Réseau d'intervenantes et d'intervenants en petite enfance

Maintenir - Renforcer - Développer

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

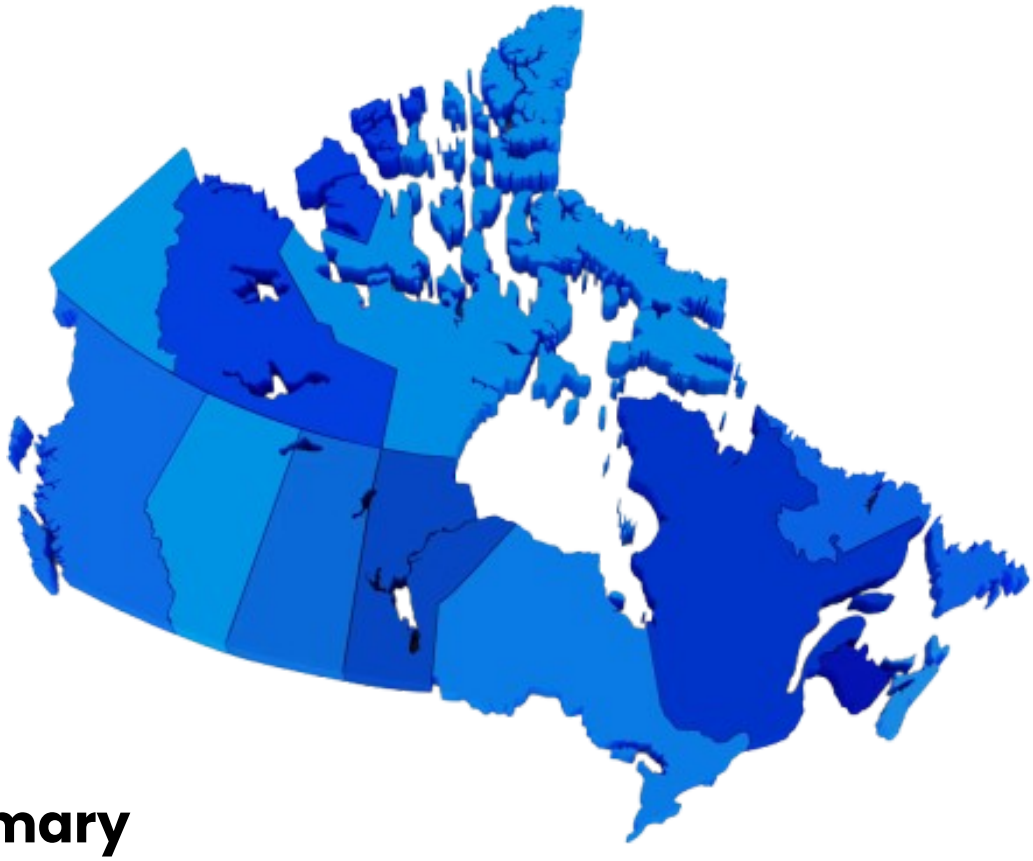
Profile of French-language ELCC services for children aged 0 to 4 eligible for French-language education

National overview

cnpf

La Commission nationale des parents francophones

September 2026



Summary

Several communities in Canada are left with a shortage of full-time spaces in French-language early learning and childcare services for young children under five years of age. 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 of the national situation in Francophone minority communities as of September 1, 2025, and suggests target localities 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.

Funded by the Government of Canada | Cana

Table of contents

1- Background 3

2- Methodology 5

3- Foundations of the analysis 7

4- Presentation of results 8

- Atlantic provinces 9
- Ontario 10
- Western provinces 12
- Territories 14

5- Conclusion 16

Appendix 1 18

Appendix 2 19

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 the 2021 *Census of Population*), but where there are not enough childcare services. In other words, we seek to identify, for Francophone parents looking for a space in a French-language ELCC service, the chances that they will be able to find such

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

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 Canadian women and men 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 early learning and childcare (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 Francophone minority communities across each province and territory in Canada, based on census subdivisions and 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.

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. We have thus identified 130,435 children nationwide in Francophone minority communities.

To obtain the number of spaces in French-language ELCC services, this study uses data from the various sub-recipients of the *Creation and Support of the Network of Early Childhood Stakeholders in Minority Communities* project of the Commission nationale des parents francophones (CNPF), as well as lists obtained from provincial departments responsible for early childhood and direct calls to French-language ELCC services. The identified spaces are accurate as of September 1, 2025. We have thus identified 23,591 full-time spaces nationwide in Francophone minority communities[3]. From these datasets, we were able to identify a parameter indicating, for each preschool-aged child, how many spaces are available.

