

Turning Equality in Law into Equality in Fact

GOVERNMENT POLICY
FOR GENDER EQUALITY



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WRITING

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with assistance from the
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Message from the Prime Minister of Québec

Our government firmly supports women's historical struggle to achieve full equality. This conviction was recently reasserted in our "Shine Among the Brightest" action plan, which highlights our commitment to making Québec a paradigm of gender equality.

We believe that society as a whole stands to benefit from the achievement of equality. Equality will help us face the major challenges ahead, including the aging population and the labour shortages expected in various sectors of the economy. Turning equality in law into equality in fact is not an easy thing to do. Beyond legislative changes, it takes a change in mentality, cultural changes and new ways of thinking.

This policy for gender equality sets the course for the next ten years. It aims to enlist not only the government, but also society as a whole, in the pursuit of full, vigorous equality. It should be very clear that this is not solely a goal for women, but for everyone. A pluralistic society must be able to proclaim gender equality as one of the most important common values of all Québec women and men, regardless of origin. That way, we will all benefit from living in a society whose citizens are equal and contribute to our joint progress to their full potential.



Jean Charest
Prime Minister of Québec



I am happy to be taking up the torch of the gender equality policy, *Turning Equality in Law into Equality in Fact*, that was introduced and proudly carried by my predecessor, Ms. Carole Théberge.

As Minister of Culture, Communications and the Status of Women, I have the honourable task of ensuring that Québec advances toward being a society where equality between the sexes is absolute. I consider this to be a great responsibility as well as a priority for the Government of Québec.



Our government is supporting this policy with a series of eloquent actions. For example, it has committed to ensuring that within five years, the boards of administration of public companies be composed equally of women and men. In April 2007, the Prime Minister appointed a cabinet comprising equal numbers of women and men, thereby breaking the glass ceiling which, while allowing women to move closer to decision-making positions, has prevented them from attaining genuine equality of representation. It has taken over 60 years to write this into the pages of Québec history.

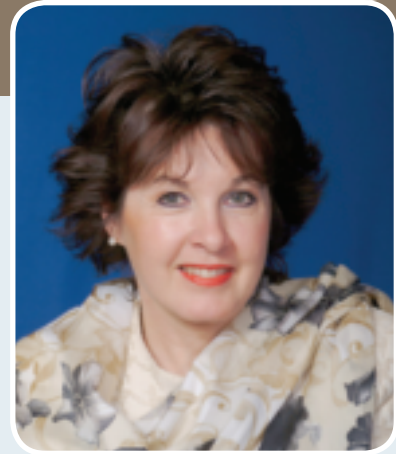
The policy for equality between women and men distinguishes itself by calling on different actors in society, including local and regional communities, public, paragonovernmental and private agencies, the media, and community organizations to put their shoulder to the wheel to counter the discrimination of which women are the specific targets. Women and men are also called on individually to play a crucial role in achieving this social objective.

I am determined to pursue women's ongoing march toward achieving full equality, a mission I consider essential to the advancement of Québec society and its presence on the international scene. I consider that de facto equality between women and men, like the language we speak and our culture, should be held up and remain as profound values forging the identity of Québec society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. St-Pierre', written in a cursive style.

Christine St-Pierre
Minister of Culture, Communications and the Status of Women

Message from the Minister



Over the years, Qu  bec has passed various pieces of legislation aimed at enshrining the principle of gender equality in law. This progress was spearheaded by pioneering women who helped make Qu  bec a beacon among societies with the highest aspirations for equality.

The government's current policy, *Turning Equality in Law into Equality in Fact*, builds on the first policy on the status of women, entitled *Sharing a Future*, which was formulated by the Robert Bourassa government in 1993. The current policy is the fruit of many years' work involving hundreds of people who share the vision of a fully egalitarian society. I wish to thank those who have enriched this policy with their ideas and ideals by participating in the first widespread consultation on gender equality in Qu  bec's history, held in 2005.

Our government has paved the way for this policy by taking a series of steps toward the advancement of women: regulating pay equity, creating the obligation to achieve parity on the boards of directors of public companies, instituting the Qu  bec Parental Insurance Plan, the government Action Plan to Fight Poverty and Social Exclusion, the legislative amendment making it possible to break a lease to escape domestic violence and the tabling of a five-year action plan to combat domestic violence.

The *Turning Equality in Law into Equality in Fact* policy aims to put an end to all discrimination affecting women. It brings all government departments and agencies together and invites society as a whole to promote equality. It is ambitious in scope. It is rigorous in its introduction of result measurement and monitoring mechanisms. It is mobilizing in its professed ideal of a society at the forefront of gender equality.

Through this policy, I invite Qu  bec women and men to embrace gender equality as one of the fundamental values shaping Qu  bec's identity, and to work together to turn equality in law into equality in fact.

Together, we will provide future generations with a model society in terms of gender equality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Carole Th  berge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carole Th  berge
Minister of Families, Seniors and the Status of Women

Acknowledgements

This policy is the fruit of cooperation on the part of several persons and organizations. Special thanks go to:

- » the *Conseil du statut de la femme*, for developing a brief that was used in the discussions of the parliamentary committee and inspired this policy;
- » the representatives of the community organizations, associations, and universities who took part in the consultations;
- » the various people in government departments and agencies in all sectors of activity, as well as those in charge of the status of women, who made it possible to complete the policy and its associated action plan;
- » all members of the National Assembly and of the *Commission des affaires sociales*, for their enriching contribution to the policy;
- » the teams at the *Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*, including the *Direction générale des politiques*, the *Secrétariat à la condition féminine* and the members of Cabinet, who brought this policy into being;
- » all the women and men who, through their ongoing commitment, have contributed to the advancement of gender equality in Québec in recent decades.

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Summary

With the aim of renewing the 1993 policy on the status of women, the Government of Québec held public hearings in 2005 as part of a consultation on the brief of the *Conseil du statut de la femme* entitled *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men*.

Through this new policy, the government intends to ensure application of the rights recognized by the Québec and Canadian charters of rights, equality legislation and international commitments, in order to turn equality in law into equality in fact.

This policy, which spans the next ten years, is divided into four major chapters: Policy Cornerstones, Governance, Guidelines and Policy Assessment. It comprises six guidelines and eighteen objectives that cover all gender equality concerns. Through this policy, the government invites all stakeholders in all sectors to commit to equality.

POLICY CORNERSTONES

The past few decades have seen significant achievements and progress in terms of equality and the emergence of a strong consensus. Since certain changes take longer than others, we must continue our efforts to achieve a culture of equality that permeates all social relations.

Women and men must have equal conditions to fully exercise of their rights, reach their full potential and contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development. They must also benefit equally from these changes. Both women's and men's freedom of choice must be based on equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities.

GOVERNANCE

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

Maintain government structures. The government continues to rely on the organizations 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 people in charge of gender equality;*
- » *The Conseil du statut de la femme and its regional structure.*

Approaches for action. The government has selected three approaches:

- » a targeted approach aimed at correcting 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.

Accountability system. An accountability system consistent with the *Public Administration Act*, which institutes results-based management, and with the *Act Respecting the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*, which makes the Minister responsible for seeing to the actual progression of gender equality, will make it possible to track the activities of government departments and agencies.

Parliamentary committee. The parliamentary committee will sit every three years, at the National Assembly, to monitor the evolving situation of women and men in Québec.

Partners committed to equality. The government will call on social partners to make commitments and take action to help develop the culture of equality in their respective spheres of influence.

Québec: a leader when it comes to equality. At the international level, the government intends to:

- » keep promoting its expertise in terms of equality;
- » maintain an overview of all priority issues discussed;
- » keep abreast of all emerging trends to help guide its steps toward achieving gender equality.

POLICY GUIDELINES AND OBJECTIVES

The government will take action based on six guidelines and eighteen objectives that cover all aspects of the gender equality issue.

PROMOTING EGALITARIAN MODELS AND BEHAVIOURS

A gender division of roles and gender inequality are reinforced by persisting stereotypes. These stereotypes get in the way of equality in fact. Even though social and professional horizons are broadening for women in Québec, this process is far from complete. New phenomena are cropping up. One example is the sexualization of the public arena, which has an impact on young people's sexuality. Such phenomena threaten the values of gender equality. It is therefore important to reach the following objectives:

Foster young people’s non-stereotyped socialization. It is necessary to work with childcare services and school environments to fine-tune interventions with young people, incorporating an understanding of their view of equality and their concerns on this issue.

Support the teaching of egalitarian parenting skills and practices. It is important to give greater recognition to the parent’s role in all of its forms, to promote paternal involvement and support women and men in the exercise of their parental obligations.

Encourage the media, cultural enterprises and sports and recreation environments to promote non-sexist behaviours. Promoting egalitarian models and behaviours through advertisement, the products of the cultural industry and sporting or recreational activities makes it possible to fight sexual and sexist stereotypes.

Support gender equality in a context of growing cultural and religious diversity. In order for public institutions to respond in ways that guarantee women’s rights and gender equality, notably when it comes to reasonable accommodations made in the name of diversity, it is essential for institutions and their clientele to have a mutual understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ECONOMIC ARENA

Over the last 40 years, women have become increasingly educated and are more and more present on the labour market. This breeds hope of imminent parity in this regard. However, women’s employment status remains problematic. Despite the progress made, women still occupy a limited range of trades and professions. Women often work part-time or have precarious jobs, and their income is lower than men’s. Finally, there is still a higher proportion of women living in poverty, the risk being even higher for women belonging to certain more vulnerable groups. It is therefore important to reach the following objectives:

Promote greater diversity of training options, as well as persistence in school and academic success. This diversification must be supported by promoting non-traditional and emerging trades and raising employer awareness of the difficulties experienced by women in areas traditionally reserved for men.

Provide more specific support for women’s job integration and retention. Some groups within the female population experience multiple discrimination that makes their economic and social integration more complex. This discrimination leads to inequality and prevents these women from reaching their full potential. The government therefore intends to take steps to improve and support the skills of Québec women.

Continue implementing and enforcing the Pay Equity Act. Raising awareness and publishing related tools will help women become more familiar with the law and their rights. The Commission de l’équité salariale will work on this 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.

Improve women's economic security throughout their lives. There are many ways of fighting poverty among women, including access to skilled jobs and retention in those jobs, access to pension plans and the achievement of economic self-sufficiency throughout their lives.

ACHIEVING A BETTER BALANCE BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME AND AT WORK

A number of factors have made balancing family and work responsibilities increasingly complex. These include 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 demands and the demographic changes affecting Québec society. Despite the efforts made over the last 15 years or so, balancing home and work life continues to create an equality problem between men and women, both in the private arena and when it comes to the labour market and economic sectors. It is therefore important to attain the following objectives:

Foster fair distribution of family responsibilities. 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 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 partners from different spheres must work as a team to set up measures that meet women's and men's needs when it comes to balancing home, work and civic responsibilities.

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. Approaches and practices must pinpoint and take into account the similarities and differences in women's and men's health. It is important to work on the following objectives:

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 the determining factors of health. This is evident in the policy's guidelines and objectives, and its related

action plan. The government 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. It will also focus on the most at-risk groups.

Raise workplace awareness regarding the prevention of employment injuries in women.

The occupational health and safety issue is fraught with major challenges in terms of 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.

ACHIEVING RESPECT FOR WOMEN'S PHYSICAL INTEGRITY AND SAFETY IN ALL SPHERES OF LIFE

Fighting violence against women means promoting basic values, such as respect for everyone's physical and psychological integrity, and the importance of ensuring their safety in all spheres of life. Some forms of violence are gaining ground in Québec, as in other parts of the world. The sexual exploitation of women and children, trafficking in migrant women and the proliferation of pornographic material with violent content, for example, all require government action on various fronts. The experience acquired over the last 30 years has shown that 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 for women and men to join forces to put an end to such violence by striving to attain the following objectives:

Prevent and combat domestic violence and sexual assault. It is essential to conduct initiatives to promote egalitarian relationships between women and men, girls and boys. It is also necessary to lower society's tolerance for all types of violence through education and awareness-raising campaigns that deal with the issue of violence against women. Activities linked to conflict resolution, preventing violence in love relationships between young people, and to sex education are also necessary.

Prevent and combat sexual exploitation and the trafficking of women. It is imperative to keep clearly stating society's condemnation, particularly on the part of public authorities, of sexual exploitation and the trafficking of women by highlighting the fact that they violate Québec society's values. 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.

ACHIEVING GREATER PARTICIPATION BY WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES

We see an ongoing deficit in the number of women in various institutions or in different decision-making positions, be it in the political, economic or social arena, or in public service. Furthermore, the government is transferring more and more powers and responsibilities to local and regional stakeholders, who must also take part in the struggle to achieve equality in fact within their jurisdictions. The government wishes to keep supporting initiatives to attain the following objectives:

Aim for equal representation in circles of power. The social change required to achieve gender equality will only take place if women participate in the desired changes from within current power structures. Concerted action by a group of social and government stakeholders is necessary to achieve a significant increase in 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. The government encourages local and regional decision-making bodies to take women's situation into account and take the appropriate steps.

POLICY ASSESSMENT

The assessment will enlighten authorities on the relevance of maintaining, strengthening or changing the steps taken to achieve gender equality. Some measures that are particularly significant for the achievement of this objective will be targeted for assessment, including gender-based analysis.

CONCLUSION

The work leading up to this policy has shed light on the significant progress made with regard to women's rights and gender equality over the last decade. 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 to start fighting the sexist stereotypes that prevent girls and boys from reaching their full potential from a very young age.

Although the government is playing a front-line role in the achievement of gender equality, it cannot shoulder this responsibility alone, since it is shared by all components of the economic, social, political and cultural spheres of Québec society. 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.

Introduction

Québec is recognized as a forerunner with regard to gender equality, both in Canada and throughout the world. Québec has declared itself to be bound by international instruments such as the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) and its protocol. Québec's often avant-garde legislation on issues such as pay equity, the parental insurance plan or low-cost childcare have enabled it to implement measures that not only draw the admiration of other countries and provinces, but also go a long way toward creating a fairer and more egalitarian environment.

In 2004, the Government of Québec reiterated its desire to remain a model of gender equality in its *Shine among the Best* action program. In June 2006, it passed the *Act Respecting the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*, which enshrines the mission of promoting women's rights and equality. Intense public work and debate have built upon these earlier commitments, culminating in this new policy aimed at turning equality in law into equality in fact. This policy has a ten-year scope and comes with a first three-year action plan for 2007-2010.

It should be recalled that a first policy on the status of women was adopted in 1993. That first policy gave rise to the adoption and implementation of three consecutive action plans. In 2005, the government held public hearings as part of a widespread consultation on the document entitled *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men*. In December 2005, the *Commission des affaires sociales* tabled a unanimous report recommending the Minister for the Status of Women to see to the development of a new policy and action plan for its implementation.

Québec society has changed profoundly in the last 30 years. Since the adoption of the Québec *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* in 1975, gender-based discrimination is prohibited in Québec. From that moment on, efforts were stepped up to correct differences in treatment present in all legislation. Concrete measures were also taken to achieve greater equality in fact. In addition to this, women began catching up in waves in terms of education, becoming a growing presence on the labour market – where they have almost reached parity with men in terms of numbers – and their slow but sure progress in various circles of power. All of this makes it possible to state that, today, Québec women enjoy equality in law, have more control over their health and reproductive lives, and are more financially self-sufficient.

Despite all of these achievements, it is important to realize that the transition to real, de facto equality has not yet taken place. Persistent biases remain at the core of rules, practices and cultural constructs. This is what is called systemic discrimination. It breeds social, economic and political inequality for women. This inequality is intensified for women in at-risk groups, i.e., disabled women, Native women, immigrant women and women who belong to visible minorities.

At the same time, emerging social problems throw up new obstacles to equality. The use of the Internet to disseminate pornographic and violent images, the global sex trade and the exploitation of vulnerable women and children are just some examples. Demographic change, globalization, the decentralization of power and regionalization make it more complicated to act and can lead to further inequality.

Growing religious and cultural diversity enriches society but can also cause values to collide. Reasonable accommodations to ensure the exercise of individual rights must be compliant and consistent with efforts to achieve the objective of gender equality.

