

Turning Equality in Law into Equality in Fact

Government Policy
on Gender Equality and
2007-2010 Action Plan

AT A GLANCE



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DESIGN

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Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine

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Contents

LEGAL FOUNDATIONS	6
ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSENSUS	7
VISION	8
GOVERNANCE	9
INTERNATIONAL	12
GUIDELINES AND OBJECTIVES	13
Guideline 1: Promoting Egalitarian Models and Behaviour	13
Guideline 2: Achieving Gender Equality in the Economic Arena	14
Guideline 3: Achieving a Better Balance Between Responsibilities at Home and at Work	16
Guideline 4: Achieving Health Approaches Tailored to Women’s Specific Needs	17
Guideline 5: Achieving Respect for Women’s Physical Integrity and Their Safety in All Spheres of Life	18
Guideline 6: Achieving Greater Participation by Women in Decision-making Bodies	19
POLICY ASSESSMENT	20
THE ACTION PLAN	21
CHARTS	22
Chart 1 – Tools of Governance	22
Table 2 – Guidelines, Objectives and Priority Actions	24
CONCLUSION	28

Introduction

To renew its 1993 status of women policy, the Government of Québec held public hearings, between January and September, 2005, on the *Conseil du statut de la femme's* brief entitled *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men*. The invitation by a parliamentary committee to participate in a broad public discussion sparked much interest among Quebecers. Numerous findings and areas of strong consensus emerged out of this process. The *Commission des affaires sociales* tabled a unanimous report in December 2005, recommending that the Minister for the Status of Women oversee preparation of a new policy and action plan.

For the past 30 years, different legislative measures have helped to correct gender-based discrimination. Despite these advances, we have yet to reach true equality in fact. Inequality persists and continues to affect women, notably in economic, social and political spheres. This inequality is exacerbated in the case of women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Parallel to this, emerging social problems throw up new obstacles to equality, for example, pornography and violence on the Internet, global sex trafficking and the exploitation of vulnerable women and children.

In addition, Québec society is confronting new challenges, as is true of other Western nations; these are linked to globalization, demographics, the decentralization of power and regionalization. We must address the reality of rising cultural and religious diversity, which is contributing to Québec's social, cultural and demographic enrichment.

The policy spans 10 years and is divided into four main chapters: policy cornerstones, governance, guidelines and policy assessment. The six guidelines and 18 associated objectives cover the main concerns related to gender equality. With this policy, the government invites all stakeholders and sectors to move from equality in law to equality in fact.

The 2007-2010 three-year action plan includes 63 measures or actions (42 new ones and 21 already existing measures), many of which require the collaboration of non-governmental partners.

Legal Foundations

The government is setting itself realistic medium- and long-term objectives whereby it will continue to implement practical measures to fulfill the women's rights that have been recognized in Québec and Canadian charters and international commitments, in particular:

- » the *International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW);
- » the *Declaration and Platform for Action* adopted by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing.

In 2003, the government reiterated its commitment to counter gender-based discrimination and promote the advancement of gender equality in its Shine Among the Best action program. It progressed further in this direction when, in June 2006, it passed the *Act respecting the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*.

For the first time in Québec, respect for women's rights, the elimination of systemic discrimination and the achievement of gender equality were enshrined in a departmental mission.

Achievements and Consensus

The past few decades have seen significant achievements and progress in terms of equality and the emergence of a strong consensus. For example:

- » more women in training programs like medicine and administration that previously were almost exclusively male bastions;
- » increasing numbers of women in the labour market and higher female representation at different levels of decision-making, in municipal, regional, provincial and federal bodies.

We must also consider the efforts deployed to correct differential treatment of women and men in legislation and take concrete steps to achieving greater equality in fact:

- » the *Pay Equity Act*;
- » the *Act Respecting Equal Access to Employment in Public Bodies and Amending the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*;
- » the *Parental Insurance Act*;
- » the *Women's Workforce Strategy*;
- » measures to encourage women's entrepreneurship;
- » the domestic violence policy, implemented with two action plans;
- » new child support and custody rules;
- » reduction of the sponsorship period for an immigrant spouse from 10 to three years;
- » the Equal Access to Decision-Making program, under which 367 projects aimed at increasing women's participation in local and regional decision-making structures have been funded since its creation in 1999;
- » the government declaration of April 2006 that stipulated gender parity on the boards of administration of public companies within five years.