For this national analysis, we used data aggregated at the provincial and territorial levels. A series of studies presenting the situation in each province and territory is available for readers seeking a more detailed overview of a specific region[4].

[2] Table n° 98,100,541 from Statistics Canada's former CANSIM database.
[3] The complete list of identified French-language ELCC services is available in the province- and territory-specific studies.
[4] These studies are available on the CNPF website: www.cnpf.ca/ripe/composantes/#etude-desert

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

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)[5]. 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.

[5] 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.[6] 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[7] 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.

[6] 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.
[7] 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 130,425 children aged 0 to 4 eligible for French-language education in Canada within Francophone minority communities. With 23,591 full-time spaces in French-language ELCC services, the national average ratio stands at **0.18 spaces per child**, or just under 1 space for every 5 children. This means that for the country to become well served by French-language ELCC services, the number of full-time spaces would need to quadruple.

Table 1 presents a summary of the situation regarding available French-language ELCC spaces and children for each region of the country.

Table 1: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in Canada*

Region	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Atlantic provinces	7,640	16,250	**0.47**
Ontario	12,364	75,235	**0.16**
Western provinces	3,452	38,160	**0.09**
Territories	135	790	**0.17**
Total	**23,591**	**130,435**	**0.18**

No region in Canada meets the threshold for being well served (ratio ≥0.7). The region with the highest ratio (0.47) is the Atlantic provinces. The Western provinces make up the region with the lowest ratio (0.09). For their part, Ontario (0.16) and the Territories (0.17) sit close to the Canadian average (0.18).

Appendix 1 presents the national summary of spaces, children, and space-to-child ratios for each province and territory (except Quebec). Appendix 2 outlines the number of spaces that need to be created in each province and territory to reach the threshold of a well-served zone for French-language ELCC services (ratio ≥0.7). The following sections present the situation by region.

Atlantic Provinces

The Atlantic provinces comprise Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. This region of Canada accounts for 16,250 children eligible for French-language education and 7,640 spaces in French-language ELCC services. Overall, this region is a medium-need zone, with a **ratio of 0.47**.

Table 2 presents the situation in these provinces.

Table 2: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in Atlantic provinces*

Province	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Newfoundland and Labrador	66	690	**0.10**
Prince Edward Island	299	595	**0.50**
Nova Scotia	956	3,725	**0.26**
New Brunswick	6,319	11,240	**0.56**
Total – Atlantic provinces	**7,640**	**16,250**	**0.47**

Given the bilingual nature of the province of New Brunswick, it is not surprising that it accounts for two-thirds of the children and 82% of the spaces in French-language ELCC services within the Atlantic provinces region. New Brunswick's space-to-child ratio (0.56, which represents a medium-need zone) constitutes the highest coverage in the country. Since this province also has the largest number of children in the Atlantic region, this ratio significantly pulls up the average coverage observed in this part of Canada.

Prince Edward Island, with a ratio of 0.50, is also a medium-need province. Along with New Brunswick, it is the only province in Canada to cross the medium-need threshold in terms of spaces in French-language ELCC services.

In Nova Scotia, there are 3,725 children, but with only 956 spaces (a ratio of 0.26). This makes it a high-need zone. The need is even more pressing in Newfoundland and Labrador, which has a ratio of 0.10.

To achieve satisfactory coverage (a ratio of ≥0.70 spaces per child), the Atlantic provinces would need 3,736 additional spaces. Table 3 presents the distribution of these spaces by province.

Table 3: *Shortage of spaces in French-language ELCC services in the Atlantic provinces*

Province	N° of spaces to create
Newfoundland and Labrador	417
Prince Edward Island	118
Nova Scotia	1,652
New Brunswick	1,549
Total – Atlantic provinces	**3,736**

Comparatively speaking, Newfoundland and Labrador has the greatest need for space creation. In fact, the current number of spaces would need to be multiplied by seven to reach the threshold of 0.70 spaces per child. Conversely, Prince Edward Island would need a 40% increase in spaces to achieve the target ratio (≥0.70).

In absolute terms, as Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are the most populous provinces, they also have the largest shortage of spaces. Thus, Nova Scotia (shortage of 1,652 spaces) is the province with the most significant gap, while in New Brunswick the shortage stands at 1,549 missing spaces.