That is the context for this policy. The Government of Québec is convinced that both women and men's freedom and growth depends on achieving de facto equality between them. Beyond legislative amendments, this equality implies changes in mentality, culture and ways of thinking.

The government invites the population and society at large to commit to this endeavour. All Québec women and men will benefit and, in the long run, so will society as a whole. As international reports show, gender equality policies are more and more of an asset for modern societies. They have a positive impact on fertility and lead to women's greater involvement in the labour market. They can create positive conditions to face a number of challenges, including those linked to the aging population and the labour shortages expected in several sectors of the economy. Free of the shackles of predetermined social roles, women and men will be able to reach their potential and participate fully in the social and economic development of Québec. In short, a government strategy that gives tangible expression to the values of gender equality is a valuable tool for democracy.

With this policy, the government is renewing and enhancing its commitment to gender equality in Québec. But the government cannot do this alone. Unions, businesses, teaching institutions, health and social services, childcare services, community organizations, local and regional bodies and political parties are a sample of the vast diversity of stakeholders who play a determining role in changing values and implementing meaningful measures to achieve equality in their respective areas of influence. With this policy, the government is asking women, men, social and economic partners to pool their efforts to take Québec society from equality in law to equality in fact.

The first chapter sets out the policy's cornerstones. The second shows how the government is instituting a series of instruments to take effective steps toward equality, make equality a common social goal and bring this issue to the forefront. The third chapter lists the six guidelines and eighteen objectives that will guide the government's actions in the various areas. The fourth and final chapter specifies how the policy will be assessed to get a clear picture of its impact.

1 Policy cornerstones

1.1 LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

A number of charters, laws and other international conventions confirm governments' commitment to gender equality. The Government of Québec's commitments in terms of gender equality mesh with the content of Québec's *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which prohibit gender-based discrimination. The rights proclaimed in the Québec charter include basic rights, such as the right to life, personal security, integrity and freedom; political rights, legal rights, and economic and social rights.¹ The government's commitments are also based on the principle of equality between women and men enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948).

Furthermore, Québec's initiatives in the name of equality will continue to draw on the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW),² which creates the basis for achieving gender equality in addition to striving to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Québec became a party to the Convention through an order passed in 1981, and regularly showcases its initiatives to meet the Convention's requirements before the United Nations Committee in charge of this issue.

The *Beijing Platform for Action* adopted by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) is another permanent mobilization and coordination tool. It is also a framework that guides government action to support gender equality. Québec renewed its commitment to achieving the strategic objectives of the Platform for Action at the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which highlighted the 10th anniversary of the Beijing Conference.

Québec also ensures that women enjoy all of the rights recognized in international covenants on economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights on equal footing with men.

In June 2006, the government passed an act instituting the *Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*.³ This made respect for women's rights, the elimination of systemic discrimination and the achievement of gender equality an intrinsic part of a department's mission for the first time in Québec.

The government intends to continue putting forth concrete measures that give life to women's rights as recognized in the Québec and Canadian charters, equality legislation and international commitments, in order to turn equality in law into equality in fact.

1.2 ACHIEVEMENTS

Women have caught up remarkably in education. This shows up clearly in comparative data on the highest degrees obtained by two generations of Québec women, namely those who were between the ages of 25 and 34 in 2001 and women in the same age group in 1971, and who were between the ages of 55 and 64 in 2001. In the younger group, 30.8% had a university certificate, diploma or degree in 2001, and 24.1% had a college certificate or diploma, whereas the percentages for the older group were only 14.9% and 9.4% respectively.⁴

Enormous progress also comes to light upon examination of certain data from earlier census surveys. With regard to the labour market, 57.7% of Québec women age 15 and up were part of the labour force in 2001 (33.9% in 1971). Mothers are a more steady presence on the labour market. In 2002, 73.3% of women between the ages of 20 and 44 whose youngest child was under the age of 6 were part of the labour force. That was the case for 30.3% of women in that category in 1976. In terms of employment income, women earned 69.1% of men's salary in 2001 (compared to 52.3% in 1971).⁵

The proportion of Québec women living in low-income households, according to the low-income cut-off (LICO) after taxes, dropped from 20.3% to 13.3% between 1997 and 2003. Furthermore, the proportion of women at the head of single-parent families with low incomes after taxes decreased from 53.2% in 1997 to 34.5% in 2003. The number of single-parent families on employment insurance also plummeted by 52% between 1996 and 2006, bringing the number of families from 100,008 to 48,120.

Furthermore, the disposable income of women on employment insurance improved between 2003 and 2006. Single women able to work had a 4% increase in income. This increase is even more noticeable for women with children, varying from 15.3% to 18.5%. The situation of single women has also improved. The proportion of single women age 65 or older living under the low-income cut-off went from 39% in 1996 to 31% in 2003 and the proportion of women under 65 in the same situation dropped from 49.6% to 36.1% during the same period. That being said, women are still more likely to live in poverty than men.⁶

The number of women in circles of power has increased. In 1970, there was only one woman who was both a member of the National Assembly and a minister. In 2006, elected women accounted for 31.2% of members and 38.5% of ministers.⁷

Moreover, several government initiatives since the adoption of the last policy on the status of women have helped to advance equality:

- In the area of parental rights, Québec passed the *Parental Insurance Act* in 2001. The new plan, which went into effect in January 2006, provides higher benefits and covers self-employed workers as well as employees. It also includes parental benefits for fathers, enabling them to get involved with their newborns from birth. The introduction of low-cost childcare services in 1997 was a major step forward that provided approximately 200,000 childcare places. This has made it easier to balance work and home life, and has increased the employment of mothers of young children, while providing safe and stimulating childcare for children.

- The government’s Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, adopted in 2004 as an outcome of the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, contains several measures aimed at improving women’s economic self-sufficiency. These measures include increasing low-income workers’ disposable income by increasing the minimum wage, replacing the Parental Wage Assistance Program (PWA) with a refundable tax credit called the Work Premium, setting up child support and extending the \$100/month child support income exemption to people eligible for employment assistance. The government has also built new housing for low-income households, provided free medication for people over the age of 65 who receive the maximum guaranteed income supplement benefit, and instituted the new refundable tax credit for caregivers of elderly persons.
- The *Pay Equity Act* now creates the obligation for all businesses with ten employees or more to correct any gender-based pay inequities. In 2006, the Government of Québec entered into pay equity agreements involving over 360,000 people in the health and education sectors and the public service.
- Since 2001, the *Act Respecting Equal Access to Employment in Public Bodies and Amending the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* provides for equal access programs in public organizations with 100 employees or more. It aims, among other things, at eliminating the obstacles to hiring and promoting women, and at fostering the equitable presence of women and men in the various job classes or categories.
- The *Women’s Workforce Strategy*, published in 2001, provides a framework and guidance for government initiatives to develop women’s work force participation. It also supports the job integration of women who may face greater challenges in that respect, including single mothers, women with disabilities, immigrant women, and women from visible minorities. Finally, women’s entrepreneurship has also been encouraged by creating funds for women entrepreneurs in six resource regions.
- With regard to the family, new rules for child support and custody have been introduced. In 1995, the *Act to Facilitate the Payment of Support* established a universal, automatic collection service in Québec. In 1997, both the federal and Québec governments decided to exempt child support payments from taxes. These support payments became taxable as part of the paying parent’s income, and no longer considered part of the custodial parent’s taxable income. A system for determining child support payments was also developed. That same year, the *Regulation respecting family mediation* was adopted to facilitate dispute settlement between spouses with children in the event of divorce.
- In the area of health care, Québec has authorized midwifery. This means that Québec women can now give birth under the supervision of a midwife in a hospital, in a birthing centre or at home. Measures have also been set up to facilitate young women’s access to contraception. The first action plan to promote women’s health and well being has been tabled.

- The phenomenon of violence against women has also led to various initiatives. The consolidation of a network of shelters for women victims of domestic violence is almost complete. The network of sexual assault centres continues to develop, as does the network of services for violent husbands. In 1995, the Government of Québec unveiled its intervention policy on domestic violence and, in 2001, its government guidelines on sexual assault. It brought the implementation of the intervention policy up to date by publishing an action plan for the 2004-2009 period, which contains 72 commitments by eight departments and agencies. One of these commitments allows victims of domestic violence or sexual assault whose life is in danger to break their lease.
- With regard to immigration policies, the sponsor's commitment to support his immigrant spouse has been reduced from ten to three years. Also, with regard to domestic violence, proposals by Québec led, in 2002, to the practice of refusing a sponsorship application if the sponsor has been convicted of a sexual or other offence against the person. Furthermore, since October 16, 2006, a sponsorship application is also refused if the sponsor has been convicted of a sexual or other offence against the person in Canada or abroad.
- Several steps have been taken with respect to access to power. These include the creation, in 1999, of the Equal Access to Decision-Making Program, which has made it possible to fund 367 projects to increase women's participation in local and regional decision-making bodies. The government declaration in April 2006 also stipulated that the boards of directors of state corporations must feature an equal number of women and men members within the next five years.

Finally, it is worth mentioning Section 21.7 of the *Act Respecting the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions*, which states: "The regional conference of elected officers shall establish a five-year development plan that identifies general and specific development objectives for the region in keeping with sustainable development and taking foremost account of young people's participation and, in accordance with the principles of equality and parity, women's participation, in the democratic life of the region."

1.3 FINDINGS AND CONSENSUS

Persistent inequality

Ten years into the previous policy, the *Secrétariat à la condition féminine*, in 2003, examined developments in women and men's socioeconomic situation. The analysis was updated and fleshed out with comments or recommendations gleaned during the consultation process conducted in March 2003 with the participation of 86 non-governmental organizations. The resulting document, entitled *L'avenir des Québécoises: Les suites des consultations de mars 2003* (Québec Women's Future: Outcomes of the March 2003 Consultations), shows persistent inequalities, as well as differences in women's and men's experience of particular situations.

The *Conseil du statut de la femme* made additional findings, which it set out in its brief entitled *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men*, published in 2004. The brief explains the inequality and obstacles that continue to exist for women in many respects.⁸

One of the first such factors concerns the very real consequences of motherhood, single parenthood and family responsibilities, which can notably entail lower incomes, as well as impacts on health and quality of life given the difficulty of balancing work and home life, and a slowing of professional and civic pursuits, not to mention lower retirement income.

Economically speaking, the gender gap is still significant. The explanation for this is the situation in work environments, and wage conditions that are more difficult for women: atypical work, part-time work, minimum wage, lower paid jobs, unequal wages for jobs that are different from but equivalent to men's jobs, and lower benefit payments in the event of unemployment, occupational injury, illness or retirement.

Furthermore, all forms of violence against women constitute a social scourge that has an impact on women's integrity, health and even socioeconomic disparities between women and men.

Finally, women have taken great strides with regard to participation in circles of power, but there is still a long way to go to achieve parity.

Consensus

The above findings were confirmed during the massive consultation held from January to September 2005 to follow up on the brief presented by the *Conseil du statut de la femme*. During that time, 75 organizations were heard and 107 written submissions were analyzed. These figures show the importance of the issue examined. The *Commission des affaires sociales* report was adopted unanimously by members of the National Assembly from all parties. The consultation brought out strong consensus on the following points:

- » government initiatives in Québec have gone a long way toward fostering equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men, and most of the written submissions advocated ongoing action by the government;
- » although gender equality has nearly been accomplished in law, equality in fact remains to be achieved. Women are still discriminated against on the basis of their gender and have not yet achieved equality despite the progress made at the legal level;
- » in order to continue progressing toward true gender equality, Québec society needs a clear statement of political will, strong structures, responsible civil society and a solid action plan.⁹

1.4 THE VISION OF EQUALITY

GENDER EQUALITY AS AN IDEAL MEANS EQUAL RIGHTS, EQUAL OBLIGATIONS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Over the last few years, equality has come to be seen as a notion that proposes equal conditions for women and men to fully exercise their rights, exploit their potential and contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development, while benefiting equally from these changes.¹⁰

The government supports the brief by the *Conseil du statut de la femme* regarding the ideal of gender equality, which entails both correcting existing gender-based inequality and eliminating all gender-based discrimination. This ideal means equal rights, equal obligations and equal opportunities.¹¹ Those are the grounds for women and men's development and freedom of choice.

Achieving equality also requires that all analysis or action be based on the values of democracy, justice, freedom, solidarity and peace, which are the safeguards of true freedom of individual and collective choice and action.

The pursuit of equality is not aimed at tackling all of the problems that women and men may face. Its aim is to address the problems caused by systemic discrimination or inequality that create gender-based disadvantages at the economic, social, political and legal levels, or with respect to health.

The vision of equality is intimately linked to the notion of systemic discrimination, which is worth defining:

Systemic discrimination is part of the rules, practices, cultural schema and methods used in a given environment. While they may not necessarily discriminate intentionally or even consciously, these ways of doing things penalize a given social group, in this case women.¹³

When we talk about systemic discrimination, we therefore mean a series of factors that combine and collude to put women in an unequal situation. Some examples of this are the consequences that motherhood and time devoted to the family can have on career development and women's economic situation, the concentration of women workers in lower-paying, so-called traditionally female jobs, and women's unequal participation in decision-making bodies.

The strategy to reduce inequality would not be complete without in-depth actions within institutions to introduce equality into families, communities and work environments.

The challenges ahead, of which there are still many, show the need to set realistic objectives in the medium and long term, within the policy's ten-year scope. This policy is aimed at giving shape to the vision of equality and will guide the steps taken by partners to achieve equality.

2

Governance

On the way to achieving equality in fact, the government has devised tools to facilitate this undertaking and firmly anchor this objective in the State apparatus. Pursuing past actions, it reaffirms that it will maintain government structures working towards gender equality. It has chosen three approaches to act as effectively as possible against discrimination and the different forms of inequality that women experience in Québec. It undertakes to govern in keeping with the principle that gender equality be an integral part of its policies, programs and projects since their adoption and implementation can have different repercussions for women and men. The government is setting up an accountability system and will use indicators to follow up on government commitments.

For this to become an issue taken up by the whole of society, the government relies on a solid partnership with social institutions that can influence progress towards gender equality.

The government believes that it is equally important to promote egalitarian models and keep up its participation on the international scene to make known its expertise and exercise its leadership.

2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN QUÉBEC, A TWOFOLD MANDATE REGARDING THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND EQUALITY HAS BEEN ENSHRINED IN LAW.

The government created Québec-wide and regional organizational structures that are flexible, efficient and allow it to become more familiar with women's and men's realities and take them into account in its actions.

As stated in section 2 of the *Act respecting the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*, adopted in June 2006, a major part of the Minister's mission is to foster the social, civic, economic and professional contribution of women to Québec's development, as well as to promote their rights and actual gender equality. This is the first time in Québec that a twofold mandate regarding the status of women and equality has been enshrined in law.

Specifically, section 3.2 of the Act confers the following responsibilities on the Minister:

1. Reinforcing government intervention to ensure gender equality and the safeguarding of women's rights.
2. Encouraging the actual achievement of gender equality, in particular by eliminating systemic discrimination against women.
3. Informing, encouraging and supporting Québec-wide, regional and local authorities so that they will act with full regard for gender equality and women's rights.
4. Seeing to the actual progression of gender equality.
5. Encouraging the public to take positive action toward the achievement of gender equality and equal rights for women.

The government is keeping the current structures: the *Secrétariat à la condition féminine*, with its mandate to assist in developing government action, and the *Conseil du statut de la femme*, with its twofold mandate of advising the Minister and promoting and informing the public about the status of women.¹⁴

Within the *Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*, the *Secrétariat à la condition féminine* continues to help develop government activities and ensure their consistency. It accomplishes this by providing the professional expertise needed in carrying out the mandates and responsibilities of the Ministère and particularly by working with interdepartmental teams and committees. It also ensures follow-up of the action plan stemming from this policy.

The *Secrétariat* plays a basic role as facilitator and advisor to the network of officers in charge of gender equality in government departments and agencies. The *Secrétariat* ensures coordination and follow-up of the implementation of the policy and action plan.

To have appropriate advice and to be able to inform the population and social partners involved in implementing the policy and action plan, the government must rely on a research, promotion and information organization. The *Conseil du statut de la femme's* mandate is to produce studies and briefs on all matters of equality and respect for women's rights, and to inform the public about these questions. It makes known its research findings to the government, its social partners and the population.

