



# Québec Provincial Poverty Profile

CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY, 2015

## OVERVIEW

Québec was the first government to legislate poverty reduction, unanimously adopting Bill 112: An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2002.<sup>1</sup> The Act expanded the definition of poverty to include social exclusion, defining “poverty” as the lack of means, choices, and power to maintain self-sufficiency and to participate in society.<sup>2</sup>

Québec implemented its first Poverty Action Plan, *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*, in 2004.<sup>3</sup> With a budget of \$2.5 million, the plan emphasized two basic principles: first, employment is the primary solution for social inclusion and long-term economic security; second, greater protection is required for persons with severe employment limitations.<sup>4</sup>

Québec’s second Poverty Action Plan, *Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social inclusion 2010-2015: Québec’s Combat against Poverty*, set out four goals in 2010:

1. Review our standard practices and make local and regional communities key players in the decision-making process;
2. Acknowledge the value of work and foster the self-sufficiency of individuals;
3. Foster the economic self-sufficiency of underprivileged individuals;
4. Improve the living conditions of low-income individuals and families.<sup>5</sup>

Québec intended to strengthen its solidarity and social safety net with its second plan.<sup>6</sup> The plan focused on matching resources with regional and local needs, as well as on protecting the purchasing power of individuals.<sup>7</sup> Despite a budget of \$7 billion over five years,<sup>8</sup> the second plan lacks new measures and the reduction rate has lost momentum. From 1999 to 2009, the overall poverty rate dropped 40% in Québec.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, statistics indicate the number of welfare recipients in the province remained largely steady over the past three years.<sup>10</sup> Although significant gains were made for certain groups (e.g. families with children), progress is poor for

persons living alone, single mothers, and individuals with disabilities.<sup>11</sup> Statistical indicators show a large number of Quebecers struggle to meet even their most basic needs, with the latest studies revealing that nearly 157,000 people within the province are accessing food banks.<sup>12</sup>

## **Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion**<sup>13</sup>

### **PURPOSE**

To guide the Government and Québec society as a whole towards a process of planning and implementing actions to combat poverty, prevent its causes, reduce its effects on individuals and families, counter social exclusion and strive towards a poverty-free Québec.<sup>14</sup>

### **GOALS**

- To promote respect for and protection of the dignity of persons living in poverty and combat prejudices in their regard;
- To improve the economic and social situation of persons and families living in poverty and social exclusion;
- To reduce the inequalities that may be detrimental to social cohesion;
- To encourage persons and families living in poverty to participate in community life and social development; *and*
- To develop and reinforce the sense of solidarity throughout Québec, so that society as a whole may participate in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.<sup>15</sup>

The Act also proposed measures to accomplish these goals through consistent action.<sup>16</sup>

### **KEY PROVISIONS**

Calls for the establishment of an advisory committee dedicated to combating and preventing poverty and social exclusion.<sup>17</sup> The strategy is accompanied by a fund (Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales [FQIS]) to support social initiatives.<sup>18</sup>

Consideration for specific needs, such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and regional discrepancies.<sup>19</sup>

The government must report results in 2010 and every three years thereafter.<sup>20</sup>