Vision

- » Women and men must enjoy equal conditions to fully exercise their rights, exploit their potential and contribute to the country's political, economic, social and cultural development, while benefiting equally from these changes.
- » The grounds for women's and men's development and freedom of choice are equal rights, equal obligations and equal opportunities.
- » The strategy to reduce inequality, however, would not be complete without in-depth actions within institutions to introduce equality into families, communities and work environments.

Governance

The government must equip itself to continue moving toward equality by creating tools to promote equality while entrenching this goal within the State apparatus.

MAINTAIN GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES

In continuity with its past actions, the government continues to rely on the State structures that work toward gender equality:

- » the *Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*;
- » the *Secrétariat à la condition féminine*;
- » the network of officers in charge of gender equality;
- » the *Conseil du statut de la femme* and its regional structure.

THREE APPROACHES TO FOSTER GENDER EQUALITY

With a view to action on several fronts, the government has adopted:

- » a targeted approach, to correct instances of gender-based inequality;
- » a cross-cutting approach, aimed at preventing inequality;
- » a societal approach, based on the combined and coordinated efforts of all partners, and on a shared vision of gender equality.

GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS (GBA)

- » GBA is a tool under the cross-cutting approach that makes it possible to see, at all steps of the development process, the different effects of government policies, programs and measures on women and men.
- » The government intends to introduce this tool in the government apparatus and encourage its use in local and regional bodies by means of adequate training and equipment.

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

The government is setting up an accountability system to monitor departments' and agencies' actions. This system involves:

- » a follow-up committee;
- » defined indicators;
- » a three-year report and analysis of government measures at the conclusion of the three-year action plan.

A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

Achieving gender equality is a matter of prime social and political importance that warrants periodic examination by elected representatives.

Presently, MNAs address gender equality issues only sporadically, or with respect to specific issues. Bringing it forward on a regular basis in a parliamentary committee would inevitably transform it into a central political issue.

In response to the recommendation of the *Commission des affaires sociales*, the government is making the following commitment:

- » to table a document in the National Assembly every three years on the changing situation of women and men in Québec.

PARTNERS COMMITTED TO EQUALITY

The State is a key player on the issue of gender equality. Women's equality, however, is also the responsibility of several influential institutions and partners in civil society.

Every organization has a specific role to play, knowledge to impart, particular influence to exert and, above all, action to take to promote and realize gender equality. This is why the government wants:

- » to further develop the culture of equality in all sectors;
- » commitments and actions by social partners in their respective spheres of influence.

RECOGNITION AWARDS

The government wants to showcase efforts deployed to improve the status of women and advance gender equality as a means of maintaining equality at the forefront of everyone's concerns.

Québec's Presence on the International Scene

Québec is recognized on the international scene as a leader in the area of gender equality. To this end, the government commits to:

- » continue promoting its expertise on the international scene;
- » maintain a comprehensive view of priority subjects discussed at the international level;
- » keep abreast of all emerging trends to help guide its steps toward achieving gender equality.

Guidelines and Objectives

An analysis of women's socio-economic situation over time, coupled with different indicators of the gap between their living conditions and those of men, provides the overall framework for government action. Contextual factors and new social phenomena, which represent either challenges or new obstacles to achieving equality, must also be considered.

The starting point for the government's action, therefore, will be six major guidelines covering all aspects of gender equality:

1. Promoting egalitarian models and behaviour.
2. Achieving gender equality in the economic arena.
3. Achieving a better balance between responsibilities at home and at work.
4. Achieving health approaches tailored to women's specific needs.
5. Achieving respect for women's physical integrity and their safety in all spheres of life.
6. Achieving greater participation by women in decision-making bodies.

GUIDELINE 1: FOSTERING EGALITARIAN MODELS AND BEHAVIOURS

Gender-based roles and inequality are strengthened through stereotypes still present in people's minds, putting a brake on achieving equality in fact. Although the range of social and occupational prospects has broadened for women in Québec, the process is far from over. This is especially so since the advent of new phenomena such as the sexualization of public space, which have an undeniable effect on young people's sexuality and threaten the principle of gender equality.

