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Demographic analysis and shortage of French-language early learning and childcare services

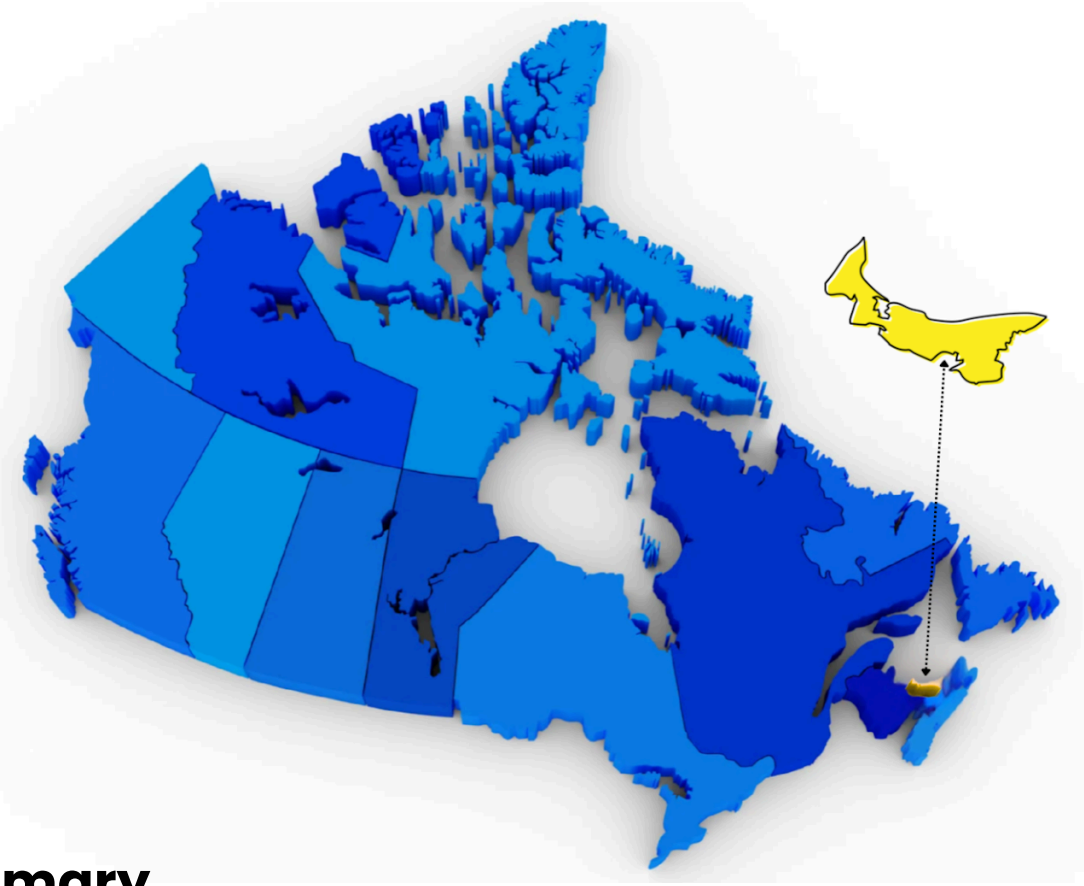
Profile of French-language ELCC services for children aged 0 to 4 eligible for French-language education in

Prince Edward Island

cnpf

La Commission nationale des parents francophones

September 2026



Summary

Several communities in Prince Edward Island are left with a shortage of full-time spaces in French-language early learning and childcare (ELCC) services for children. As part of the federal program aiming to reduce childcare costs, it is essential that this cost saving initiative be associated with an increase in the number of available spaces. This analysis, produced by the Commission nationale des parents francophones [National Commission of Francophone Parents] (CNPF), presents a situation assessment in Prince Edward Island as of September 1, 2025, and suggests communities to target to optimize the impact of these new spaces.

The project "Creation and Support of the Network of Early Childhood Stakeholders in Minority Communities" by the Commission nationale des parents francophones (CNPF) is funded by the Government of Canada through the "Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Program" under the Action Plan for Official Languages. The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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Note: The terms "French-language early learning and childcare (ELCC) service" and "French-language ELCC service" include the diverse terminology used in the provinces and territories, such as daycares, educational centres, early childhood centres (ECC), etc.

1- Background

In 2021, the Government of Canada aimed, in its budget, to implement an accessible and affordable early learning and childcare system for the Canadian population[1]. With the aim of helping Canadians return to work after the COVID-19 pandemic, the government identified the cost of childcare services as a barrier preventing some parents from returning to work. Budget 2021 therefore provided $30 billion over five years for this initiative, with the main goal of reducing childcare fees for preschool-aged children.

