measures in 2004. Every year, the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) grants sizable amounts for low-cost housing that are factored in to the Action Plan. In 2008, over \$530 million in subsidies was awarded in order to cover the shortfall between operating costs and rental income of organizations (municipal housing bureaus, housing cooperatives and not-for-profit organizations) that manage the low-rental housing stock. Other important programs, including the Rent Supplement and Shelter Allowance, bring the SHQ's annual investments for households in situations of poverty to roughly \$700 million.

PREVENTING POVERTY THROUGH EDUCATION

The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) and its partners invest in a number of programs and services aimed at fostering student success, more particularly in impoverished communities. The estimated figure for these outlays is nearly \$250 million a year.

For example, under the New Approaches, New Solutions intervention strategy for disadvantaged communities, the MELS provides \$44.8 million in recurrent funding to tailor interventions to the particular characteristics of 554 elementary schools and 778 secondary schools in underprivileged communities.

Furthermore, since 2004-2005, support for special-needs students has been allocated a specific budgetary envelope measured against a number of criteria, including the deprivation index that varies according to school board territories.

Since 2006-2007, there have been additional monies to increase services for special-needs students and for creating or maintaining 653 full-time equivalent remedial teachers at the elementary level and 618 full-time equivalent resource teachers at the secondary level. Year after year, nearly \$155 million is invested so that these efforts can continue.

It bears pointing out that the support provided through Financial Aid for Québec Students contributes specifically to help individuals on low incomes to enrol in vocational programs at the secondary level or to undertake post-secondary studies. For 2008-2009, some 137,000 individuals received assistance for their education, for a total of \$848 million, nearly 44% of which consisted of bursaries.

TAX MEASURES FOR LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

The **refundable tax credit for the Québec Sales Tax** is granted to all low-income taxpayers, including those who have no taxes to pay. For 2009, the Ministère du Revenu issued refunds in the amount of \$489 million.

The **property tax refund** helps to reduce the tax burden of low- or modest-income property owners living in areas where property taxes are relatively high. For 2009, the Ministère du Revenu issued refunds in the amount of \$305 million.

The **refundable tax credit for individuals living in northern villages** is issued to residents of municipalities whose status is that of northern village and whose territory forms part of the territory, within the meaning of the *Act respecting northern villages and the Kativik Regional Government*. Designed for low- or average-income households, in 2009, the outlay was \$3 million.

These three tax credits will be merged to create the Solidarity Tax Credit, with an additional investment under the 2010-2011 Budget.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Québec's community organizations play a role that contributes substantially to the success of the blueprint for society set out in the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010-2015. They offer irreplaceable services for socially and economically excluded individuals. These organizations, which are learning spaces for citizen activism, often tender new approaches to solutions and enable rethinking of certain aspects of the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Their actions and services are highly diversified and respond to the specific needs of the most vulnerable among us.

The financial support granted to community organizations by some twenty government departments and agencies amounted to \$794.7 million in 2008-2009.

SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL INITIATIVES

Managed by the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones (SAA), the Aboriginal Initiatives Fund is a financial assistance package totalling \$125 million for the period from 2007 to 2011. The amounts from this fund are granted for mounting economic development projects by and for Aboriginal nations or communities, fostering the emergence of new entrepreneurs, carrying out consultations, restoring or improving community infrastructure, and promoting action by Aboriginal community groups. Once the projects are approved, Band Councils have five years to complete them. The SAA intends to work on renewing the Aboriginal Initiatives Fund starting in 2010.

OTHER INVESTMENTS

The investments described above are among the main measures to combat poverty and social exclusion that are given centre stage due to the hefty costs associated with them, but there are a multitude of other relatively inexpensive measures whose benefits are not calculated in monetary terms but which are equally important nonetheless.

5

A COMMITMENT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The main objective of the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion* is to progressively make Québec one of the industrialized States having the least number of persons living in poverty, according to recognized methods for making international comparisons.

Certain low-income indicators will be used to chart the gains made on the anti-poverty front. Since poverty has many faces and just as many indicators to characterize it, other measuring instruments will provide a clearer understanding of the phenomenon and greater awareness of it.

