

United
for
equity

Policy on the Fair
Representation of
Women in Positions
of Power and
Decision-Making



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fiqp

FIQ | SECTEUR PRIVÉ

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Introduction

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Quebec society is not immune to what is happening all around the world. For some time now, populism has been on the rise and the right and far-right, has been gaining momentum all over. Sexist, racist, homophobic and xenophobic sentiment is rampant and constitutes a threat to democratic institutions. This type of political climate endangers our rights, targeting the rights of women in particular. People are expressing sexist sentiment more openly and more often in public and on social media. Violence against women is increasing across the world and the impoverishment of women goes hand in hand with the rise in social inequality triggered by the privatization of public services, among other things. What's more, abortion rights are also coming under fire again on a large scale.

This attack on women's fundamental rights makes the UN WOMEN's priority to participate equally in democratic governance even more relevant. The world needs to hear from women. It needs their experience and talents to curb the shifts we are seeing all over the planet and to lead the battles we must fight to change their course.

Like many women who are currently mobilizing around the world to promote their rights, the FIQ and FIQP encourage healthcare professionals to join in this major mobilization and to take a stand in places of power and make their voices heard. The fact that they belong to a labour organization in the health industry gives them a certain status in the public eye, enabling them to speak on behalf of those who are more vulnerable or who don't have the collective means to take a stand.

Why do we need a fair representation policy?

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At the Federal Council in June 2016, the delegation adopted a proposal to develop a policy to ensure the fair representation of women in all areas of decision-making power at the FIQ and FIQP. The proposal reflected a need revealed by the Status of Women Sector's analysis, which shows that there was a decrease in involvement among women at several levels of power. At the 1988 Convention, women made up 88% of the delegation, however, this percentage dropped to 75% at the 2014 Convention, and then again to 75% at the 2017 Convention. This could lead to the under-representation of women in an organization with a 90% female workforce.

To reverse this trend, which seemingly coincides with the health system's major reforms, the FIQ and FIQP propose this draft policy.

A tool

The policy is intended as a tool to reverse this trend. Such inequality cannot be tolerated at the FIQ and FIQP as it constitutes an attack on women's rights. It goes against the guidelines in the Statement of Principles promoting equality between men and women. It also jeopardizes women's influence within the organization, which fluctuates based on the amount of women in positions of power and decision-making.

The FIQ and FIQP did not opt for equal representation, which would call for equal numbers, because that wouldn't be appropriate for the organizations.¹ Nor did they opt for proportional representation. It would be impossible to attain 90% representation and it would discourage mobilization among union reps. Therefore, they opted for fair representation, with a target percentage, one that is fair and respectful of its members' work and life conditions. It is a benchmark target that can be adjusted based on how the situation evolves. As you can see, the FIQ and FIQP are not proposing any restrictive measures or reserved positions.

¹ The notion of equality holds that women and men must play equal roles in exercising power because the human race is composed of people of both genders. That is why there is often talk of equal representation during federal, provincial and municipal elections because women, who represent half of the population, are still under-represented in elections.

In other words, the policy is also a tool to create change to stop the number of women at decision-making meetings from decreasing and instead increase their numbers with support measures that will bolster their participation. The policy presents measures which were suggested at group discussions² among women aimed at discerning the challenges members face when they consider running in an election.

Furthermore, the policy seeks to strengthen alliances between the women and men within the organization. Women need men's participation to promote gender equality. That is why it is so important to be able to count on strong allies, with whom one can openly discuss the delicate but necessary topic of sharing power in a spirit of cooperation.

Obstacles

The policy won't solve everything. For it to be effective, the FIQ and FIQP will need to continue to focus on dismantling major obstacles that prevent women from becoming union reps. There are still too many obstacles in the way for those who would like to run in union elections. These obstacles discourage involvement and put members' health and quality of life at risk.

Family³-work-study balance: This is one of the greatest obstacles to union involvement. The FIQ and FIQP will continue to work closely with the Coalition pour la conciliation famille-travail-études (CFTE) to implement framework legislation that will provide a collective solution to family-work-study balance problems. They will also continue their own work on this issue and follow through on recommendations that were adopted by the Federal Council in June 2017 in the follow-up of the commissions on the CFTE.