## MEASURING PROGRESS

### Statistical Indicators of Poverty (Unofficial Measurement Tools)

	<b>LICO</b> <sup>21</sup> Low Income Cut-off After-tax	<b>LIM</b> <sup>22</sup> Low-Income Measurement	<b>MBM</b> <sup>23</sup> Market Basket Measure	<b>Food Bank Usage</b> <sup>24</sup>	<b>Household Food Insecurity</b> <sup>25</sup>	<b>Welfare Recipients</b> <sup>26</sup>
<b>2004*</b>	849,000, <b>11.5%</b>	964,000, <b>13%</b>	673,000, <b>9.1%</b>	219,689, <b>3%</b>	*	345,683
<b>2005</b>	870,000, <b>11.7%</b>	1,048,000, <b>14.1%</b>	775,000, <b>10.4%</b>	178,368, <b>2.4%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	338,532
<b>2006</b>	828,000, <b>11.1%</b>	1,006,000, <b>13.4%</b>	740,000, <b>9.4%</b>	*	<b>11.3%</b>	336,645
<b>2007</b>	784,000, <b>10.4%</b>	1,076,000, <b>14.3%</b>	629,000, <b>8.3%</b>	151,203, <b>2%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	332,459
<b>2008</b>	828,000, <b>10.9%</b>	1,172,000, <b>15.4%</b>	754,000, <b>9.9%</b>	127,536, <b>2%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	328,494
<b>2009</b>	686,000, <b>8.9%</b>	1,030,000, <b>13.4%</b>	735,000, <b>9.6%</b>	137,464, <b>1.8%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	335,070
<b>2010*</b>	778,000, <b>10.0%</b>	1,129,000, <b>14.5%</b>	787,000, <b>10.1%</b>	154,364, <b>2%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	332,692
<b>2011</b>	745,000, <b>9.5%</b>	1,095,000, <b>14.0%</b>	842,000, <b>10.7%</b>	156,279, <b>2%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	326,666
<b>2012</b>	820,000, <b>10.4%</b>	1,181,000, <b>14.9%</b>	939,000, <b>11.9%</b>	155,574, <b>1.9%</b>	<b>13.5%</b>	320,502
<b>2013</b>	*	1,117,000, <b>14.0%**</b>	*	156,750, <b>1.9%</b>	*	317,710
<b>2014</b>	*	*	*	156,895, <b>1.9%</b>	*	320,128

Note: 2004 – first plan came into effect; 2010 –second plan came into effect

\* Data not available

\*\* Please note that data from the 2013 calculation of Low Income Measure (LIM) is from the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) instead of the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID)."

### The Québec Government's Success Indicators

1. **LOW-INCOME MEASURES:** The three most used sets are the Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO), the Low Income Measure (LIM), and the Market Basket Measure (MBM). Other indicators such as disposable income, intensity, dispersion, gap, and severity of poverty should be taken into account to get a better sense of low income in Québec.<sup>27</sup>

2. **INEQUALITY MEASURES:** The Gini coefficient is used as a measure of inequality of income distribution or wealth distribution and/or inter-quintile comparisons that show gaps between the richest and the poorest.<sup>28</sup>
3. **SOCIAL EXCLUSION MEASURES:** “Social exclusion” must be defined and main dimensions identified.<sup>29</sup>
4. **OTHER MEASURES (TO BE DEVELOPED):** Indicators that recognize exclusion mechanisms at work, such as a trend chart that considers all the dimensions targeted by the Act. Measures should include different methods and perspectives and involve those living in poverty or working with those communities.<sup>30</sup>

## Progress to Date

Much of the government’s progress has slowed down. This year’s budget cuts mean the Québec Government is unlikely to regain momentum in its efforts to fight poverty.

The number of social assistance recipients has increased for the first time since 2009. In December 2014 2,418 additional households relied on social assistance, representing a 0.8% increase from 2013. People living alone disproportionately experience poverty. Independent adults require \$13,000 annually to meet their basic needs – nearly \$5,000 more than the annual \$8,444 that social assistance provides.<sup>31</sup>

## Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

1. **HUMAN RIGHTS:** After much pressure from the highly organized human rights movement, Québec recognized its international human rights obligations in its Second Action Plan: “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.”<sup>32</sup> Last year the government funded the launch of public awareness campaigns to combat social prejudice and stigma suffered by those in poverty.<sup>33</sup> In October of 2014, the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity launched the fifth edition of *Solidarity Week*.<sup>34</sup> *Solidarity Week* aims to raise awareness that all persons, regardless of their living conditions, can actively contribute to society.<sup>35</sup> It also highlights their potential, ensuring respect for all persons.<sup>36</sup>
2. **INCOME SUPPORT:** Acting on the recommendation of the *Centre d’étude sur la pauvreté et l’exclusion*,<sup>37</sup> the government agreed to increase payments for single social

assistance beneficiaries, investing in \$71.4 million by 2017.<sup>38</sup> In 2013 eligible persons received a benefit of \$604 per month, or \$7,248 per year.<sup>39</sup> Their disposable income met only 49% of their basic needs.<sup>40</sup> From 2014 to 2017, the Government of Québec will increase the benefit to at least \$654 per month, or \$7,848 per year, covering 52.5% of basic needs.<sup>41</sup> The benefit rate increased by \$20 per month on February 1, 2014.<sup>42</sup> The government plans to pay an additional \$10 per month as of January 2015, 2016, and 2017.<sup>43</sup> This investment is expected to benefit nearly 60,000 people.<sup>44</sup>