Thanks to its regional structure, the *Conseil* will pay special attention to the introduction of the policy, together with its local and regional partners, most particularly the regional administrative conferences and regional conferences of elected officers (regional steering committees of elected officers known by the French acronym CRE). If necessary, it will convey its observations and recommendations to the Minister.

2.2 APPROACHES

Achieving a truly egalitarian society requires measures to correct instances of inequality (targeted approach) as well as the means to prevent them (cross-cutting approach). Since such an achievement depends on the combined and coordinated efforts of all partners, the government wants to rally them around a shared vision of gender equality and a commitment to it (societal approach).

Using the three approaches to achieve gender equality met with the approval of many groups heard in parliamentary committee. Thus legislators concurred with the majority positions regarding the simultaneous use of the three approaches so that all facets of inequality can be taken into account.¹⁵

2.2.1 Targeted approach

The targeted approach where women are concerned is essential given persistent systemic discrimination and inequality. It is a tool to devise appropriate measures to eliminate gender-based discrimination, which can be exacerbated by socioeconomic status, age, ethnicity, cultural background or disability.

The targeted approach entails carrying out concrete actions to correct instances of inequality. It sheds light on the kinds of inequality women must confront and helps conceive of effective action to counter such situations.¹⁶ These actions may be “positive” at times. One example is enforcement of the *Pay Equity Act*, designed to correct unfair pay discrepancies affecting people doing traditionally female jobs valued as equivalent to jobs traditionally done by men.¹⁷ Another example is the *À égalité pour décider* program, whose main objective is increased representation of women in local and regional decision-making bodies all over Québec.

2.2.2 Cross-cutting approach

The cross-cutting approach covers the entire civil service as well as local and regional decision-making bodies. The aim of this approach is to have governmental agencies build concern for gender equality into their ways of doing things and making decisions. It is a means of ensuring that legislation, policies, programs and public services as a whole move towards gender equality or at least don't go against it.¹⁸

The Platform for Action of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, adopted in Beijing in 1995 by over 180 States and governments, states that:

In addressing the enjoyment of human rights, Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively.¹⁹

In Québec, the cross-cutting approach is manifested in gender-based analysis, defined as a management approach to assess differential effects on women and men—given their socioeconomic conditions—of government interventions as they are conceived, implemented and evaluated.²⁰

The purpose of gender-based analysis is to build into government practice a method that can be adapted to ongoing work and that sheds a particular light on past or future decisions. Thus it informs policy makers ahead of time about unsuspected effects of their work that could be a source of gender inequality.²¹

Gender-disaggregated data are the basic material essential to discovering gender-based realities. Government departments and agencies, as well as local and regional bodies, will use them to become familiar with and analyze the different situation of women and men within their area of jurisdiction.

From September 1997 to December 2004, nine gender-based analysis projects were carried out in different areas of the government apparatus. An analysis done at the *Ministère des transports*, for example, led to a better understanding of women's and men's mobility patterns in the greater Québec City region and to the observation that women used public transit more than men did. The analysis also revealed unequal access by gender to cars and consequently an effect on access to jobs, which are increasingly dispersed and decentralized.

Now that the findings of the nine projects have been analyzed, it is time to move to the second stage, namely, the gradual integration of gender-based analysis (GBA) in the machinery of government. The government is thus following the recommendation by the *Commission des affaires sociales* and would like to see GBA introduced in government practice and applied to key projects.

2.2.3 Societal approach

Although the State plays a principal role in the endeavour to achieve gender equality, it cannot do this on its own. Through the societal approach, the State will try to mobilize different social actors to achieve equality in fact. This third approach presupposes that civil society is both a participant and keenly interested in reaching this objective. Its aim is the modification of social relationships between women and men, and the introduction of a culture of equality in institutions.

To attain equality in fact, all social, economic, political and cultural entities must commit to it. We are thinking of public, semipublic and private organizations such as employers and trade unions, or community-based organizations such as human rights groups.

Some of these actors are already partners with the government where the promotion of gender equality is concerned. To go further, however, current and potential partners must make a deeper commitment to their social responsibility, and they must be encouraged to take part in discussions to think about and define problems obstructing equality, make diagnoses and look for solutions.

Women and men, individually or belonging to different movements, also have a vital role to play. To speed up progress in achieving equality in fact, the State will support and encourage men to take responsibility for and participate in building equality. The societal approach is very much called for in the matter of balancing work and family, an issue that particularly concerns men as fathers, spouses, caregivers, bosses, workers and citizens.

This is what led the Québec government to include in its parental insurance plan five weeks of parental benefits reserved for fathers only.

The above-mentioned approaches imply that social research must also subscribe to the goal of equality. The study of gender relations and women's particular realities has produced a rich body of multidisciplinary scientific research over the past 30 years in the world at large and in Québec specifically.²²

The expertise of university chairs, feminist research groups and public organizations in Québec working on the status of women must continue to develop through new competencies, among other things.

When addressing gender equality, every State must find a procedure suited to the characteristics of its society, whether in terms of its political, legal or institutional system, organization of work and working conditions, culture, or, in a broader sense, its value system and social schemes.

Québec is interested in research on the subject done by international organizations such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations, and in the experiences of other societies with whom it has certain affinities. It must, however, shape these studies to its own reality.

2.3 ACCOUNTABILITY AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROGRESS OF EQUALITY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

In keeping with the *Public Administration Act*, which establishes results-based management, and the *Act respecting the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine*, which confers on the Minister the responsibility of seeing to the actual progression of gender equality, it is essential for the policy to be accompanied by measures to ensure its effective implementation and its contribution to reaching the objectives set. Equally important is that it be possible, in the ten-year period of its implementation, to monitor progress towards equality and measure perceptible improvements and, if necessary, the obstacles hindering progress.

In addition, to ensure follow-up of the measures that the government departments and agencies included in the action plan accompanying this policy, an accountability system will be introduced. The departments and agencies will be asked to pair every measure for which they are responsible with an indicator to measure the progress of their commitments. They will also be asked to include in their annual management report the efforts made to reach the objectives they set for themselves. The *Secrétariat à la condition féminine* will be responsible for forming a follow-up committee to assist the government departments and agencies in their accountability duties. It will collect all the indicators defined by the departments and agencies in a log that will show the overall realization of the objectives envisaged.

At the end of the three-year action plan, the *Secrétariat's* mandate will be to write a report and analysis of the activities undertaken using the indicators chosen and the information it will have collected from the government departments and agencies responsible for the measures. It may also report on initiatives taken to act on gender equality in government departments' different sectors of intervention or give an account of their participation in equality governance in areas such as gender-based analysis, or their efforts to mobilize social actors.

Achieving gender equality is a matter of prime social and political importance that warrants periodic examination by elected representatives. At the present, none of the existing mechanisms allows for this, except for specific situations or circumscribed topics. Members of the National Assembly from different political parties—who are also responsible for control of the government, the monitoring of the enforcement of laws and the repercussions of political choices on how major social issues evolve—are a well-suited forum to hear different representations on how gender equality is handled.

In keeping with the recommendation by the *Commission des affaires sociales*, the government undertakes to table in the National Assembly, every three years, a document on the evolution of gender equality.

The report on the government's three years of action may be included in this document, along with observations on results obtained from certain global indicators of gender equality. The appropriate National Assembly committee will receive the document, study it and examine any other relevant matter. Depending on the circumstances, it might proceed to hold public consultations to clarify its thinking and invite government representatives, institutions or social partners who contribute or may contribute to the real advancement of equality.

2.4 PARTNERSHIP

The State is a front-line actor on the issue of gender equality. In many spheres, laws have been amended and new ones adopted. Programs, projects and action plans to fight systemic discrimination and inequality experienced by women have been implemented. In the last few decades, many initiatives were endorsed to collect data and act on the causes of gender inequality. These efforts were so marked that in Canada, as well as abroad, Québec now enjoys one of the best reputations in the world. This exemplary tradition must continue to be embodied in concrete projects that may move women's and men's situation towards equality in fact.

However, gender equality is also an individual responsibility and a responsibility of many civil society institutions and partners in different spheres of influence. We are referring first of all to public, regional and local authorities, mainly the regional conferences of elected officers (CRE), regional county municipalities (MRC), municipalities, local development centres school boards, health and social services agencies, and regional councils of labour market partners. These are organizations to which the government has delegated powers and whose decisions affect women's and men's living conditions.

Businesses, trade unions, community organizations, the education and health networks, the media and political parties are all stakeholders contributing to equality in fact. They are principals in implementing measures to achieve gender equality. In the past few years and decades, women's groups and institutions such as cities, regional conferences of elected officers, trade unions and businesses have indeed taken initiatives and collaborated on public projects to that effect.

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.

That is why, drawing on the societal approach it advocates, the government would like these different stakeholders to take action in their respective organizations. Similarly, in Québec, in areas such as regional initiatives or employment, they should come together to act and coordinate their actions on the ground. It is essential to create spaces where they can share experiences and good practices but also agree on concerted action and commitments.

Some initiatives will deserve public recognition and the government wants to highlight them so that the concern with equality is present and made manifest. Only truly committed participation by all will ensure the development of a genuine culture of equality.

2.5 QUÉBEC'S PRESENCE ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

Québec is recognized on the international scene as a leader on the issue of gender equality. All actions taken in Québec on behalf of gender equality are based on, and will continue to be based on, Québec's international commitments to two fundamental documents: the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, drawn up at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (1995).

On both the bilateral and multilateral levels, it is important to promote the Government of Québec's expertise and its leadership regarding rights and gender equality. By having its competencies and responsibilities acknowledged abroad, Québec increases its influence and ability to act, while its interests in this matter are more likely to be taken into account internationally.

The activity of international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Organization of the Francophonie and the Council of Europe point to questions that will give rise to new discussions on gender equality in the coming years.

The Government of Québec would also like to maintain a comprehensive view of priority subjects discussed at the international level and learn of emerging trends in order to guide its action with respect to gender equality.

3 Guidelines

With a view to formulating specific measures, six major guidelines are put forward in the policy:

- 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 across all aspects of life**
- 6. Achieving greater participation by women in decision-making bodies**

The first guideline concerns ongoing sexual and sexist stereotypes. It shows that egalitarian models and behaviour must be promoted since such stereotypes are indicative of cultural models that impede equality in fact. The second and third guidelines revolve around unequal living and working conditions. They deal with economic gaps between women and men and balancing family and work responsibilities. The fourth guideline concerns health approaches as well as occupational health and safety, which must take into account women's specific needs and characteristics. The fifth one deals with respect for women's integrity and safety in all environments, that is, regarding all aspects of life in society that need to be influenced from the perspective of gender equality. This guideline addresses, in particular, the need to counter violence against women. Last, the sixth concerns exercising power. Participation by women and men in decision-making bodies and the presence of both in discussion and decision-making processes are essential in determining living conditions in our communities. As a government, we want women to have their place and we want decision-making bodies to take their needs and concerns into account.

3.1 PROMOTING EGALITARIAN MODELS AND BEHAVIOUR

Context

Gender division, which reinforces sexual and sexist stereotypes, has an impact on the learning of social roles, values and the behaviour of people of both sexes. It can narrow the range of choices or opportunities in areas such as training, employment, occupational advancement and income. Thus, for women especially, the chances of achieving economic independence may be limited, and for men, their involvement in the private sphere may be curtailed since these stereotypes are also present in institutions, they affect service delivery and response to stated needs.

Since they influence how we perceive women and men, stereotypes also have an effect on physical and psychological integrity, sexual exploitation and violence, and power sharing.

Promotion of and education about egalitarian models and behaviour are a solution to the stereotyped division of gender roles. The State and civil society must embrace this solution to ensure equality in fact, mainly by eliminating sexist bias in institutions and individual relationships, and thus work together to develop a society more respectful of people's individual life choices.

It is from this vantage point that the Government of Québec subscribed to the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). Under the Convention, governments undertake to pursue all appropriate measures to modify women's and men's social and cultural patterns of conduct based on prejudice or stereotypes, including the idea that one of the sexes is superior or inferior to the other.

Objectives

The government intends therefore to promote egalitarian models and behaviour in the pursuit, on a priority basis, of the following four objectives:

- » Foster young people's non-stereotyped socialization;
- » Support the teaching of egalitarian parenting skills and practices;
- » Encourage the media, cultural enterprises, and sports and recreational organizations to promote non-sexist roles and behaviour;
- » Support gender equality in a context of growing cultural and religious diversity.

3.1.1 Foster young people's non-stereotyped socialization

The process of learning roles at home, at day care or school should be imbued with the values of equality and respect for differences throughout youngsters' education. From very early on, children gain from being sensitized to these principles and from experiencing egalitarian relationships between the sexes. In this sense, childcare establishments and schools play a predominant role in passing on knowledge, skills and attitudes. They help girls and boys shape their identity, develop a worldview and have an idea of the place they occupy and would like to occupy in society later on.

While girls and women have gradually freed themselves from gender-linked constraints and now have access to a variety of social and occupational perspectives, the process is far from over. Boys could also profit from a relaxation of stereotypes associated with masculinity, which would broaden their prospects and could indirectly have beneficial effects on their physical and mental health and their education. We know for a fact, for example, that there is a direct correlation between stereotypical thinking and behaviour and poor academic achievement.²³

Many specialists are now interested in the new social phenomenon of the sexualization of public space, which has an impact on young people's sexuality. Manifestations of this kind of sexualization are multiplying; hence the importance of improving our knowledge of the root causes and consequences—especially for people's health and well-being—and the values conveyed. The phenomenon affects not only girls and women; boys and men are also concerned, albeit in different ways. Thus it is important for young people to be given the means to adopt a critical position on models of sexuality directed at them and for them to be encouraged to experience a healthy sexuality.

Sex education, moreover, should be given its proper place and structured in such a way as to lead both girls and boys to engage in egalitarian couple relationships and to develop a critical approach to sexual role-models presented to them. Actions in this respect are essential and can have a crucial influence on doing away with stereotyped concepts of female and male roles.

It is important to work with childcare establishments and schools to eliminate sexist stereotypes and to foster the advance towards gender equality. In addition, to achieve better interventions with young people, it is vital to understand fully their view of equality and their concerns about this matter.

3.1.2 Support the teaching of egalitarian parenting skills and practices

Since 1977, the *Civil Code of Québec* has stipulated that the father and mother exercise parental authority together.²⁴ However, the social division of gender roles with respect to family responsibilities continues to be prevalent in many families, with a great majority of women still looking after the children. Nonetheless, more and more fathers, especially young ones, are involved in bringing up their children and spend more time with them in socialization activities.

By offering fathers paternity benefits that cannot be transferred to the mother under the Québec parental insurance plan, the government is contributing to blur the division by gender when it comes to the responsibility of child rearing. It is also sending a clear message to society that women and men must be allowed to take on their various roles.

According to a recent study, when unions break down, most children continue to live with their mother, and this is almost always a joint decision made by the parents and confirmed by the court.²⁵

The awarding of child custody to parents is changing however: exclusive custody awarded to mother is declining steadily in favour of custody shared between mother and father.²⁶ According to the *Institut de la Statistique du Québec*, the percentage of divorce cases²⁷ involving shared custody (or joint custody, depending on the term used in the forms) more than doubled from 1995 to 2003,²⁸ that is, from 11.1% to 28.6%, whereas it stood at only 7.3% in 1990.

Where conditions permit, we must facilitate egalitarian practices in parenting following the breakdown of a union, especially since such breakdowns are occurring earlier and earlier in children's lives. However, the goal must not be systematic recourse to shared custody, since in some cases it is not in the child's best interests. There are situations where the child's safety and development may be compromised.

Moreover, the particular reality of blended families—a family type that is increasing—puts women and men in the double role of parent and stepparent. At present, little scientific documentation exists on the models, social aspects and practices of this double role.

In a context marked by a variety of family situations and make-ups, it is important to value to a greater extent the role of parents in all its forms, and to promote paternal involvement and help women and men carry out their parental duties.