Consequently, it is important to work towards the non-stereotyped socialization of youngsters and egalitarian parenting. Since they contribute to shaping young people's sexual identity, the education, culture, media and sports environments must participate in this effort. Last, following an intercultural approach, we must ensure the promotion of principles and values surrounding gender equality among Quebecers regardless of their origin.

Foster young people's non-stereotyped socialization. The actions or measures aimed at eliminating all stereotyped definitions of male and female roles are essential and of prime importance. In this respect it is important to work in tandem with childcare establishments and schools to eliminate sexist stereotypes and stimulate progress toward gender equality. In addition, to better adapt interventions with young people, we must possess a thorough understanding of their view of equality and their concerns on this issue.

Support the teaching of egalitarian parenting skills and practices. In the current context, marked by diverse family situations and compositions, it is important to place a higher value on parenting in all its forms, promote fathers' involvement with their children and support women and men in carrying out their parental responsibilities.

Encourage the media, cultural enterprises and sports and recreation environments to promote non-sexist behaviours. The media and culture—from the performance arts to cultural enterprises—and the recreation and sports sectors play a role in establishing and perpetuating certain values and standards. The government calls on all these sectors to help eradicate sexual and sexist stereotypes and promote egalitarian models and behaviours.

Support gender equality in a context of growing cultural and religious diversity. The government intends to ensure that the response of public institutions, in particular, reasonable accommodation made in the name of this diversity, guarantees women's rights and gender equality. To do this, it is essential for the appropriate organizations to devise tools that enable institutions and individuals attending them to have a mutual understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

GUIDELINE 2: ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ECONOMIC ARENA

Over the past 40 years, women have become increasingly highly educated and expanded their presence in the labour market to such a degree that they should soon reach parity. However, the status of women in employment remains problematic: despite the advances, they are still confined to a limited range of trades and occupations and are more numerous in the part-time work force, where they hold precarious jobs and their earnings remain lower than those of men. Last, more women than men live in conditions marked by precariousness and poverty, with this risk being higher for certain more vulnerable groups of women. To improve women's economic self-sufficiency, it is important to diversify their training options, encourage academic perseverance, support their job entry and retention, pursue efforts to reduce wage inequity, support women entrepreneurs and take measures to improve women's economic security throughout their lives.

Foster a broader scope of training options as well as academic success and perseverance. The promotion of non-traditional and emerging trades to women is still an effective means of encouraging them to choose these trades and professions, which often guarantee better working conditions. In terms of sensitizing employers to the problems women

experience in traditionally male environments, additional effort must be directed toward job retention. Further, it is important to encourage men to be more present in certain sectors like early and primary education, health and social services. Moreover, young women and young men need access to training that is adapted to their needs and will allow them to persevere until they earn a diploma. This is true at all educational levels.

Provide more specific support for women's job entry and retention. Many Québec women still experience difficulty entering or re-entering the work force, difficulties that may be due to the interaction of numerous individual, socio-economic and cultural factors. It must be kept in mind that the labour market participation gap between women and men continues to exist and, even more importantly, the employment status of many women is precarious. Some groups of women are confronted with multiple forms of discrimination, complicating their economic and social integration. Such discrimination generates inequality and undermines the development of their full potential. The government will therefore take action to improve and support Québec women's skills.

Continue implementing and enforcing the Pay Equity Act. The *Commission de l'équité salariale* intends to employ diverse means to inform women workers, particularly the most vulnerable among them (less educated, older, non-unionized, or who work in small businesses), through awareness-raising and the publication of information about the Act and their rights and through its collaboration with representatives of women's groups.

Support women's entrepreneurship. The income inequalities affecting women entrepreneurs are mainly due to their overwhelming concentration in the service sector. It is important to encourage the diversification of sectors of activity chosen by women, and to set up conditions that are favourable to their businesses' development.

Improving women's economic security throughout their lives. We must explore various avenues to combat women's poverty: access to skilled jobs and maintenance in these positions, access to retirement plans and the achievement and maintenance of economic autonomy throughout their lives.

GUIDELINE 3: ACHIEVING A BETTER BALANCE BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME AND AT WORK

The fast pace at which women have entered the labour market, the slow development of men's participation on the domestic front, the delay in adapting ways of organizing and doing things to new family situations, labour market and social demands, and the demographic changes affecting Québec society are some of the elements that have complicated the balancing of work and family responsibilities.