²The Status of Women Sector collaborated with an outside firm in June 2017 to organize four discussion groups made up of members and union reps. Their goal was to identify the challenges women face when taking on elected positions and to propose measures that would make it easier for them. Two additional discussion groups were held, one with young union reps, the other with union reps from ethnocultural communities, in order to get a more representative base of information.

³ The term family in this context refers to any type of family situation (single-parent, same-sex parents, blended families, etc.).

Workplace violence: Members of the FIQ and FIQP face a high level of violence. One study⁴ showed that the scale of this violence is associated with the fact that the members are mostly women. Unfortunately, this situation is far from being resolved. The many health system reforms largely contributed to the deterioration of the network's work climate and exacerbated tensions between the managers and staff, and between members who are often coping with excessive workloads. To make things worse, many of them are scared of reprisals which only increases their distress. The FIQ and FIQP will continue to look for solutions to resolve organizational violence in order to improve the work climate on local teams.

Overtime: The FIQ and FIQP are the only labour organizations that have to deal with overtime hours, both voluntary and mandatory, on such a large scale. Poor organization of work is the cause of team instability. This includes insufficient ratios, and in many cases, using overtime as a scheduling method. To remedy this poor management, which only deteriorates work-family balance and generates fatigue and stress, heightening healthcare professionals' risk of error, the FIQ and FIQP have increased their efforts to stabilize teams and increase the number of jobs with healthy work conditions.

Emotional toll of work: Providing care is a demanding job. So when it is also stretched thin by budget cuts and austerity measures that eat away at public services, it has a huge impact on the staff: it is harder for them to perform their roles as caregivers; they feel powerless as they see their network crumbling bit by bit; they lose multiple staff members, especially from their teams; relationships built on trust fall apart, etc. All of these constraints foster chaos, leading to demobilization, professional burnout, stress, depression and grief. One would have to be pretty naive to believe that the Couillard government didn't know how its reform would impact the unions in the health network. Instead of encouraging member engagement and participation, it is much more likely to discourage it and all of the places they need to travel within the huge territories only adds to the problem. The FIQ and FIQP continue to denounce budget cuts and austerity measures on all platforms and firmly believe that the solutions lie in mobilization and proposal-oriented unionism.

⁴FIQ, *To Work in Dignity: Violence/Zero Tolerance*, 2000.

Socialization and sexist and gender-based stereotypes: The principle of fair representation is perfectly legitimate and allows women to be represented based on their numbers and strength within an organization. However, sexist and gender-based stereotypes are always at play and we must break them down: women often find it challenging to picture themselves in positions of power, believing they are incompetent or have to prove themselves, etc.

On top of everything, the union organizing model in and of itself can sometimes be an additional challenge to engaging in unionism. Workplaces aren't really adapted to women and neither is unionism. Some women find it difficult to take a stance in big meetings that require self-affirmation or leadership and they feel ill-equipped to manage large institutions with a lot of staff. They aren't often comfortable in or drawn to places seen as places of confrontation. Men identify more easily with this culture, which was set up a long time ago by men, for men. One might say that their socialization better prepared them to occupy these positions of power. The FIQ and FIQP always strive to reflect the reality of the majority of their members. The support measures in this policy are a good example of these efforts. They promote a unionism adapted to the unique conditions of women.

What's at stake

Throughout the history of both organizations, union reps, having participated in decision-making, had a particular influence on orientations and interventions, whether it was through the selection of projects, strategies or approaches. Women's interests were taken into account—the priority actions include efforts to improve their situation, address feminist issues and many battles have been led to defend their rights. Whether the issue is abortion, part-time work, workplace violence, retirement conditions or recognition for midwifery, unionism has reflected the reality and concerns of the majority of the FIQ and FIQP's members. Unionism has also enabled them to defend their rights, rights for which they seek recognition for both themselves and for all Quebec women.

This is the heritage that the FIQ and FIQP would like to protect and which could be at stake if women's influence continues to decline in decision-making bodies. And yet, it is a pivotal moment for women to participate and make their voices heard: when budget cuts affect public services, as UN WOMEN clearly states, it is women and girls who pay the price.

