



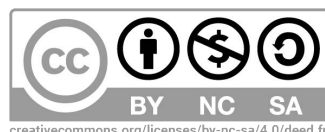
Coopérative de consultation
en développement

SUMMARY OF RECENT CHANGES TO QUÉBEC POVERTY REDUCTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT POLICIES

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Action Plan	Plan d'action gouvernemental en matière de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (<i>Governmental Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion</i>)
Bill 112	Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion
CLSC	centre local de services communautaires (<i>local community service centre</i>)
Collective	Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté (<i>Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec</i>)
Common Front.....	Front commun des personnes assistées sociaux (Common Front of Persons Receiving Welfare)
FDMT	Fonds de développement du marché du travail (<i>Labour Market Development Fund</i>)
FFQ	Fédération des femmes du Québec (<i>Québec Women's Federation</i>)
FQIS.....	Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (<i>Québec Social Initiatives Fund</i>)
FRAPRU	Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (<i>Popular Action Front on Urban Development: a social housing advocacy umbrella organisation</i>)
IDA	individual development accounts
MESSF	Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille (<i>Ministry of Employment, Social Solidarity and Family Welfare</i>)
MRCI	Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration (<i>Ministry of Relations with Citizens and Immigration</i>)
MSSS	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (<i>Ministry of Health and Social Services</i>)
RQCC.....	Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire (<i>Québec Community Credit Network</i>)
SHQ	Société d'habitation du Québec (<i>Québec Housing Authority</i>)

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This paper summarises measures related to a variety of social programs in Québec contained in two recent documents:

- 1) the 2004-2005 Budget tabled in the National Assembly on March 30th, 2004;
- 2) the Action Plan made public on April 2nd, 2004, by the Minister of Employment, Social Solidarity and Family Welfare.

Because the vast majority of the measures contained in the Budget that relate directly or indirectly to poverty reduction, welfare reform and support to families and children, are included in the Action Plan, this latter document is the focus of this report. All of the relevant Budget measures are nevertheless discussed in this report, including those that do not appear in the Action Plan.

A reminder that, in December 2002, Québec's National Assembly unanimously adopted Bill 112, an Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. This piece of enabling legislation basically defined general principles while obligating the government to table an action plan stating how it intends to attain the objectives described in the law. The tabling of the Action Plan was delayed because of the change in government brought about by the April 2003 election. However, shortly after the election, the MESSF Minister reiterated his government's commitment to implement the most urgent provisions of Bill 112 within a year: a) a baseline threshold; b) an indexing of benefits; c) free medication.

A few weeks later, the same minister unveiled a "new philosophy" within the MESSF, one centred on speedy support of new applicants without job constraints combined with a hard-line, coercive approach to individuals deemed able to work and receiving welfare benefits who refuse to follow training courses or accept a job. The Minister also foresaw saving \$188M by the reintegration into the labour market of 25,500 people receiving social assistance as well as an additional \$20M by a more rigorous application of penalties. None of these quantitative results was even remotely reached in the year since then and even the best new applicants still face a minimum six-week delay before meeting with an Emploi-Québec employment counsellor.

WELFARE REFORM

With the publication of the Action Plan in April 2004, the Minister has completed a stunning about-face, abandoning his targets and distancing the MESSF from the punitive workfare approach that he had previously announced and that predominates almost everywhere else in North America. Indeed, the first part of the Action Plan presents the Government of

Québec's vision of both its role and that of Québec society in providing assistance to those who are most needy and vulnerable. This vision focuses on respecting the dignity of the people concerned, responding to their needs and supporting their efforts to progressively integrate the labour market if they can or, if they cannot, to make some other form of active contribution to society. Overall, the Plan is replete with references to this vision as well as to additional principles that include incentives rather than penalising approaches. More specifically, measure 1.3 includes a clear statement to the effect that the principle of reciprocity (upon which welfare policy is based) will rest upon approaches that stimulate rather than punish. The provisions contained in the other parts of the Action Plan follow through on this vision but unfortunately only to a certain extent: while the provisions do not necessarily punish, it cannot be said that all of them are necessarily stimulating.

