

Conseil du statut
de la femme

For a New Social
Contract of **Equality**
Between Women and Men

Summary

Québec 



Conseil du statut
de la femme

For a New Social
Contract of **Equality**
Between Women and Men

Summary



Introduction	3
Equality: Realizing the Ideal	5
Québec, A Leader in Equality	5
Great Strides by Women in Québec	6
Persistent Inequalities and Obstacles	7
Proposed Strategie	9
Three Approaches to Realize the Ideal of Equality	9
Recommended Government Policy Focuses and Areas of Intervention	11
1st Policy Focus: Promote the transformation of social roles by fighting female and male stereotypes and promoting equalitarian values and conduct	11
2nd Policy Focus: Promote economic equality between women and men and correct persistent inequalities in an open, globalized economy	14
3rd Policy Focus: Promote recognition of parenting and the support of dependents and develop conditions conducive to better organization of social time	16
4th Policy Focus: Improve health and welfare by adapting services to the differences between women and men	18
5th Policy Focus: Eliminate all gender-based violence or violation of dignity or integrity	20
6th Policy Focus: Support full gender equality in the exercise of power and social participation at the Québec-wide, regional, and local levels	22
7th Policy Focus: Ensure gender equality is firmly entrenched in government	24
Conclusion	27

As the policy *Sharing a future* on the status of women finished running its course, the Minister responsible for the Act respecting the Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF) law and for the Secrétariat à la condition féminine, Ms Michelle Courchesne, gave CSF a dual mandate in February 2004: to define the concept of equality as broadly as possible, and from the definition to recommend policy focuses and areas of intervention for a government policy promoting stronger alliances with all parts of Québec society.

The brief *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men* is the result. It presents an overview of progress in Québec in the last thirty years, reports on persistent inequalities, and proposes a government strategy built on three levers to promote true equality between women and men. It identifies the main building blocks for a government policy aimed at furthering this democratic ideal.

Essentially, the brief recommends that the state make the fight against sexist stereotypes a priority, promote maximum economic independence for individuals, support the role of parents and family caregivers, promote and enhance health and welfare in a way that is mindful of the different needs of women and men, eliminate all gender-related violence, and foster equal participation between women and men in the various spheres of influence and at all decision-making levels.

Lastly, since the state plays a pivotal role in the pursuit of gender equality, it must draw on the powers and resources available to it to make this value the basis of a new social contract calling all of Québec society to action.





Realizing the ideal of equality between women and men entails remedying gender-based inequalities and eliminating all related discrimination. This ideal is one of equal rights, responsibilities, and possibilities. It requires freeing society of social hierarchies between men and women and discarding sex as a marker of social roles.

In Québec, of course, women have equal rights, but there remains work to be done to achieve actual equality. Gender inequality impedes personal, national, and societal growth, whereas equality is a powerful engine of development that benefits all of society.

Québec A Leader in Equality

Around the world and in Canada, Québec is recognized a leader in promoting equality between women and men. It has declared itself bound by a number of international human rights conventions, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the main conventions of the International Labor Organization. Its commitment to equality translates into positive action through a multitude of legislative and other measures.

Québec has every reason to be proud of the advances made with the help of a dynamic and diverse women's movement active throughout Québec in communities, unions, universities, the government, and politics.

Many states today, in response to the program of action drawn up at the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), are committing to taking more structured action to foster equality. Québec must therefore continue to show initiative and leadership to embody the ideal of equality as much as possible in everyday life, based on a new social contract shared with all the actors of society as well as individuals on a personal level.

“Every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms without distinction, exclusion, or preference based on [...] sex...” Section 10

Source: *Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, Government of Québec, 1975



Great Strides by Women in Québec

With the adoption of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms in 1975, sex-based discrimination was officially outlawed in Québec. Ever since, efforts have been stepped up to remedy differing treatment before the law, and concrete action has been taken to achieve greater equality in real life. These initiatives have changed the lives of women in Québec, sometimes dramatically, particularly in terms of their economic circumstances, control over their reproductive health, marital rights, parental rights, daycare services, and the acknowledgement and prevention of violence against women. Statistics show the dramatic changes in the lives of women in Québec over the last decade.

Education: Women have gained remarkable ground, as illustrated by comparative statistics on diplomas among two generations of Québec women—the 25 to 34 age group in 2001 and the same age group in 1971, who were 55 to 64 in 2001. Of the younger group, 30.8% held a university certificate, diploma, or degree in 2001, and 24.1% a college certificate or diploma. For the older group, the figures were only 14.9% and 9.4% respectively.