3.1.3 Encourage the media, cultural enterprises, and sports and recreational organizations to promote non-sexist roles and behaviour

The role of the media is to inform the public, emit opinions on how public affairs are being conducted, reflect what society considers worthy of public interest and also to entertain. They play a role in establishing and perpetuating certain values or standards. The media, along with information technologies and communications, including the Internet, have a direct influence on shaping young people's identity and their perception of their social roles and they occupy a central place in young people's lives. Unfortunately, many images and views carried by the media continue to be stereotyped and contribute not only to fanning prejudice and inequality but also to showcasing different forms of violence.

All too often, advertising still represents women as sex objects and presents unrealistic beauty standards to young people. In fact, the negative or stereotyped images conveyed by the media and advertising tend to lock women and men into limited relationships and roles that don't reflect the many facets of their contributions to society.

The world of culture, whether we are referring to the performing arts or cultural enterprises, is also an important source of transmission of values. This is particularly true in the music, film, television and computer games industries, which mainly attract young people. Some productions still carry a message of male domination over women.

Physical activities and sports, like all other social practices stemming from education and culture, are occasions to build one's sexual identity, particularly in relation to one's body. The distribution of women and men in sports, the kinds they choose to play and the positions of responsibility or supervision they occupy reflect, more than in other fields, a gendered division of society.

The government would like the worlds of culture, media, recreation and sports to take part in the fight against sexual and sexist stereotypes and in the promotion of egalitarian models and behaviour.

3.1.4 Support gender equality in a context of growing cultural and religious diversity

Québec is a democratic, French-speaking, pluralist society. It must be sure to promote among newly arrived immigrants, and also among Quebecers as a whole, the values that sustain the cohesive nature of society, most notably those set out in the Québec *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*—for example, the right to equality; political, legal, economic and social rights; and the prohibition of discrimination in all its forms.

In the context of growing cultural and religious diversity, and a certain resurgence of religious fervour, we are witnessing an increase in the manifestation of religious values and practices in the public sphere, some of which can be a source of friction where the exercise of women's rights is concerned.

Consequently, the following values and principles in particular must be reaffirmed:

- » Ours is a secular State, and the separation of the political and religious spheres is a fundamental value of Québec society;
- » Women and men are equal; they have the same responsibilities and enjoy the same rights in both the public sphere and in private life;
- » Québec society promotes the resolution of conflicts through negotiation;
- » The fundamental rights and freedoms, which the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* recognizes for Quebecers, be they born in Québec or abroad, are exercised with a proper regard for democratic values, public order and the general welfare of the citizens of Québec.

Growing cultural and religious diversity means that perceptions of values surrounding gender equality may be altered. It is in our interest to assuage fears and to avoid a rise in lack of understanding and polarization of positions held by different groups in Québec society.

It is essential to create spaces for dialogue reflecting the values of listening and empowerment – a determining factor in relation to autonomy and equal rights – and to broaden existing networks of solidarity.

On occasion, cultural or religious practices are the subject of requests to public institutions for accommodation. Some of these incidents have been much publicized in the media in the past few years. As the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* has warned, reasonable accommodation granted on an individual basis to deal with a specific problem does not always allow for gender equality to be taken into account. Moreover, as of 1997, the *Conseil du statut de la femme* underlined the need to provide public institutions with guidelines so that women's rights are respected when cultural and religious requests are made.

In the context of growing cultural and religious pluralism, the government intends to make sure that the public institutions' response, particularly in the form of reasonable accommodation made in the name of this diversity, guarantees the rights of women 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.

3.2 ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ECONOMIC ARENA

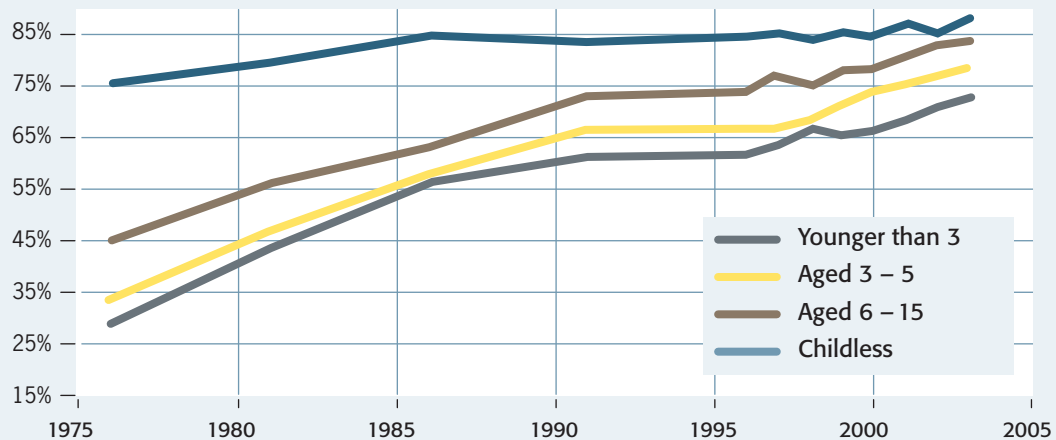
Context

Women's labour market activity rate

Over the past 40 years, Québec has passed a number of laws and measures to democratize education and improve workers' conditions. A notable result is that women's education levels have risen constantly and their presence in the labour market has grown as have their income levels.

The labour market activity rate of women with children has increased constantly since the 1970s. Beginning in 1998, when low-cost childcare spaces and full-time kindergarten for children aged five became available, the labour market activity rate of mothers of children aged five and younger has risen. The measures thus had a large and statistically significant impact on women's activity rate.²⁹

Figure 1: Activity Rate of Women Aged 20 to 44, Based on the Presence or Absence of Children and, Where Applicable, Age of the Youngest Child, Québec, 1976-2003



Source: Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine, *Un portrait statistique des familles au Québec*, 2005, Table 4.2, p. 243.

Among young people, in 2005, women's activity rate³⁰ was equivalent to that of men. Women aged 45 and older were more active than previously. Further, increasing numbers of women aged 25 to 44 with children younger than 16 have paid employment. This is the age group whose activity rate has grown the most in the last 13 years.³¹

Employment precariousness and poverty

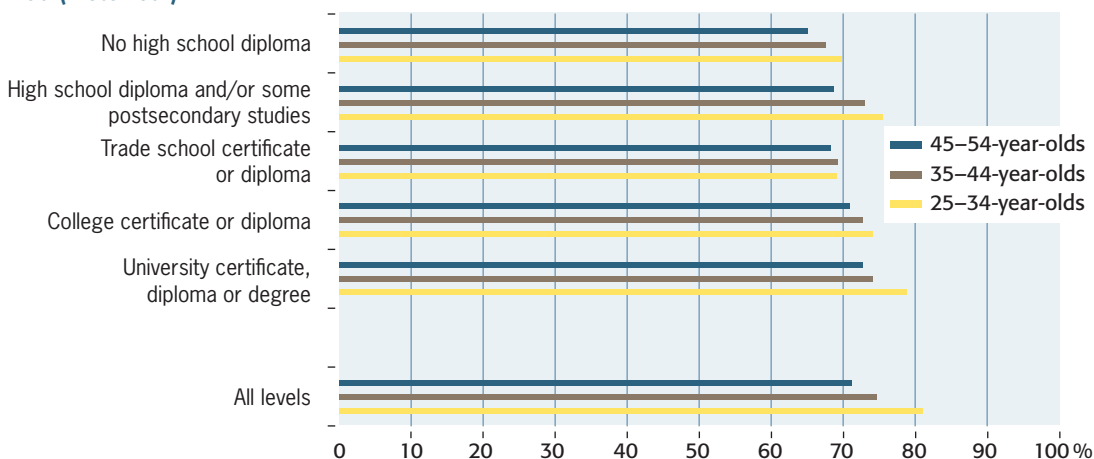
Despite this progress, most women are still to be found in a restricted range of occupations and less well-paid trades where they form the majority of the work force. Furthermore, the fields where women form the majority, notably the service sector, are less valued in terms of remuneration than activity sectors where the majority of the work force is male.

In addition, more women of all ages work part time during their lives, while this is true only of young men. Last, women's work week is shorter and, on average, they work fewer weeks during the year.

Women's average employment income, with comparable educations, at similar or equivalent jobs, and an equivalent work arrangement (full or part-time), among both younger and older women, continues to be lower than that of men.

Figure 2: Women's Average Employment Income as a Percentage of That of Men, for People Working Full Time All Year, By Age, Québec, 2000

Highest level of education attained (historical)



Source: Compiled by the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine using data from Statistics Canada's 2001 Census, Catalogue No. 97f0019XCB2001002, Web site.

Last, it has been observed that more women than men live in conditions marked by precariousness and poverty. This risk is higher for particular groups of women, in particular, heads of single-parent families, older women living alone, Native women, women with disabilities, women from visible minorities, recently arrived immigrant women, less educated workers and workers in the manufacturing sectors that have been hit by economic restructuring. To achieve gender equality in the economic arena, therefore, we will focus on five main objectives:

- » promote a greater diversity of training options, as well as academic success and perseverance;
- » offer specific support for women's job integration and retention;
- » continue implementing and enforcing the Pay Equity Act;
- » support women's entrepreneurship;
- » improve women's economic security throughout their lives.

Objectives

3.2.1 Foster a greater diversity of training options, as well as academic success and perseverance

Increase the diversity of training options

The diversification of women's training options is a major challenge. Another is men's virtual absence in certain sectors. The weight of tradition, persistence of sexist and sexual stereotypes, social background, the nature of working environments, educational and working conditions, and the representation of women and men in a given field are all factors that influence decisions about training.³²

Despite the widespread use of computerized processes and robotics that significantly reduce the requirement for physical strength in industry, female students still hesitate when it comes to choosing the traditionally male fields for vocational and technical training.³³

Still, women continue to advance in college and university disciplines traditionally associated with men—especially medicine, law and administration. But some sectors, applied sciences, for example, are still mostly male, especially programs like mechanical processing, electronics, computers, engineering and physics.³⁴ Women still form the majority in fields like health and social services.³⁵ The slow diversification of training choices is also reflected in the composition of the professional orders.

The natural and applied sciences offer many possibilities for employment and well-paid positions. This is why, even if women's under-representation in the sciences and technology is not a new phenomenon, an examination of this issue over the years has shown that continuing efforts are essential to encourage and support women's presence in these economic sectors.

The government invests much effort to ensure women's access to trades traditionally reserved to men and to provide them with information to help them make enlightened career choices. Yet, despite the measures adopted by *Emploi-Québec*, much remains to be done.

The promotion of non-traditional occupations among women is still an effective method to encourage them to choose trades and occupations that can often provide them with 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.

For example, the *Chapeau, les filles!* contest with its *Excelle Science* component, is a measure aimed specifically at encouraging women to go into trades traditionally reserved to men.

Similarly, men must be more represented in sectors like early and primary education, and personal care and services. This would break down the traditional roles while offering boys new models of masculinity and could only be of benefit to society. In sum, it is important to encourage women and men to choose fields in which they are still underrepresented.

Perseverance and academic success

Women have made remarkable strides in academic success and perseverance; this is one of the major transformations of the past three decades. Educational advancement is an important factor in improving women's quality of life.³⁶

The probability that 100 Quebecers will earn a diploma in a given educational system³⁷ is higher for women than for men attending high school, college and university. By the time they reach post-graduate studies, however, the rates are roughly equivalent.

These were the rates in 2004-2005:

- » 92.2% of women in high school, compared to 78.9% of men;
- » 59.2% of women in college, for all types of diploma, compared to 36.9% of men;
- » 36.5% of women earned a bachelor's compared to 22.3% of men;
- » 8.8% of women earned a master's compared to 9% of men;
- » 1% of women earned a doctorate compared to 1.3% of men.

Since the early 1980s, the school drop-out rate has declined, but it remains a concern. Statistical data indicate that this phenomenon affects boys more than girls. In 2004, the drop-out rate for girls aged 17 was 8% compared to 14% for boys of the same age.³⁸

The causes of dropping out of school differ according to sex. Although girls and boys mention academic failure and lack of interest as the reasons they drop out of school, girls also refer to pregnancy and family issues, while boys state they prefer work to school. Research indicates that boys' academic problems are linked more to social, geographic, ethnic and cultural background.³⁹

Dropping out of school affects the occupational integration of young people and their capacity to achieve economic security. Dropping out of school is linked to greater economic dependency, instability, a lower income, problems of individual productivity, unskilled jobs and shortages of qualified workers in certain sector, family tensions and lower self-esteem.⁴⁰

The situation is more serious for women without a high school diploma. In 2005, their hourly wage stood at \$11.36, compared to \$15.01 for men,⁴¹ and their employment rate was 23.6% compared to 42.4% for men.⁴²

Other studies reveal that teen maternity reduces the probability of continued studies and finding employment. In addition, teen and young mothers have a higher likelihood of becoming single parents and poor. In First Nations communities, 50% of women with children have not completed high school.⁴³

The range of government services for mothers at school has grown in recent years, notably in terms of financial aid, yet, a number of obstacles jeopardize their continued education: lack of spaces in childcare services located near educational institutions, non-flexible childcare hours, lack of measures to support student mothers in some institutions, and non-flexible class and examination schedules, making it difficult to balance motherhood and school.

Graduation is both an individual concern—to improve one's economic situation—and a societal issue linked to the development of Québec society. 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 educations.

TABLE 1: Employment Rate (%) of Persons Aged 15 or Older, by Education Level, Québec, 2005

Education	Men	Women
No diploma and all levels	65.0	55.5
No high school diploma	42.4	23.6
High school diploma	71.9	58.4
Postsecondary studies	72.5	67.4
University degree	76.1	75.5

Source: Institut de la Statistique du Québec, *Annuaire québécois des statistiques du travail*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Chapter 3, Table 3.44, p. 118.

3.2.2 Offer specific support for women's job integration and retention

Job integration

Many Quebeckers experience difficulties with job integration and re-integration, possibly due to the interaction of numerous personal, socioeconomic and cultural factors. Note that the gap between women and men in labour market participation continues to exist, but more fundamentally still, the employment status of numerous women is precarious. Globalization, the constantly increasing flexibility demanded of the labour force and the high concentration of female workers in the service sectors are factors contributing to this job precariousness. Existing protections under labour legislation must be applied and strengthened when unfair practices arise.

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.

Women over 45. Although their numbers in the labour market have increased, some women over 45 face difficulty returning to the job market, especially if they are 55 or older and are less educated. Women aged 55 to 64, for example, exhibit a low activity rate in comparison with that of men of the same age, and even with that of women in Ontario. It would be useful to find solutions—for those who are interested—to increase their labour market participation.

Women with disabilities. There continues to be a gap between the labour market participation of women and men with disabilities; but it also exists between women with disabilities and other women. The *2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey* reveals that the proportion of active men with disabilities was 36%, but 30% for women in the same condition; for women and men without disabilities, the proportion was 65% and 76%, respectively.⁴⁴ Among people with disabilities, therefore, women appear to be proportionally less numerous than men in active employment, and thus more numerous among the “inactive” population.

Since December 2005, people with disabilities are among the groups covered by the *Act Respecting Equal Access to Employment in Public Bodies*. People with disabilities join women and visible minorities as a group targeted under this Act, which in time may improve their access to the labour market.

Native women. The survey conducted by the First Nations of Québec and Labrador's Health and Social Services Committee shows that a little over half of the adults in First Nations communities have a job. More men than women (63.7% versus 52%) receive income from a job. Some 80.9% of women with children receive income from the government.

Immigrant and visible minority women face diverse situations depending on when they arrived in the country, age, source region, and education, and should not be lumped together in a homogenous group. Labour market indicators reveal they have a lower overall activity rate and higher unemployment rate than for women in general.⁴⁶ The immigration period, however, is a factor that causes significant variation in the rate of employment integration; this generally improves with time. In addition, despite their substantial educational credentials, some immigrant women are subjected

to a form of professional dequalification on their arrival, and even subsequently. Lack of familiarity with the language and the non-recognition of training and credentials obtained abroad, combined with discriminatory attitudes and negative stereotypes result in some women being forced to accept low-paying unskilled jobs.⁴⁷

Some immigrant women are admitted to Québec on a temporary basis under a federal program addressed to **live-in caregivers**; in 2005, roughly 90% of them came from the Philippines. To obtain permanent residency status, these women must live with their employer for at least 24 out of the first 36 months of their stay. During this time they must work full time performing household duties and caring for children, seniors or disabled people. Although they are covered by the *Act Respecting Labour Standards*, particularly in terms of the minimum wage and normal work week, their employment situation is cause for concern and we must ensure that they are not subjected to forms of exploitation.