Québec's income support program granted up to \$710 a month for one adult and \$1,065 a month for two adults affected by collective dismissals.<sup>45</sup> The provincial government cancelled this support in July 2014,<sup>46</sup> along with the the return to work supplement.<sup>47</sup> Eligible applicants after July 2014 had 45 calendar days or before August 25, 2014 to demand their supplement.<sup>48</sup>

3. **HOUSING:** The Government of Québec has made significant cuts to accessible housing in the latest provincial budget.<sup>49</sup> Funding towards the *AccesLogis Québec* program, the only government program that supports the construction of social housing and community housing, has been cut by half.<sup>50</sup> This means the annual goal of developing 3,000 new social housing units has dropped to 1,500.<sup>51</sup> Cut funding has been reallocated to rent supplements for private market housing under the *Shelter Allowance Program*.<sup>52</sup>

The eligibility age for the *Shelter Allowance Program* has been lowered to allow more low-income Québeckers to receive aid under the program. In 2014 the eligibility age was reduced by one year to 51 and again in 2015 to 50.<sup>53</sup> Low-income families with at least one dependent child continue to be eligible. Notably, the maximum admissible income (\$16,480) and the monthly assistance granted for persons living alone (\$80) has remained unchanged since the creation of the program in 1997.<sup>54</sup>

4. **EDUCATION:** The Government of Québec plans to continue limiting tuition fees over the next four years to the annual indexation of 3% per year, according to changes in disposable household income per capita.<sup>55</sup> This annual indexation of tuition corresponds to what the government promised in the 2013 *Summit on Higher Education*. The government proposed a three-year spending plan, with program spending for the *Éducation* portfolio increasing 2.2% in 2014-2015, 1.9% in 2015-2016 and 2.2% in 2016-2017.<sup>56</sup>
5. **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE:** In October 2014 the daily parental contribution for childcare expenses increased to \$7.30 per day.<sup>57</sup> The provincial government has replaced its fixed cost daycare system with a fee program charging parents based

on their net family income.<sup>58</sup> For example, the \$7.30 rate applies to families with incomes under \$50,000.<sup>59</sup> Above \$50,000, the rate rises to \$8 per day.<sup>60</sup> For incomes between \$75 000 and \$155,000, the daily rate will gradually increase to \$20.00 per day.<sup>61</sup>

In efforts to reduce the budget deficit, the provincial government has stated that it will be raising the parental contribution “by a factor equivalent to the annual growth in the cost of childcare services.”<sup>62</sup> The government also announced that creation of new daycare spaces is on hold until current ones are maximized.<sup>63</sup> Instead of accelerating the speed at which these spaces are created as planned, the government will create the new spaces over a period of seven years.<sup>64</sup>

6. **HEALTHCARE:** In 2013 the government implemented a new progressive health contribution, significantly reducing the burden on low-income taxpayers: each person now contributes what they can.<sup>65</sup> Québec’s patient-based funding allocates resources based on the type and volume of care provided.<sup>66</sup>

The *Expert Panel for Patient-Based Funding* submitted a report titled *Pour que l’argent suive le patient*, recommending a comprehensive strategy with three priority areas in patient-based funding: access to surgery through a more integrated program; emphasis of care quality through funding based on recognized best practices in the health sector; and taking charge of patients with chronic illnesses through funding that facilitates service integration.<sup>67</sup> The Minister of Finance and the Economy welcomed these recommendations and announced that the government would be setting aside \$15 million to improve clinical and financial information.<sup>68</sup>

7. **EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT:** In May 2015 the provincial government increased minimum wage 20 cents to a general rate of \$10.55 an hour.<sup>69</sup> For workers not attending school, the average number of hours worked per week in 2012 was 31.3 for women and 35.4 for men.<sup>70</sup> Although the wage increase is a step in the right direction, many people are still unable to afford their basic necessities.<sup>71</sup>

