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

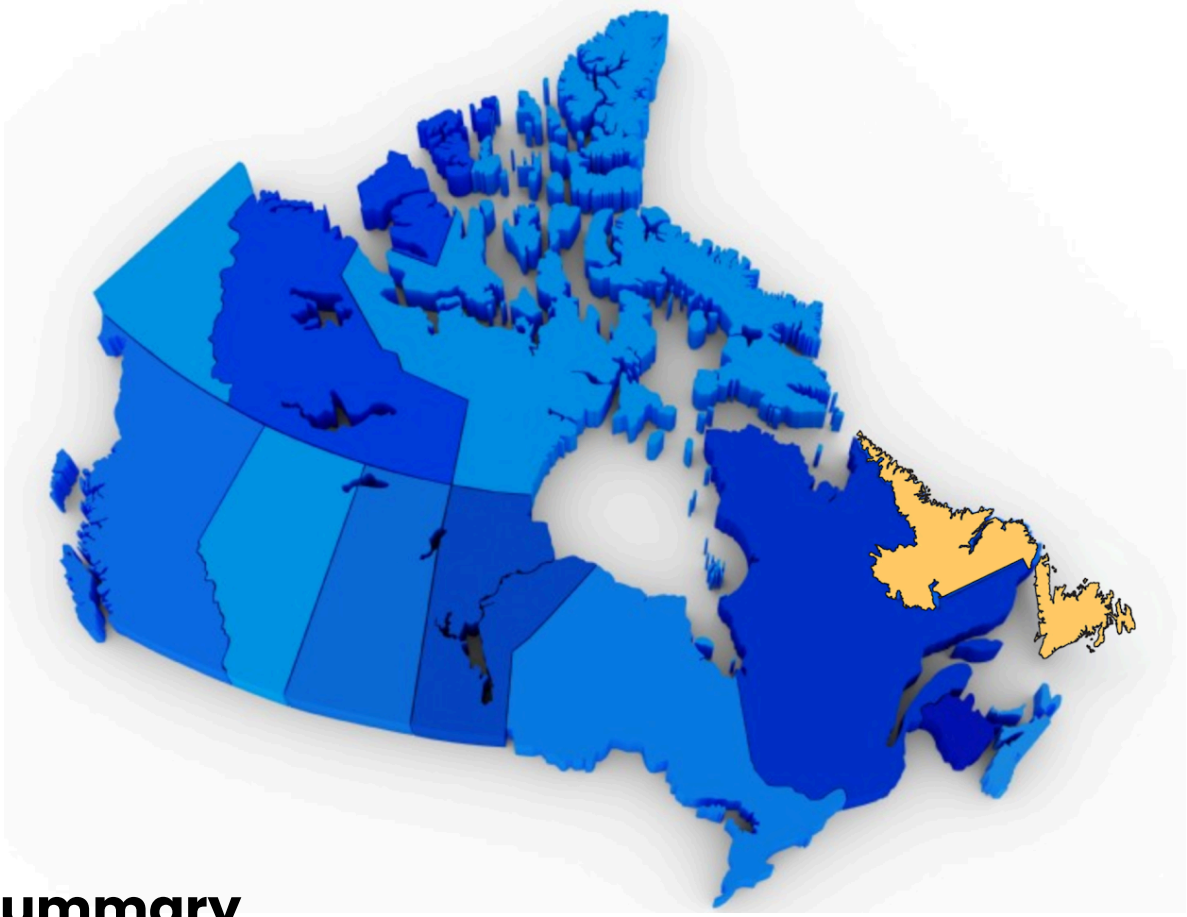
Profile of French-language ELCC services for children aged 0 to 4 eligible for French-language education in

Newfoundland and Labrador

cnpf

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Summary

Several communities in Newfoundland and Labrador 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 Newfoundland and Labrador as of September 1, 2025, and suggests communities to target to optimize the impact of these new spaces.

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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

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

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 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 Newfoundland and Labrador, 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 Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador (FPFTNL) [Newfoundland and Labrador Francophone Parents' Federation] and Les P'tits Cerfs-Volants Centre. The identified spaces are accurate as of September 1, 2025. We thus identified 66 full-time spaces in three 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 Newfoundland and Labrador, 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 or areas.

[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.

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)[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.

[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.

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.

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.

[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.

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.

4- Presentation of results

According to the 2021 *Census of Population*, there were 690 children aged 0 to 4 eligible for French-language education in Newfoundland and Labrador. With 66 full-time spaces in French-language ELCC services, the provincial average ratio is **0.10 spaces per child**, or 1 space for every 10 children.