Employment: In 2001, 57.7% of Québec women aged 15 and over were part of the labor force, versus 33.9% in 1971. Mothers are more present on the job market. In 2002, 73.3% of women aged 20 to 44 whose youngest child was under 6 years old were part of the labor force, compared to only 30.3% in 1976.

Employment income: On average, women earned 69.1% of the income earned by men in 2001 (versus 52.3% in 1971). Counting only women and men who worked full time for the entire year, the figure was 77.9% (versus 58.9% in 1971).

Halls of power: In 2004 in the National Assembly of Québec, 32% of elected representatives and 32% of ministers were women, compared to 0.9% and 4.3% in 1970 when there was only one woman who was both a member and minister. In the House of Commons, women accounted for 25.3% of elected officials from Québec in 2003, compared to only 4% in 1972. In February 2003, women held 10.9% of mayoralties and 24.1% of municipal council positions. In 1980, the 21 female mayors accounted for only 1.5% of mayors, and the 339 municipal councilors 3.8% of the total number. Women made sizable gains in the senior civil service between 1994 and 2003, with the proportion of female deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers rising from 11.8% to 25%, and agency presidents from 13.5% to 34.1%. (source: Secrétariat aux emplois supérieurs)



Persistent Inequalities and Obstacles

Despite undeniable progress, women in Québec still face inequalities and obstacles. Discrimination against women is often magnified by other forms of discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, native status, religion, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, age, or social condition.

A number of factors are to blame for the persistent disparities. One of the foremost is the enduring impact of **maternity and family responsibilities**. Although fathers are now somewhat more involved at home than they were in the past, women's financial independence is weakened when a child is born—even that of the most educated women. This disadvantage continues for the rest of their lives, since a temporary or partial withdrawal from the job market has an impact that continues until retirement. They contribute less to public or private retirement plans and are not able to save as much as men or childless women.

Maternity also holds women back in their careers due to the lack of means for **reconciling work and family** and the unequal sharing of family and domestic tasks between spouses. In addition, women often have to care for a sick or dependent family member or **elderly parents**, which has the same limiting effects.

From an **economic standpoint**, the gender gap is still wide. Women are less active on the job market than men, and those who are employed are more likely to work part time. Women who work full time still earn less than men. The income disparity between full time workers is generally caused by a number of factors, such as the length of the work week, choice of profession and sector, and amount of experience. However, most studies show that a portion of this divide is still unexplained and may be due to discrimination.

Men and women are still concentrated in different trades and sectors on the job market, despite efforts to put an end to job ghettos and influence the academic choices of girls and boys. Some young women are now choosing professions that were once dominated by men—medicine, management, law—but in general, they still hesitate to go into nontraditional trades, or careers in computers or applied sciences, where job opportunities are often excellent. It still appears hard for women to make a place for themselves in traditionally male fields. Men, too, are rarely inclined to enter traditionally female jobs (secretarial work, primary education, nursing, etc.).



“The existing divisions of labour, of power and of responsibilities according to gender are not only harmful to women in particular and—less obviously—to men as well; they are also patently dysfunctional for the complex world of the next millennium.

Redressing discrimination against women is not the problem, it is a vital element of the solution. The achievement of equality will enrich society as a whole.”

Source: Council of Europe, *Promoting gender equality: a common issue for women and men*, Compilation of texts prepared by the Directorate General of Human Rights, pp. 31–32, excerpt of the Final Report of Activities of the Group of specialists on future priorities, strategies and working methods in the field of equality between women and men, Part 1, “Guiding vision for a future that has overcome gender inequality,” Strasbourg, 2002.

Violence against women in all its forms (physical assault, incest, sexual assault, elder abuse, prostitution, trafficking, homicide, etc.) is a social evil with exponential repercussions on its victims. Studies are drawing more and more connections between conjugal violence, social and economic inequality, and gender domination. Male stereotypes also play a role in violence. This phenomenon also affects all men, in that while most are not violent, they can be considered potentially violent in some circumstances simply because of their sex (nights, dark or deserted areas, parking lots, etc.).

As for **participation in the halls of power**, whether the National Assembly, the House of Commons, municipal politics, government, or business, women have made considerable progress. However, advances have not been consistent in all sectors, and progress remains to be made to achieve parity.

In the face of these persistent inequalities and obstacles, along with emerging economic and social realities, it is time to move into a new phase to give positive form to the values of gender equality and women’s rights that Quebecers share.

In these times of great economic and demographic challenge in Québec, every effort must be made to help women and men achieve their full potential and take full part in the development of Québec.