According to *Emploi-Québec*, 53% of the 725,400 jobs available by 2017 will be filled by people under 25 not yet in the labour market.<sup>72</sup> The proportion of employed Québeckers aged 15 to 64 is expected to exceed the last recorded peak to 74.4% in 2017.<sup>73</sup>

The beginning of 2014 was a difficult period, with 29,600 jobs lost between January and April.<sup>74</sup> Since then Québec experienced a rebound and November 2014 brought a gain of 19,600 jobs, increasing the employment rate to 59.7%. As of June 2015, the unemployment rate is 8%.<sup>75</sup>

8. **COMMUNITY BUILDING/INVESTMENT:** In its action guideline, “*Solidarity: A Precious Asset for Québec*,” the provincial government announced measures to assist community organizations working to achieve solidarity.<sup>76</sup> The provincial government will increase funding to community organizations by \$54 million per year. Québec plans to invest \$162 million by 2017 to support community organizations.<sup>77</sup>

## Views from Outside the Québec Government

Over the past year, *Le Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté (Le Collectif)* has criticized the provincial government for its austerity measures. According to *Le Collectif*, the government is attempting to resolve its financial problems by taking from funds from the province’s poorest people.<sup>78</sup> *Le Collectif* also notes inconsistencies between the provincial government’s emphasis on employment and cuts to the return to work financial assistance supplement.<sup>79</sup>

*Le Collectif* cautions that austerity policies are taking from the poor and the middle class, reminding us that 10% of Québeckers cannot meet their basic needs, including welfare recipients.<sup>80</sup> An increasing number of people have no choice but to depend on last-resort financial assistance.<sup>81</sup> According to the *Comité consultatif de lutte contre la pauvreté et l’exclusion sociale (Comité)*, the proportion of people living alone receiving social assistance benefits has increased due to insufficient income.<sup>82</sup> Many of these people live in extreme poverty and must frequently choose between buying medicine and food.<sup>83</sup> The *Comité* urges the government to increase assistance to move individuals out of social exclusion.<sup>84</sup> *Le Collectif* claims that cost increases and cuts to public services (e.g. freezing public and parapublic sector staffing levels) and to social programs (e.g. reducing funds to the *Youth Alternative Program* and eliminating the return to work supplement) have undermined Québec’s social safety net.<sup>85</sup>

*Le Collectif* encourages the Québec government to consider increasing financial institution taxes; this would “get three times more money annually than all of the projected cuts to the Department of Employment and Social Solidarity for the year 2015-2016.”<sup>86</sup> Québec’s wealthiest quintile paid an average tax of 26% in 1997, decreasing to 22% in 2011.<sup>87</sup> The *Coalition Against User Fees and Privatization of Public Services* also proposes restoring capital tax for financial companies.<sup>88</sup> The *Coalition* criticizes the government for cutting funds from public services and social programs rather than increasing income through taxing those who can afford it.<sup>89</sup>

*Front d’action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU)* warns that rental units are much less affordable today than fifteen years ago.<sup>90</sup> *FRAPRU* notes that across Québec, the average rent for a two bedroom has increased 44.8%, from \$491 per month in 1999 to \$711 in 2014.<sup>91</sup> 479,750 Québec tenants paid more than 30% of their income on housing, 227,835 paid more than 50%, and 108,475 over 80%.<sup>92</sup>

## THE BOTTOM LINE

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There are no conclusive reports to demonstrate whether Québec has achieved its First Action Plan goal – “To progressively make Québec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty.” Although Québec has considerably reduced its poverty rate over the last decade, the reduction has slowed in recent years. Québec showed a lot of promise with its Second Action Plan and with its third pillar, *“Solidarity: A Precious Asset for Québec.”* With its goal of balancing the 2015-2016 budget, the provincial government has focused on controlled spending this year. Due to these budget cuts, it is difficult to predict whether the Second Action Plan will end as strongly as it started.

### For More Information

#### CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY

251 Bank Street, 2nd Floor

Ottawa, ON K2P 1X3

613-789-0096 (1-800-810-1076)

info@cwpcsp.ca

## ENDNOTES

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