Ontario

Ontario accounts for 58% of all children eligible for French-language education in the country. The 75,235 children are divided among the Ontario Peninsula (39,795 children), the National Capital (25,760 children), and Northern Ontario (9,680 children). With a **ratio of 0.16**, it is a **high-need** province.

Table 4 presents the situation in the regions of this province.

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

Region	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Ontario Peninsula	5,356	39,795	**0.13**
National Capital	5,155	25,760	**0.20**
Northern Ontario	1,853	9,680	**0.19**
Total – Ontario	**12,364**	**75,235**	**0.16**

As shown in this table, there are 5,356 spaces in the Ontario Peninsula. Including cities such as Toronto, Hamilton, London, and Windsor, among others, this region has a ratio of 0.13, or 1 space for every 8 children.

The National Capital region has 5,155 spaces in French-language ELCC services. This represents a ratio of 0.20 (1 space for every 5 children).

Northern Ontario covers the largest part of the province's territory. Including cities such as Sudbury and Thunder Bay, among others, the region has 1,853 spaces in French-language ELCC services, which represents a ratio of 0.19.

The three regions of Ontario are thus high-need zones. For the province to become a well-served area, a total of 40,300 spaces would need to be added. Table 5 presents the distribution of these new spaces to be created by region.

Table 5: *Shortage of spaces in French-language ELCC services in Ontario*

Region	N° of spaces to create
Ontario Peninsula	22,500
National Capital	12,877
Northern Ontario	4,923
Total – Ontario	**40,300**

As shown in this table, more than half of the missing spaces in Ontario would need to be

created in the Ontario Peninsula region. The 22,500 missing spaces in this region constitute, in absolute terms, the greatest need in the country. This reflects the fact that it is home to the largest number of children eligible for French-language education.

With 12,877 spaces to be created, the National Capital represents the second most important region in terms of need, in absolute numbers. For Northern Ontario, the number of spaces to be created stands at 4,923.

Western Provinces

The Western provinces comprise the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. This region accounts for 38,160 children eligible for French-language education and 3,452 spaces in French-language ELCC services. With a **ratio of 0.09**, it is a **high-need** zone. Table 6 presents the situation in these provinces.

Table 6: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in Western provinces*

Province	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Manitoba	1 124	6 940	**0,16**
Saskatchewan	540	3 500	**0,15**
Alberta	1 217	16 145	**0,08**
British Columbia	571	11 575	**0,05**
Total - Ouest	**3 452**	**38 160**	**0,09**

With a ratio of 0.05 (1 space for every 20 children), British Columbia shows the lowest space-to-child rate in the country. The province's 11,575 children thus have access to only 571 spaces in French-language ELCC services.

It is in Alberta where the largest number of children (16,145) and the most spaces in French-learning ELCC services (1,217) are found. Yet, the ratio for this province remains low

(0.08), or 1 space for every 13 children. This represents the second-lowest ratio for a province, just behind British Columbia.

For their part, the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan show similar results, with ratios of 0.16 and 0.15, respectively, or approximately 1 space for every 6 children.

To properly serve Western Canada, an additional 23,259 spaces in French-language ELCC services would need to be created. In other words, more spaces would need to be created in these four provinces combined than in the Ontario Peninsula. Table 7 presents the distribution of these spaces to be created by province.

Table 7: *Shortage of spaces in French-language ELCC services in the Western provinces*

Province	N° of spaces to create
Manitoba	3 734
Saskatchewan	1 910
Alberta	10 084
British Columbia	7 531
Total	**23 259**

Alberta would thus need 10,084 additional spaces to become a well-served region. In absolute terms, this constitutes the third-largest area of need, behind the Ontario Peninsula and the National Capital in Ontario. British Columbia (shortage of 7,531 spaces) ranks fourth.

The province of Manitoba would also require a significant number of new spaces. With 3,734 spaces to be created, the need there is greater than in the entire Atlantic provinces' region. Finally, Saskatchewan would need 1,910 additional spaces to become a well-served region.

Territories

The territories cover the Canadian North. Encompassing the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, this area has a sparse population spread across a very large territory. Thus, there are a total of 790 children eligible for French-language education across all territories and 135 spaces in French-language ELCC services. With a **ratio of 0.17**, or 1 space for every 6 children, it is a **high-need** zone. Table 8 presents the situation in each territory.