Over the years, Québec has adopted practices to protect these workers' rights. However, because they are obliged to live with their employer and have only temporary status in their first years of employment, it can be arduous for them to ensure application of the social protections to which they are entitled.

The government included a measure in its 2004-2007 Action Plan entitled *Shared Values, Common Interests* designed to increase the protection of live-in caregivers and improve the operation of this program. Many measures of this action plan have already been implemented and they will be maintained in upcoming years to ensure that these women's rights are protected.

Job retention

Job retention is based on several factors, including access to continuing education, the adaptation of the labour market to workers' family situations and the opportunity for vertical advancement within a given enterprise.

Maintaining and developing knowledge throughout active life is even more demanding today, with knowledge evolving at an ever accelerated pace. Market globalization, the speed of communications and the rapid renewal of knowledge and technologies are other factors requiring that the work force not only have adequate general training, but also that individual workers regularly update their knowledge and skills.

The work force must now frequently adapt to new working environments and new duties. However, participation in continuing education is lower in Québec than in the rest of Canada and other OECD countries.^{48,49}

According to comparisons conducted by the OECD (2002) based on national survey data on adult education and training and adult literacy, including data from the *Canadian Adult Education and Training Survey*, Canada ranks 12th among the 18 OECD countries studied in terms of participation in continuing education—far behind Scandinavian countries, the US, the United Kingdom and Germany.

As revealed in a study commissioned by the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport*, “more men participate in training for professional reasons; employers offer more support to men, while women tend to take their own initiative to get training.”⁵⁰ This may be explained by the fact that a large proportion of the female work force works in small and medium businesses (SMBs), some of which are not covered by the *Act to foster the development of manpower training* that obliges employers with a payroll of over \$1 million to invest, within one calendar year, the equivalent of at least 1% of their payroll in staff training. SMBs often find it more difficult to adhere to the principle of continuing education.

Some workers thus do not have an opportunity to obtain qualifying and transferable training, which not only undermines their capacity for job and salary advancement, but can even compromise their job retention.

Furthermore, more women than men temporarily leave the labour market for family reasons (maternity leave, etc.) and an extended absence from the labour market often entails re-education.

The government will therefore take action to improve and support Québec women in developing their skills.

3.2.3 Continue implementing and enforcing the *Pay Equity Act*

The aim of the *Pay Equity Act* is to correct wage gaps resulting from gender-based discrimination against persons in jobs primarily held by women. Proactive in nature, this law obliges employers in enterprises employing 10 or more people to complete a pay equity exercise.

The law vests the *Commission de l'équité salariale* with the power to ensure the achievement and maintenance of pay equity by conducting investigations to check on compliance with the Act. Also, in 2003, the Commission established a verification program in businesses employing 10-49 workers, where large numbers of female employees are not unionized.

Any business (except enterprises under federal jurisdiction) that employed 10 or more workers in the year following passage of the Act or in its first year of existence is governed by the *Pay Equity Act* (roughly 45,000 businesses in Québec).⁵¹

According to data obtained in a survey of private companies, 68% of business employing 10 or more workers stated they had completed their pay equity process. When we determine progress based on a series of questions about each completed stage of the exercise, making it possible to establish a diagnosis, we observe that roughly half (47%) of the businesses concerned in fact finished their pay equity process. Nearly 60% of businesses employing 50 to 99 workers completed the exercise, and 56% of businesses employing 100 workers or more have done so.⁵²

In 1996, the year the law was passed, the average hourly wage of women and men was \$13.85 and \$16.51, respectively, representing a wage gap of 16.1%. In 2004, the average hourly wage of women workers rose to \$16.63, while that of men rose to \$19.32, representing a gap of 13.9%. This represents a decrease of 2.2 percentage points compared to 1997, the year Act came into force.⁵³

The Commission intends to employ diverse means to inform the most vulnerable workers (less educated, older, non-unionized, or who work in small businesses), particularly through awareness-raising and publishing information about the Act and their rights and by working with representatives of women's groups.

3.2.4 Support women's entrepreneurship

MOST WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ARE IN THE SERVICE SECTOR. IT IS IMPORTANT TO INCREASE WOMEN'S RANGE OF OPTIONS AND SET UP CONDITIONS TO FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR BUSINESSES.

According to a collection of writings on entrepreneurship, women represent one-third of the entrepreneurs in Québec.⁵⁴ In 2001, 125,680 women and 250,745 men were entrepreneurs. From 1981-2001, the number of women entrepreneurs grew by 213%, compared to 32% for men.⁵⁵ The contribution of women entrepreneurs to the economy has boomed in the last two decades, but this is not to say that the situation of these women is free of pitfalls.

Women entrepreneurs still tend to gravitate toward more high-risk sectors with less potential for growth. According to Statistics Canada, in 2000, 80% of Canadian women entrepreneurs operated in the service sector (wholesale and retail businesses, professional services, culture and real estate). In addition, their businesses are generally smaller than those of men and they work fewer hours on average than men. They are relatively less likely than men to apply for a loan, usually because they do not require this type of financing.⁵⁶

More than financing problems, it would appear that the income gap experienced by women entrepreneurs is due to their large concentration in the service sector. It is important to facilitate a wider choice of sectors for women and implement conditions to stimulate the development of their businesses.

Here, we should mention the contribution of regional agencies supporting women's entrepreneurship that were created by the government in six resource regions: Bas-Saint-laurent, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, Mauricie, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Côte-nord and Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. In addition to offering loans to women interested in starting a business, these agencies offer support and networking services that are very important to the business' success.

There is a particularly large percentage of women in collective entrepreneurship and they face many challenges, notably in social economy enterprises (non-profit groups and cooperatives). These enterprises have very limited access to financing through banks and other financial institutions, indeed investors consider them to be high risk and unlikely to be profitable.

Women entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector must also surmount great obstacles. The proportion of women-owned agricultural enterprises in Québec has remained stable, at 26%, since 1991. Women still must struggle to be considered potential owners of a business that is being transferred or in the process of starting up.⁵⁷ **It is therefore important to continue supporting women entrepreneurs.**

3.2.5 Improve women's economic security throughout their lives

Despite progress in labour market participation and income levels, especially for the more highly educated younger generations who are now almost at parity, women still earn less money on average than men. They are overrepresented among minimum wage earners. There are proportionally more women working at atypical jobs, part-time or definite term jobs. In addition, the wage gap deepens for women who, due to maternity or the need to care for a family member, have absented themselves from the labour market for significant periods of time. As a result, women have lower lifetime earning expectations than men, making them more vulnerable, especially during periods like maternity, separation, divorce, illness, retirement or the death of a spouse.⁵⁸ Statistics show that more women than men are poor, given their specific socioeconomic conditions.

In 2002, half of women (50.4%) aged 15 or older earned no more than \$20,000 per year, compared to a third of men (34.9%).⁵⁹ Women are more exposed to persistent poverty, in particular, single mothers and women living alone, including older women. The rate of low after-tax income of families headed by single mothers was 27.4% in 2003, compared to 9.8% in families headed by a single father.⁶⁰

Under the *Act respecting the economic equality of spouses*, passed in 1989, the value of the family patrimony could be divided up in case of death, divorce, legal separation or annulment. This law improved the economic situation of spouses when the marriage broke down, especially when children were present, with men, on average, contributing more than women to the value of the family patrimony because of their higher incomes and employment levels.

Women's labour market situation has a direct impact on their retirement. First, their average income is lower than that of men throughout their active lives; next, they do not always contribute to a pension fund when they temporarily leave the labour market to assume family responsibilities, to say nothing of the fact that they are sometimes self-employed; last they live longer than men and, in 75% of couples, survive their husbands.⁶¹

If they are immigrants, disabled, Native, members of a visible minority or homeless and in a condition of social exclusion, they are even more at risk of being subjected to multiple forms of discrimination and experiencing persistent difficulty integrating the labour market and poverty.

TABLE 2: Minimum Wage Earners, By Gender, Québec, 2006

Men	33.6%
Women	66.4%
Total	100.0%

Source: *Commission des normes du travail*, Database of official statistics for Québec: Socioeconomic characteristics of workers earning the minimum wage (Web site).

Québec survey data reveal that among active persons aged 15 and older with a disability, 76.7% of women earn less than \$20,000 per year compared to 54.5% of men. Among women and men who do not have a disability, the proportions are 56.6% and 36.4%, respectively.⁶²

In **First Nations communities**, 80.9% of women with children receive income from the government.⁶³

Among **immigrants**, women's average income continues to be lower than that of men. In 2000, the average income of immigrant women corresponded to 91.9% of the income of non-immigrant women and 63.6% of the income of immigrant men.⁶⁴

Caregivers, the vast majority of them women, are particularly severely penalized economically, in the short and long term, especially when they must temporarily leave the labour market to look after a family member. In this respect, questions such as taxation, the organization of care and social services, employment, the health and well-being of caregivers, and home help and services for dependent individuals must be studied.

According to a study by Statistics Canada concerning the period from 1993 to 2003, widowhood impoverishes older women more than older men. In all, 51% of widowers experience a loss in their adjusted income after five years of widowhood. In comparison, 72% of women who lost their husbands experienced a reduction in their income. Five years after becoming widows, 8.7% of women had low incomes compared to 5.1% of men.⁶⁵ As a result, women are more dependent than men on government transfers; and income gaps at retirement persist, despite the great strides women have made in terms of their presence in the labour market.

In 2002, the Régie des rentes du Québec reported that the average annual income of a retired women was \$18,302 compared to \$29,094 for a retired man. Since the pension paid by the *Régime des rentes du Québec* is calculated based on length of participation and earnings, it is not surprising that in 2004, the average monthly benefit paid to women (\$302.70) was substantially lower than that paid to men (\$508.10).⁶⁶

TABLE 3: Indicators Regarding Seniors' Income, Québec, 2003

Indicator	Men	Women
Proportion (%) of retirement income in overall average annual income of persons aged 65 and older in Québec	37.7	23.4
Proportion (%) of government transfers in overall average annual income of persons aged 65 and older in Québec	45.0	59.6
Including the Québec pension plan	21.1	19.7

* Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Spouse's Allowance, *Régime des rentes du Québec*.

Source: Institut de la Statistique du Québec, chart of statistics and social indicators on seniors, Web site

To foster women's economic security, Québec has created a social protection system to improve women's and men's economic security. The *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, passed in 2002, was unique and innovative in that it takes into account the impact of gender on poverty. In 2004, as a part of the implementation of this law, the government tabled an action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion. Since then, different actions have been taken to improve the socioeconomic conditions of women and men.

Since 2005, the government has implemented major measures like the Work Premium and Child Assistance. These measures provide strong support to increase labour market participation and income.

Since 2006, the \$100 monthly exemption for child support, applicable under the Employment Assistance Program for families with a dependant child under five, has been extended to include all families with dependant children, regardless of their age.

The government's objective to provide 20,000 new social and community housing units as part of the *Accès Logis* and *Logement Abordable* programs should be achieved in the next few years. This is a concrete measure to help low-income, modest and average households.

The acceleration of demographic aging is a major challenge for Québec. This is especially true for women, among other things, in terms of employment, retirement and economic security. Compared to men, women still have lower activity rates, experience more interruptions in their professional lives and suffer poorer working conditions, due particularly to their areas of concentration.

We must explore various avenues to combat women's poverty: access to skilled jobs and retention of these jobs, access to retirement plans and the achievement and maintenance of economic autonomy throughout life.

3.3 ACHIEVING A BETTER BALANCE BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME AND AT WORK

Context

The current demographic context, marked by both a low birthrate and an aging population, has major economic and social consequences for the present and future development of our society. For example, a labour shortage is beginning to appear in some sectors of activity, and the number of older people who will require care and other kinds of assistance is growing.

Therefore, when addressing the question of balancing work and family, the concept of family should be taken in the broadest sense. Family responsibilities refer to activities that parents carry out for their children, but they can also refer to duties that people take on with respect to a spouse, a parent or a loved one who is ill or has a temporary or permanent disability.

Similarly, the concept of work responsibilities includes studies and continuing professional development, which are assets in ensuring women's and men's occupational fulfilment and making contributions to Québec's economic development. It is important for learning, upgrading and renewing knowledge to take place in conditions that respect family and social responsibilities associated with adult life.

The range of government services and financial assistance have been broadened in the past few years to take into account the particular needs of student parents. Even so, students are confronted with difficulties, especially those who are pregnant or have just given birth; their situation calls for the implementation of conditions to help them attend classes and graduate. A number of CEGEPs and universities offer services to student parents, for example, childcare, financial assistance, mutual aid groups, and special scheduling and deadline arrangements. However, these services are not provided everywhere, they vary from one institution to another, and often students and the people in charge of the services know little about them.

In 2001, over 84,000 parents of minor children were studying while working.⁶⁷ In 85% of cases, they were living with their partner. Generally speaking, they were working full time and studying part time.⁶⁸

Despite the progress seen in balancing work and family, 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 at times cause tension that affects people's mental and physical health, their occupational advancement and quality of life.

Efforts have been made in this field for the past 15 years or so. In actual fact, however, balancing work with family life continues to pose a problem for gender equality, in the private sphere as well as in the sectors of employment and the economy.

Introducing measures to facilitate a better balance between job and family responsibilities contributes to the achievement of gender equality. Coordination of these two sets of responsibilities is a challenge that the government intends to continue to tackle.

Existing measures to achieve a better balance

Various measures associated with family events and responsibilities were adopted in labour legislation, specifically in the *Act respecting labour standards* and in the *Act respecting occupational health and safety*.

Since 2003, the government has introduced measures such as the Québec Parental Insurance Plan, the creation of over 33,000 new childcare spaces, advance payment of the tax credit amount for childcare expenses, modernization of the loans and bursaries program to assist student parents, the Homework Assistance Program, investments in community stop over centres and childcare services in school daycares at reduced rates during the March break. Moreover, tax credits have been introduced for caregivers and home care.

Last, we should remember that trade unions and women's groups made significant contributions to improving living conditions for women (especially in terms of wages) and men in the labour market by supporting the implementation of parental leaves, employee assistance programs, pay equity and protective reassignment for pregnant workers.

Objectives

The government is pursuing three objectives:

- » Foster fair distribution of family responsibilities;
- » Encourage workplaces to institute measures to improve the balance between work and family in both predominantly male and predominantly female sectors;
- » Heighten collaboration and partnership among stakeholders at diverse levels.

3.3.1 Foster fair distribution of family responsibilities

Childcare and housework

The gendered division of roles in doing housework is still very present in many families, even though a great majority of women are active on the job market. The persistence of stereotyped gender roles undermines true sharing of such tasks and therefore spells overwork and exhaustion for many women.

Despite the fact that women's and men's productive time is now the same in terms of hours, it turns out that, year in, year out, occupational activities take up at least 60% of men's productive time, as compared to about 40% for household activities. The ratio varies little for men, whether or not they live with a partner or have children. The ratio is reversed for women, however, whether or not they have children. In two-income households, gender parity is fast approaching with regard to total time devoted to work, since in 1998, women accounted for 47% of the total time spent by both partners in occupational activities. Progress in the area of sharing domestic tasks is more modest, however.⁶⁹

The increase in women's occupational activity was not accompanied by a decrease in housework. The data show that young men participate more in household tasks, and the pattern is even more marked in fathers of children under the age of five and, of course, in single fathers. However, the difference between men and women in this respect persists in all subgroups.⁷⁰ More and more fathers of the younger generation behave differently from their elders. They are more involved in caring for their children and greater numbers are availing themselves of parental leaves. They still have some way to go, however, in sharing in housework.

TABLE 4: Percentage of Men and Women Aged 15 and Over, Living With a Partner or Alone, Who Spend Five Hours or More Per Week Caring for their Children, by Age Group, Québec, 2001

Age group	Percentage of parents who spend 5 hours or more per week caring for their children			
	Living with partner*		Parent alone	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Under 35	48	60	72	91
35 to 64	34	42	47	57

* May or may not have children

Source: Compiled by the Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine based on data from Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, special order Co-0738, Table 6.