Three Approaches to Realize the Ideal of Equality

The proposed plan builds on and broadens past actions to promote equality. It reframes the social contract for equality through a new strategy rooted in three interrelated, complementary levers of intervention.

1st lever: A specific approach to redress or prevent inequalities against women. The approach entails documenting the inequalities that women suffer and designing effective means to overcome them.

Still necessary today, this first lever is the best known and most used to date. It is founded on targeted initiatives to promote women's rights. A number of governmental initiatives are good examples: the Pay Equity Act, the policy on conjugal violence, mobilizing projects on the prevention of early pregnancy and support of adolescent mothers, female entrepreneurship, support for women in science and technology, the *Chapeau, les filles!* contest to diversify young women's career choices, and the program *Decision-making, A matter of equality*, which promotes women's participation in the political sphere.

2nd lever: A cross-sector approach by which gender equality is made an integral part of government procedures and decision-making processes. The government must ensure that its laws, policies, programs, and public services as a whole, and particularly the most visible ones, enhance gender equality, or do not infringe on it. This approach is known as gender mainstreaming (GM), or gender-based analysis (GBA) in Québec, upon which nine projects have been developed in seven departments since 1997.

This tool is used to detect the discriminatory effects of government decisions and actions on women and men. The objective is to closely consider all steps of policy development and enforcement to avoid reproducing the sexist biases that may exist in social institutions or former policies.

3rd lever: A societal approach that makes gender equality a common societal concern by rallying the support of various stakeholders and bringing more men into the efforts. The government cannot create equality all on its own. This approach more directly targets the social relations between women and men and provides for more comprehensive action in institutions.

The societal approach entails partnerships with the organizations to which the state has transferred powers, such as regional conferences of elected officials, school boards, and municipalities,



to involve them more directly in the pursuit of equality. It also requires that other partners—particularly community groups, unions, and social researchers—continue to share this objective.

In addition to organizations, men and boys must also be involved. Research and experiments illustrate the important role they play in building equality between the sexes. For example, Sweden's governments have been supporting the paternal role since 1974, notably through parental leave for fathers and training projects. International organizations work with men and boys in cooperative projects on issues such as sharing family and domestic responsibilities, sexual and reproductive hygiene, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Closer to home, initiatives like the White Ribbon Campaign in Ontario bring men and boys together to fight violence against women.

To accelerate progress toward real equality, the state must support and encourage men to take responsibility for and join the pursuit of equality. The government must take the action required to foster and encourage this commitment.

Government Policy Focuses and Areas of Intervention

In order to correct inequality between the sexes and eliminate all gender-based discrimination, seven policy focuses are recommended, along with areas of intervention. Based on a long term vision, these recommendations require commitment by the government and partnerships with all stakeholders in society.

They take persistent obstacles to gender equality into account, as well as the political and social context of economic globalization, demographics, and changes in governance that raise new issues in society.

1st Policy Focus

Promote the transformation of social roles by fighting female and male stereotypes and promoting equalitarian values and conduct

With today's return to very distinct social roles, fighting stereotypes by advocating values and behavior of equality is essential. This should be the cornerstone of government action, treated as aggressively as in the 1970s and 1980s, and made a priority for all of society.

As custodian of the values in Québec and the one responsible for putting them into action, the state plays a leading role in transforming social roles. As such, it would be useful to **document sexual stereotypes and effective strategies to counteract them in its fields of jurisdiction**. A number of issues should be examined in greater depth, such as gender role construction; stereotype socialization; the impact of culture, the media, recreation, and sports on stereotype reproduction and propagation; academic success and the diversification of educational choices; the desegregation of the job market and occupational training; and the impact of stereotypes on health.

Over the last four decades, girls and women have gradually broken free of the shackles of sexism and now have access to a wide range of social and professional possibilities, particularly in Québec. However, the process is far from complete. The models women follow tend to emphasize subjectivity, relationships, and intimacy, and while these are positive qualities, their pursuit often reduces economic, social, and political participation. In the male paradigm, assertiveness and



domination of space and resources are often the focus, and while positive, too, can deprive men of the rewards of a stronger investment in the private sphere and leave behind those who do not or will not conform to the profile.

Area 2

Since social roles are formed in childhood, the government must **support gender equality in parenting**. Programs, workshops, and regional support initiatives fostering fathers' participation could encourage parents, teachers, and professionals to reconsider stereotypes and think of means of promoting equality between women and men.

Area 3

Working in partnership with daycares and schools is essential to eliminating sexist stereotypes and promoting progress toward equality between the sexes. Particular emphasis must be placed on eliminating all stereotypes about male and female roles in educational programs, as well as among teachers and guidance counselors, to promote equality and respect for differences. Information about education and occupations must directly reflect a concern for diversified career and life choices, both for girls and boys.