5.1 PUT QUÉBEC AT THE FOREFRONT IN CANADA AND INTERNATIONALLY

In its Advice to the Minister regarding the indicators to use in measuring poverty, inequality and social exclusion²⁶, the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion (CEPE) recommended the Market Basket Measure (MBM) as the yardstick in monitoring situations of poverty from the perspective of the coverage of basic needs. This measure corresponds to the value of a set basket of commodities and services that enable individuals to have the following: food that meets Health Canada standards; clothing and footwear; rental housing; transportation; and other goods and services for personal care; household needs; furniture; basic telephone service; recreation; and school supplies. Under the Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, the MBM will be used to keep track of progress in Québec, compared with the situation in other Canadian provinces. For international comparisons, the threshold that corresponds to 50% of the median income in Québec after taxes will be used.

A FRONTRUNNER ON THE CANADIAN LEVEL

Before seeing how Québec ranks in comparison to certain industrialized nations in terms of low income, it may be wise to begin by determining how we are doing in our immediate environment. Calculated using the MBM for Québec, low-income rate trends between 2000 and 2007 in the Canadian provinces show that throughout this period, Québec's low-income rate was below that of all of Canada and receded almost continuously. This is even more remarkable when you consider the fact that Québec's gross domestic product (GDP) per inhabitant is below Canada's.

This downward trend was reflected in all segments of the population (men, women and children), and not just one. For example, the low-income rate of individuals under age 18 has been halved since 2000 to level off at 7.3% in 2007. The low-income rate of women has posted a sharp decline, from 13.7% in 2000 to 8.5% in 2007, while that of the male population dropped from 11.6% to 8.4% in the same period.

26. Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion (CEPE), *Taking the Measure of Poverty. Proposed Indicators of Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion to Measure Progress in Québec*, Québec, 2009.

Low-income rate trends since early 2000 put Québec among the high-performing Canadian provinces. As shown in Table 7, Québec, with a low-income rate of 8.5% in 2007, is in second position, right behind Alberta.

Table 7 Low-income rate of individuals using the Market Basket Measure (MBM) for the Canadian provinces, 2007 (%)

	Proportion	Rank
Alberta	7,4	1
Québec	8,5	2
Manitoba	8,7	3
Prince Edward Island	10,3	4
Ontario	10,3	5
Saskatchewan	11,3	6
Newfoundland and Labrador	12,3	7
Nova Scotia	13,3	8
New Brunswick	13,3	9
British Columbia	13,4	10
Canada	10,1	

Source: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Low Income in Canada: 2000-2007 Using the Market Basket Measure - August 2009.

SOLID FOOTING ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

As for international comparisons, and given that other countries do not employ the Market Basket Measure, one method that the CEPE recommends is use of the threshold corresponding to 50% of the median of Québec incomes after taxes converted using purchasing power parities. However, because the MBM, the measure selected for tracing low income in Québec, is a low-income threshold corresponding this time to a basket of commodities and services recognized as basic, the decision was made to compare Québec to certain countries by way of exploration, with the understanding that this is not strict adherence to the traditional methodology of the MBM²⁷.

Table 8 presents the proportion of low-income in a selection of OECD countries according to two methods. Note that no matter which method is used, Québec's low-income rate barely budges. Only its rank in relation to other countries changes. Certain Scandinavian and some other European countries top the list. With a low-income rate of 8.5%, Québec places tenth according to the threshold set at 50% of the median of Québec incomes after taxes, but has the eighth spot and a low-income proportion of 8.9 based on the Montréal MBM.

27. First, whereas the MBM is based on the cost of a set basket that buyers can afford on their disposable income available for consumption, the data presented here concern income after taxes. The Montréal Market Basket Measure, chosen because of the size of the city's population, was revised upwards by 7% to align it with the idea of «after-tax income» for the purposes of international comparison. Secondly, purchasing power parities make it possible to measure how much of a given currency is required to acquire the commodities and services of that country. Lastly, the countries chosen are the main OECD countries for which statistics were available. The database used in this case is that of the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS). However, the countries do not necessarily have the same timetable for producing national statistics, so the reference periods are not all the same. We have used 2004 as the reference year for Québec because the most recent data for a good number of countries studied applied to that year.

