



**congress 2021**

OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Northern Relations

**congrès 2021**

DES SCIENCES HUMAINES

Relations nordiques

SSHRC  CRSH

# *Three lessons of the pandemic for Québec's family policy*

Sophie Mathieu, PhD

SSHRC Postdoctoral fellow, Université TÉLUQ

sophiemathieu@hotmail.com

# Overview

Mathieu, S., D.-G. Tremblay, C. Treleaven, S. Fuller. What are the determinants of work-family integration during the pandemic? Insights from the Canadian province of Québec, (work in progress for the *Canadian Review of Sociology*)

Mathieu, S. “Unpacking the childcare policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic: insights from the Canadian province of Québec,” *Journal of Childhood Studies* (under review)

Mathieu, S. and D.-G. Tremblay (forthcoming). « L’effet paradoxal de la pandémie sur l’articulation emploi-famille : le cas du Québec », *Revue Interventions économiques*, 66.

Doucet, A., S. Mathieu and L. McKay. 2020. “Reconceptualizing Parental Leave Benefits in COVID-19 Canada: From Employment Policy to Care and Social Protection Policy”, *Canadian Public Policy*, 46 (3), S272-S286.

Mathieu, S. and D.-G. Tremblay. 2020. « Évolution et transformation de la politique familiale québécoise depuis 1997 », *Enfances, Familles, Générations*, 35.

# Context

Québec is recognised to have the best Canadian family policy, and it has been described as the most “Nordic” province.

Québec’s family policy has two key programs:

1. The network of low-cost childcare
2. Québec’s Parental Insurance Program (QPIP)

There is a misconception regarding the generosity of Québec’s family policy.

## Lesson 1 on childcare

# Québec has a strong network of childcare, but accessibility and quality are problematic

Reminder: Québec has three types of childcare:



1. CPEs (centres de la petite enfance/early childhood centres, \$8.50/day) (non-profit, typically in facilities with trained staff)
  2. For-profit/commercial “garderies” (for-profit, can be either subsidised at \$8.50/day or not subsidised, are typically of low quality)
  3. Childcare in family environment/garderies familiales (can be subsidised or not)
- In the Spring of 2020, the CPEs and all garderies had to close.
  - Emergency childcare was provided by the CPEs only for essential workers (with a proof of employment in essential services).

# Lesson 1

## Québec has a strong network of childcare, but accessibility and quality are problematic

**The situation has become worst with the pandemic:**

- \* Between March and November 2020, 800 family-environment garderies closed.
- \* Currently, it is estimated that more than 51 000 children are waiting for a space in a childcare center.

Better accessibility may be achieved at the cost of lower quality:

- \* In the early 2000s, Québec chose to open garderies instead of CPEs, because they can offer spaces more rapidly.
- \* Many childcare workers quit their job in the Spring of 2020.
- \* Labour shortages affect the number of spaces available and the quality of services.





## Lesson 2 on parental benefits

2 a) Quebec is not entirely autonomous in managing its parental benefits.

2 b) A large proportion of mothers and fathers in Québec receive low benefits when on QPIP

- From CERB to EI benefits ...

- ...to QPIP

QPIP is the result of an agreement signed in March 2005, which provides Quebec residents and employers with a reduction in EI premiums. In this agreement, Quebec commits to paying its residents QPIP benefits that are substantially the same as in the other provinces.

- How many mothers and fathers receive benefits below \$500?