However, while the focus was placed on reducing childcare fees, this was not accompanied by an equivalent creation of spaces in French-language early learning and childcare (ELCC) services, making the shortage of spaces even more important. Five years later, accessibility remains a major challenge: many parents struggle to find a full-time space for their child in a French-language ELCC service. Fee reduction is an important incentive for parents. On the other hand, it does not necessarily make up for the shortage of available spaces. This sharp increase in demand for services by parents has not been offset by a corresponding supply of new spaces.

In a Francophone minority setting, this problem is made worse by the spread of Francophones across the territory. Early childhood stakeholders see this program as an opportunity to start new services, knowing that, obviously, many families could benefit from such a service.

This study fits into this context by identifying geographic areas where children aged 0 to 4 are present (according to Statistics Canada's 2021 *Census of Population*), but where there are not enough childcare services. In other words, we seek to identify, for

[1] https://www.budget.canada.ca/2021/home-accueil-en.html

Francophone parents looking for a space in a French-language ELCC service, the chances that they will be able to find such a space for their child. We must be aware that parents unable to find a French-language ELCC service will face two choices: delay their return to the labour market or send their child to a centre in another language, usually English.

It is important to specify that the areas identified in this document may be childcare deserts for Francophones, while overall there are enough spaces for parents of the English-speaking majority. The CNPF believes it is essential to identify areas that are Francophone deserts so that the Government of Canada's program achieves its objectives, meaning that access to childcare for Canadians is equal for parents of both official languages.

Launched in 2025, the project *Creation and Support of the Network of Early Childhood Stakeholders in Minority Communities* aims, by 2028, to improve access to high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive ELCC spaces, services, and programs in Francophone minority communities (FMCs). To achieve this, the CNPF was able to conduct studies and data analyses.

This present study aims to identify service deserts in the communities of the province of Prince Edward Island, based on census subdivisions as well as the number of rights-holders aged 0 to 4, to determine the number of spaces in French-language ELCC services to be created to meet the needs of Francophone communities in the province.

2- Methodology

This study identifies French-language ELCC service deserts by identifying a ratio of full-time spaces per child. To conduct this analysis, we use the number of children aged 0 to 4 identified as eligible for French-language education, pursuant to section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*[2], as measured by Statistics Canada's 2021 *Census of Population*. The term "child" used in the rest of this document refers to this definition.

To obtain the number of spaces in French-language ELCC services, this study uses data from the Association des centres de la petite enfance francophones de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (ACPEFIPE) [Association of Francophone Early Childhood Centres of Prince Edward Island] and direct calls to various French-language ELCC services. The identified spaces are accurate as of September 1, 2025. We thus identified 299 full-time spaces in French-language ELCC services across the province[3].

From these datasets, we were able to identify a parameter indicating, for each preschool-aged child, how many spaces are available.

To accurately represent the situation in Prince Edward Island, we used the datasets that locate the children in the province as precisely as possible. While in some cases it was possible to specify a municipality directly, in others we had to fall back on census divisions.

To determine the French-language ELCC service deserts, we will use three simplified thresholds:

[2] Table n° 98100541 from Statistics Canada's former CANSIM database.
[3] The complete list of identified French-language ELCC services is found in Appendix 1.

1. **First threshold: ratio between 0 and 0.40 (in white)**

It corresponds to **high-need** sectors, meaning there are more than 2.5 children per available space. On average, this means a parent waits 2.5 years before getting a space in a French-language ELCC service. Considering that a parent registers their child on a service waitlist from birth, the child will be over two and a half years old when a space is offered. By this point, the parent will likely have chosen another childcare option for their child.

2. **Second threshold: ratio between 0.40 and 0.70 (in yellow)**

It corresponds to **medium-need** communities, where there are between 1.5 and 2.5 children per space in French-language ELCC services. As explained previously, this means the child will, on average, get a space around the age of 2. In this case, we find ourselves in a situation where the parent might use a temporary option while waiting to get a space in a French-language ELCC service.

3. **Third threshold: ratio superior to 0.70 (in green)**

It corresponds to **well-served** communities. In these areas, there are enough French-language ELCC spaces, and parents can trust they will get a space for their child relatively quickly (before 18 months of age)[4]. Given that the parental leave permitted by law is 18 months, it can be assumed that children in these communities will secure a French-language ELCC space on their very first day.