Low-income proportion for individuals, by country included in the Luxembourg Income Study (50% of median after-tax income in Québec and the Montréal MBM converted using purchasing power parities (PPA))

Table 8

	Cut-off : 50% of median after-tax income in Québec	Rank	Cut-off : Montréal MBM	Rank
Luxembourg (2004)	1.1	1	1.2	1
Norway (2004)	3.6	3	3.9	2
Denmark (2004)	3.5	2	3.9	3
Switzerland (2004)	3.8	4	4.1	4
Austria (2000)	5.1	5	7.5	5
Sweden (2005)	7.6	7	8.3	6
Finland (2004)	8.0	9	8.7	7
Québec (2004)	8.5	10	8.9	8
Belgium (2000)	6.6	6	9.5	9
Germany (2000)	7.6	8	10.0	10
Canada (2004)	9.7	11	10.1	11
United Kingdom (2004)	9.9	12	10.7	12
United States (2004)	11.3	14	11.7	13
France (2000)	10.8	13	14.8	14
Ireland (2000)	16.8	15	20.9	15
Australia (2003)	20.2	16	21.1	16
Spain (2000)	21.2	17	25.5	17
Italy (2004)	28.3	18	29.6	18

Source : Luxembourg Income Study and Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics for Québec and Canada.

On the basis of these result, Québec ranks advantageously in relation to the main industrialized countries and is a North American leader. However, we cannot deny that much work remains. A careful reading of Table 8 indicates that the differences in the low-income rates of countries hovering around Québec's position on the list are very slim indeed. The government's goal for the next five years is therefore to consolidate, if not improve, Québec's position among these countries. It is also determined to remain among the three Canadian provinces with the smallest low-income rate using the Market Basket Measure.

5.2 TAKE POVERTY'S MULTIDIMENSIONAL NATURE INTO ACCOUNT²⁸

Apart from the low-income rate, other indicators were chosen to monitor poverty trends and the socioeconomic factors and conditions that have an impact on poverty. The question of the determinants of poverty and its consequences presupposes a broader vision of the phenomenon that affords an appreciation of its multidimensional nature. Other than the low-income rate and the low-income gap, housing, education, health, and employment, as well as inequalities, can be pressed into service as indicators, be used to better characterize the situation of groups affected by poverty, and provide information about the elements that could be avoided through preventive action. Tracking of these indicators should serve to guide the actions of the partners engaged in combating poverty and social exclusion.

LOW-INCOME RATE

Monitoring of the low-income rate using the previous indicators and according to the availability of statistics²⁹ will make it possible to gauge how the situation is evolving in Québec, Canada and internationally and, where required, to adjust our actions on the basis of the changes that will occur.

LOW-INCOME GAP

To measure how much catching up low-income households must do to edge their way over the low income cut-off using the MBM, the low-income gap was also selected as an indicator. The low-income gap, expressed in either dollar or percentage terms, is the amount by which a household income falls short of the relevant low income cut-off. Tracking of this indicator sheds light on the scope of the effect of the measures proposed in Action Plan 2010-2015 on the income of families in situations of poverty. For instance, certain measures may narrow the gap between the income of low-income households and the cut-off in question, without having an effect on the low-income rate. It is therefore safe to say that monitoring of low-income rates in and of itself is not sufficient to determine whether low-income households are doing better in terms of income.

HOUSING

Housing is one of the expenses that makes the biggest dent in the budget of low-income households. This means that the cost of housing is among the items that takes the biggest bite out of a limited budget. The tracking of the proportion of tenants who spend 30% or more of their income on housing that will be carried out from now on will make it possible to keep abreast of the phenomenon and of the efforts deployed for this purpose in the coming years.

EDUCATION

The correlation between education and poverty is a proven fact. Lack of a Diploma of Secondary Studies is identified as being one of the factors that makes entering the job market difficult, and as one of the reasons for the poverty that ensues. It follows that monitoring the level of education of a given population, in particular that of the younger members of a society, is a must in combating poverty and social exclusion. Keeping track of the proportion of working-age citizens who have at least a Diploma of Secondary Studies provides a portrait of the situation and of the progress in that area.

Given government action to increase the proportion of the population with a Diploma of Secondary Studies at minimum, the proportion of the working-age population having at least this basic level of education should expand in the coming years and, with it, positive outcomes in terms of poverty in Québec.

HEALTH

Poverty and social disparity are important, if not the most important, determinants of how public health and well-being are faring. Just as health and psychosocial problems can breed poverty, likewise, poverty can have a powerful adverse impact on health and well-being, even if ill-health is not the cause.

The neighbourhood effect and how it relates to health has caught the attention of researchers. Inhabitants in poor districts tend to have health and psychosocial problems more often, and these problems appear earlier than they do in the overall population.