Despite progress in this area, it is still harder for women than men to cope with the double challenge of having a job and a family. The accumulation of family and work responsibilities can cause tension that affects people's mental and physical health, their occupational advancement and quality of life. Over the last 15 years efforts have been made to achieve a better balance, but in actual fact, the difficulty of balancing home and work continues to generate inequality between men and women, both in the private arena and the labour market and various economic sectors.

Foster fair distribution of family responsibilities. Better coordination of family and work responsibilities requires a new view of the roles of mother and father and a fair division of tasks among spouses. Work-family balance measures must be provided to mothers and fathers, so as to foster the fair distribution of tasks between women and men. Everyone must fulfill their duties, both at home and at work. Finally, fathers' involvement at home must be presented in a positive light.

Encourage workplaces to institute measures to improve the balance between work and family in both predominantly male and predominantly female sectors. The labour market must be more geared toward achieving and promoting equality. The participation of public, private and community employers, management and union associations and the workers themselves is of the utmost importance.

Heighten collaboration and partnership among stakeholders. The government and concerned parties must team up to implement a set of measures tailored to the needs of women and men who must balance their family and work responsibilities, and their duties as citizens.

GUIDELINE 4: ACHIEVING HEALTH APPROACHES TAILORED TO WOMEN'S SPECIFIC NEEDS

Maintaining and improving health and well-being are priority objectives for women and men. Several factors influence health, including gender, relationships between men and women and socioeconomic inequalities.

The policy recommends that the government continue to design approaches and practices that pinpoint and take into account the similarities and differences in women's and men's health. Research and gender-based analysis are basic means to improve the scope, effectiveness, efficiency and effects of interventions that benefit women and men in the field of health, and contribute to greater social justice.

In addition, for over 20 years, much effort has been made to improve services for women and, above all, to adapt them more closely to fit women's needs and those of the most vulnerable groups. Efforts aimed at improving women's health and well-being must continue. It is also important to continue working to improve women's health and safety in the work place.

Taylor health care and social services to the specific needs of women and of certain groups. In order to counter the health impacts of gender inequality, the government proposes to address health determinants. It also proposes to address a number of aspects that are more relevant for women, including the perinatal period, body image and the effects of aging. Furthermore, it will place a particular focus on the most vulnerable groups.

Raise workplace awareness regarding the prevention of employment injuries in women. The occupational health and safety issue is fraught with major challenges to the equality and prosperity of women in Québec. It is important to shed light on the hazards that work environments pose for women, as well as on appropriate prevention measures.

GUIDELINE 5: ACHIEVING RESPECT FOR WOMEN'S PHYSICAL INTEGRITY AND THEIR SAFETY IN ALL SPHERES OF LIFE

The struggle against violence against women is based on the promotion of fundamental values, including the protection of the physical and psychological integrity of all individuals, and the importance of ensuring their safety in all spheres of life. Other forms of violence are increasing in Québec as they are everywhere in the world, in particular, the sexual exploitation of women and children, trafficking of migrant women and the proliferation of violent pornography, all of which call for diverse actions by the State.

Experience acquired over the last 30 years has shown that in the medium and long term, these types of violence can only be countered in all spheres of life if all of society is mobilized toward that goal. It is of the utmost importance that women and men unite their efforts to put an end to it.

Prevent and combat domestic violence and sexual assault. It is essential to conduct initiatives that promote egalitarian relationships between women and men, girls and boys. It is also necessary to lower social tolerance for all types of violence through education and awareness-raising campaigns calling on all members of society to denounce and report incidents of violence against women. Conflict resolution activities, prevention of violence in young people's intimate relationships and sex education are also needed.

Prevent and combat sexual exploitation and the trafficking of women. It is imperative for society, especially public authorities, to continue clearly condemning the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women by stressing that they run counter to the values of Québec society. Furthermore, immigrant women who have already undergone various forms of exploitation and are suffering the consequences thereof (physical, psychological or sexual) must have access to services that meet their needs.