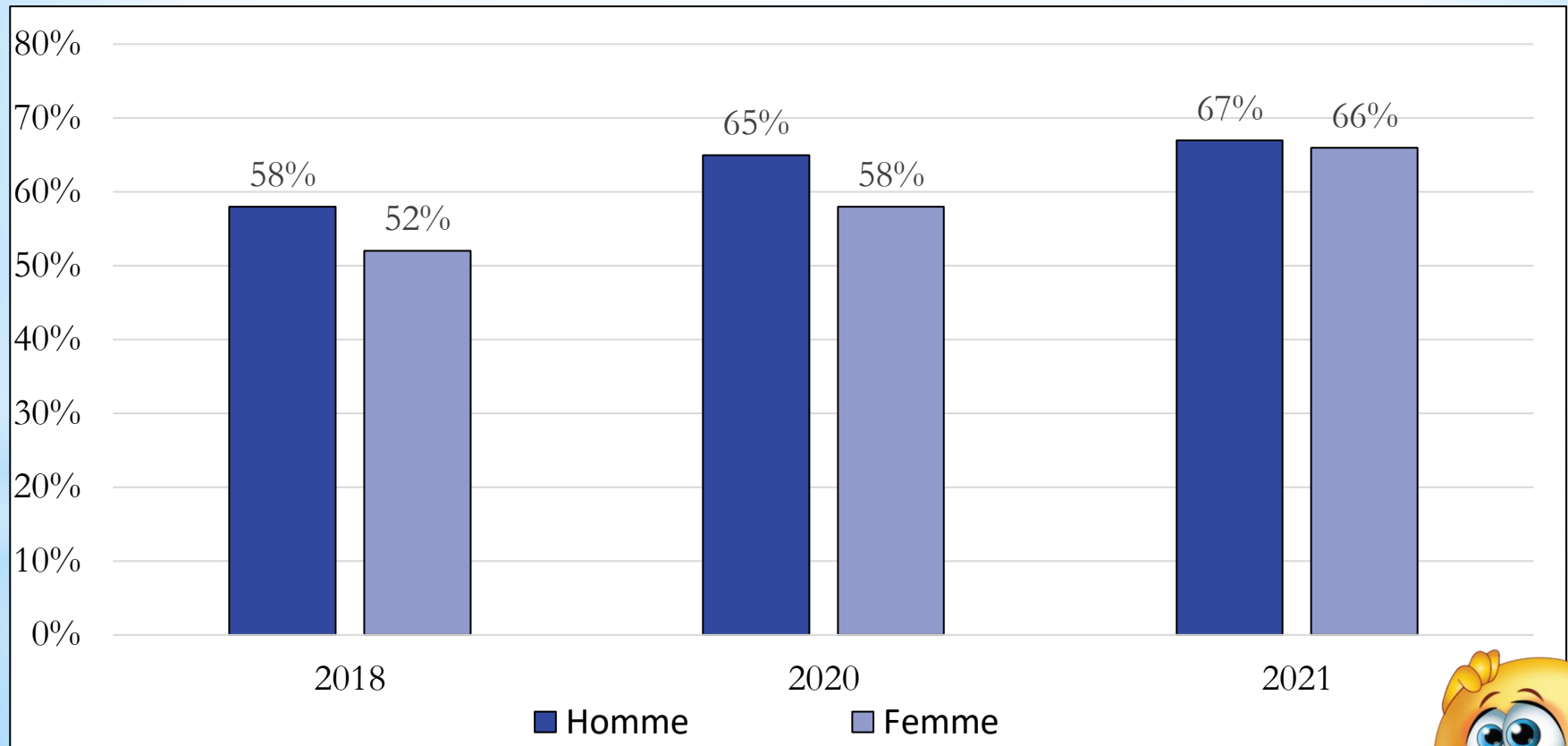
One-third!



## Lesson 3 on work-family conflict

Among parents who stayed in employment during the pandemic, the majority reported having an « easy » work-family reconciliation.

Proportion of parents who rated their reconciliation as “very easy” or “easy” by gender, 2018, 2020 and 2021



Source: Réseau pour un Québec famille, 2018, 2020 et 2021.



# Future avenues



## Regarding childcare:

Given the pressure to create new spaces rapidly, will the government choose to open more spaces in the for-profit garderies?

Will the government be successful at attracting new students to the early childhood education program in cégep?

## Regarding QPIP:

There has been recent changes in QPIP to increase the take-up of parental benefits by fathers (with Bill 51)... Is there room for more changes, such as having minimum benefits of \$500 per week?

## Regarding work-family reconciliation:

With the reopening of the economy – and the return to a more normal life – will parents continue to rate their work-family reconciliation as ‘easy’?



Merci!  
Thank you!

Sophie Mathieu, PhD

SSHRC Postdoctoral fellow, Université T luq

sophiemathieu@hotmail.com

UNIVERSIT   
**T LUQ**

**Brock**  
University