

La volonté d'agir la force de réussir



Stratégie nationale de lutte contre
la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale

Summary Policy statement

The challenge for the coming decade

To progressively transform Québec into one of the industrialized societies with the least poverty. This is the goal that the Québec government has set with its National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. Meeting this goal not only requires the commitment of the Québec government, but also of groups representing Québec society as a whole—including people and communities more directly affected by poverty—to fight the causes and effects of poverty.

The values of solidarity and community spirit are deep rooted among the people of Québec and have spurred the implementation of numerous components of the social and economic safety net. Over the last 20 years, a variety of actions have been taken to allow local and regional communities to take control of their development. The most important of these actions was the adoption of the Policy on the Support of Local and Regional Development. Another important initiative during this same time period was the introduction of the Parental Wage Assistance Program (PWA)—a follow-up measure to the White Paper on Personal Taxation—promoting work through better integration of taxation and transfers.

Concrete actions to combat poverty

Since 1994, several measures have been taken to eliminate poverty, specifically in the wake of the 1996 Summit on the Economy and Employment and the 2000 Québec Youth Summit. Significant among these actions were the establishment of the Fonds de lutte contre la pauvreté par la réinsertion au travail (Anti-Poverty Fund), increased support for the development of social economy enterprises, and the establishment of assistance programs for young parents in financial difficulty.

Measures were also taken during this period to improve the situation of low-income workers. Additional initiatives to prevent poverty and improve employment assistance included support to Montreal schools, the new *Act respecting income support, employment assistance and social solidarity*, and the school adjustment action plan, *Agir tôt pour réussir*.

Fighting every aspect of poverty

However, in spite of all the progress that has been made, the persistence of poverty in recent years, its prevalence within certain high risk groups and disadvantaged areas and the consequences arising from it, compel us to increase our efforts.

This is why, over the past twelve months, the Québec government has shown its determination to fight all aspects of poverty by announcing a number of measures that will result in major investments over the next three years. These investments will affect taxation, housing, neighborhood revitalization, development of the social economy and target areas, academic success, assistance for youth and families, and basic food requirements.

The National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion is part of the ongoing efforts made by the government since 1994 to eliminate poverty, and of a broader effort aiming at the social development of Québec as a whole. The strategy is based on consultations held across Québec in the past year, involving thousands of people from all sectors of activity.

The National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion sets forth orientations that lay the foundation for the strategy and will serve as a basis for a plan of action that will ensure these goals are met. It invites the people of Québec to contribute both collectively and individually in reducing poverty and promoting the inclusion of all citizens.

Three Converging Goals

The National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion centers around three converging goals.

To improve the economic and social situation of people living in poverty or marginalized by society

First, by fostering the creation of employment for people who are able to work and by sustaining such employment.

Then, via access to essential services such as health care, social services, education, and family and housing support enabling all citizens to develop their full potential and contribute to society's collective well-being.

Third, by making sure that those able to work—and those unable to work due to their own limitations—have access to an income that allows them to lead a dignified life and participate fully in their communities.

Finally, by ensuring that anyone temporarily without sufficient income to meet their basic needs receives sufficient support from the government, both financially and through employment assistance measures.

To reduce inequalities that specifically affect people living in poverty

Gaps in income can adversely affect social cohesion when individualism and market values are not tempered by a social ethic that promotes

- equality between men and women
- reduction of regional disparities
- access to skills
- access to health care and that ensures basic food requirements
- access to housing and a healthy and secure environment free of violence
- access to decent working conditions
- access to services as well as to a standard of living that enables parents to fulfill their responsibilities to their children, individuals to realize their full potential and to be full citizens at every stage of their lives.

To take comprehensive action by developing a sense of social solidarity

Promote a new way of acting, an approach whereby the government

- considers every aspect of an individual
- sees the capacity of communities to care for themselves
- regards partners as sharing responsibility for actions.

Five Main Components of Global Action

The National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion will focus on five main components.

1. Prevention: promoting empowerment

The prevention component recognizes that

- empowerment and skills development begins in childhood and continues throughout life
- access to education is the key to true citizenship
- skills development is central to any poverty reduction strategy
- a reasonable command of basic skills and the acquisition of professional & technical skills are essential to labour market integration

2. Strengthening the social and economic safety net

By ensuring that

- Individuals who are unable to work due to a severely limited capacity for employment, those who are employed full time or on an ongoing basis, and those who can be integrated into the work force and are using the Employment-Assistance Program can increase their available income according to formulas that take their situations into account
- Housing becomes a way of reaching the disadvantaged and supporting their social and professional integration

3. Promoting job access and employment

A prosperous economy with abundant employment opportunities, thriving resource regions, and rural communities supported as they develop their potential are among the conditions essential for the kind of development that will reduce poverty.

The creation of job opportunities requires coordinated efforts involving

- all active employment assistance measures
- labour market partners
- the social economy
- community labour and employment organizations

In today's society, employment is the best way to achieve autonomy and, whenever possible, to stem poverty. Yet we must remember that certain limitations prevent a portion of the population from taking this route. These individuals must be provided the means to fulfill their potential and contribute to society to the best of their ability.

Promoting employment also means improving the quality of jobs available so that workers can earn enough income to live decently. It includes providing working conditions that protect against exclusion and help reconcile family-work responsibilities.

4. Promoting the involvement of society as a whole

To achieve these goals, the whole of Québec society must be involved. Quebecers generally share a desire to curb the causes of poverty, reduce inequality, and encourage inclusion. Every segment of society must feel committed to this collective task, and the government must take innovative steps to spur society's involvement in supporting the disadvantaged.

To boost such involvement

- Actions by citizens to fight poverty must be facilitated, supported and encouraged
- Local and regional initiatives to tackle poverty must be supported and backed by organizations and government departments
- Corporate social responsibility must be encouraged, recognized, and reinforced
- Community organizations must be given a greater role in integrated initiatives targeting the groups most affected by poverty and in developing mechanisms to tackle poverty mitigation at every level

5. Ensuring consistency and coordination of action at all levels

Reducing poverty and promoting the inclusion of all Quebecers requires vigorous, ongoing action. During the consultations held to develop this strategy, the message was always the same: fighting poverty requires a long-term commitment, a broad-reaching approach, increased involvement, and the means to assess progress and allow for any necessary adjustments.

While consistency must remain a theme in the fight to eliminate poverty and social exclusion, integrated and coherent action is also crucial.

This double concern for consistency and coordination must be carried through into action at every level by:

- Providing sustained support for innovative approaches
- Creating the flexibility required to adapt programs and services to the needs of individuals and communities
- Further developing dialogue and cooperative endeavors with stakeholders while ensuring democratic participation every step of the way

A National Strategy

These guidelines, the concrete actions against poverty taken by the Québec government since 1994, particularly in the last 12 months, are the foundations of The National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. This strategy calls for the commitment and involvement of all those who wish to fight poverty and social exclusion and make Québec a more integrated society where all individuals have the tools they need to live as proud citizens.