

Progress in preventing poverty and social exclusion

Between 1998-1999 and 2003-2004 there was a steady decline in the **secondary school graduation rate**. Since then there has been an ongoing improvement in the situation. The graduation rate for 2005-2006 was **86.4%** — **the highest since 1996**.

The school drop-out rate shrank from **11.6%** in 2003-2004 to **10.5%** in 2005-2006, and there has been a decline in the percentage of elementary and secondary school students who complete less than a grade of school per year.

More information

For more information, see our Web site:
www.mess.gouv.qc.ca

Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion: A Priority for Québec



Word from the Minister



Québec society has chosen to combat poverty.

In December 2002, the Québec National Assembly unanimously passed the Act to combat poverty and social exclusion. The only law of its kind in North America, it guides the government's efforts and commits Québec society as a whole to tackle the exciting, ten-year challenge of making Québec one of the world's industrialized nations with the smallest number of citizens struggling with poverty and social exclusion. The Act has spawned a government action plan called *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*.

The amounts earmarked to deploy the government action plan, initially evaluated at \$2.5 billion, have been increased to more than \$3.5 billion over a five-year period. These outlays are a clear sign of the importance that our society places on improving the quality of life of its poorer citizens.

Thanks to the invaluable contributions of social, economic and governmental players and participation by people in vulnerable circumstances, we have chalked up significant progress.

Today, with the publication of our third-year progress report, we have reached the half-way mark in implementing our action plan. Our battle against poverty, however, is far from over. Together, let us rise to the collective challenge of combating poverty and social exclusion. Our joint efforts will have an impact on all of society.

Sam Hamad
Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity

Improvement in families' financial situations

Combined with the favourable labour market context, the measures launched since the adoption of the **Act to combat poverty and social exclusion** and the government action plan have helped improve Quebecers' living conditions, particularly those of families.

- The number of last-resort financial assistance recipients **shrank by 54,440, or 6.1%**, between March 2003 and August 2007.
- This decrease was especially significant among women (8.5%), single-parent families (15.2%), two-parent families (13.4%) and couples with no children (17.6%).
- **Since April 2003, the number of children who are members of families that receive last-resort financial assistance has decreased by 20,000, or over 14%.**
- **Poor families' disposable income** has risen significantly. For example, for a single-parent family composed of a 3-year-old child and a parent who works full-time for the minimum wage, disposable income has surged ahead by **23.3%**. For a single-parent family receiving social assistance, with two-children, aged 3 and 7, disposable income has grown by **25.3%**.
- Since the start of deployment of the government action plan in April 2004, the minimum wage has been increased on four occasions. In May 2007 it reached \$8 an hour. **These increases in the minimum wage** have made paid employment more attractive, by taking into account the rise in the cost of living.

Enhanced access to better living conditions

The government has increased the amounts earmarked in April 2004 for social housing, in order to offer **20,000 new low-cost or affordable housing units** by 2009 — i.e., 4,000 more units than initially planned.

Since July 1, 2007, thanks to the government's new medication policy, over a million people in vulnerable financial situations, including social assistance recipients, have been fully entitled to **free medication**.

Higher participation in job-entry measures

The measures deployed by virtue of the government action plan in order to support job-entry for people who encounter certain obstacles to employment have generated encouraging results. Since March 2003, participation in public employment service measures has grown by **10%** among members of cultural communities and visible minorities, by **20%** among people aged 50 or over, and by over **12%** among people with handicaps.