Thus, only communities with a ratio of more than 0.70 spaces per child aged 0 to 4 (meaning at least 7 spaces for every 10 children) are considered properly served, while all others are classified as areas in need.

[4] According to the *Québec Study on the Accessibility and Use of Childcare Services 2021* by the Québec Institute of Statistics, 70% of children use childcare services. As Québec is a model in childcare, a threshold of 0.70 spaces per child (where 70% of children have a space) is considered sufficient.

3- Foundations of the analysis

A few elements deserve to be presented from the outset to lay the groundwork for this analysis.

Data as of September 1, 2025

Current data represent the best available information as of September 1, 2025. Given how quickly an ELCC service can close and current efforts to develop new spaces, we must be aware that a geographic area can rapidly shift from a high-need community to a well-served area, and vice versa.

Pre-kindergarten and school-age childcare services excluded

Since the purpose of this study is to present an inventory of available full-time spaces in French-language ELCC services, all preschool services offering part-time spaces were excluded from the ratio calculations. The same applies to all support services for school-age childcare programs that serve school-aged children.

Proximity to home: the primary reason for choosing an ELCC service

A study by Learn Square Inc.[5] revealed that the primary reason parents choose an ELCC service is its proximity to their home or workplace. The 2025 *Canadian Early Learning and Child Care Survey* by Statistics Canada[6] arrives at a similar conclusion: two thirds of parents mention location as a determining factor in choosing childcare services for their child.

Although censuses provide an overview of the average distance a parent travels to work, they do not indicate the destination of that commute. This means that home location data is the only usable data. Despite this limitation in the data, the proximity of the home remains an important factor in the parent's choice.

[5] Learn Square Inc., *Rapport d'évaluation des services de garde privés francophones et bilingues dans les régions d'Edmonton et Calgary*, [*Evaluation Report on French-Language and Bilingual Private Childcare Services in the Edmonton and Calgary Regions],* presented to the CDÉA, February 2021.
[6] Statistics Canada, *Table 42-10-0006-01 Parent and guardian reasons for using main childcare arrangement, children aged 0 to 5 years*, 2025.

4- Presentation of results

According to the 2021 *Census of Population*, there were 595 children aged 0 to 4 eligible for French-language education in Prince Edward Island. With 299 full-time spaces in French-language ELCC services, the provincial average ratio is **0.50 spaces per child**, or 1 space for every 2 children.

The province is a **medium-need** area. To ensure it is well served, 118 spaces would need to be added. This places the province in a relatively advantageous position compared to other provinces and territories. Table 1 presents a summary of the situation regarding available French-language ELCC spaces and children across the province.

Table 1: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in Prince Edward Island*

Counties[7]	No of spaces	No of children	Ratio
Prince	163	240	**0.68**
Queens	106	290	**0.37**
Kings	30	65	**0.46**
Total	**299**	**595**	**0.50**

To maximize the reach of these potential new spaces, their location is paramount. This is why a more detailed analysis by geographic area (county) is necessary to identify the sectors where the needs are greatest.

[7]The division of counties comes from Statistics Canada's definitions and is presented in Appendix 2.

Prince County

Prince County is located on the western side of Prince Edward Island. It includes the Summerside agglomeration (population 19,051), which is the second-largest city in the province. This county has 240 children and three French-language ELCC services offering 163 full-time spaces for children aged 0 to 4. Table 2 shows the distribution of these spaces by municipality.

Table 2: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in Prince County*

Municipalities	No of spaces	No of children	Ratio
Summerside	84	60	**1.40**
Wellington	37	40	**0.93**
Tignish	42	15	**2.80**
O'Leary	0	15	**0.00**
Miscouche	0	10	**0.00**
Alberton	0	10	**0.00**
Rest of the county	*0*	*90*	***0.00***
TOTAL PRINCE COUNTY	**163**	**240**	**0.68**

The county is close to the threshold of a **well-served** region, with a ratio of **0.68 spaces per child**, just below the 0.70 threshold.

Summerside, Wellington and Tignish

The municipalities of Summerside (ratio of 1.40), Wellington (0.93), and Tignish (2.80) are all **well served**. For the French-language ELCC services in Summerside and Tignish (the latter of which includes the French-language ELCC service in DeBlois[8], located less than

[8] This municipality is too small to display data on children eligible for French-language education.

10 km away), it can be assumed that they also serve the surrounding population, but in communities too small to have an identifiable number of children.