Another positive feature is the fact that some of the provisions take the form of refundable tax credits. This is an example of how public policy programme measures can be developed in ways that preserve beneficiaries' dignity and self-esteem. Indeed, a fiscal treatment removes a portion of the stigmatisation and guilt that often accompany more personalised forms of benefit delivery.

In the Action Plan (as well as in the Budget), the Government takes great pains to demonstrate how the measures speak to the issues contained in Bill 112, primarily articles 13 to 17, and even go beyond them with the Child Assistance provision and increased social housing. The Minister of Finance even states that the provisions included in his budget fulfill the commitments contained in Bill 112. This is a stretch, a course, but it provides an indication of the importance of having legislation as opposed to a simple programme. Indeed, it is quite doubtful that such an Action Plan would have been possible without Bill 112.

On June 11th, 2004, legislation (Bill 57) was tabled to enact many of the provisions contained in the Action Plan, most notably those concerning welfare reform and the provisions related to it. Like the Action Plan, it is complex and short on details: at least four specific programmes are identified but information regarding admissibility criteria and operations will only be provided in the future since none of the associated regulations were included. What is more worrisome, however, is that there is no mention of the new work benefit, the annual indexing of benefits, or the exemption for child support payments. Moreover, this new law will provide the Minister with considerably more arbitrary power and there is concern that some of the new provisions, such as the social participation allowance, will make the system even more complex. Their Collective is dismayed that the Ministry did not consult with it before tabling the proposed Bill since the Minister could have saved a lot of time by taking advantage of the "citizen expertise" possessed by the members of the Collective. A public consultation period is foreseen in the Fall and the deadline for submitting briefs is September 17th.

PROVISIONS OF THE WELFARE REFORM POLICY

OVERVIEW

The 47 measures included in the Action Plan are divided according to four strategic directions:

- 1) improving the welfare of individuals living in poverty;
- 2) preventing poverty and social exclusion;
- 3) facilitating the engagement of all of society;
- 4) ensuring a coherent and constant action.

These measures are summarised in a table at the end of this section along with comments by groups who have been advocating for progressive social policies in Québec. In the table, the measures are arranged according to the various objectives pursued by each strategy wherever applicable. Also included are the dates that the measures are set to come into effect and the amount of funds provided for each one in the current 2004-2005 fiscal year budget as well as for the next one, 2005-2006 (in brackets), in millions of dollars.

Generally speaking, the provisions in the Action Plan do improve the lot of many if not most families living in poverty, especially the working poor, but not that of welfare recipients deemed able to work. This latter portion of the population remains the poorest of the poor since their benefits remain at their current levels (\$533 per month for an individual, \$825 for a couple without children). On the other hand, low-income working families with dependent children will benefit significantly. In particular, those who can take advantage of three specific provisions — the increase in minimum wage, the work benefit and the child assistance measure — will see their situation improve considerably. For example, a couple earning minimum wage with two children will receive \$5,030 more a year (from \$21,760 to \$26,790). Moreover, increases in the number of affordable housing units might also enable them to find a less expensive place to stay.

The Budget estimates that the measures that it sets aside funds for will cost about \$2.5 billion over the next five years, and most of these will result in direct improvements to the financial situation of people living in poverty. Considering that the current Québec government is seen as right-wing, what is contained in the Budget (and subsequently brought forward in the Action Plan) can be considered to be both progressive and impressive.

