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French-language early childhood and child care services in Canada outside Quebec, 2001 and 2016

By Catherine Frigon and Étienne Lemyre

Child care facilities can be linguistically stimulating environments for the young children who attend them. This is particularly true for children in French-language minority communities. For these children living in Canada outside Quebec, attending French-language child care can encourage the acquisition and development of French language skills and promote future integration into a French-language school environment.¹ The importance of these services is included in the Government of Canada's *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023*, which provides for investments in the development of early childhood care services for official language minorities.

However, a 2019 survey revealed that more than one-third (36.4%) of Canadian parents had difficulty finding child care for their child.² In light of this, this fact sheet aims to estimate the gap that may exist between the potential demand and supply of French-language early childhood care services in various regions of Canada outside of Quebec.

The information presented in this fact sheet comes from the 2001 and 2016 censuses of population, particularly the responses to parts A and B of the questions on languages used at work and languages spoken at home, as well as the questions on labour market activities.

In this fact sheet, “French-speaking children” means children living in Canada outside Quebec who are likely to attend a French-language child care facility. These are defined as all children aged 1 to 4 who lived in a census family³ with at least one parent⁴ who spoke French most often at home.⁵ As a result, the children included in this study are those who either lived in a two-parent family where both parents spoke French most often at home, in a two-parent family where only one parent spoke French most often at home, or in a single-parent family where the parent spoke French most often at home. Children under 1 year of age are excluded from this study as they are not accepted in many child care facilities. In Canada in 2017, 15% of parents with children under the age of 1 used child care, while this was the case for 51% of parents with children aged 1, as well as for over 70% of parents with children aged 2 to 4.⁶

Although these children are considered the most likely to attend French-language child care, it is important to note that not all parents who speak French at home choose to use French-language child care services. Similarly, parents who do not speak French at home may choose to use French-language child care. For these reasons, this fact sheet focuses on the potential demand for French-language child care rather than the actual demand.

“Child care workers” include home child care providers⁷ and early childhood educators and assistants (according to the National Occupational Classification [NOC]). Another study on child care staff in Canada used the same NOC codes.⁸ In contrast, the workers included in this fact sheet are limited to those who worked in the child daycare services industry (according to the North American Industry Classification System) at a fixed address in Canada outside Quebec, and who used French most often at work.⁹ Although these workers are most likely to provide child care in French, there is no guarantee that they will do so. Similarly, workers who used French at least

1. Gilbert, Anne and Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. “Vers l’institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone : entre judiciarisation et compromis politique – L’enfant et sa diversité : recherches et pratiques,” *Revue de l’Université de Moncton*, 35, no. 2 : pp. 155–72. <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/rum/2004-v35-n2-rum862/010647ar/>

2. Statistics Canada. 2019. “Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019,” *The Daily*, component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190410/dq190410a-eng.htm>

3. Census families considered in this study are those that include a child or children living in the same household as a married or common-law couple or a single parent. Children may be children by birth, marriage, common-law union or adoption. This fact sheet does not include children living outside a census family or within a census family where no parent is present. Very few children were excluded for these reasons.

4. Including step-parents.

5. Includes responses to Part A of the question on languages spoken at home, including parents who spoke French most often at home equally with another language.

6. Zhang, S., R. Garner, L. Heidinger, and L. Findlay. 2021. “Parents’ use of child care services and differences in use by mothers’ employment status,” *Insights on Canadian Society*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2021001/article/00007-eng.htm>

7. Namely “babysitters, nannies and parent’s helpers” according to the classification used for the 2001 Census.

8. Uppal, Sharanjit and Katherine Savage. 2021. “Child care workers in Canada,” *Insights on Canadian Society*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2021001/article/00005-eng.htm>

9. Includes responses to Part A of the question on languages used at work, including workers who used French most often at work equally with another language.

regularly at work could also provide French-language child care. It is also possible that they were working with children younger or older than 1 to 4 years of age. This fact sheet therefore focuses on the potential supply of French-language child care services rather than on the actual supply.