O'Leary, Miscouche and Alberton

For the last three municipalities, with populations of 10 to 15 children, there are no full-time spaces, making them **high-need** areas. Their small number of children could justify a home-based French-language ELCC service, but hardly a larger facility.

Overall, this county would need 5 additional spaces to become a well-served area, a demand that could be met by a home-based French-language service.

Queens County

Queens County represents the centre of the island. It is the most populous region, notably due to the presence of the Charlottetown census agglomeration (population 83,104). There are 290 children eligible for French-language education in this county, as well as two French-language ELCC services offering 106 full-time spaces. With a **ratio of 0.37 spaces** per child, this county constitutes a **high-need** area. Table 3 presents the distribution of children and spaces by municipality within this county.

Table 3: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in Queens County*

Municipalities	No of spaces	No of children	Ratio
Charlottetown	64	105	**0.61**
Stratford	0	35	**0.00**
Cornwall	0	20	**0.00**
New Glasgow	42	15	**2.80**
North Shore	0	15	**0.00**
West River	0	15	**0.00**
New London	0	10	**0.00**
Rest of the county	*0*	*75*	***0.00***
TOTAL QUEENS COUNTY	**106**	**290**	**0.37**

Charlottetown

The capital, Charlottetown, is by far the city with the highest number of children. With a **ratio of 0.61 spaces per child**, it is a **medium-need** area. Around ten additional spaces would need to be added in the city for it to become well served.

New Glasgow

The second French-language ELCC service is in Hunter River[9], but we have associated it with the municipality of New Glasgow, located less than 10 km away. With a **ratio of 2.80 spaces per child**, this municipality benefits from excellent coverage. It is likely that other children from the surrounding regions attend this service.

Stratford and Cornwall

The two municipalities of Stratford and Cornwall, on the outskirts of Charlottetown, could benefit from the creation of spaces in French-language ELCC services. If we assume that children from these municipalities attend the capital's French-language ELCC service, it means that the need for spaces should be revised upward: this would mean creating 48 spaces, rather than 10, in the Greater Charlottetown area.

North Shore, West River and New London

Finally, for the municipalities of North Shore, West River, and New London, adding a home-based French-language ELCC service in each of them would meet the demand.

[9] This municipality is too small to display data on children eligible for French-language education.

Kings County

Located on the eastern side of Prince Edward Island, Kings County has the most dispersed population. It accounts for 65 children eligible for French-language education, representing less than 11% of the province's children. There is one French-language ELCC service with 30 spaces, which positions the county within the **medium-need** area. Table 4 presents a summary of the situation in this county.

Table 4: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in Kings County*

Municipalities	No of spaces	No of children	Ratio
Three Rivers	0	20	**0.00**
Souris	30	15	**2.00**
Murray Harbour	0	10	**0.00**
Rest of the county	*0*	*20*	***0.00***
TOTAL KINGS COUNTY	**30**	**65**	**0.46**

Souris

The county's only French-language ELCC service is in Rollo Bay, 5 km from the municipality of Souris. With a ratio of **2 spaces per child,** this municipality can be considered **well served**. It is likely that other children from the surrounding areas also attend this French-language ELCC service.

Murray Harbour and Three Rivers

The other two municipalities with a significant presence of children represent **high-need** areas, as no spaces are available there. While the municipality of Murray

Harbour could be satisfied with a home-based French-language service, the population of the municipality of Three Rivers could justify creating a French-language service of at least 14 spaces to lift this municipality above the threshold of a well-served area.

5- Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the areas and municipalities in Prince Edward Island that experience a shortage of French-language early learning and childcare (ELCC) services, where the number of available spaces is very insufficient compared to the needs of children eligible for French-language education aged 0 to 4. Without proposing an ideal model, the study mainly provides a database and descriptive analysis for individuals who plan to start a project of French-language ELCC services in the province.