On the other hand, when examined through the lens of the three most urgent needs mentioned by the Minister a year ago, the results are less exciting: a) the baseline welfare threshold is insufficient and also abysmally low for individuals deemed able to work; b) the indexing of benefits is partial since these same individuals' benefits will only rise half the

rate; c) no provision is made for free medication. Some of the provisions are also setbacks. For example, it will now be again possible for owners to seize a portion of welfare benefits for unpaid rents. The Common Front estimates that as many as 40,000 families could see their benefits reduced because of unpaid amounts due to the Government or unpaid rents. Moreover, the Collective denounces:

[...] the lack of specific targets for covering the basic needs of life and for escaping poverty, the deterioration of the revenues of the poorest, the insufficient protection of welfare benefits, the incoherence of banking on employment as an exit route from poverty without tackling the conditions affecting the working poor, including a minimum wage that would allow people to escape poverty, and without budgeting the necessary labour market measures [as well as] the failure to implement the monitoring mechanisms stipulated in the Act, and the plan's utter silence concerning citizen involvement.¹

Other serious omissions are seen by Alain Noël:

the new plan [...] is accompanied by budgetary cuts in the very services that are supposed to help the unemployed reintegrate into the labour market, and it offers no evaluation or development perspectives for the future. The plan also remains, more or less, a one-time affair, with no commitment to go further, and no mechanisms to engender such commitments along the way.²

The Collective's public comment on the Action Plan is entitled "Forward, Backward, Sideways..." and this somewhat sums up the equivocal nature of the Plan.

WORK INCENTIVE

A current programme, APPPORT, provides financial support to 29,500 low-income households in which at least one adult receives a salary or business income. It is supposed to be replaced on January 1st, 2005, by a refundable tax credit available to all workers regardless of family status or assets, although family status will have an effect on the amount of the benefit received. At present, no financial support is available for individuals or families without children who attempt to integrate the labour market. It is hoped that this measure will encourage low-income workers to integrate the labour market or to keep their jobs.

The new work benefit will gradually increase until earnings reach the maximum allowed for welfare benefits and steadily decrease thereafter until earnings ceilings are attained (\$14,810 for individuals and \$42,800 for a couple with young children). Some examples:

¹ Site visited on May 28th, 2004: http://www.pauvrete.qc.ca/article.php3?id_article=184.

² Noël, Alain (2004). *A Focus on Income Support: Implementing Quebec's Law Against Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Ottawa, Canadian Policy Research Networks, 13 pages [available at: <http://www.cprn.org/en/doc.cfm?doc=828>].

the work benefit will peak at \$504 for individuals earning \$9,643 a year, \$2,156 for single-parent families with revenues of \$14,818 (one child) or \$18,303 (two children), and \$2,760 for families consisting of two adults and two children and bringing in \$21,760. At these levels, the work benefit will correspond to a 5.2%, 14.5%, 11.8% or 12.7% increase in the respective individual or family incomes. It will be paid quarterly based on the previous year's estimated earnings.

It is estimated that 535,000 households (335,000 individuals; 200,000 families) will profit from this measure and that it will cost \$510M over five years.

The Collective sees a lot of merit in the work benefit. This measure de-stigmatises financial assistance to low-income workers by creating universal programme based on a standard fiscal credit seen as an entitlement for all who are eligible without subjecting anyone to a means test. It eliminates the welfare plateau after which each dollar earned is deducted from benefits received and allows those receiving welfare benefits to retain a small portion of additional revenues. Indeed, every dollar earned, even for someone receiving welfare benefits, will enhance his or her financial situation. To an extent, it begins to rectify the fiscal disparity between the basic welfare benefit and the exemption from taxation threshold.

On the other hand, this measure could result in more precarious employment since it can be seen as encouraging employers to keep offering low quality jobs. In order not to foster cheap labour, the work benefit must be accompanied by measures that will hold employers accountable for providing working conditions that help people escape poverty.

CHANGES TO THE CHILD BENEFIT

The new Child Assistance measure will be available to all families with children under 18 as of January 2005. It will provide up to \$2,000 a year for one child, \$3,000 for two, \$4,000 for three, and will increase by \$1,500 for every additional child.

