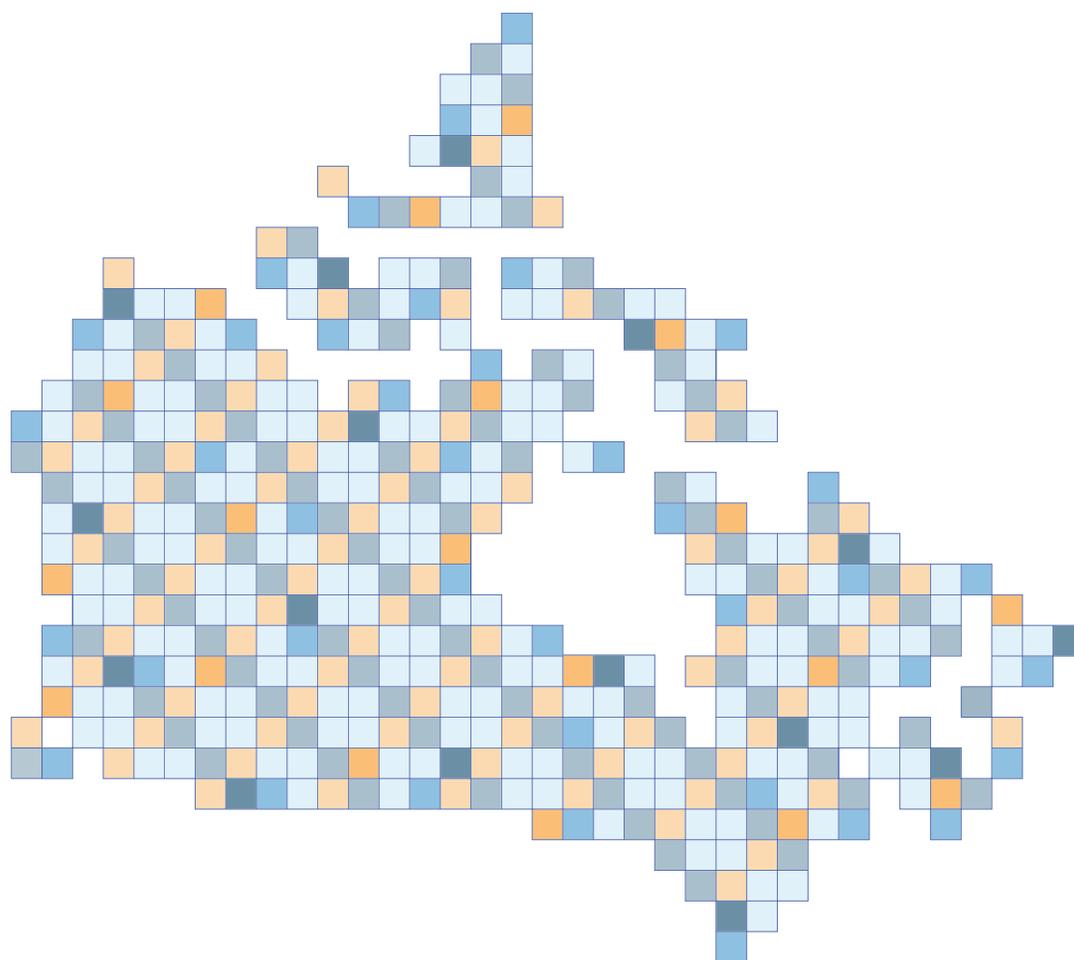
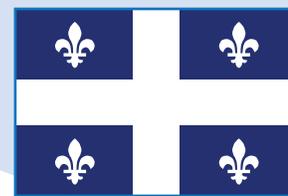


Québec Poverty Progress Profile



2016



CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

Poverty is a violation of human rights.

OVERVIEW

Québec implemented its first Poverty Action Plan, *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*, in 2004.¹ Québec's second Poverty Action Plan, the *Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010-2015: Québec's Combat against Poverty*, was implemented in 2010.² The second plan was specified to be valid through 2015. As of December 2016, the Government of Québec has not indicated plans for successive poverty strategies.

From 1999 to 2009, the overall poverty rate dropped 40% in Québec.³ At the same time, statistics indicate the number of welfare recipients in the province remained largely steady over the past several years.⁴ Although the number of economic families living in poverty dropped between 2012 and 2013 from 1,038,310 to 1,036,640, this rate rose steadily in 2014 to 1,065,490.⁵

Plan Components and Highlights

Québec intended to strengthen its solidarity and social safety net with the *Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010-2015*.⁷ With an emphasis on "efficiency, protection of the purchasing power of individuals, and renewed support for local and regional action", the overall objective of the Québec Action Plan is 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."⁸

The plan outlines four thrusts as guidelines for action. These areas include:

Thrust 1: Review our standard practices and make local and regional communities key players in the decision-making process;

Thrust 2: Acknowledge the value of work and foster the self-sufficiency of individuals;

Thrust 3: Foster the economic self-sufficiency of underprivileged individuals; and

Thrust 4: Improve the living conditions of low-income individuals and families.