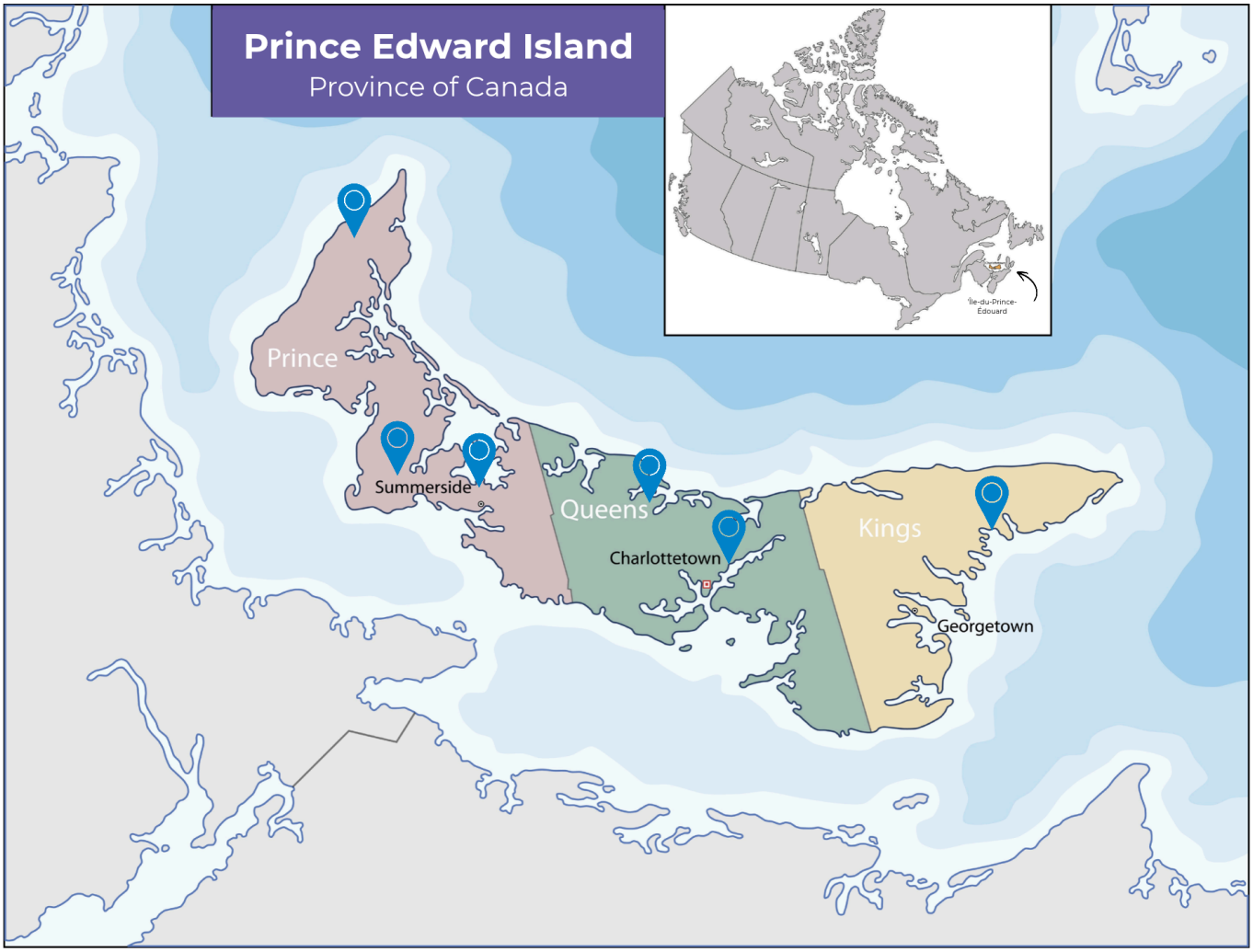
Although the province is a **medium-need** area, there are municipalities where no full-time French-language spaces are available within a 30 km radius. Since location is the predominant factor for parents when choosing a French-language service for their child, it is essential to add services in these municipalities. While the province shows a shortage of 118 spaces, it is in Queens County where the shortage of spaces is most pronounced, with a lack of 97 spaces to reach the well-served region threshold.

Obviously, it is unrealistic to assume that every municipality can support viable French-language ELCC services, given the number of children eligible for French-language education in certain areas. Therefore, it is important to use the values presented in this analysis to properly size the French-language ELCC services. In some municipalities, family-based French-language ELCC services may be the best option. These home-based services offer flexibility in how care is provided and help ensure financial stability.

Appendix 1 – French-language ELCC services in Prince Edward Island offering full-time spaces as of September 1, 2025

Municipalities	Name of French-language ELCC service	No of available spaces
Wellington	Académie d'exploration Évangéline	37
Summerside	Jardin des étoiles	84
Hunter River (New Glasgow)	Petits Rayons de soleil	42
Charlottetown	Île enchantée	64
Rollo Bay (Souris)	Académie d'exploration Rollo Bay Château des étoiles	30
DeBlois (Tignish)	Centre L'arc-en-ciel	42
Total		**299**

Appendix 2 – Prince Edward Island census divisions (counties)



Source: ID 81313106 @ Volina | Dreamstime.com

French-language ELCC service