This new benefit is a reimbursable tax credit that replaces three existing programmes: family allowance, the non-reimbursable tax credit for dependent children and the income tax reduction for families. The impact of the measure will therefore vary from family to family according to status (single parent, couple), income and number of children. For example, a minimum wage family (annual earnings of \$24,040) with one child will receive an additional \$625 a year whereas one with two children will get \$1,750. The Child Assistance will be paid quarterly and the first cheques are due to be issued in January 2005. A total of \$1.074 billion was allocated in the budget for this measure over the next five years.

The Collective believes that this measure does a good job in harmonising a number of measures targeting families. It approves of the progressive and universal nature of the

provision and believes that it will really help low-income families. The fact that it is a reimbursable tax credit makes it also very interesting.

This measure is consistent with Québec's Family Policy, in force since 1996, but the message to a parent of a child between 2 and 5 is "Go to work!" given that the work benefit and this measure provide enough money to pay for childcare. Parents who would prefer to stay at home have to wait until a final agreement is reached with the Federal government on the transfer of funds allowing the Quebec government to develop its parental leave programme.

SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Budget allocates \$329M to address housing issues in three distinct provisions. First, it includes a commitment to build 16,000 units of social and affordable housing over three years beginning immediately (256M\$), 3,000 more than had been previously promised in the November 2001 Budget. The Action Plan uses this commitment to bring forward the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 programmes to speed up construction, and it indicates that an undetermined portion of these will be available for the elderly, the disabled and victims of violence. These units are to be built throughout Québec but \$30M has been earmarked for projects in resource (outlying) regions depending on the vacancy rates in the different municipalities. It is foreseen that a minimum of 6,459 of these social housing units will be produced by municipal authorities, housing co-operatives or non-profits (depending on the project and local available resources). Some of the remaining units are to be produced by these same organisations through the "social" component of the SHQ's affordable housing programme while others will be built by private promoters through the "private" component of this programme, but it isn't known how many units will be reserved for each component.

There is also \$34M allocated for rent supplements over the next three years: no amounts are foreseen for 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, but it isn't clear why. Current programmes enable low-income individuals and families to receive subsidies that reduce the rent payments to 25% of their annual income. It is foreseen that this measure will assist 5,276 households. This measure does not replace the emergency programme already in place to support low-income households who, because of a lack of adequate affordable housing, find themselves without shelter on July 1st, 2004.

Finally, \$39M has been reserved for adapting the homes of 6,010 individuals with disabilities over the next four years, including the inspection and replacement of 3,460 wheelchair lifts. This corresponds to an increase of 2,550 households over existing programmes.

1. IMPROVING THE WELFARE OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN POVERTY

● **Increases to welfare benefits in light of the commitments contained in Bill 112**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
1.1	Annual adjustment of welfare benefits for the next five years at the rate used to index personal income taxes	January, 2005	7 (35)	Unacceptable. It discriminates against childless, able to work individuals without employment earnings, whose benefits will only rise by half of the rate. Their annual income will only improve by \$36 in 2005, with their monthly benefit going from \$533 to \$536, triggering a further loss of purchasing power.
1.2	Easing of welfare accounting rules related to assets to encourage the purchase of a house, training, becoming self-employed or starting a development project	not stated	0 (2)	None found. This measure along with #1.5 paves the way for IDA programmes.
1.3	Guarantee the amount of welfare benefits that a person is entitled to [benefits will be maintained at their current (April 2004) level without any further reduction except in cases of fraud or debt reimbursement]	January, 2005	0 (10)	An important “philosophical” gain. Not really a threshold since reductions are still possible and since single, able to work individuals will continue to be penalised with current low benefits. A socially acceptable level for the minimum amounts of benefits would be that available for persons with severe work constraints.

1. IMPROVING THE WELFARE OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN POVERTY (CONTINUED)

● **Increases to welfare benefits in light of the commitments contained in Bill 112 (continued)**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
1.4	Partial exemption for families with at least one child (five years old or less) of up to \$100 a month for child support payments received from a former spouse, plus a committee to review how such revenues should be treated in all of the Québec Government's programmes	January, 2006	0 (4)	A partial instead of a full exemption is simply unacceptable.
1.5	Provide financing to the Québec Community Credit Network	April, 2004	1 (1)	None found. This measure provides an additional resource to support self-employment initiatives and, in some cases, IDA's.