Table 8: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in the territories*

Territories	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Yukon	45	325	**0,14**
Northwest Territories	38	295	**0,13**
Nunavut	52	170	**0,31**
Total - Territories	**135**	**790**	**0,17**

When considering the ratios, the situation across the three territories (ratio of 0.17) is slightly below the national average (0.18).

In Nunavut, with a ratio of 0.31, 1 in 3 children has access to a space. Yukon presents a ratio of 0.14. With 45 spaces and 325 children, only 1 in 7 children has access to a space. The Northwest Territories, with a ratio of 0.13, offer 1 space for every 8 children.

To properly serve the three territories, 418 spaces would need to be added across the region. Table 9 presents this distribution.

Table 9: *Shortage of spaces in French-language ELCC services in the territories*

Territories	N° of spaces to create
Yukon	182
Northwest Territories	169
Nunavut	67
Total	**418**

In absolute terms, the three territories constitute the regions where the number of spaces to be created is the lowest (along with Prince Edward Island). However, the challenge of creating spaces is amplified by the geographic expanse of the territories and the issues related to the Northern reality.

Thus, in the Northwest Territories, 169 additional spaces would need to be created to meet the population's needs. The Yukon is short 182 spaces, and Nunavut lacks 67 spaces to properly serve these areas (ratio ≥0.7).

5- Conclusion

The Commission nationale des parents francophones (CNPF) has reported for several years that Francophone minority communities do not benefit from enough spaces in French-language ELCC services to meet the needs of children aged 0 to 4 eligible for French-language education. This study demonstrates that a space shortage does indeed exist at the national level, and that this shortage is observed in all provinces and territories outside Quebec.

Overall, a ratio of **0.18 spaces per child** is observed across **Francophone minority communities**. This means that Francophone families have access to less than 1 space for every 5 children eligible for French-language education. No province or territory qualifies as a well-served zone. The highest ratios are found in New Brunswick (0.56 ratio) and Prince Edward Island (0.50), which are nearly three times higher than the national average. These provinces are the only ones categorized as medium-need zones (ratio between 0.4 and 0.7). All other provinces and the three territories are classified as high-need zones (ratio ≤0.4). British Columbia (0.05), Alberta (0.08), and Newfoundland and Labrador (0.10) present ratios that are less than half the national average. These three provinces are left with a glaring need for the creation of spaces in French-language ELCC services.

The low national ratio means that there is a shortage of 67,713 spaces across the country (see Appendix 2). Although most of the missing spaces are in Ontario (40,300 spaces), several other provinces show a significant need for spaces in French-language ELCC services in absolute numbers. Alberta (10,084 spaces) and British Columbia (7,531 spaces) represent the other provinces where the need is most pronounced. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the current number of spaces would need to be multiplied by seven (shortage of 417 spaces) to make it a well-served zone.

As this analysis is intended to provide a national overview, readers interested in more specific data for each province, territory, region, census division, or municipality are invited to consult the dedicated documents containing the detailed portrait of each Canadian province and territory.

The reality remains that the shortage of spaces in French-language services is widespread nationwide, and strategies leading to substantial investments must be prioritized.

Appendix 1 – National Summary of Available Spaces, Francophone Children, and Ratios of Spaces per Francophone Child by Province/ Territory

Province/Territory	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
New Brunswick	6,319	11,240	**0.56**
Prince Edward Island	299	595	**0.50**
Nunavut	52	170	**0.31**
Nova Scotia	956	3,725	**0.26**
Ontario	12,364	75,235	**0.16**
Manitoba	1,124	6,940	**0.16**
Saskatchewan	540	3,500	**0.15**
Yukon	45	325	**0.14**
Northwest Territories	38	295	**0.13**
Newfoundland and Labrador	66	690	**0.10**
Alberta	1,217	16,145	**0.08**
British Columbia	571	11,575	**0.05**
TOTAL – CANADA	**23,591**	**130,435**	**0.18**

National Average

Note: The province of Quebec is not included in this table because the analysis targets Francophone minority communities.

Appendix 2 – National Summary of Child Care Space Deficits in Francophone Services by Province/Territory

Province/Territory	N° of places to create
Ontario	40,300
Alberta	10,084
British Columbia	7,531
Manitoba	3,734
Saskatchewan	1,910
Nova Scotia	1,652
New Brunswick	1,549
Newfoundland and Labrador	417
Yukon	182
Northwest Territories	169
Prince Edward Island	118
Nunavut	67
TOTAL – CANADA	**67,713**

Note: The province of Quebec is not included in this table because the analysis targets Francophone minority communities.

.