Quebec society (women in particular)⁵ needs to hear what healthcare professionals have to say about how budget cuts impact health care and how they have paid the price. They have a duty to speak up, and not only because they are first-hand witnesses to the declining services, but also because they have the expertise to accurately evaluate the damage and propose solutions.

A leading organization on the status of women

If the FIQ and FIQP are to continue to:

- promote women's rights;
- take a public stand on behalf of those who are more vulnerable and cannot speak up;
- be leading organizations on the status of women in Quebec society and, due to their ties of solidarity, strive to achieve gender equality throughout the world;

then we need to ensure that healthcare professionals participate at every level of decision-making power and influence, despite the challenges posed by Bill 10.

It is with this in mind that the FIQ and FIQP propose the adoption of this policy.

⁵ Women use health and social services more than men. There are several reasons for this: physiological reasons (birth control, pregnancy, abortion, etc.) and socio-economic and cultural reasons (poverty, violence, caregiving, etc.). Council on the Status of Women, 2016.

Policy on the fair representation of women at the FIQ

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1. Preamble

In the FIQ's Statement of Principles, which also applies to the FIQP, it recognizes that a society cannot advance without promoting women's rights. It also adheres to the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which promotes equality between men and women and women's right to fully participate in democratic governance.

To this end, the FIQ and FIQP seek to ensure that women, who make up 90% of their workforce, have equal access to all levels of power and influence in the pursuit of democracy and social justice.

Since their foundation, the FIQ and FIQP have gotten involved in feminist struggles. The objective of all of these struggles has been to end systemic discrimination and create greater gender equality. Women's full participation at all levels of power is therefore one of the battles that the FIQ and FIQP continue to wage in order to advance women's rights.

2. The FIQ and FIQP's commitments

- 2.1 Implement the target benchmark and the support measures included in this policy at the federal level in order to increase women's involvement in decision-making bodies and areas of influence.
- 2.2 Persuade all affiliated unions to also commit to implementing the benchmark target and support measures at the regional and local levels in order to increase women's participation in local union activity and make it easier for them to attain elected positions.
- 2.3 Encourage all members to adhere to the principles in this policy by actively participating in local union activity and by supporting those who would like to take part in the electoral process.

3. Objectives

- 3.1 Make members aware that the principle of fair representation is a question of equality and requires women's full participation in places of decision-making power and influence.
- 3.2 Raise awareness among members, both women and men, about gender-based and sexist stereotypes which deter women from participating in positions of power and decision-making bodies.
- 3.3 Encourage men to work with women to establish equality by adhering to the principles in this policy and by building solidarity and alliances.
- 3.4 Support women who would like to be part of the electoral process, including those from diverse ethnocultural groups, so that they can benefit from the support measures implemented for this purpose.⁶
- 3.5 Raise awareness among FIQ employees about what's at stake with the fair representation of women at the different levels of power so that they can help local teams and members implement this policy.

4. Policy foundation

This policy was inspired by:

- The FIQ's Statement of Principles
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW]
- The Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms

⁶ Equality between women and men is first achieved through equality among all women. We must therefore take diversity among women into account and the subsequent inequality and propose measures that will facilitate their access to all levels of power and influence.

5. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following terms mean:

Equality

Equality is the corner stone of all charters. It holds that men and women must benefit from the same conditions to exercise their fundamental rights and fulfill their potential. This principle has been part of international rights since 1945 in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. Equality implies that women participate in the decision-making process for matters that concern them.

Equity

Equity between sexes means showing impartiality towards men and women. To achieve equality, often one must adopt measures that eliminate gender-based bias and compensate for historical and social disadvantages that deprive women of equal opportunities.⁷ Pay equity is a good example of such a measure.

Discrimination

“The term “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex [whether intentional or not] which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women [...] of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”⁸

Discrimination can also be systemic. It is the result of policies, procedures or regulations based on beliefs, values or prejudices, which, over generations became a system. Historically and culturally, it has disadvantaged or excluded groups, in this case, women.

⁷ Réseau des tables régionales de groupes de femmes du Québec, *Analyse comparative entre les sexes : guide d'élaboration des politiques*.