● **Improve the situation of low-income workers: combat poverty by enhancing work**

1.6	Annually review the minimum wage rate (to increase from \$7.30 to \$7.45 on May 1 st , 2004, and to 7.60\$ on May 1 st , 2005)	May, 2004	0 (0)	Nothing new and not enough: the new minimum wage does not allow people to escape poverty.
1.7	Increase support to low-income workers by the development of a new work premium [Work Benefit Programme]	January, 2005	10 (68)	A lot of merit but still a selective improvement that will be undercut by losses of services and rate hikes.

1. IMPROVING THE WELFARE OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN POVERTY (CONTINUED)

● **Increase employment assistance: better support to individuals trying to enter the job market**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
1.8	A participation benefit: increase the minimum allowance provided to persons receiving welfare benefits who take part in various "active" programmes	January, 2005	2 (6)	The measure just reinstates the 1996 allowance, then \$150. The current amount is \$130. About 166,000 people could be eligible but only 17,000 spaces are available at present.
1.9	Encourage a quick start for new welfare benefit applicants (without severe work constraints)	in force	0 (0)	Incoherent, since funding for Emploi-Québec has been chopped and more cuts are foreseen.
1.10	Increase participation and access to employment support measures for groups more severely touched by poverty [families with young children, workers over 55, individuals with important employment limitations]	not known	0 (0)	No funds available at present. This measure identifies FDMT priorities to be financed by eventual new Federal funding or transfers.
1.11	Better support for the socio-professional integration of immigrants and visible minorities	not known	0 (0)	Incoherent, since the MRCI has seen its budget reduced. This is another measure conditional upon receiving Federal funding.

1. IMPROVING THE WELFARE OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN POVERTY (CONTINUED)

● **A specific scheme for individuals with important employment limitations**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
1.12	Establish a specific scheme of financial assistance for individuals with important employment limitations	not known	0 (0)	No budget and very unclear. Is this a call for two distinct welfare programmes based on the capacity to enter the labour market?

● **Support access to adequate affordable housing**

1.13	Increase the number of social and affordable housing units and accelerate their completion	April, 2004	75 (91)	Reactions have been positive but unenthusiastic. Generally meets the minimum requirements put forward by social groups but is not sufficient to meet all current needs (21,000 units).
1.14	Grant rent supplements to 5,276 households in order to mitigate the impact of the housing shortage	April, 2004	13 (14)	This helps a bit but doesn't solve the current housing crisis.
1.15	Adapt the housing of more than 6,000 persons with disabilities	April, 2004	17 (7)	No comments found.
1.16	Adopt an integrated management framework to provide community-based assistance for social housing	not known	0 (0)	Not in the budget. This seems to be the mandate of an existing joint MSSS-SHQ committee.

1. IMPROVING THE WELFARE OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN POVERTY (CONTINUED)

● **Support access to adequate affordable housing (continued)**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
1.17	Encourage the development of community-based housing initiatives (including funding for projects to help tenants of public low-income housing to take charge of their milieu)	not known	0 (0)	Not in the budget. It is not clear what this measure or the two following ones add to what is being done at present.
1.18	Increase services for present or potential homeless individuals	not known	0 (0)	Not in the budget.
1.19	Rely on the contribution of community organisations (notably those offering budget counselling services to tenants incapable of paying their rent)	not known	0 (0)	Not in the budget.

● **Access, without sacrificing dignity, to a sufficient and nutritious supply of food**

1.20	Continue to support the development of food security projects in local communities and underprivileged neighbourhoods	not known	0 (0)	Not in the budget. Very vague and it isn't clear what the objective is.
1.21	Continue to support the development of temporary food assistance projects, notably those for children	not known	0 (0)	Problem won't be solved by targeting children but rather by supporting their parents. Food autonomy is the goal.