GUIDELINE 6: ACHIEVING GREATER PARTICIPATION BY WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES

Establishing an equal balance of power between women and men is a matter of basic democratic health. However, there is a persistent deficit in the number of women in various institutions or decision-making positions, whether in the political, economic, or social arenas, or in the public service. Furthermore, the government is transferring more and more power and responsibility to regional and local stakeholders, who must also participate in achieving de facto equality within their jurisdictions. The government wishes to continue supporting all initiatives for equal representation in circles of power.

Aim for equal representation in circles of power. The social change required to achieve gender equality cannot occur unless women participate in the desired change, from within current power structures. The government firmly intends to increase the number of women in leadership positions at the local, regional and national levels.

Concerted action by a group of social and government stakeholders is necessary to significantly develop women's representation rate in all decision-making bodies.

Promote gender equality in local and regional governance structures. While some of the problems faced by women exist throughout all territories, others are specific to certain regions. It is therefore important to establish a made-to-order partnership at the regional level, while pursuing the government's overall objectives. It is particularly important to take into account different contexts in the resource regions and central regions, rural and urban regions. The government encourages local and regional decision-making bodies to take women's situation into account and to adopt measures accordingly.

Policy Assessment

The accountability system and policy monitoring will provide us with a description of the means implemented to achieve our set objectives. The assessment will concentrate on the processes and results obtained through the principal measures adopted.

The assessment will enlighten authorities on the relevance of maintaining, strengthening or changing the steps taken to achieve gender equality.

Several measures in the policy's action plan that are particularly significant for the achievement of gender equality will be targeted for assessment, including gender-based analysis.