⁸Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Article I The governments of Canada and Quebec adhered to this convention in 1981.

Representation

Representation means one person has the power to represent a community following an election. The objective is to eliminate discrimination against women by providing conditions that facilitate their participation in the decision-making that affects them in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of society.⁹

Fair representation

The purpose of fair representation is to achieve equitable representation for women at every level of power in an organization using numeric targets. These numeric goals (percentages) are reference points for measuring the participation of women in the decision-making process and can be adjusted as needed.

6. Benchmark target

To curb the waning participation of women over the last few years, the FIQ and FIQP propose a benchmark target of 75% women at conventions, provincial councils, Federation committees and on local teams. It is a realistic target intended to correct the current shortage. It takes into account the challenges women face when taking on the responsibility of an elected role and constitutes a step towards equality. This target should be used as a reference point to evaluate the policy.

As you can see, the FIQ and FIQP are **not proposing restrictive measures** for all of the positions of power or influence (reserved positions). Rather, they are focusing on a percentage that can be achieved with an action plan that contains support measures, all the while counting on the solidarity and cooperation of male members.

⁹ CEDAW, Article 7c.

7. Support measures

The action plan, to be developed by the Implementation and Monitoring Committee and adopted by the delegation in December 2018, will include one or more support measures. The FIQ and FIQP, in cooperation with its affiliated unions, are going to implement measures in order to make it easier for a greater number of women to participate in positions of power. Most of these measures were suggested by the union reps and members who participated in the discussion groups.¹⁰

7.1 Potential support measures that the FIQ and FIQP could offer

Training programs

- Training programs for newly elected members must be available when they begin their mandate in order to help union reps quickly take on their roles. These training programs must meet union reps' needs and cover various topics, including:
 - The FIQ and FIQP's projects;
 - Women's struggles and gains;
 - The roles and responsibilities of a union representative;
 - Speaking up and communication strategies;
 - Union organizing and meeting procedures;
 - Techniques for negotiating with the employer;
 - Etc.
- A training program for male members of the delegation in order to provide a basis for reflection on concrete ways to foster their alliance and understand feminist issues.
- A training program for employees to broaden their understanding of this policy and to get them involved in implementing it in their area of work.

¹⁰ See note 2.

Working in small groups

- When working in small groups, more people get a chance to express their views. Speaking up in front of big groups can often be a real challenge for women, as several people mentioned in discussion groups. In this way, Federation committees and networks (Women's, Youth and OHS) can be an opportunity for new union reps to gain valuable experience. With more experience, they will gain confidence and speak up more often.

Twinning

- Twinning will be offered to two elected members within one union who would like to share the attendance time for any decision-making meeting that runs for more than three days.

Mentorship

- Mentorship will give a newly elected member guidance at the local level, upon election, so that they may build the confidence needed to then in turn guide members who need help.

Seeking talent

- Looking for talent involves noticing candidates who have the potential to be representatives but who are reluctant to take the plunge because they lack confidence in their abilities. A strategy could be developed locally to generate interest among potential candidates and adapted to the reality of members from ethnocultural communities to encourage representation that reflects diversity.

Decision-making meeting scheduling

- The schedules have often been viewed as strict and can be an additional obstacle to women's participation at meetings. They are an obstacle to family-work-study balance. We will study this matter in order to innovate and suggest new ways to hold the meetings, while taking into account the difficulties women encounter, especially in the new structures which have increased the number of places they must travel.

Greater accessibility to taking the floor at meetings

- To encourage women to take the floor at meetings, we need to develop and circulate a code of ethics that promotes discussion in a climate that is open and respectful. This measure will also help women take the floor more often by providing them with assistance as needed or by simplifying the procedures. Furthermore, simply holding discussions that are more open and less formal leaves room for people to suggest new ideas or proposals that should be explored. This will not only lay the foundations for people to learn more about broad debates, it will also bolster participation in the democratic process.

Workplace training

- Training in the workplace is a solution that could foster family-work-study balance, which respondents say is a major obstacle to getting involved.

Work leaves

- To be effective, work leaves must meet representatives' needs. Full-time leaves should be offered to those who would like continuity in their union work, and part-time leaves should be offered to those who prefer less, while ensuring they are replaced while absent to reduce any potential excessive workloads upon their return.