Consequences for women of the lack of balance between work and family duties

Although problems associated with balancing work and family affect working parents as a whole, it is largely women who demand measures to improve the situation, since they still shoulder most of the tasks linked to looking after their children, doing housework and caring for a loved one who is ill or needing assistance. This is so despite women's increased participation in the job market and changing family attitudes and behaviour.

Due to gender-based socialization with respect to parental roles, women take on all kinds of parental and family obligations, including those requiring them to miss work. The generally higher pay of men most often leads women to avail themselves of the existing measures to balance work and family.

In the long term, an income gap between women and men is created and then widened by the cumulative effect of the following factors: occupation, hierarchal position, salary, employment status, work schedule and frequency of stopping work. The measures to improve the balance may actually have undesirable effects if women's opportunities for training and advancement are reduced, together with their retirement income.

Moreover, the yearly number of hours of absences for personal or family reasons is almost six times greater for women than for men (65 hours as compared with 11).⁷¹

Better coordination of family and work responsibilities requires a new view of the roles of mother and father, and a fair division of tasks between spouses. Men must become more involved in the domestic and family sphere.

The measures to improve the work-family balance must be offered to mothers and fathers, and must foster the fair division of tasks between women and men.

Each partner must find fulfillment in their family and their work. Last, positive representations of fathers' involvement in family life must be presented.

TABLE 5: Number of Hours of Absences a Year Due to Personal or Family Obligations,* Québec, 2004

Men	11.0
Women	64.6
Women/men ratio	5.9

* All employees (full time or part time)

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Annuaire québécois des statistiques du travail*, No 2, Chapter 3, Table 3.9, p. 150, based on data from the Labour Force Survey.

Employment and fulfilling the wish to have children

In countries where political measures allow women to strike a better balance between their occupational and family life, and men to participate more in household tasks and looking after their children, couples find it easier to fulfill their wish to have children. According to researchers, having a partner capable of sharing household and parental duties is one of young women's basic requirements when deciding to have a child.

Birthrates have been compared in countries with low and high fertility rates. When women have virtually the same educational and job opportunities as men but these opportunities are compromised by having children, in the long run their fertility will be very low. Conversely, in countries where policies foster gender equality and where having children does not penalize women too much, fertility rates are higher.⁷²

Caregivers

Parents are primarily responsible for most of the care provided to their minor children or adult children with a disability, and in the majority of Québec families, this role falls to the mother.⁷³

More women than men take on the role of main caregiver. According to Statistics Canada, in 62% of cases, mothers care for their children with disabilities. Thus the arrival of a child with a disability will have more of an effect on the mother's role than the father's. Very often the mother must adapt to new tasks, and the adjustment can be stressful. The daily demands of a child with a disability entail a heavy workload. The family feels the consequences in several ways: the chances of obtaining a job or a promotion, the effect on income and on physical and mental health (risk of exhaustion, psychological distress, stress, etc.).

In the field of health, families' contribution to care and services is at the core of means of service delivery, a circumstance that puts a great deal of pressure on families. It is also common knowledge that women clearly outnumber men when it comes to looking after the safety, well-being and basic care of a spouse, a child, a parent or a loved one who is ill, becoming frail or experiencing temporary or permanent impairment. For many, this is a heavy burden to shoulder and a major source of stress and exhaustion.

In 70% to 80% of cases, caring for people who are becoming frail is shouldered by women, mostly the spouse, daughter or daughter-in-law.⁷⁴

Given the aging population and the smaller size of families, we can expect the demand for care and assistance for the elderly to grow and bring more pressure to bear on workers and people outside the job market, for example, older women.

3.3.2 Encourage workplaces to institute measures to improve the balance between work and family in both predominantly male and predominantly female sectors

Not all employers—especially small and medium-sized business concerns—view measures to promote a better balance between work and family as an advantage. Although all of them say they attach great importance to the issue, they don't always put these measures into practice. In some businesses, the existence of such policies does not ensure their implementation. Moreover, the prejudiced view that work-family measures are exclusively or principally aimed at women is still very entrenched.

In many workplaces, therefore, the balance between work and family responsibilities is still considered the business of women rather than a challenge for society. Yet it would appear that more and more men would like to avail themselves of the measures but are afraid of their co-workers' or boss's covert or overt disapproval.

For a long time, the social roles attributed to women and men were rigid. They also confined women mostly to the service sector and, more often than not, to lower level jobs. The array of choices and opportunities has been expanding for many years now and has meant that women increasingly have jobs in all sectors of activity and at all levels, including management positions. Although much progress has been made in this respect, the gender-based division of roles persists and continues to be a factor contributing to inequality.

The perceptions of some employers and even unions are tenacious. The fact that women mostly shoulder family responsibilities hinders the occupational advancement of many of them. This is one reason why many men do not seek to stop working to take up their family obligations as they might like to do; they fear their prospects to get ahead might be jeopardized.

Therefore, the labour market must do more to embrace the values of equality and promote them. Participation by employers in the public, private and community sectors; employers' associations; trade unions; and workers is indispensable.

3.3.3 Heighten collaboration and partnership among stakeholders at diverse levels

Support for achieving a better work-family balance must stem from a collective, coordinated effort by all stakeholders, that is, women and men first of all, along with businesses and unions, but also concerned actors and institutions such as childcare establishments, schools and municipalities. The way services are offered and organized may partly influence how easy or difficult it is for families to balance their different obligations.

Municipalities and regional county municipalities (MRC), with the diversity of services, equipment and infrastructure they provide for the population, have a daily influence on families' lives—particularly in the fields of land-use planning, housing, leisure, culture, public safety and transport. Harmonizing their services is essential to their communities' quality of life. A large number of municipalities and regional

county municipalities have instituted family policies with the aim of improving and harmonizing services to meet their citizens' needs.

School boards play a crucial role in young people's development. They also take part in community development by providing educational, cultural, social, science and community services. School has a direct influence on families' daily lives: schedules, school calendar, childcare services, homework assistance and extracurricular activities. In addition to providing students with better supervision, these services for youngsters help parents juggle their schedules with their children's. Using schools as the departure point for organizing services may also help ensure that services are maintained, are accessible and are of good quality, especially in small environments.

The regional conference of elected officers (CRE) have a mandate to foster concerted action by partners. As part of the mandate, they are to establish a five-year development plan defining objectives that are specific to their region. Their role is essential in mobilizing their milieu on behalf of citizens and their families. In particular, they must ensure that governmental programs and services are tailored to their region's specificities.

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.

3.4 ACHIEVING HEALTH APPROACHES TAILORED TO WOMEN'S SPECIFIC NEEDS

Context

Maintaining and improving one's health and well-being are priorities for women and men. Results are encouraging in this respect since life expectancy at birth in Québec peaked between 2002 and 2004 at 82.4 years for women and 77.2 years for men.⁷⁵

According to the *Institut national de santé publique du Québec*, health is defined as a state of well-being that presupposes individuals' physical, psychological and social capacity to act in their environment and fulfil the roles they intend to assume in a manner acceptable to themselves and to the groups to which they belong. Health therefore is far more than the absence of illness and goes beyond the physical and mental aspects.⁷⁶ Québec's policy on health and well-being, published in 1992, was based on this conception, which shed light on the whole question of health determinants, including gender relations.

Biological and genetic predisposition, lifestyle choices, attitudes towards health, the environment—that is, exposure to risks associated with roles, jobs and particular living conditions—and the use of health and social services are all health determinants.⁷⁷

TABLE 6: State of Health by Gender, Québec, 1998

	Men	Women
Percentage of people aged 15 and older having more than one long-term problem	27.2	42.7
Percentage of people aged 15 and older having an average or poor perception of their mental health	7.2	9.0
Percentage of people aged 15 and older having a high level of psychological distress	17.3	22.8
Percentage of people aged 15 and older who reported having had serious suicidal thoughts during a 12-month period	3.9	3.9

Sources: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and Institut de la statistique du Québec, "La santé des hommes au Québec, d'après l'Enquête sociale et de santé 1998," 2005, p. 136 and Tables 5.1 and 5.2. Also Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and Institut de la statistique du Québec, "Santé et conditions de vie des Québécoises, d'après l'Enquête sociale et de santé 1998," 2005, Table 5.5.

TABLE 7: Lifestyle Choices by Gender, Québec, 1998

	Men	Women
Percentage of people aged 15 and older who are overweight	32.4	23.8
Percentage of people aged 15 and older who are underweight	8.6	18.2
Percentage of people aged 15 and older who smoke 26 cigarettes or more a day	15.0	7.5
Percentage of people who say they take 14 drinks or more a week	15.0	4.6
Percentage of current drug users in the population aged 15 and older	20.3	14.5
Percentage of people who say they have had more than one sexual partner in a 12-month period among the heterosexual population aged 15 and older, and who have had sexual relations	11.2	7.9

Sources: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and Institut de la statistique du Québec, "La santé des hommes au Québec, d'après l'Enquête sociale et de santé 1998," 2005, Tables 5.1 and 5.2 and Figure 5.2. Also Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and Institut de la statistique du Québec, "Santé et conditions de vie des Québécoises, d'après l'Enquête sociale et de santé 1998," 2005, Tables 4.5, 4.8, 4.10 and 4.11.

When we compare women's and men's health using the indicators of longevity, prevalence of life-threatening diseases and high-risk lifestyle choices, men are at a disadvantage. In Québec, in 1998, for example, a greater proportion of men than women say they have poor eating habits, are overweight, smoke 26 cigarettes or more a day, take 14 drinks or more a week, take drugs or have more than one sexual partner.

For their part, proportionately more women than men say they have more than one health problem, a long-term health problem or a high level of psychological distress. Moreover, proportionately more of them have taken at least one prescribed or non-prescribed medication (43% of men versus 63% of women) in the two days preceding the *Enquête sociale et de santé*⁷⁸. However, women looked after their well-being and health more than men did.⁷⁹

Knowledge of gender differences, coupled with more research into gender-specific causes of death, illness and health problems, opens the way to effective, customized action along with differentiated treatment as a function of women's and men's particular conditions.

Of the main determinants of health, phenomena such as poverty, social exclusion, violence and poor working conditions have a crucial effect.⁸⁰ In every society, the poorest members run the greatest risk of being exposed to disease, of falling ill and of dying sooner. What is more, we now know that health status follows the social hierarchy, in other words, differences are observed from one level to the next in the hierarchy and not only at the extremes.⁸¹

Gender influences the representations women and men have of health, the relative importance of health determinants and state of health as such. It is important to take into account the links between these determinants and a person's gender. For example, women die more often of causes particular to their gender such as breast cancer, ovarian cancer and complications related to pregnancy. Men, however, are more prone to die of external causes such as accidents or injury.

Gender-based socioeconomic inequality means that more women live in poverty, and this is true for all social groups: the elderly, people living alone, heads of single-parent families, people with disabilities, immigrants and Native people.⁸²

A greater proportion of mothers with minor children, blended or one-parent families as compared with intact two-parent families, and mothers of two-parent families as compared with fathers of two-parent families experience higher levels of psychological distress.

For many women, violence is one of the major causes of mental health problems. Studies show that 50% to 85% of women hospitalized for a mental health problem have been victims of sexual or physical violence in their lives.⁸³

To counter the effects of inequality on health, the government proposes to intervene on a number of fronts: access to schooling, training and quality jobs; pay equity, improved working conditions; the balance of work and family; occupational health and safety; social protection; accountability by men; and respect for women's integrity where sexuality and love relationships are concerned.⁸⁴

Objectives

We will pursue two objectives in relation to women's health:

- » Tailor health care and social services to the specific needs of women and certain groups;
- » Raise workplace awareness regarding the prevention of employment injuries in women.

3.4.1 Tailor health care and social services to the specific needs of women and certain groups

For over 20 years, many efforts have been focused particularly on perinatal care, family planning and the phenomenon of violence to improve services for women and, above all, to adapt them more closely to fit women's needs.⁸⁵ In 2003, the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux* published its action strategy on women's health and well-being in a document titled *Au féminin... à l'écoute de nos besoins*. The strategy included three objectives:

1. Integrate women's needs into Québec-wide and regional planning of care and services;
2. Tailor care and services to women's needs;
3. Improve our knowledge of the population and their needs.

A number of women's comprehensive health objectives mentioned in this document are still relevant and could be adapted to new problems arising and to the female population's changing needs over the coming decade.

Québec is faced with an aging population. Six out of ten older persons are women and the trend is expected to continue in coming years. In the 90 years and older age group, the ratio is three women for one man.⁸⁶ Although women can look forward to a longer life expectancy, they will likely spend a good part of their last years incapacitated to some extent. Chronic illnesses and those associated with aging, such as Alzheimer's disease, and the availability of short- and long-term services and home care services, will therefore become very important matters.

Regardless of their age, women are the main caregivers for family members, and they suffer the consequences of the accompanying lopsided distribution of responsibilities. Tension and stress due to juggling the demands of family and work take their toll on the mental and physical health of many women. Moreover, as they age, women will increasingly be called on to care for loved ones who are ill or incapacitated. We must prepare, starting now, to cope with needs that exist already but that might well intensify in the next few decades. It is also important to continue the work undertaken to assist women caregivers or their families, particularly by developing respite and support services.

Women's perception of their bodies can give rise to harmful behaviour and habits in young women and those who are not so young. Although women's advancement in society is obvious, the influence of the myriad of images of the young, slim, perfect woman relentlessly carried by the advertising, fashion and cosmetics industries is still very strong.

To conform to the image, women engage in serial dieting or weight reduction programs, and submit to beauty treatments or cosmetic surgery that can be very risky to their health. Many suffer from eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia or the obsession of being thin. Many health-related issues then are associated with the socially-driven quest for beauty, not to mention the considerable cost it creates for public services. Health professionals and workers in other sectors affected by this phenomenon could mobilize to counter it.⁸⁷

Where sexual health is concerned, once again it is mostly women who, either with a permanent partner or in their sexual relationships, are responsible for contraception, family planning and sex hygiene. They often have problems negotiating protected sex.⁸⁸

As for perinatal care and family planning, steps have been taken to improve the continuum of care for mothers in childbirth and to decrease the number of unplanned pregnancies, especially in adolescents. For example, women in Québec can now give birth in some hospitals, in birthing centres or at home, under the supervision of a midwife. Regarding family planning, young women from the age of 14 may obtain emergency contraceptive pills, without a doctor's prescription, directly from a pharmacist, who may also prescribe oral contraceptives for a three-month period. These measures will no doubt help decrease the number of elective abortions. A new government policy on perinatal care will be adopted to assist mothers and to continue to promote and maintain the health, optimal development and well-being of every child.

Physical and mental health problems may be compounded when other factors are added to gender-based ones, such as ethnic origin, cultural background, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, having a disability or being a Native woman.

Some women who are **immigrants** or **refugees**, for example, have scant awareness of their rights, don't know the language of their host nation, live in isolation or have little experience with health care institutions. Others who are from visible minority communities are exposed to racism and discrimination. In some cases, women may have been exposed to abuse or practices such as genital mutilation in their home country.

Services must be adapted to deal with the situation of **women with disabilities** with respect to family planning, motherhood and the problem of violence, for example. The objectives and action strategy regarding women's health and well-being⁸⁹ that the *Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux* published in 2002 open the way to considering more carefully the particular needs of women with disabilities, who are vulnerable in several respects.

According to the findings of studies, 34% of women and 41% of men with a disability say they are satisfied with their state of health, whereas close to 31% of women and 26% of men scored high on a distress index.^{90,91}

Many government reports and documents describe very worrisome problems for **Native women** such as high rates of early pregnancy, all forms of violence, various addictions, a high prevalence of diabetes, a high level of psychological distress and a drop in life expectancy.⁹²

A research project by the First Nations of Québec and Labrador's Health and Social Services Committee⁹³ revealed the extent of problems affecting general health and well-being, for example, detrimental lifestyle choices, poverty, social exclusion and lack of community resources. It also highlighted the scope of social problems of Native people in general and Native women in particular. The report on members of First Nations living in communities showed that “women are generally more affected by illness or medical problems than men, with the exception of eyesight and hearing problems.”⁹⁴ For example, according to Diabetes Québec, 7% of Québec's population as a whole has diabetes, whereas for the First Nations adult population, the incidence is 14.5% (16.4% among women and 12.5% among men). As for Native women living in urban centres, outside First Nations communities, they have specific problems that must also be taken into account.