Finally, in order to assess the alignment between potential supply of and demand for French-language early childhood care services, this study proposes ratios of the number of French-speaking children to child care workers for different geographical areas.¹⁰

Table 1
Number and proportion of children aged 1 to 4 with at least one parent who spoke French most often at home, Canada outside Quebec, 2001 and 2016

Provinces or territories	2001			2016		
	Children aged 1 to 4			Children aged 1 to 4		
	With at least one parent who spoke			With at least one parent who spoke		
	Total	French most often at home		Total	French most often at home	
	number	number	percentage	number	number	percentage
Total: Canada outside Quebec	1,061,600	29,795	2.8	1,148,210	33,735	2.9
Newfoundland and Labrador	20,030	75	0.4	17,855	130	0.7
Prince Edward Island	6,200	165	2.7	5,600	135	2.4
Nova Scotia	38,480	955	2.5	33,600	750	2.2
New Brunswick	30,470	8,630	28.3	27,520	7,555	27.4
Ontario	541,865	16,265	3.0	555,305	18,355	3.3
Manitoba	55,675	925	1.7	62,065	1,345	2.2
Saskatchewan	48,485	290	0.6	56,335	410	0.7
Alberta	148,090	1,440	1.0	207,985	3,060	1.5
British Columbia	165,825	980	0.6	174,500	1,775	1.0
Territories	6,490	80	1.2	7,450	225	3.0

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2001 and 2016 censuses of population.

In 2016, close to 1,150,000 children aged 1 to 4 lived with at least one parent in a census family in Canada outside of Quebec. Among them, 33,735 (2.9%) had at least one parent who spoke French most often at home. This proportion was relatively stable compared to 2001 (2.8%).

The numbers and proportions of French-speaking children increased in Ontario and the western provinces from 2001 to 2016. In Alberta, the number of children with a parent who spoke French most often at home more than doubled during this period. However, the numbers and proportions of French-speaking children decreased from 2001 to 2016 in the Atlantic provinces, except for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Table 2
Number and proportion of child care workers who used French most often at work, Canada outside Quebec, 2001 and 2016

Provinces or territories	2001			2016		
	Child care workers			Child care workers		
	Total	Who used French most often at work		Total	Who used French most often at work	
	number	number	percentage	number	number	percentage
Total: Canada outside Quebec	127,195	3,925	3.1	137,900	6,310	4.6
Newfoundland and Labrador	1,935	15	0.7	2,645	30	1.1
Prince Edward Island	790	25	3.0	940	30	3.4
Nova Scotia	4,350	85	2.0	4,840	150	3.1
New Brunswick	3,695	975	26.4	4,655	1,625	35.0
Ontario	61,620	2,335	3.8	66,130	3,545	5.4
Manitoba	7,630	230	3.0	8,880	290	3.3
Saskatchewan	5,875	45	0.8	6,965	105	1.5
Alberta	17,620	120	0.7	21,525	295	1.4
British Columbia	22,755	70	0.3	20,500	190	0.9
Territories	930	25	2.1	810	30	4.5

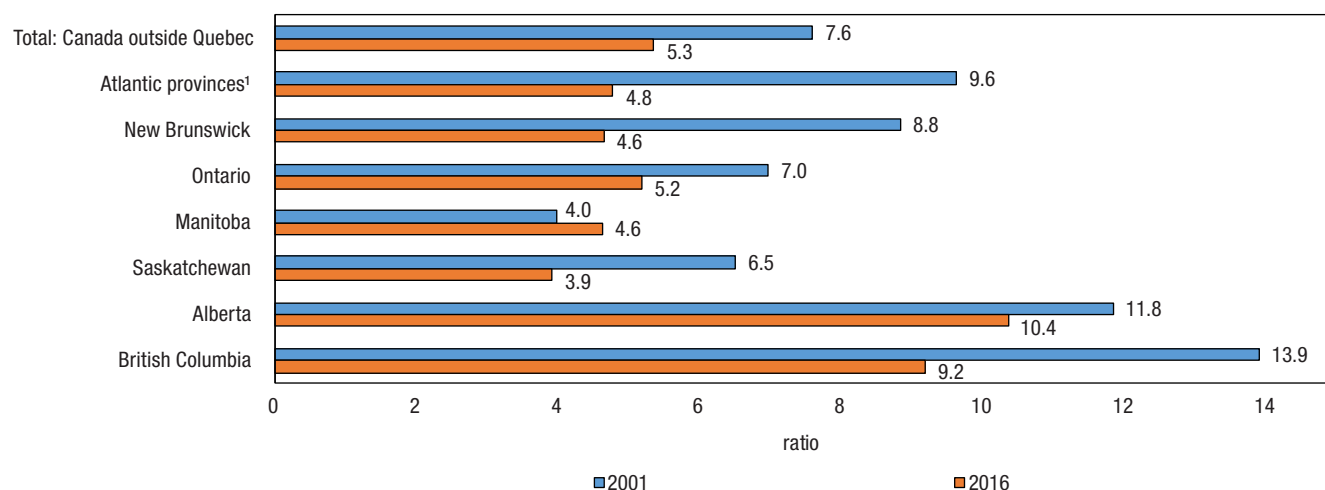
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2001 and 2016 censuses of population.