Area 4

Cultural, sports, and recreational spheres and the media should be urged to consider their role in propagating sexual and sexist stereotypes and promoting egalitarian values. The media has a decisive impact on the spread of stereotypes and the development of sexual identity. Videos and magazines still portray women as submissive and passive. Men are also debased through images that reinforce the perception of men as domineering. As a counterweight, some media depict domineering women and foolish-looking men, which undermines egalitarianism to the same extent.

Sports reflect the gender divisions in society. Women's physical activities are more for aesthetics or fun (e.g., aerobic dancing, workouts, stretching, aquafitness, etc.) and are often carried out in structures and places other than those for athletics. Sports requiring physical strength, activities taking place outdoors, and disciplines requiring technical, scientific, or technological skill or know-how are considered male domains. The same logic applies as in business, management, and politics: the higher in the hierarchy, the fewer the women.

Area 5

An interesting course of action is to support initiatives **promoting more egalitarian relationships and helping young people learn to be more discerning with regard to sexuality and personal relationships**. With triple-X images more readily available than ever before,



young people have an increasingly genital and mechanical image of sexuality that leaves little room for the relationship aspect. It is therefore essential that sex education be appropriately emphasized in youth clinics and school programs, beginning in the primary years. It must be structured to help young people develop a critical sense regarding the sexual models presented to them (with a particular focus on getting young men to take responsibility for safe practices and contraception) and should take intercultural contexts into account as required.

To make the gender equality ideal a reality, **support must continue for groups working to advance equality**, such as women's groups and those promoting gender equality and women's rights in an intercultural context. Resources must be allocated to men's groups that encourage a rethinking of the male identity and the definition and adoption of new behaviors, attitudes, or male roles to help build an egalitarian society.

Area 6

“Aware that a change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women, States Parties shall take all appropriate measures: to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women; to ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children.” (Article 5)

Source: United Nations, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women*, A.G. Res. 34/180 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 46) to 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, entered into force on September 3, 1981, available at http://www.genderandpeacekeeping.org/resources/5_CEDAW.pdf



2nd Policy Focus

Promote economic equality between women and men and correct persistent inequalities in an open, globalized economy

Economic independence is a prerequisite to all other rights. Despite advances, economic equality between women and men has not yet been achieved. Women play a greater role in child rearing, housework, and caregiving for dependent family members, which, in the short and long terms, creates an income and economic security divide. The unequal sharing of duties and responsibilities between women and men in the private sphere affects the educational choices of girls and boys and is echoed in a job market still marked by professional segregation. The gender differences in workplace integration are seen on many levels, including economic sectors, professions, hierarchical levels, salary scales, employment status, work schedules, number of entries and withdrawals from the labor force, and social protection.

Area 1

To correct these inequalities, the state must **continue to emphasize initial training, develop a culture of continuing education, encourage professional diversification, and support job integration**. For example, the government is encouraged to continue to actively adhere to the principle of educational democratization throughout Québec (student financial assistance, affordable tuition, significant tax breaks for those at school, geographic accessibility of educational institutions and training programs, etc.). In addition, with the various stakeholders in society, efforts must be sustained to encourage boys to enter female-dominated fields and girls to go into traditionally male sectors.

Area 2

In a globalizing economy, the government must **continue working to eliminate the gender divisions in the job market**. Today's fast-developing technology sector, knowledge society, and open economy all offer opportunities that must be seized. People working in the most innovative, dynamic fields—often export-related sectors—generally enjoy enviable work conditions and positive opportunities for advancement. For women to catch up as a whole in terms of income, they must be present in the professions of the future and sectors of promise.

However, globalization, which magnifies concerns for performance and competitiveness, has its disadvantages. The growing demand for maximum labor force flexibility is increasing nontraditional work. Without economic security, this makes it difficult for workers to undertake long term personal projects such as having children.



For women to continue to gain ground on the job market, the government must safeguard legislative progress (e.g., the *Act respecting labour standards*, preventive withdrawal) and stay the course with corrective laws, such as the *Pay Equity Act*. Their effectiveness must also be assessed in order to adapt them to the new economy as needed. Given the rise in nonstandard jobs, legislation must also be adapted to improve the working conditions of those that hold them.

In addition, the government is called on to **adapt social protection and taxation to the realities of our social and economic environment to enhance equality between women and men.** Because women can usually expect to earn less than men over the course of their lives and make a greater investment in the family, they are generally more vulnerable in the face of life's adversities, such as illness, unemployment, aging, separation, divorce, or the death of a spouse.