The women's health strategy document points out that **lesbians'** access to health and social services can be limited by attitudes and practices coloured by prejudice and ignorance. This phenomenon and knowledge of these women's specific characteristics must be considered.⁹⁵

More and more research and studies give us a better grasp of the situation of women and thus help us determine actions likely to improve their overall health and well-being. The continuation of government commitments is essential to better respond to their particular needs and those of vulnerable groups.

3.4.2 Raise workplace awareness regarding the prevention of employment injuries in women

Growing feminization of the labour market introduced a new dimension in the field of occupational health and safety. Women are economically active for a longer time than they were 10 or 15 years ago, mostly in the tertiary sector and, to a lesser extent, in the secondary sector. Also, employment injuries have increased in sectors where the density of women in the work force is high. By contrast, the distribution of men in the work force is much more even across the different sectors of economic activity.

Certain beliefs and stereotypes live on, however, according to which health and safety risks are greater in workplaces with a predominantly male work force. As a result, a good number of women mistakenly turn away from careers that could be both lucrative and gratifying. They often hesitate to choose non-traditional job fearing they don't have the proper physical constitution or they will be exposed to abnormally high risks to their health and safety. However, with the development of technology, most non-traditional jobs, fearing they don't have the required physical constitution or thinking the risks for their health or safety are too great. Thanks to technological development, however, most non-traditional jobs are perfectly accessible to people with all kinds of constitutions. In fact, the health and safety risks are the same in comparable workplaces.

Generally speaking, male workers are more prone to work accidents, whereas women workers are more prone to a range of occupational diseases caused by repetitive movements or inappropriate posture. These injuries can put one's health at risk in the long term, even though they are less spectacular than male workers' injuries. It is also more difficult to have them acknowledged and they tend to be less well compensated by occupational health and safety parity agencies.⁹⁶

Different factors (working conditions, occupation, sector of economic activity, etc.) influence gender-based income gaps. Therefore, when an employment injury occurs, the gap is also found in women workers' income replacement indemnity.

In the field of health and safety, gender-based analysis is essential because it facilitates the effectiveness, efficiency and effects of interventions in the workplace. It is also an extremely important factor in improving knowledge of problems that are particular to women and pinpointing gender differences regarding employment injuries, with a view to prevention.

The question of occupational health and safety poses major challenges for women's equality and prosperity in Québec. It is important to highlight the risks present in women's work environments and appropriate prevention measures.

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

Context

As stipulated by the Québec and Canadian human rights charters, government action to combat violence is based on fundamental values, including the respect of every human being's physical and psychological integrity, and on the importance of ensuring their safety in all spheres of life.

In the early 1970s, different government bodies recognized the seriousness of domestic, family and sexual violence and their responsibility for eliminating these forms of violence. The experience of the past 30 years has shown that these forms of violence can only be countered in all spheres of life if all of society is mobilized, in the medium and long term, toward that end. It is essential that women and men who are determined to put an end to violence work together.⁹⁷

Acts of violence committed in a marital context and sexual offences are the two most widely known forms of violence, mainly through incidents that have been reported to the police.^{98,99} This data, however, represents only a small fraction of the incidents of violence against women. Every year, many persons are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, the majority of them women and children.

Despite a multitude of interventions in recent years, women of all ages and backgrounds continue to be victims of various forms of violence.¹⁰⁰ Being a member of a particular social group, or enjoying a certain status or financial situation does not guarantee women's protection from domestic violence and sexual assault.

Furthermore, all the research confirms that Native and young women are particularly targeted for domestic violence and sexual assault. Both groups present very high mortality rates, notably through violent death, in the cohort of 15- to 24-year-olds.¹⁰¹

Other groups of women are more vulnerable, or exposed to violence, for example, women from cultural communities, immigrant women, older women, lesbians, women with disabilities, prostituted women, female substance abusers and homeless women. Furthermore, some victims are still subjected to numerous forms of prejudice, both on the part of the public and the officials and workers they turn to for assistance and protection with regard to a situation of violence.¹⁰²

The diverse forms of violence to which women are subjected have major social and personal consequences. Socially, the threat of becoming a victim of violence restricts freedom of movement and contributes to instilling a climate of fear and distrust. All forms of violence and the threat of violence therefore represent, for women victims, an obstacle to their equality rights, autonomy and full participation in society, including all spheres of life, public and private. On the personal level, the harmful consequences of violence on victims generally affect their physical and psychological health, well-being and emotional life.¹⁰³

The consequences of acts of violence vary depending on victims' personal characteristics such as age, and also, the relationship between victims and their attackers, the duration and frequency of the attacks, the availability of support from family and friends and access to services offering assistance and protection.¹⁰⁴

Homophobia, racism and xenophobia intersect with sexism, even in Québec. The fact of belonging to a marginalized group not only increases women's vulnerability to all forms of violence, but also reduces their chances of escaping violent situations.¹⁰⁵

Some forms of violence are increasing in Québec, as they are everywhere else in the world. Examples of this are the sexual exploitation of women and children,¹⁰⁶ trafficking of migrant women¹⁰⁷ and the proliferation of violent pornography,¹⁰⁸ all of them requiring diverse actions on the part of the State.

In addition, given increasing personal mobility and expanded immigration to Québec, concrete assistance measures should be provided for women and girls who have suffered genital mutilation in their countries of origin.¹⁰⁹

Once again, using gender-based analysis, we can better identify the incidence and consequences of certain forms of violence experienced by both women and men, particularly workplace violence and psychological harassment¹¹⁰ and senior abuse and exploitation in a family or institutional context.¹¹¹ Future intervention programs will be better equipped to respond to women's and men's needs by taking into account their particular situations.

Objectives

The government has set two objectives:

- » Prevent and combat domestic violence and sexual assault;
- » Prevent and combat sexual exploitation and trafficking of women.

3.5.1 Prevent and combat domestic violence and sexual assault

Without question, one of our priority goals is to combat violence against women, and more precisely, to eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault. These forms of violence originate in men's relationships of dominance over women, or gender inequality.

Despite the federal and provincial legislation governing us and governmental policies and action plans to combat violence, it continues to be an unacceptable social blight and a crime demanding additional effort. This is indeed mentioned in the United Nations's *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, to which the government subscribes.¹¹²

In the past decade, Québec has developed means of action and supported diverse initiatives to better assist women who are victims of domestic violence^{113,114} and women and children victims of sexual assault.^{115,116} To combat violence against women, two institutional mechanisms ensure the actions' consistency and complementarity as well as the effectiveness of government activity: the *Comité des sous-ministres* and the *Comité interministériel de coordination en matière de violence conjugale, familiale et sexuelle*. In 1995, Québec adopted a domestic violence intervention policy and, in 2001, guidelines on sexual assault. In 2004, it introduced the 2004-2009 governmental action plan on domestic violence, the aim of which was to update the application of government policy in this area. Further, the new five-year sexual assault action plan will enable stronger intervention in this matter.

TABLE 8: Indicators Associated with Reported Incidents of Domestic Violence, by Gender, Québec, 2001, and Some Available Comparisons for 2004

	Total	Men	Women
No. of reported victims in a marital context	16,709	2,736	13,973
Percentage of reported domestic violence victims, by gender, 2004	100	16	84
Percentage of reported perpetrators, alleged acts of domestic violence, 2004	100.0	87.5	12.5
No. of homicides, 2004	24	1	23

Source: Ministère de la Sécurité publique, *La violence conjugale, statistiques 2001*, p. 21 and *La criminalité commise dans un contexte conjugal au Québec*, 2004 Statistics, January 2006, p. 27 and Table C (Web site).

The situation of violence of women in general is cause for much concern. It is all the more worrisome when it affects women who are especially vulnerable due to poverty, a relationship of dependence on others, or the isolation of their community.

Native women are subjected to more serious forms of violence than Québec women in general, and their risk of becoming homicide victims remains very high.^{117,118} Women from minority ethnocultural backgrounds who are victims of domestic violence experience multiple problems.^{119,120} Some are related to their condition in their country of origin, while others may be attributed to the context of settlement in the host country. Disabled women are also more likely to become victims of violence.^{121,122} Often, their condition of extreme dependency renders them much more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence.

Over the next few years, we will increase our efforts to improve women's safety in terms of domestic violence and sexual assault, consolidate victim assistance and protection services, and better meet the assistance and support needs of violent spouses and sexual offenders.¹²³ With a view to prevention and safety, services provided by the different intervention networks, whether public, paragonovernmental, or community based, will be adapted to the multiple needs of the groups of women who are most vulnerable to these forms of violence, particularly Native women, women with disabilities and women from minority ethnocultural backgrounds.¹²⁴

The issue of violence is very complex. Actions must be addressed to both victims and attackers, and they require the participation of practitioners in the legal, correctional, and health and social service sectors. Research, analysis, experimentation and innovative practices will enable us to better understand these phenomena, prevent them and respond effectively. The elimination of violence against women demands major changes in personal attitudes, in the behaviour of practitioners, and even within the different social institutions.

Recent research on violence against women shows that if we wish to substantially reduce its scope, the priority of prevention should be to address its causes and associated factors.¹²⁵

It is essential to carry out actions aimed at promoting egalitarian relationships between men and women and boys and girls. It is just as crucial to diminish social tolerance of all forms of violence through awareness-raising and education campaigns encouraging everyone—men and women—to report incidents of violence against women. Activities linked to conflict resolution, prevention of violence in teens' love relationships and sex education are also necessary.¹²⁶

3.5.2 Prevent and combat the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women

In Québec, like everywhere else, the proliferation of lucrative activity linked with the sex industry and prostitution¹²⁷ (nude dancing, escort agencies, massage parlours, street prostitution, pornographic videos, etc.) has led to an increase in the numbers of young people, usually women, who offer sexual services as a means of survival.¹²⁸ Studies clearly reveal that these women suffer a high level of discrimination and violence.¹²⁹ The sexual exploitation of adult and teen women is an economic activity that generates huge profits, especially for organized crime—including street gangs.

In addition, while it is difficult to precisely measure the scope, among prostituted women we find many women who are confronted with additional forms of discrimination, in particular, immigrant and Native women.¹³⁰ Sexual exploitation is a form of violence that includes the trafficking of migrant women.^{131,132}

In the context of globalization, human trafficking cannot be limited to the usual meaning of the term because it also encompasses the different forms of exploitation common to the situation of migration, for example in the area of work.^{133,134}

Pornography and its virtual expression, Internet crime, and all activities connected with the sale of sexual services are other forms of violence that are rooted in relationships of domination.¹³⁵ In general, sexual exploitation is targeted more at women, teenage girls and young girls, and is the manifestation of an abuse of power that must not be tolerated in a society that upholds the values of justice and equality.

To combat prostitution and trafficking in women, Québec will implement mechanisms enabling it to fight human trafficking, combining repression of traffickers with the protection of women victims.¹³⁶ To every extent possible, it will implement programs and directives to more effectively fight all other forms of sexual exploitation, in particular, Internet criminality, sex tourism and the proliferation of pornography containing acts of violence against women and children.¹³⁷ We must also prevent teens from being drawn into prostitution, especially by combating poverty, reducing the school drop-out rate, and sex education designed to instil a sense of responsibility in boys and girls.¹³⁸

Genital mutilation practices must not be ignored either, because they count among the forms of violence experienced by some immigrant women and girls who now live in Québec.¹³⁹ These practices are specifically prohibited under the *Criminal Code of Canada*.¹⁴⁰

It is imperative to continue expressing clear social disapproval of these practices—especially on the part of public authorities—by affirming that they run counter to the values of Québec society. Further, immigrant women who have been subjected to different forms of exploitation and are suffering the consequences (physical, psychological or sexual) should have access to services that meet their needs.

In order to eliminate social tolerance of the numerous manifestations of violence, we must strongly reassert that violence against all human beings—more specifically, violence against women—is unacceptable and criminal. To this end, the legal system should continue its efforts with regard to the criminalization of acts of violence against women, ensure the safety of women victims and those close to them and increase the confidence of victims and the public in the administration of justice.¹⁴¹

Social justice, gender equality, the respect of the physical and psychological integrity of all persons and the promotion of non-violence are values that make Québec a free and democratic society where women and men can hope to live in a safe environment, free of violence of any kind.

- » In 2004, in Québec, there were 5,247 reports of sexual assault; 4.5 times as many victims were female than male.
- » Alleged sexual assault offenders are male in 97% of the cases, and are 18 or older in 77% of the cases.

3.6 ACHIEVING GREATER PARTICIPATION BY WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES

Background

As mentioned at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, only equal participation by women and men at all levels of decision-making can lead to the balance required for the proper functioning and strengthening of democracy. However, despite efforts and progress, there is a persistent imbalance in the number of women in various institutions and decision-making positions, in political, economic and social spheres.

Furthermore, the government's regionalization initiative has led it to delegate its powers to several bodies that are making more and more decisions liable to affect the living conditions of women and men in their region. In particular, the regional conferences of elected officers (CRE), which are mainly composed of municipal representatives, have a privileged relationship with the government when it comes to regional development. They also have all of the autonomy required to make decisions to stimulate development within their respective territories. They have the role of coordinating partners in the region and, according to Section 21.7 of the *Act Respecting the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions*, they must establish a five-year development plan that defines their region's objectives.

The government's responsibility to take steps toward gender equality is therefore increasingly shared with all local and regional decision-making bodies. Given this context, it is important for those bodies to fulfill their role in this respect, take into account the particular needs of women, and encourage women's participation in regional development.

Objectives

Two objectives form the approach of involving more women in making the decisions that concern them as citizens:

- » Aim for equal representation in circles of power;
- » Promote gender equality within local and regional governance structures.

3.6.1 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 the current power structures. The government firmly intends to increase the number of women in leadership positions at the local, regional and national levels.

Over the last decade, women have made progress with regard to their share of positions of power, but parity is far from achieved. Whereas 18.4% of the members of the National Assembly of Québec were women in 1994, that percentage was 31.2% in 2006. For the same years, the percentage of women ministers rose from 26.3% to 38.5%.

TABLE 9: Representation of Men and Women in Provincial Politics, Québec, 1994 and 2006

	GENDER		1994	2006
Members of the National Assembly of Québec	Men	n	102	85
	Women	n	23	39
	Men	%	81.6	68.0
	Women	%	18.4	31.2
Ministers of the National Assembly of Québec	Men	n	14	16
	Women	n	5	10
	Men	%	73.7	61.5
	Women	%	26.3	38.5

Source: Conseil du statut de la femme, Web site, updated in 2006.

During the parliamentary committee consultation on the document entitled *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men*, members of parliament noted that most groups and persons who spoke or presented a written submission supported that document's recommendations, particularly the following: "to adopt measures that encourage political parties and decision-making bodies to recruit more women and to desexualize the responsibilities they are given."

In the municipal sector, the presence of women in elected positions is developing slowly. In fact, the percentage of women mayors, which was 8.8% in 1993, was 11.6% in 2003 and 13.1% in 2005. During those same years, the percentage of women municipal councillors grew from 19.6% to 26.6%. With regard to the regional conferences of elected officers (CRE), the percentage of women there is 27.2%.

TABLE 10: Representation of Men and Women in Municipal Politics, Québec, 1993, 2003 and 2005

	GENDER		1993	2003	2005
Mayors	Men	n ^e	1,420	951	955
	Women	n	125	125	144
	Men	%	91.2	88.4	86.9
	Women	%	8.8	11.6	13.1
Municipal Councillors	Men	n ^e	8,827	5,151	5,108
	Women	n	1,730	1,672	1,855
	Men	%	80.4	75.5	73.4
	Women	%	19.6	24.5	26.6

e: number estimate derived from the gender composition provided.

Source: Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, Mayors, Municipal Councillors, *Statistiques sur la participation des femmes et des hommes aux instances électives municipales* (Statistics on Women's and Men's Participation in Municipal Elected Bodies), 2003, p. 7 and Dept. Web site, updated in 2005.