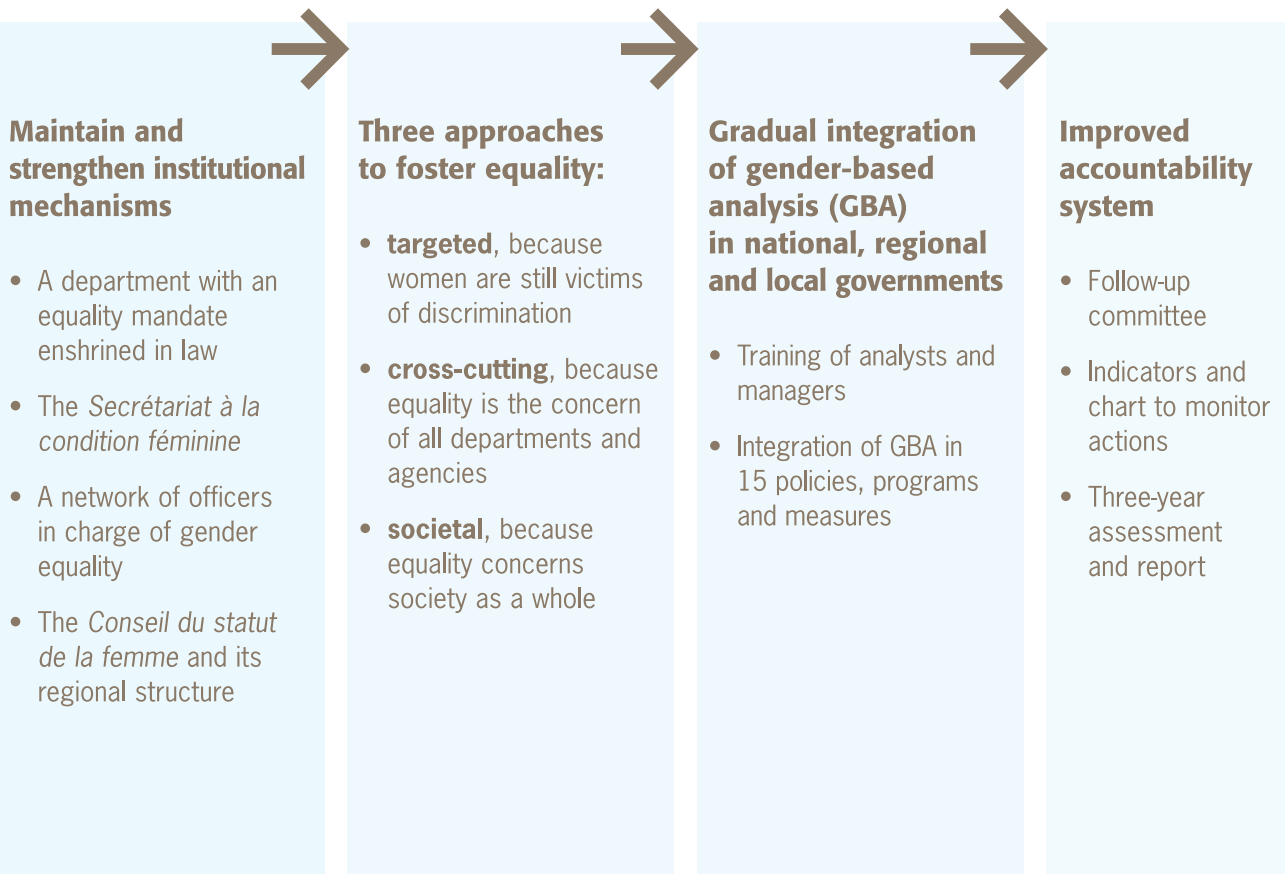
Action Plan

For each of the objectives associated with the policy guidelines, the action plan presents the measures or actions to be carried out by government departments and agencies over the next three years to comprehensively address gender equality. With respect to governance, there already exist a number of important tools, and others will be established to ensure implementation of governmental action. They have been described at the beginning of this document.

Also, government departments and agencies were asked to guide governmental action regarding priority targets in the respective activity sectors and circles concerned by the action plan.

The guidelines and objectives will be achieved through measures that, in the verbs used to formulate them—understand, consolidate, inform, educate, promote, prevent, legislate, create, support, equip and recognize—clearly reflect the range of interventions that must be deployed to achieve gender equality.