1. IMPROVING THE WELFARE OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN POVERTY (CONTINUED)

● **Access to medication: solutions to come within a medication policy**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
1.22	Increase access to medication for low-income individuals	not known	0 (0)	Unacceptable because it is pushed back to 2005 and subject to debates around a future medication policy. Re-establishing free medication for welfare recipients is an urgent and inexpensive necessity.

2. PREVENTING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

● **Take action to ensure greater equality of opportunity for children and their families**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
2.1	Establish a Child Assistance measure particularly supporting low-income families	January, 2005	112 (359)	A rather exemplary transformation of families' taxation schemes into a universal system of family subsidies, with a sizeable portion assigned to low-income families. The idea of a refundable tax credit is commendable.

2. PREVENTING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION (CONTINUED)

• **Take action to ensure greater equality of opportunity for children and their families (continued)**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
2.2	Encourage the development of children from underprivileged settings by facilitating their access to quality educational childcare services	not known	0 (0)	Nothing new. Merely a reminder of the Government's promise to create 200,000 new childcare spaces by March 2006, and to reserve a portion of these for underprivileged children.
2.3	Offer integrated pre-school and early care services for vulnerable families	not known	0 (0)	Again, nothing new. Already called for in the 2003-2012 National Public Health Programme and in the MSSS's strategic plan for youth at risk and their families.
2.4	Support innovation and the integration of prevention activities targeting young children (ages 0-6) and their family	not known	0 (0)	This is a partnership being negotiated between the Québec government and the Fondation Chagnon. First announced in the 2003-2004 Budget, with each partner slated to put in \$5M.
2.5	Test the <i>Famille, école et communauté : ensemble pour la réussite scolaire</i> programme	began in 2003	0 (0)	None found. Refers to a five-year, multi-sector pilot programme involving 23 schools and 11 school boards to encourage scholastic success of 2 to 12 year-old underprivileged children.

2. PREVENTING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION (CONTINUED)

• **Take action to ensure greater equality of opportunity for children and their families (continued)**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
2.6	Implement the <i>Programme d'aide à l'éveil à la lecture et à l'écriture</i> in underprivileged communities	2004 school year	0 (0)	None found. This is an inter-departmental programme to spark reading and writing among underprivileged children less than six years old.
2.7	Support the school network in the development of homework assistance programmes	not known	0 (0)	Besides parents and teachers, these programmes call upon a host of other resources: school childcare agencies, interns, volunteers, retirees, students. Is this just another way for the State to save money, for parents to shirk their responsibilities, or can it be a true networking of knowledge?
2.8	Support the development of high school mentoring programmes to encourage academic success	not known	0 (0)	None found.
2.9	Ensure the academic qualification of adolescents coming from State-operated youth centres	not known	0 (0)	None found. This refers to a four-year pilot programme involving 4 youth centres to ensure access to financial resources for higher education.

2. PREVENTING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION (CONTINUED)

• **Take action to ensure greater equality of opportunity for children and their families (continued)**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
2.10	Provide services to use in great difficulty in all communities served by CLSC's	not known	0 (0)	None found. Services are to be provided by a special task force in each CLSC. This will begin with the setting-up of 19 task forces, one in each of Québec's administrative regions.
2.11	Adapt training and accompaniment services to the needs of school dropouts and other youth between the ages of 16 and 24 with little academic qualifications	2004 school year	0 (0)	None found. A total of 70 multi-sector agreements to be developed over three years.
2.12	Encourage the acquisition of a first diploma by favouring mediation between work and studies	not known	0 (0)	None found. This refers to one-year pilot projects to be developed in an undetermined number of regions plagued by the exodus of youth or in sectors having trouble recruiting qualified workers.
2.13	Offer an alternative to welfare to you is under 25 and able to work [such as some form of work/study remuneration]	not known	0 (0)	MESSF staff explains that this programme will be strictly voluntary. To be followed. Where's the budget?