10. Due to small numbers, ratios for the territories are not presented in this fact sheet, and the Atlantic provinces have been grouped together, except for New Brunswick.

In 2016, there were nearly 138,000 child care workers in Canada outside of Quebec. Among them, 6,310 (4.6%) used French most often at work. This proportion was lower in 2001 (3.1%). From 2001 to 2016, the numbers and proportions of child care workers who used French most often at work increased in each province and territory. In New Brunswick, this proportion increased from 26.4% in 2001 to 35.0% in 2016.

Chart 1

Number of French-speaking children per child care worker using French most often at work, Canada outside Quebec, 2001 and 2016



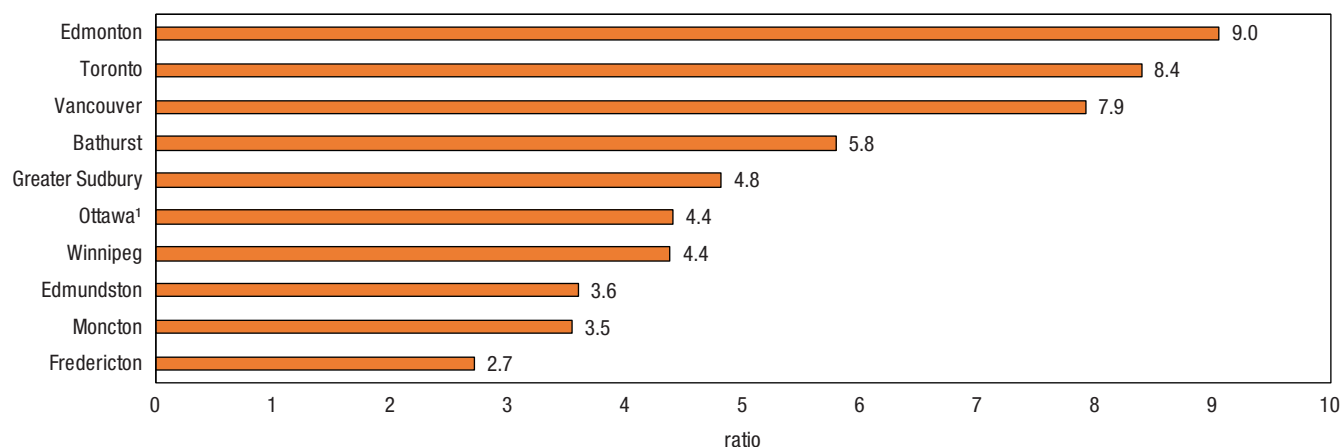
1. Excluding New Brunswick.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2001 and 2016 censuses of population.

Chart 1 shows that the ratios of French-speaking children to child care worker decreased in every province from 2001 to 2016, except Manitoba. In 2016, the ratios ranged from 3.9 to 10.4 French-speaking children for every child care worker. The ratio decreased by nearly half from 2001 to 2016 in New Brunswick (from 8.8 to 4.6 French-speaking children per child care worker) and elsewhere in the Atlantic provinces (from 9.6 to 4.8 French-speaking children per child care worker). During the period studied, the number of French-speaking children decreased in the Atlantic provinces (with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador), while the number of child care workers increased.