In seeking to balance the budget or develop a more business-oriented approach to services in response to the dictates of international trade agreements, the state may be tempted to question the breadth of public services it offers in the fields of health, education, and social protection. However, reductions in these areas would compromise the economic and social security of a large proportion of the population, the less fortunate members of society, and would affect a great many women.

Area 3

“Gender-based inequalities affect productivity, performance, and economic progress. By creating obstacles for women on the job market and systematically refusing women and men access to certain resources, public services, and production activities, gender-based discrimination stunts both economic growth and the enhancement of living conditions.”

Source: World Bank Policy Research Report, *Engendering Development Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice*, Montréal, Les Éditions Saint-Martin pour l'édition française, 2003, p. 10, and ch. II, p.75–109. (Our translation)



3rd Policy Focus

Promote recognition of parenting and the support of dependents and develop conditions conducive to better organization of social time

Women were quick to enter the job market while men have been slow to move into the domestic sphere, structures and processes have not kept pace with new family realities, the requirements of the job market and society have changed, and Québec society has been transformed, all making the organization of social time more complex.

Reconciling work and the family call for measures to support individuals, but also a change in organizational culture. Organizations must particularly acknowledge the societal contribution of those who care for their loved ones—mostly women.

Area 1

Due to the enormity of the challenge, the state and social stakeholders must promote **more equal sharing of family and home responsibilities between spouses**. To ensure equality between women and men both in the private and public spheres, measures must be put into place, for example, to encourage men to make a greater commitment to the home and family. Parental leave for the father would appear to be a means of promoting a change in the traditional division of work between the sexes. Parental leave should be made available to men and should be appealing enough to attract fathers, without diminishing measures available to mothers.

Area 2

A number of steps must be undertaken to **help better organize social time**. The government has already committed to developing a family policy for Québec that makes work-family reconciliation a priority, it being recognized as a key to social and economic development. Subsidized daycare and the parental insurance plan are also important measures. The home support policy rounds out the tools available to promote reconciliation.

While the state has the power and obligation to intervene directly with the family with measures that promote the role of parent and caregiver, it also has the ability and responsibility to seek the cooperation of social partners on these issues.

Some companies have instituted support measures adapted to their environments (flextime, flexible work weeks, voluntary part time, parental leave, etc.). However, not all companies are at the same point. Those that have taken such initiatives, in cooperation with unions and workers, are reaping greater rewards than they ever expected—a more productive and loyal staff. Their



experience has illustrated that initiatives to reconcile work and the family are effective, and do not have to be spectacular or costly. These initiatives should be acknowledged and encouraged.

Today, an increasing proportion of students also have parental responsibilities. As such, the educational community must also implement measures to reconcile education and personal life. Gradual returns from maternity leave, project or exam rescheduling, and on-campus daycares are all initiatives that help student parents.

As the managers of our immediate environment, municipalities are well positioned to act as catalysts or coordinators in this regard. Many already have family policies in place. Various experiences in Québec and Europe have shown conclusively that services improve when local authorities consult both women and men users and take their suggestions into account when assessing and adapting their services. This approach deserves greater exposure and may inspire further initiatives, notably in terms of public transit, city planning, recreation services, and home support.

At all times, government and other social stakeholders must ensure that measures encouraged or already in place to support those who care for children or other dependent family members do not create social inequalities or disparities between the socioeconomic status of women and men. To this end, gender-based approach (GBA) would be appropriate before measures are adopted, to gain a better understanding.

Nordic countries, which have high percentages of women active in the workforce and are more advanced in sharing child care responsibilities between parents, also have higher fertility rates than other countries like Spain, Italy, or Germany, where men's and women's roles in the family have remained more traditional.

Source: Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille. *Natalité et interventions publiques*, [research and copywriting: Laurent Roy], Québec City, MESSF, 2004, p. 26.



4th Policy Focus

Improve health and welfare by adapting services to the differences between women and men

Becoming and staying as healthy as possible is important for everyone. However, the challenge is different for women and men due to biological differences and risk factors associated with social roles, living conditions, jobs, and attitudes about health, and the use of health and social services.

The health and social services network is faced with the challenge of improving personal health and welfare by striking the delicate balance between, on the one hand, adapting to the differences between the sexes due to biological factors and social roles, and on the other, not perpetuating stereotypes in health and social service intervention.

Area 1

To this end, the government must commit to a **gender-based approach (GBA) to planning, organizing, and assessing health and social services with a view to adapting them to the differences between men and women** in terms of physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health.