Québec was the first government to legislate poverty reduction, unanimously adopting Bill 112: *An Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2002*.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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.¹²

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.¹³

The Act proposed measures to accomplish these goals through consistent action.¹⁴

Key Provisions

- Calls for the establishment of an advisory committee dedicated to combating and preventing poverty and social exclusion.¹⁵ The strategy is accompanied by a fund (Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales [FQIS]) to support social initiatives.¹⁶
- Consideration for specific needs, such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and regional discrepancies.¹⁷
- The government must report results in 2010 and every three years thereafter.¹⁸

Community Engagement in Plan Development and Implementation

According to the Government of Québec, the 2010 poverty strategy was drafted based on consultations with the community. In particular, the government points to a round of consultations in 2009, called *Rendez-vous de la solidarité*. This process involved a broad spectrum of members from the social sector including Indigenous groups, charitable organizations, unions, and others. The consultations took special consideration to include persons with lived experience of poverty. An online survey also accompanied the consultation process.¹⁹

MEASURING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

Statistical Indicators of Poverty (unofficial measurement tools)[†]

| | LICO Low-Income Cut-off After-tax ²⁰ | LIM Low-Income Measure After Tax ²¹ | MBM Market Basket Measure ²² *** | Food Bank Usage ²³ | Social Assistance** Recipients ²⁴ | Minimum Wage ²⁵ |
|----------------------|---|--|--|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| 2004 **** | 849,000, 11.5% | * | 673,000, 9.1% | 219,689, 3% | 345,683 | \$7.45 |
| 2005 | 870,000, 11.7% | 1,045,890 | 775,000, 10.4% | 178,368, 2.4% | 338,532 | \$7.60 |
| 2006 | 828,000, 11.1% | 1,057,520 | 740,000, 9.4% | * | 336,645 | \$7.75 |
| 2007 | 784,000, 10.4% | 1,073,710 | 629,000, 8.3% | 151,203, 2% | 332,459 | \$8.00 |
| 2008 | 828,000, 10.9% | 1,100,220 | 754,000, 9.9% | 127,536, 2% | 328,494 | \$8.50 |
| 2009 | 686,000, 8.9% | 1,097,920 | 735,000, 9.6% | 137,464, 1.8% | 335,070 | \$9.00 |
| 2010 ***** | 778,000, 10.0% | 1,080,060 | 787,000, 10.1% | 154,364, 2% | 332,692 | \$9.50 |
| 2011 | 745,000, 9.5% | 1,090,140 | 842,000, 10.7% | 156,279, 2% | 326,666 | \$9.65 |
| 2012 | 820,000, 10.4% | 1,038,310 | 939,000, 11.9% | 155,574, 1.9% | 320,502 | \$9.90 |
| 2013 | * | 1,036,640 | * | 156,750, 1.9% | 317,710 | \$10.15 |
| 2014 | * | 1,065,490 | * | 156,895, 1.9% | 320,128 | \$10.35 |
| 2015 | * | * | * | 163,152, 2.0% | 323,068 | \$10.55 |
| 2016 | * | * | * | 171,800, 2.1% | * | \$10.75 |

[†] The LICO, LIM and MBM rates in this chart should be compared vertically to understand trends in poverty from year-to-year. As there is no official low-income threshold, and data is calculated differently based on a variety of factors, these rates are not comparable horizontally.

* Data not available.

**"Social Assistance" refers to the total number of people assisted by all Social Assistance programs in the province.

***Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010-2015 uses the Market Basket Measure as its statistical indicator of poverty in the province.

**** Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future was released in 2004.

*****Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion 2010-2015 was released in 2010.

Progress to Date

The *Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion* (CEPE), a group responsible for assessing progress with the 2010 strategy, released a progress report in 2015. The report recommended the following nine success indicators and remarked on their progress:

Physical needs – measured by:

- Proportion of households often or sometimes afraid to run out of food for financial reasons. Trend: up slightly from 2007-08.
- Proportion of income spent on housing. Trend: stable compared to 2007.
- Proportion of households consider their housing inadequate according

to the National Occupancy Standard. Trend: up compared to 2003.

Health – measured by:

- Proportion of people suffering from permanent disability preventing them from working. Trend: stable compared to 2007-08.

Work and Employment – measured by:

- Proportion of long-term unemployed. Trend: up since 2008.
- Proportion of involuntary part-time workers. Trend: rising slightly since 2000.

Education – measured by:

- Proportion of the population ages 25 to 64 without a high school diploma. Trend: downward trend since 2000.
- Proportion of population with only level 1 literacy. Trend: no previous comparable measurement.