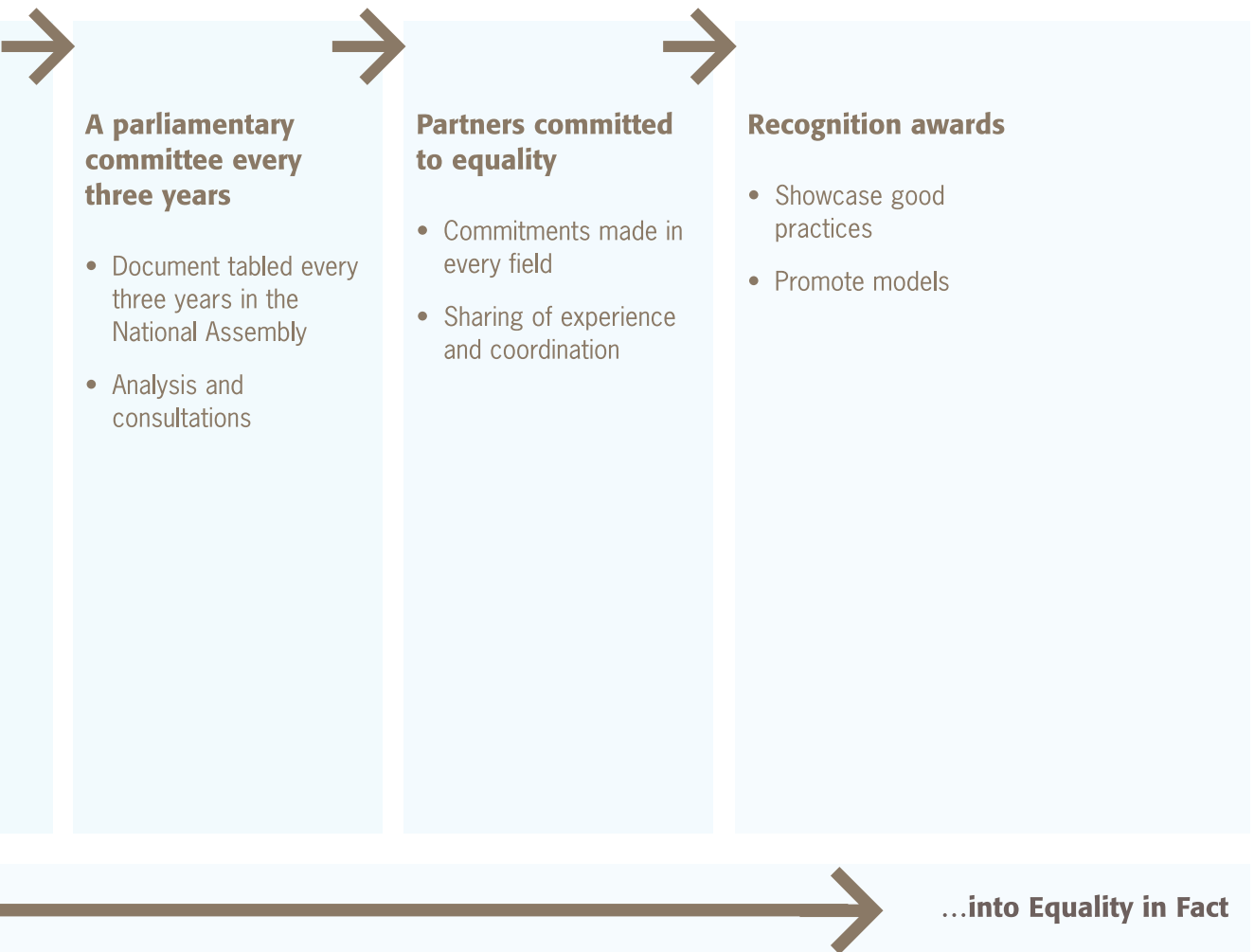
Tools of Governance



Turning Equality in Law...

A policy spanning 10 years

First 3-year action plan



Guidelines, Objectives and Priority Actions

Guidelines	Objectives
<p>Egalitarian models and behaviour</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialization of youth • Support for parenting • Egalitarian images in the media and sports • Equality in a context of growing cultural and religious diversity
<p>Economic equality</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversification of fields of study and academic success • Job entry and retention • <i>Pay Equity Act</i> • Entrepreneurship • Lifelong economic security
<p>Work-family balance</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal sharing of family responsibilities • Collaboration of work places • Collaboration of social/recreational stakeholders

Guidelines:	6
Objectives:	18
Measures:	63
New:	42/63
Continuing:	21/63

Priority Actions



- Teaching tools
- Training of academic personnel
- Contest on egalitarian images in the media
- Self-regulation of certain media
- Information on equality for recently arrived immigrants






- Diversification of academic trajectories
- Women's work force intervention strategy
- Accompaniment and reintegration for vulnerable women
- Hiring in non-traditional sectors
- Financial assistance for women entrepreneurs



- Technical and financial assistance for businesses
- Family recognition awards
- Equality label for businesses
- Specific work-family balance agreements with regional conferences of elected officers (CRE)

Guidelines, Objectives and Priority Actions

Guidelines	Objectives
<p>Adapted health care</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care tailored to women • Prevention of occupational injuries
<p>Women's physical integrity and safety</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of domestic violence and sexual assault • Campaign against sexual exploitation and trafficking of women
<p>Women's participation in decision-making bodies</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal representation in circles of power • Equality in local and regional governance structures

Guidelines:	6
Objectives:	18
Measures:	63
New:	42/63
Continuing:	21/63

Priority Actions



- Second action plan on women's health
- Perinatal policy



- Awareness-raising campaign
- 2004-2009 domestic violence action plan
- 2007-2012 sexual assault action plan



- Maintain the Equal Access to Decision Making program
- Training of future female elected representatives
- Gender parity in boards of directors of public companies
- Statements of principle in favour of equality and gender parity in regional conferences of elected officers (CRE)
- Support regional projects on equality and specific agreements with regional conferences of elected officers (CRE)

Conclusion

The work of drafting the policy shed light on the past decade's significant advancement toward the fulfillment of women's rights and gender equality. Women have come a very long way in the public arena, but there is still a lot of work to do to turn equality in law into equality in fact. Persistent discrimination and society's gender-based division of roles is certainly one of the main reasons why it is so hard to achieve gender equality. It is therefore important—starting in early childhood—to challenge the sexist stereotypes that prevent girls and boys from reaching their full potential.

Québec is already a leader in the area of gender equality. The government wants to maintain this position and calls on the collaboration of members of civil society so that equality in law becomes equality in fact. Although the State plays a key role with respect to gender equality, it cannot shoulder this responsibility alone. The policy's success depends on the commitment of all sectors of our society, because its content covers every sphere of activity: economic, social, political and cultural. The policy and its associated action plan are based on several concrete measures and approaches that will foster respect for women's rights and help achieve equality in fact between women and men at the personal, organizational and social levels.