A variety of data illustrates the importance of using a GBA. Studies show that socialization causes women and men to adopt different behavior regarding their own health and that of their loved ones. In general, women develop more health-conscious behavior, while men are more inclined to adopt higher risk behavior.

Relationships between men and women have an impact on health and welfare. In fact, it has been proven that equality-based relationships reduce the risk of early pregnancy, unplanned pregnancy, STDs, and HIV/AIDS. The UN considers that in terms of family planning and sexual hygiene, men are part of the solution and must therefore be taught to take their share of the responsibility.

Economic conditions also affect personal health and welfare. Many reports on public health show that the poor are less

Because the relationship between health promotion and gender equality is not fully recognized, it seems particularly difficult to develop strategies that do not fall back on the competing interests of groups, playing them against each other.

Source: Council of Europe. *Promoting gender equality: a common issue for women and men*, A compilation of texts prepared by the Directorate General of Human Rights, Strasbourg, May 2002, p. 33.



likely to adopt healthy lifestyles and more likely to adopt higher risk behaviors, suffer more illness, and die younger than the rich. Statistics show that poverty affects women more than men, in all parts of society.

In terms of mental health more specifically, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS), like the World Health Organization (WHO), acknowledges that sex is one of the determining factors. The living conditions and socialization of women and men play a major role in mental health, particularly on the strategies used to get their lives back on track.

For all these reasons, training by qualified personnel in the gender-based approach (GBA) and its use must be quickly expanded to the full health and social services network at the Québec, regional, and local levels. GBA must notably be used to adapt health and social services and develop prevention, detection, and treatment measures, as well as to further health research. This approach can also help with lifestyle initiatives by making them easier to target by sex.

The health and social services network is encouraged to **adopt special measures for groups facing double discrimination**. The network should take into consideration the difficulties that people experience when they are discriminated against, whether due to sexual orientation, ethnic origin, cultural background, age, or limitations. Special corrective measures are necessary in these cases. Québec, regional, and local health and social service organizations should be encouraged to develop means of systematizing their understanding of the situations these groups face and adopt measures to guarantee them access to appropriate services.



5th Policy Focus

Eliminate all gender-based violence or violation of dignity or integrity

Since the late 1970s, conjugal and sexual violence has been a public issue in Québec society and no longer a private matter. However, despite a new common understanding of the disastrous effect both on the individual and society as a whole, along with many cooperative efforts to end it, many people still fall victim to this form of violence, particularly young women.

Studies on violence show that women from native or cultural communities, immigrant women, women with disabilities, lesbians, prostitutes, women with addictions, and homeless women are at higher risk of and more vulnerable to conjugal violence. A better understanding is also being gained of the various types of criminal abuse and exploitation suffered by the elderly, the clear majority of whom are women.

Given this state of affairs, the government and other stakeholders in society must continue to **develop and consolidate services to eliminate conjugal violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse.**

Notably, sufficient support and services must be available to female victims of violence and their children throughout Québec, both at health and social service institutions and from community organizations. In the administration of justice, efforts must be made to substantially increase the safety of victims of conjugal violence and sexual assault, taking into account the specific needs of the more vulnerable, higher risk clientele.

It would be best to intervene before situations degenerate into violence, through a Québec-wide promotion and prevention program designed to build awareness. This type of initiative would make men part of the fight against violence. It would be an opportunity to promote respect for personal integrity and dignity, foster egalitarian relationships between women and men and between girls and boys, prevent relationship violence, and reduce social tolerance of the phenomenon.

The government also has the responsibility to **fight sexual exploitation.** The findings of research on the sex industry (street prostitution, dancer and escort agencies, massage parlors, etc.) show that more and more young people—generally women—are selling sexual services to make a living. They face extremely high rates of violence, from clients, pimps, other prostitutes, and the public.

Area 1

Area 2



Moreover, it is essential that prostitutes have access to discrimination-free health, social, police, and legal services, including all prostitutes who wish to leave the trade. Measures must also be put into place to prevent minors from becoming prostitutes, notably by fighting poverty and reducing school dropout rates.

Also to address prostitution, the government is urged to closely monitor the impact of legislative approaches adopted abroad, using an analytical approach focused on the achievement of gender equality.

Mechanisms should be put into place to fight the sexual trafficking of women and children, as well as all other forms of sexual exploitation, notably cybercrime, sex tourism, and the proliferation of violent pornography.

Information and awareness-raising tools must be developed to **fight genital mutilation and improve intervention with victims**. Genital mutilation is a fact of life for some immigrants to Québec. To effectively raise awareness, initiatives must be founded on an understanding of the traditions and beliefs behind the practice. All intervention must be made in partnership with the communities concerned. It is crucial that women who have undergone mutilation receive the health and social services they need. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, genital mutilation is a serious criminal act of violence and a violation of fundamental human rights.