Drop-in daycare

- We will evaluate whether it is possible to offer daycare services during meetings in order to promote family-work-study balance.

Guidance for newly elected union reps

- We could develop measures for training newly elected members. For example, they could attend presidents' meetings in order to learn about exercising power.

7.2 Potential measures that affiliated unions could offer

Affiliated union engagement is absolutely essential. They must subscribe to the action plan (to be adopted in December 2018) from the outset and implement the support measures that fall under the scope of their responsibility to achieve the target percentage. Affiliated unions can also, on a voluntary basis, draw up their own action plan. Here are some support measures that survey respondents preferred:

- Holding meetings in the workplace;
- Providing the option to attend meetings remotely (video conference);
- Creating schedules adapted to family-work-study balance restrictions;
- Seeking out talent and mentors;
- Using electronic media;
- Providing drop-in daycare services during union meetings.

Affiliated unions will be responsible for setting up a status of women committee. A tool developed by the Status of Women Sector is available on FIQ Militantes for this purpose.

7.3 Assessing measures

During the first three years we will be implementing both the policy and the main measures. Every year the measures, as described in the action plan, will be revised and evaluated. A report will be submitted at every convention. The evaluation will help us to make the necessary adjustments.

8. Alliances

We need to forge alliances with male members so that the responsibility of fostering equality within the FIQ and FIQP does not fall solely to women. These are not new alliances and we have seen male members show solidarity on several occasions. In order to achieve fair representation for women at all levels of power, we need men's solidarity and cooperation. The goal is to learn to share power and to advocate for equality together with a view to fostering unionism built on solidarity.

With this in mind, the FIQ and FIQP propose two annual activities. The first is an annual mixed luncheon held at each provincial council in June. The second, the allies' luncheon, would be held for male members of the delegation. They would be invited to attend a luncheon at every provincial council in December in order to discuss feminist principles and issues. The male members of the Provincial Executive Committee would be responsible for this activity.

9. Statement of Principles

To comply with this policy, the Statement of Principles will be amended at the Convention in 2021 to include the principle of fair representation of women at all levels of power within the FIQ and FIQP.

Action plan

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The policy will come with an action plan that will be updated at every convention. However, the first action plan will be the exception because it will be submitted at the December 2018 Provincial Council.

The FIQ and FIQP put the Implementation and Monitoring Committee in charge of overseeing the implementation of the policy. The committee will be composed of eleven union reps, including five union reps from affiliated unions, and six union reps (five women and one man) selected among the members of the Federation's standing committees:

- ◆ 2 union reps from the Status of Women Committee
- ◆ 1 union rep from the Education-Animation Committee
- ◆ 1 union rep from the Youth Committee
- ◆ 1 union rep from the Occupational Health and Safety Committee
- ◆ 1 male union rep from one of these committees

The Implementation and Monitoring Committee will work with the consultants from the appropriate sectors and services to develop an action plan and, at every convention, it will submit a report on the measures and initiatives that had an impact on members' participation at both the local and regional levels. Its mandate will be to:

- Help prepare an action plan to implement support measures, which follows the integrative approach;
- Help develop tools for an information and talent search campaign. These tools will be available during elections in institutions to broaden understanding of the target percentage for fair representation;
- Oversee the implementation of specific measures concerning the search for talent to ensure representation of ethnocultural diversity;
- Oversee the implementation of support measures;
- During president meetings, propose thoughts and ideas on the challenges they face in exercising power;

- Help circulate all information tools designed for members that cover union involvement in a general way, as well as fair representation;
- Participate in the brainstorming process on possibly holding an awareness campaign on feminine power;
- Give the Women's Network regular updates on the policy's implementation so that union reps' stay abreast of its progress;
- Report to the Convention on the action plan's progress and update it.

Awareness campaign

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In order to better understand the objectives of this policy and the challenges regarding power that prevent women from taking on greater roles within the FIQ, FIQP and the health network, it would be useful to develop and run a major awareness campaign on the topic of feminine power. If approved, the campaign would be part of the action plan developed by the Implementation and Monitoring Committee.