Within senior public service and in government departments and agencies, the percentage of women deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers, presidents or vice-presidents rose from 25% in 1998 to 32% in 2005. As of March 31, 2006, 32% of deputy ministers were women, as were 33.3% of assistant or associate deputy ministers, 26.9% of presidents and 33.8% of vice-presidents. The proportion of women in management positions was 32.5%.¹⁴²

Furthermore, in 2006, the government tabled a policy paper entitled *Moderniser la gouvernance des sociétés d'État* (Modernizing Government Corporation Governance). One of the measures in the paper aims at having the government make sure, within the next five years, that the boards of directors of public companies have an equal number of women and men members. This measure is a first in Canada.

Finally, in the private business sector, the presence of women in decision-making positions is far from equal. A recent study by the Catalyst firm, conducted in 2005, shows that only 12% of the members of the boards of directors of Canada's top 500 companies are women.¹⁴³

The Equal Access to Decision-Making Program aims to increase the number of women in positions of power within local and regional decision-making bodies throughout Québec. It makes it possible to provide financial support to local, regional and national non-profit organizations, as well as Aboriginal communities, to carry out local or regional projects.

Since the program came into effect in 1999, 367 projects have received support in all regions of Québec, making it possible to develop expertise throughout the territory. This means that pitfalls and obstacles have been clearly defined. Solutions have also been devised and, in many cases, successfully applied. It would seem, however, that local, regional and Québec-wide decision-making bodies have still not done enough to incorporate the principle of equality into their practices.

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

3.6.2 Promote gender equality in local and regional governance

As part of its regionalization initiative, the government has delegated powers to various decision-making bodies. Those that chiefly come to mind are the regional conferences of elected officers (CRE), the regional county municipalities (MRC), the municipalities, the *centres locaux de développement* (local development centres), the school boards, the *agences de la santé et des services sociaux* (health and social service agencies), and the *conseils régionaux des partenaires du marché du travail* (regional councils of labour market partners).

Adapting government initiatives to local and regional characteristics is fully in tune with the will to ensure a greater accommodation of women's needs. In the regions, certain departments and agencies have already appointed persons in charge of keeping the concern for equality alive with measures that are supported and validated by departmental guidelines and strategies.

Although some of the problems experienced by women exist throughout all territories, others are specific to certain regions. This is what makes it important to establish tailor-made partnerships at the regional level, while continuing to pursue general government objectives. It is particularly important to take into account the sometimes different situations in resource regions and central regions, as well as in rural and urban areas.

Decision-making bodies, particularly the regional conferences of elected officers, but also the health and social service agencies, some regional councils of labour market partners and local development centres, as well as some municipalities and regional county municipalities have helped make development in their regions more inclusive by more actively taking all components of the population into account. Specific agreements mobilizing the efforts of regional partners to encourage the move toward equality have been signed in some regions.

According to Section 21.7 of the *Act respecting the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions*, each regional conference of elected officers (CRE)¹⁴⁴ establishes a five-year development plan that defines the region's general and specific development objectives, taking into account the priority of involving young people and, according to the principles of equality and parity, women, in the region's democratic life. Some of these conferences have already taken the initiative of adopting these principles and conducting gender-based analysis.

These efforts must be sustained. The government encourages local and regional decision-making bodies to take women's situation into account and to take measures accordingly.

4

Policy Assessment

The accountability system and follow-up for the policy 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 should also enlighten authorities on the relevance of maintaining, strengthening or changing the steps taken to achieve gender equality.

A committee composed of representatives from the evaluation division of each government department and agency concerned by the policy shall be formed to assess the policy. The *Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine* will coordinate its activities. Some measures in the policy's action plan that are particularly significant for the achievement of gender equality will be targeted for assessment. A department or agency with specific responsibility for a measure will also be responsible for its assessment, but the results of all assessments will be shared and subjected to a cross-cutting analysis. We will then have an overview of all the processes and effects of the policy.

The gender-based analysis (GBA) measure is one that must be assessed. Since 1993, it has been the subject of many pilot-projects in different departments. With this policy, the government intends to integrate GBA into the entire machinery of government. It is therefore a central element and will merit special attention during the in-depth assessment.

Conclusion

The work leading up to this policy has shed light on the significant progress made with regard to women's rights and gender equality over the last decade. Women have come a very long way in the public arena. They are more active than ever before in the labour market and have arrived in massive numbers on college and universities campuses. Women's entrepreneurship has also developed remarkably in recent years. These advances constitute major steps toward the institution of egalitarian models and behaviours. In the private sphere, however, family responsibilities are still mainly assumed by women, although men are increasingly doing their share. The issue of work-family balance continues to be viewed by many workers as a "women's problem."

Much remains to be done, then, before equality in law can be translated into equality in fact. Lower wages, despite education levels equivalent to those of men; the scarcity of women in decision-making positions; and domestic violence springing from systemic discrimination are some aspects of the situation of women today. Moreover, the conditions of immigrant women; the racism and discrimination experienced by women of minority ethnocultural groups; old age; and the fact of having a disability or being a single mother may combine with forms of gender-based discrimination and reinforce women's vulnerability.

Persistent discrimination and society's gender-based role division is certainly one of the main reasons why it is so hard to achieve gender equality. Combined with the weight of tradition, these elements continue to determine many women's personal choices regarding education and training, careers and caring for a child or family member. It is therefore important to start fighting the sexist stereotypes that prevent girls and boys from reaching their full potential from a very young age.

This policy introduces new means and improves existing instruments that will enable us to place the concern for gender equality at the centre of government action, through innovative strategies and rigorous and constant monitoring of progress.

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, because 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.

Fostering gender equality and creating the conditions whereby everyone can contribute to the best of their ability and enjoy the same degree of responsibility and opportunities are the expressions of a healthy democracy. By focussing on equality, Québec will be better equipped to handle the multiple demographic, economic and social challenges facing us today and in the future.

Appendix: Recommendations of the *Commission des affaires sociales*

Members of the *Commission des affaires sociales* therefore recommend:

- » that gender-based analysis (GBA) be systematically incorporated into governmental practice and extended throughout the State apparatus;
- » that the government undertake a vast long-term education and awareness-raising campaign to eliminate violence against women;
- » that the government maintain the existing status of women structures: the *Conseil du statut de la femme* and its regional offices, with its twofold mission as advisor to government and promotional and informational body for the public; and the *Secrétariat à la condition féminine*, with its mandate to support the development of governmental action and its network of status of women officers in the different departments and agencies;
- » that the Minister for the Status of Women oversee the formulation of a new policy to support women's rights with a view to achieving gender equality, and an action plan to ensure its implementation;
- » that a consultation process be set up to guide policy formulation;
- » that the future policy emphasize the problems encountered by women facing, or who have been victims of multiple forms of discrimination and that it propose solutions;
- » that compulsory annual reporting on the action priorities and their implementation be instituted in all the departments and agencies of the Québec government to the minister or person in charge of coordinating governmental action on gender equality, to ensure concrete implementation of public policy in this domain;
- » that the parliamentary committee sit every three years instead of every five years, as recommended in the brief of the *Conseil du statut de la femme*, to enable policy assessment within the government's term;
- » that the issues raised by several men's groups be brought to the attention of concerned government departments; they include suicide (*Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*), boys' school drop-out rate (*Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport*) and child custody during divorce and separation court settlements (*Ministère de la Justice*).

Source: Commission des affaires sociales, *Rapport et recommandations à la suite des auditions tenues dans le cadre de la consultation générale* on the document entitled: *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men*, Québec, Secrétariat des commissions de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec, 2005, p. 13-14.

Notes

1. QUÉBEC, *Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, R.S.Q., C-12. [www.cdpdj.qc.ca/fr/commun/docs/charte.pdf#search=%22charte%20des%20droits%20%22] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
2. In 2003, Québec stated it would also abide by the Optional Protocol, a document that complements the Convention and allows individuals or groups of individuals to file complaints if they feel their rights have been violated under the terms of the Convention.
3. QUÉBEC, *Act to amend the Act respecting the Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance and other legislative provisions*, C-25, (Québec City: Éditeur officiel du Québec, 2006).
4. CONSEIL DU STATUT DE LA FEMME, *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men, Summary* (Québec City: the Conseil, 2004) 6.
5. CONSEIL, 6.
6. INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC, *Recueil statistique sur la pauvreté et les inégalités socioéconomiques au Québec* (Québec City: Institut de la statistique du Québec and Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, 2006) 30, Table 1.1.4, and statistics from the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale.
7. CONSEIL, Members of the National Assembly and Québec government ministers. [www.csf.gouv.qc.ca/telechargement/stat/DeputeesAssNatioMinistres.pdf] (Consulted on line, December 4, 2006).
8. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men, Brief* (Québec City: the Conseil, 2004) 24-27.
9. COMMISSION DES AFFAIRES SOCIALES, *Rapport et recommandations à la suite des auditions tenues dans le cadre de la consultation générale* on the document entitled: *For a New Social Contract of Equality Between Women and Men* (Québec City: Secrétariat des commissions de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec, December 2005) 11.
10. STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA, *Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality*. [www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/066261951X/199508_066261951X_5_f.html] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
11. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*, 69.
12. According to the Glossary of Gender and Development Terms, gender equality is a concept that means "that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally." See EUROPEAN COMMISSION, "Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in EC Development Cooperation," Section 3, 3. [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/europeaid/projects/gender/toolkit_2006/fr/pdf/section3_fr.pdf] (Consulted on line, November 10, 2006).
13. Hélène MASSÉ et al., *L'expérimentation de l'analyse différenciée selon les sexes au gouvernement du Québec: ses enseignements et ses retombées. Rapport, période 1997-2004* [for the Secrétariat à la condition féminine] (Québec City: Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine, 2005) 9. [www.scf.gouv.qc.ca/pdf_fr/ads_juillet05.pdf] (Consulted on line, November 13, 2006).
See also COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE ET DES DROITS DE LA JEUNESSE, *Le droit à l'égalité : des progrès remarquables, des inégalités persistantes* (Québec City: 2003) 69-70; Michel MINÉ, "Les concepts de discrimination directe et indirecte," presentation at a conference called Lutte contre la discrimination : les nouvelles directives de 2000 sur l'égalité de traitement, Trèves, March 31-April 1, 2003.
14. COMMISSION DES AFFAIRES, 11.
15. COMMISSION DES AFFAIRES, 5.
16. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*.
17. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*.
18. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*.
19. UNITED NATIONS ORGANISATION, *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, September 4-15, 1995 (A/ CONF.1 77/20/Rev. 1). (New York: 1996, paragraph 229, 99). [www.un.org/french/womenwatch/followup/beijing5/docs/prgaction.pdf] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
20. Hélène MASSÉ et al., 5.
21. Hélène MASSÉ, Michèle LABERGE and Ginette MASSÉ, "L'analyse différenciée selon les sexes au gouvernement du Québec: vers une mobilisation interne et des alliances stratégiques pour l'égalité," *Management international* 7, no 1 (fall 2002) 79-88. [www.scf.gouv.qc.ca/pdf_fr/Ads.pdf#search=%22SCF%20Analyse%20diff%C3%A9renci%C3%A9e%20selon%20les%20sexes%22] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
22. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*.
23. Pierrette BOUCHARD et al., *De l'amour de l'école*, quoted in Michelle PELLETIER, *La réussite des garçons: des constats à mettre en perspective, Rapport synthèse* (Québec City: Ministère de l'Éducation, 2004) 14.

24. Male preponderance, expressed in the term “paternal authority,” disappeared from the *Civil Code of Québec* only in 1977. The Code contained the following formulation at that time: “The father and mother exercise parental authority together, except as otherwise authorized under this Code. If either parent dies, or is unable to express his or her will, parental authority is exercised by the other parent.” In 1980, a portion of the *Civil Code of Québec* was passed into law; in the second part, substantial reforms were made to family law so that the equality of spouses in exercising parental authority was recognized without reservation. The article quoted above became: “The father and mother exercise parental authority together. If either parent dies, is deprived of parental authority or is unable to express his or her will, parental authority is exercised by the other parent.” This article was repeated word for word in the version of the *Civil Code* passed in 1991.
25. Nicole MARCIL-GRATTON, “La famille éclatée,” *Interface* 21, no 1 (January-February 2000) 44. See also Ariane ÉMOND, “Procès du féminisme,” *Gazette des femmes* 24, no 6 (March-April 2003) 13; Renée JOYAL et al., *Le rôle des tribunaux dans la prise en charge des enfants après le divorce ou la séparation des parents*, research report submitted to the Ministère de la Justice and the Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance (Québec City: Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille, 2003).
26. INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC, “Les enfants et le divorce: de plus en plus de garde partagée,” *Bulletin Données sociodémographiques en bref* 7, no 1 (October 2002) (Les conditions de vie collection).
27. Statistics on divorce exclude, by definition, child custody in cases when parents living in a common-law relationship separate.
28. Louis DUCHESNE, “Données sociodémographiques en bref,” 7, no 1 (October 2002) 1; INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC, file produced by Louis Duchesne, version of September 2006, using data from Statistics Canada.
29. Pierre LEFEBVRE and Philip MERRIGAN, “La politique des services de garde à 5 \$/jour et les comportements de travail des mères québécoises, partie II : Résultats d'une analyse quasi-expérimentale avec les données des 4 cycles de l'ELNEJ” (Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal, 2004).
30. INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC web site, Spring 2006, based on data from Statistics Canada's *Labour Force Survey*.
31. INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC, *Annuaire québécois des statistiques du travail : Portrait des principaux indicateurs du marché du travail, 1997-2005*, 2, no 1, Chapter 3, Table 3.44 (Québec City: Institut, 2006) 118.
32. MINISTÈRE DU DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE, DE L'INNOVATION ET DE L'EXPORTATION. [www.mdeie.gouv.qc.ca/ndercontent/000021780000/upload/publications/pdf/science_technologie/fr/publications/bilan_femme/chap2.pdf#search=%22influence%20des%20femmes%20sciences%22] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
33. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*, 93.
34. MINISTÈRE DU DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE ET RÉGIONAL ET DE LA RECHERCHE, *Bilan de la progression des Québécoises en science et en technologie de 1993 à 2003* (Québec City: the Ministère, 2004) 61.
35. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*, 93.
36. CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*, 19.
37. MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT, “Indicateurs de l'éducation,” sections 5.2, 5.6 and 5.7, 2006 edition. [www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/stat/indic06/index.htm] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
- Note that these percentages indicate the probability that 100 young Quebecers will obtain a diploma at a given level of education and not the proportion of entrants at a level of education who obtain a diploma at that level.
38. MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, section 2.6, Table 2.6. [www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/stat/indic06/docum06/F2_6_2006.pdf] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
39. Pierrette BOUCHARD, “Faire réussir les garçons ou en finir avec le féminisme? La montée d'une idéologie conservatrice,” 2002. [http://sisyphe.org/imprimer.php3?id_article= 169] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
40. Based principally on a study by the Conference Board of Canada: Brenda LAFLEUR, *Les coûts du décrochage scolaire pour le Canada* (Ottawa, 1992).
41. See note 30.
42. See note 31.
43. COMMISSION DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SERVICES SOCIAUX DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS DU QUÉBEC ET DU LABRADOR, *Enquête régionale longitudinale sur la santé des Premières Nations de la région du Québec, 2002* (Québec City: the Commission, 2006), [www.cssspnq.com:8080/cssspnq/ui/strategy/StrategyHealthSurvey.jsp?section=link_strategy] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
- Three reports were issued: the first on members of First Nations living in communities; the second on members living outside communities, in urban areas; and the third on smoking. The Commission made recommendations for members in communities only since the smaller size of the sample of members living outside communities did not allow for a representative profile.
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45. COMMISSION DE LA SANTÉ... QUÉBEC LABRADOR.
46. STATISTICS CANADA, *2001 Canada Census*, catalogue 97F009XCB2001042 (web site).
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48. MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, *Cap sur l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie, rapport du comité d'experts sur le financement de la formation continue* (Québec City: the Ministère, 2004) 13. [www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/REFORME/formation_con/Rapport/rapport.pdf] (Consulted on line, November 9, 2006).
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50. MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, *Cap sur l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie* (Québec City: the Ministère, 2004) and Appendices, quoted in CONSEIL, *For a New Social Contract... Brief*, 94.
51. STATISTICS CANADA Business Register database for December 1997, June 2001 and December 2004, examined by the Institut de la Statistique du Québec at the request of the Commission de l'équité salariale.
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