28. This section is based on the recommendations contained in the CEPE's Advice to the Minister entitled *Taking the Measure of Poverty. Proposed Indicators of Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion to Measure Progress in Québec* (2009). The thoughts presented herein are taken in part from the contents of the CEPE document.

29. There is a two- to three-year time gap between the Statistics Canada study and release by the federal agency of the available statistics for monitoring low-income situations using the Market Basket Measure.

JOBS

Access to the labour market remains a pivotal manoeuvre in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Work, a symbol of social and economic integration, is one of the dominant values of our society. As we know, the conditions for accessing it can vary. In order to take economic realities into account and to adjust the actions of every player engaged in combating poverty and social exclusion according to their means and abilities, we will pay particular attention to labour market related indicators. The link between the unemployment rate and poverty has been the subject of a host of studies and is now an established fact. A rising unemployment rate reflects reduced access to the labour market for those who want to work, which, in turn, accentuates the pressure on individuals in situations of vulnerability. Given the tight correlation between the two phenomena, the unemployment rate will be monitored very closely.

Other indicators will also be tracked in order to keep tabs on trends in the economic environment. The social assistance rate, along with the Economic Dependency Ratio (government transfer payments for every \$100 of earnings) will also be dealt with in more depth.

Table 9 presents the trends in the various indicators selected to monitor the outcomes of the actions proposed in Action Plan 2010-2015. Overall, it can be said that in Québec these variables delivered positive results between 2005 and 2007. However, the problem-ridden economy that has prevailed since late 2008 will certainly adversely affect trends in these indicators.

In short, these indicators should make it possible to chart the progress made in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, notably with a view to gender-based analysis (Q⁺GBA). In addition, where applicable, the results could serve to guide partner action more effectively.

Table 9

Trends in the indicators selected, 2005-2007, Québec

	2005	2006	2007
Low-income rate of individuals	9.7	9.8	8.5
Males	9.6	9.9	8.4
Females	9.8	9.8	8.5
Low-income gap (%)	31.7	26.4	32.2
Proportion of households that spend at least 30% of their income on housing (%)	-	22.5	-
Proportion of the population (age 25 to 64) with at least a Diploma of Secondary Studies (%)	80.6	81.1	82.1
Males	79.6	80.8	80.9
Females	81.6	81.5	83.4
Life expectancy (overall population)	79.7	80	-
Males	77.0	77.4	-
Females	82.3	82.5	-
Low birth-weight babies (percentage over 5 years)	5.7	5.7	-
Unemployment rate (overall population)	8.3	8.0	7.2
Males	9.0	8.5	7.9
Females	7.5	7.5	6.4
Social Assistance rate – population under age 65 (%)	7.8	7.6	7.5
Males under age 65	7.7	7.6	7.5
Females under age 65	7.8	7.6	7.4
Economic dependency ratio (\$)	20.14	20.88	-

Source: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (low-income rate and low-income gap); Statistics Canada (Gini coefficient, unemployment rate, education); Institut de la statistique du Québec (economic dependency ratio); Société d'habitation du Québec (housing); and Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (social assistance rate).

- : Data not available.



CONCLUSION

The Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010-2015 is proof of the government's unshakeable will to continue the commitment it made in 2002 when its anti-poverty legislation was passed into law. The process that has unfolded since then, a first in Canada, has reshaped public action in favour of individuals in situations of poverty or at risk of finding themselves there.

In producing this Action Plan, the government chose to base its decisions on the experience it had acquired in the preceding six years and on the experiences of the people who participated in the consultations in 2009.

By opting to build on the gains enjoyed under the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, the predecessor of today's Action Plan, notably by renewing tried-and-true measures such as Child Assistance and the Work Premium, by innovating with new measures such as the Solidarity Tax Credit, and by tendering a new vision that brings decision-making closer to communities and provides tools for better-coordinated work by every member of society, the Québec government intends to remain a leader on the anti-poverty front.

The 2010-2015 Action Plan therefore gives new life to actions aimed at the social and economic inclusion of every Québécois. Shoulder to shoulder, we continue to march towards a poverty-free Québec.

APPENDIX 1

Low-income rate using the Market Basket Measure, for individuals and all family units, by family unit type, and age and sex, Québec, 2000-2007

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

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

Family unit: Unattached individual or economic family of two persons or more within the meaning of Statistics Canada.

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