Personal and institutional resources – measured by:

- Proportion of people who do not have an acceptable emotional or informational support. Trend: stable compared with 2007-08.²⁶

Notes on Critical Thematic Areas

Human Rights: After much pressure from the highly organized provincial human rights movement, Québec recognized its international human rights obligations in its second Action Plan. The plan stated that “[t]he 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.”²⁷

The government has also funded the launch of public awareness campaigns to combat social prejudice and stigma suffered by those in poverty.²⁸ In October 2014, the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity launched the fifth edition of *Solidarity Week*,²⁹ an event that aims to raise awareness that all persons, regardless of their living conditions, can actively contribute to society.³⁰

Income and Employment Support: Acting on the recommendation of the CEPE,³¹ the government agreed to increase payments for single social assistance beneficiaries, investing \$71.4 million by 2017.³² 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.³³ The benefit rate increased by \$20 per month on February 1, 2014. The government announced that it would pay an additional \$10 per month as of January 2015, 2016, and 2017.³⁴ Since the announcement, benefits have increased in 2015 and 2016. This investment is expected to benefit nearly 60,000 people by 2017.³⁵

In May 2016, the provincial government increased minimum wage 20 cents to a general rate of \$10.75 an hour.³⁶ This amount is far below adequate to meet the actual cost of living for individuals in the province. In Montréal, for example, a

living wage for a single person has been estimated at \$15.68 per hour.³⁷ As of November 2016, the unemployment rate was 6.2%.³⁸

Housing: The Government of Québec has made significant cuts to accessible housing in the latest provincial budget.³⁹ Funding towards the AccèsLogis Québec program, the only government program that supports the construction of social housing and community housing, has been cut by half. This means the annual goal of developing 3,000 new social housing units has dropped to 1,500.⁴⁰ Funding has been reallocated to rent supplements for private market housing under the *Private Market Rent Supplement*.⁴¹

The *Rent Supplement Program* covers the additional fees of rent costs for the landlord and the household's contributions, which are 25% of the household income. Additionally, housing cooperatives and non-profit organizations have been allocated subsidized housing units.⁴²

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 50.⁴³ 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 1997.⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵

Early Childhood Education & Care: The provincial government has recently replaced its fixed cost daycare system with a fee program charging parents based on their net family income.⁴⁶ The lowest rate, \$7.30, still applies to families with incomes under \$50,000.⁴⁷

Previously, Québec had a system for providing childcare supplements to low-income families that was based on age of the child. The new Canada child benefit put an end to the earlier system and Québec promised that social assistance will be unaffected and that no "claw backs" will result.⁴⁸

Bill 99, an upcoming proposed law to change the criteria used to decide whether or not to remove Indigenous children from their homes, is expected to be tabled in late 2016. Indigenous children in Québec make up less than 3% of the child population but more than 15% of children in foster care. The bill recommends considering how removal from the home could affect an Indigenous child's cultural identity in an attempt to keep Indigenous children in their communities or similar environments.⁴⁹

Healthcare: In early 2016, the government announced the elimination of the health contribution. The result will be that by the end of 2017, 4.5 million individuals will be exempt from the contribution.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ Québec plans to invest \$162 million by 2017 to support community organizations.⁵²

The province and the City of Montréal renewed a \$9 million funding agreement to fight poverty in 2015, which funded 500 projects and assisted an estimated 350,000 people in the city.⁵³

Food insecurity: The most recent *Hunger Count* report reveals that more than 171,800 people a month accessed food banks in 2016 – a 5.3% increase from 2015.⁵⁴ A report from PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research found that in Québec 16% of children live in food insecure households – one of the lowest rates across the country.⁵⁵

Views from Outside the Québec Government

Le Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté (Le Collectif) has critiqued 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.⁵⁶ *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.⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸ Many of these people live in extreme poverty and must frequently choose between buying medicine and food.⁵⁹ The *Comité* urges the government to increase assistance to move individuals out of social exclusion.⁶⁰

The *Coalition Against User Fees and Privatization of Public Services* also proposes restoring capital tax for financial companies.⁶¹ The *Coalition* has voiced concern that the government has cut funds from public services and social programs rather than increasing income through taxing those who can afford it.⁶²

Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU) warns that rental units are much less affordable today than fifteen years ago.⁶³ *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 2014.⁶⁴ 479,750 Québec tenants paid more than 30% of their income on housing, 227,835 paid more than 50%, and 108,475 over 80%.⁶⁵

A coalition of provincial organizations representing retired workers has campaigned to draw awareness to the plight of retired individuals in Québec. The coalition points out that post-retirement poverty is a reality for many individuals, particularly women, and wants to see the retirement age cut down to 65 and eventually 60.⁶⁶

THE BOTTOM LINE

Québec has made significant progress through its poverty reduction strategies over the last decade, particularly through its use of human rights principles and provincial childcare strategy. However, concerns have been raised over the consolidation of the health services and social services departments, increasing rates of housing and food insecurity, and governmental budgetary priorities that do not benefit the most vulnerable. While both minimum wage and social assistance have increased, there is an absence of future plans for the Poverty Action Plan and an alarming percentage of the population still cannot afford the most basic necessities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



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