“In the last thirty years, we have seen the sexualization of society. This sexualization is rooted in social inequality and makes inequality very profitable. Society is now saturated with sex, and the fast-growing, globalized sex trade exploits women and children most of all...”

Source: Richard POULIN, Recueil de textes – Université féministe d’été 2004, p. 176, excerpt from *Revue Tiers-Monde*, t. XLIV, No. 176, October–December 2003.



6th Policy Focus

Support full gender equality in the exercise of power and social participation at the Québec-wide, regional, and local levels

Through social participation and the exercise of power, people control their communities' destiny and shape their living environment. This makes the sharing of powers between women and men fundamental to a healthy democracy. The persistent absence of women from democratic institutions has the end effect of discrediting the institutions themselves. It is also a shame that society is deprived of a portion of its talents at a time when the challenges of government have become so complex.

Gender equality requires that women be able to take equal part in collective decision making and raise all issues they consider of prime importance to the development of society. **Achieving equal participation of men and women in the political sphere** is a huge challenge facing democracy.

Québec and municipal political parties have a key role to play in this regard, notably by developing tools to recruit an equal number of male and female election candidates. The parties are encouraged to step up their focus on women in their member recruitment, training, and support activities. They must strive to break the technique-skill-male versus social-qualities-female stereotype. In addition, male parliamentarians must play a mentorship role to women new to the political scene.

Area 1

Contrary to the common belief that women are not interested in the upper echelons of business because of the challenge of reconciling work and the family, a study based on a major Catalyst survey in the U.S. shows that among upper management, an equal proportion of women (55%) and men (57%) aspire to the position of CEO. Women with children at home are even slightly more covetous of the position than those without (55% vs. 46%).

Source: Sophie Cousineau. "Elles veulent LE job," *La Presse*, July 19, 2004.

The rules of access to the decision-making arena also affect gender representation. Examples include amendments made to the incorporating acts of the regional health and social services boards and facilities to require equal representation on their boards of directors. This requirement was adopted when the local health and social service network development agencies were created, and has had a notable impact. Appointing board members on the basis of sectoral representation and from a list including as many female candidates as male and using cooptation could help remedy some of the male-female imbalance.

The program *Decision-making: A matter of equality* put into place by the Government of Québec in 1999 and renewed in 2003–2004 would be a good initiative to continue. This



program helps increase the number of women in decision-making positions. The program was improved for 2004–2005, and now accept projects by local and regional nonprofit organizations, as well by Québec-wide groups and members of native, Amerindian, or Inuit communities.

Encouraging equal participation by women and men in the economic sphere is also a priority. Women are still underrepresented in business management today. Nearly half of the 101 Québec firms in Canada's top 500 have all-male boards of directors.

To promote more equal sharing of economic power between the sexes, the government can set an example by appointing more women to the boards of directors of government agencies with economic functions, including its large public corporations. It can also support initiatives to increase the number of women in these institutions.

The government must continue **promoting equal participation among women and men in the government**, where those in positions of authority hold considerable power. In the senior civil service, the proportion of women in deputy minister and assistant deputy minister positions has grown in recent years thanks to clear political resolve. While results are encouraging, gender representation is still far from equal. A number of government initiatives, however, could help attain this objective, such as relaunching the Affirmative Action Program (AAP) for senior management positions, increasing the number of women in the senior public service, and striving for equal representation when appointing board members in public and broader-public organizations.

To achieve gender equality, **the importance of social participation must be recognized and conditions conducive to participation must be developed**. Social participation refers to the responsibility of staying informed, defending one's points of view, taking part in public debates, and contributing to the best of one's ability to the continual improvement of one's environment and quality of life.

Since community organizations enhance social participation and the strength of democracy, the government must sustain and enhance its support for independent community groups. To encourage participation, social stakeholders may wish to develop citizenship education programs to promote equal participation between girls and boys.

Area 2

Area 3

Area 4



7th Policy Focus

Ensure gender equality is firmly entrenched in government

As custodian of the values of Québec and the one responsible for putting them into action, the state must firmly assert its political commitment to equality between women and men. Adopting a policy to this effect would be one of the surest ways to integrate equality into the basic objectives of government action and social commitment, as well as to create the means and conditions necessary to achieve it. Over the last three decades, many government measures have been adopted and projects undertaken to realize gender equality. The time has come to take another, more systemic step: make equality a guiding principle of government action. **The government must begin by equipping itself with the resources needed to achieve equality.** These human, organizational, and financial resources must be dedicated to the goal of equality, both regionally and across Québec. They must be used for research, consulting, leadership, awareness raising, information, and support for new initiatives. For equality between women and men to be a true guiding principle of government action, the entire government apparatus must be put to the task.