Although the ratio of French-speaking children to worker decreased over the study period in Alberta (11.8 children per worker in 2001 and 10.4 in 2016) and British Columbia (13.9 children per worker in 2001 and 9.2 in 2016), it was still about twice as high as the ratio in Ontario in 2016 (7.0 children per worker in 2001 and 5.2 in 2016). For context, according to the different provincial legislations, current regulations for child-to-worker ratios vary from 3 children to 10 children per worker, depending on the age of the children. Accordingly, for all provinces except Alberta and British Columbia, the ratios were near the middle of this range.

The decline in ratios fuelled by the growth in the number of child care workers using French at work is a sign of the growing availability of French-language child care services across the country during the period under study, despite higher ratios in Alberta and British Columbia. In addition, with the exception of these two provinces, the ratios of French-speaking children to child care worker were lower in 2016 than the total ratios of children per worker, regardless of language (5.9 children per worker in New Brunswick, 7.0 in Manitoba, 8.1 in Saskatchewan and 8.4 in Ontario). Therefore, the availability of early childhood care services for French-speaking children seemed somewhat better than for the general population. It was the opposite in Alberta and British Columbia, where the total child-to-worker ratios (9.7 and 8.5, respectively) were lower than those for French-speaking children.

Chart 2**Number of French-speaking children per child care worker using French most often at work, census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs) in which 100 or more child care workers used French most often at work, 2016**

1. Ottawa-Gatineau, Ontario part.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Chart 2 shows that the ratios were below 5 French-speaking children per child care worker in the census metropolitan areas (CMAs) or census agglomerations (CAs) of Greater Sudbury (4.8), Ottawa (4.4),¹¹ Winnipeg (4.4), Edmundston (3.6), Moncton (3.5) and Fredericton (2.7). The highest ratios were observed in the following CMAs: Edmonton (9.0), Toronto (8.4) and Vancouver (7.9). These three CMAs all had small proportions of French-speaking children (Edmonton: 2.0%, Toronto: 1.5% and Vancouver: 1.0%). With the exception of Bathurst (5.8), the CAs and CMAs in New Brunswick had the lowest ratios. This province also had the highest numbers and proportions of French-speaking children and child care workers who used French most often at work. There could therefore be a link between the proportion of the population that is French-speaking, the geographic dispersion of that population and the balance between the potential supply of and demand for child care services in that language.

Many other children were likely to attend French-language child care, especially those with at least one parent who spoke French at home at least regularly.¹² Similarly, workers who used French at work at least regularly¹³ were also likely to provide child care in French. In 2016, 68,060 children aged 1 to 4 (5.9%) had at least one parent who spoke French at home at least regularly in Canada outside Quebec. Moreover, 8,785 (6.4%) child care workers used French at work at least regularly. For context, the child-to-worker ratios calculated from these numbers are generally higher than those presented above. Insights may therefore vary depending on the criteria used.

For all the ratios presented, the geography used is relatively broad. However, parents indicated that proximity to child care is among the main reasons they choose a child care facility.¹⁴ Thus, even if the children-to-worker ratios are low, this does not necessarily mean that services are available locally. Regulations also vary according to the age of each child and by province. A more detailed study could be used to assess the extent to which the supply of services meets the demand for each age group and family composition, at a more local level.

This fact sheet showed that the ratios of children likely to attend French-language child care to each child care worker who used French most often at work decreased from 2001 to 2016 in Canada outside of Quebec, except for Manitoba. The availability of French-language child care services thus seems to have improved over the period under study. Nevertheless, the ratios of French-speaking children per child care worker remained higher in Alberta and British Columbia, as well as in some CMAs and CAs where a small proportion of the population is French-speaking.

Once available, information from the 2022 *Survey on the Official Language Minority Population* will make it possible to conduct a more in-depth study on the subject, particularly through new questions on early childhood.

11. Ottawa-Gatineau (Ontario part).

12. Includes responses to parts A and B of the question on languages spoken at home, including parents who spoke French most often at home equally with another language.

13. Includes responses to parts A and B of the question on languages used at work, including workers who used French most often at work equally with another language.

14. Statistics Canada. 2019. "Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019," *The Daily*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190410/dq190410a-eng.htm>