2. PREVENTING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION (CONTINUED)

● **A continuum of services favouring youth**

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
2.14	Develop an interdepartmental agreement on youth development	not known	0 (0)	This measure and the next one are too vague.
2.15	Develop an interdepartmental services agreement for under-educated or unemployed youth aged 16 to 24	not known	0 (0)	See # 2.14.

● **Combat the social exclusion of the elderly**

2.16	Support community-based initiatives that encourage the social participation of low-income elderly individuals	not known	0 (0)	None found.
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3. FACILITATING THE ENGAGEMENT OF ALL OF SOCIETY

3.1	Invest in local initiatives through the Québec Social Initiatives Fund [16M\$ in 2004-2005]	not known	0 (0)	Not new: \$16M is the balance of the current Fund to Fight Poverty and no additional amounts in the Budget. Will be managed with "big" players (Federal government, municipalities and foundations) without local input.
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3. FACILITATING THE ENGAGEMENT OF ALL OF SOCIETY (CONTINUED)

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
3.2	Prioritise sectors and areas for intervention and then support action at the regional level	not known	0 (0)	Depends on how the current reflection on regional development bodies ensues.
3.3	Support the development of local strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion in prioritised areas	not known	0 (0)	To be accomplished somehow through the FISQ in accordance with Bill 112. Nothing precise at present.
3.4	See that the ministries and agencies involved determine, in agreement with the regions and municipalities, the resources required in the prioritised areas and identify expected results	not known	0 (0)	No details as to how this is to be accomplished.
3.5	Fight against prejudice related to people living in poverty	not known	0 (0)	Even though it is imprecise and insufficient, the idea of mounting a campaign to promote things that people living in parity are actually doing, is very interesting. Unfortunately, the Action Plan itself maintains a number of preconceived ideas in some of its measures.

4. ENSURING COHERENT AND CONSTANT ACTION

#	MEASURE	DATE	\$M	COMMENTS
4.1	Evaluate the impact of proposed legislation or regulations on the revenues of people living in poverty	not known	0 (0)	Insufficient. Repetition of Bill 112's articles 19 and 20. The Collective insists upon the fulfilment of the bill's impact clause.
4.2	Ensure efficient and co-ordinated interdepartmental direction	not known	0 (0)	The setting up of a steering committee is insufficient. Bill 112, with its requirements for an advisory committee and an observatory, goes much further.
4.3	Intensify exchanges with the Government of Canada with the intention of obtaining Employment Insurance funds for parental leaves as well as participation in international forums	not known	0 (0)	None found.
4.4	Intensify dialogue with First Nations and support the advent of locales strategies in aboriginal communities and reserves		0 (0)	Reworking of Bill 112's article 12.5.

OTHER MEASURES INCLUDED IN THE BUDGET BUT NOT IN THE ACTION PLAN

FISCAL MEASURES

The current programme providing parents of a disabled child with a support benefit will be transformed into a refundable tax credit.

Provincial sales tax is abolished on diapers and nursing accessories. The Collective considers this to be an inexpensive marketing ploy but nevertheless useful for low-income families with babies and toddlers.

The income tax credit for childcare expenses will be paid by cheque in advance four times a year. This tax credit is for parents who have not been able to find affordable (subsidised) childcare allowing them to work or to pursue studies.

A non-reimbursable tax credit of \$1,115 is introduced for individuals living alone and single parents.

NON-FISCAL MEASURES

Beginning May 1st, 2004, anyone who receives a cheque from the Government of Québec in the amount of \$1,500 or less will be able to cash it without charge at any one of the eight most important financial institutions in the province. This amount covers almost all welfare benefit cheques as well as the refundable tax credits to come. The Collective was quite pleased with this measure, since it should not only make it easier for persons to cash their cheques but also, it might make it easier for low-income individuals and families to open an account at a financial institution.