Area 1

As part of its regionalization initiatives, the government has delegated powers to a number of bodies that must be bound by any future government policy on equality—notably regional conferences of elected officials (CREs), regional county municipalities (RCMs), municipalities, local development centers (CLDs), school boards, local health and social service network development agencies, and regional councils of job market partners. Every effort must be made to bring all regional and local bodies on board to help adopt and implement equality-fostering initiatives as a joint responsibility. Without their commitment, the inequalities between women and men could very well persist and regional differences escalate.

Area 2

Because achieving equality is a social and political concern of the utmost importance, the **responsibility should be shared between parliamentarians and social stakeholders.** Currently, members of parliament are the most politically accountable, and they regularly consider issues of gender equality in their study of bills or in representations made at public hearings. This points to the advisability of making gender equality the regular responsibility of a parliamentary committee. Such a committee would provide women and men concerned about issues of equality with a forum to express their opinions on the matters they care about and the opportunity to influence government studies and assessments of the impact of political choices on the attainment of equality.



As a reflection of its will to work in partnership with social stakeholders, the government is advised to create a Round Table of equality partners, which could include representatives from government, unions, regional and municipal groups, the business community, and the health industry. The Table's objective would primarily be to bring people together, share experiences, and spur cooperation. It would also give each group the opportunity to decide on the steps needed in its own respective sector in order to take an active part in the pursuit of equality.

Since inequalities are not always immediately apparent, they must be identified before they can be countered. To do so, the state must **develop appropriate tools to implement the equality policy, including the gender-based statistical approach (GBA)**. The new Official Statistics Data Bank of Official Statistics on Québec, for which many departments and agencies have provided differential data, is helping create the habit of compiling this type of data and an understanding of the importance of using the gender desegregated data. Such information is vital to the gender-based approach. Moreover, the GBA should be applied to all major reforms and bills with an impact on equality in areas such as social services, health and education, regionalization, electoral reform, and labor.

It would be useful to **develop and share knowledge at the regional, national, and international levels**. The study of the social impact of sex and the situations facing women has led to a wealth of multidisciplinary scientific research around the world, and particularly in Québec. This expertise must be used and further developed to incorporate new perspectives and document the various equality-related issues.

In compliance with the *Public Administration Act*, which has instituted results-based management, **the equality policy must be monitored, assessed, and be accounted for at the central and regional levels of government**. Because the policy is horizontal, it concerns all departments and agencies. They must, without exception, be required to help implement it by making commitments in their strategic plans and taking concrete action in their fields of expertise. They must also help monitor the policy by developing indicators to assess progress in equality in their sectors.

Lastly, the departments should ensure that the regional networks or agencies under their jurisdiction help implement and follow through with the government action plan and are held equally accountable.

Area 3

Area 4

Area 5



Conclusion

Québec has made great strides in equality in recent years. However, persistent inequalities and obstacles still undeniably prevent women from participating fully in the development of society.

To strengthen its position as a leader in equality, Québec must experiment with new strategies to turn *de jure* equality into *de facto* equality. To achieve this goal, the government and all social stakeholders must come together and take the action necessary for Québec society to successfully complete this crucial step.

Promoting equal rights, responsibilities, and possibilities for women and men and creating conditions in which both sexes can achieve their full potential are signs of a healthy democracy. By pursuing equality, Québec will be better equipped to face the many demographic, economic, and social challenges of today and the years to come.



This brochure is a summary of the statement entitled *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men*, Conseil du statut de la femme, 2004.

Communications Manager
Thérèse Mailloux

Summary Author
Nathalie Beaulieu

Translation
Lisa Hawke, Anglacom

Production
Guylaine Grenier

To order or consult publications

All publications by Conseil du statut de la femme can be ordered by writing to us at the following address:

Conseil du statut de la femme
Service des communications
8, rue Cook, 3^e étage
Québec (Québec) G1R 5J7

Phone: (418) 643-4326
Toll free: 1-800-463-2851
Fax: (418) 643-8926
Website: www.csf.gouv.qc.ca

Council publications can also be consulted at our regional offices.

Full or partial translation or reproduction of this publication for noncommercial purposes is authorized provided that credit is given.

Ce document est aussi disponible en français.

Legal deposit – Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2004
National Library of Canada
ISBN: 2-550-43294-0

© Government of Québec

*Conseil du statut
de la femme*

Québec 