The province is a **high-need** area. To ensure it is well served, 417 spaces would need to be added. 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 Newfoundland and Labrador*

Region[7]	No of spaces	No of children	Ratio
St. John's	66	410	**0.16**
Rest of Newfoundland	0	190	**0.00**
Labrador	0	90	**0.00**
Total	**66**	**690**	**0.10**

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

[7] The regions correspond to the school board service areas and are presented in Appendix 2.

The St. John's Area

The St. John's census metropolitan area (CMA) alone accounts for more than 40% of the province's population. If we include the rest of census division No. 1 (Avalon Peninsula—St. John's), more than half of the province lives in this region. It is therefore not surprising that the majority (59.4%) of the province's children eligible for French-language education are also found here.

The St. John's CMA is also home to the province's only three French-language ELCC services offering full-time spaces. Despite this, the ratio of spaces per child in St. John's (0.31) remains very far from the threshold for adequate coverage. Table 2 presents the distribution of spaces and children in the region.

Table 2: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in the* census division No. 1 in Newfoundland and Labrador

Census division		No of spaces	No of children	Ratio
Division No. 1 – Avalon Peninsula—St. John's		**66**	**410**	**0.16**
Main municipalities	St. John's	66	210	**0.31**
	Conception Bay South	0	45	**0.00**
	Paradise	0	35	**0.00**
	Mount Pearl	0	30	**0.00**
	Portugal Cove–St. Philip's	0	15	**0.00**
	Rest of the division	*0*	*75*	***0.00***
Total St. John's Area		**66**	**410**	**0.16**

Interestingly, the municipalities surrounding St. John's have a large enough number of children to support French-language ELCC services. Thus, not only could the City of St. John's accommodate an additional French-language ELCC service of 81 spaces to be

well served, but the municipalities of Conception Bay South (shortfall of 32 spaces), Paradise (shortfall of 25 spaces), and Mount Pearl (shortfall of 21 spaces) have sufficient demand to add French-language ELCC services. The municipality of Portugal Cove–St. Philip's is better suited for home-based French-language ELCC services (need for 11 spaces).

The Rest of Newfoundland

There are eight other census divisions on the island of Newfoundland. These divisions include several municipalities, but very few large centres that could accommodate French-language ELCC services for children eligible for French-language education. Table 3 presents this distribution.

Table 3: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in the rest of the island of Newfoundland*

Census divisions		No of spaces	No of children	Ratio
Division No. 2 – Burin Peninsula-Marystown		**0**	**25**	**0.00**
Division No. 3 – South Coast—Channel—Port-aux-Basques		**0**	**0**	**0.00**
Division No. 4 – St. George's-Stephenville		**0**	**40**	**0.00**
Main municipality	Cap Saint-Georges	0	10	**0.00**
	Rest of the division	*0*	*30*	***0.00***
Division No. 5 – Humber District-Corner Brook		**0**	**40**	**0.00**
Main municipalities	Corner Brook	0	25	**0.00**
	Pasadena	0	10	**0.00**
	Rest of the division	*0*	*5*	***0.00***
Division No. 6 – Central Newfoundland—Grand Falls-Windsor		**0**	**30**	**0.00**
Main municipalities	Gander	0	10	**0.00**
	Grand Falls-Windsor	0	10	**0.00**
	Rest of the division	*0*	*10*	***0.00***
Division No. 7 – Bonavista Peninsula-Clarenville		**0**	**30**	**0.00**
Main municipalities	Clarenville	0	10	**0.00**
	Trinity Bay North	0	10	**0.00**
	Rest of the division	*0*	*10*	***0.00***

Division No. 8 – Notre Dame Bay—Lewisporte	**0**	**20**	**0.00**
Division No. 9 – Northern Peninsula-St. Anthony	**0**	**5**	**0.00**
Total rest of the island of Newfoundland	**0**	**190**	**0.00**

As previously mentioned, there are no French-language ELCC services outside of St. John's. This is therefore considered to be a **high-need** area. However, it is worth noting that while there is potential for 190 children to be served in this area, only the municipality of Corner Brook could justify a French-language ELCC service (potentially 18 spaces). The dispersion of children throughout the rest of the province could only justify the creation of home-based French-language ELCC services.

Labrador

Given its geographical separation from the rest of the province, Labrador must be viewed as an area in its own right. It is home to a population of 90 children, most of whom are in the Wabush and Labrador City area, on the border with the province of Quebec. Labrador is composed of two large census divisions (Nos. 10 and 11). Table 4 presents the distribution of the population in this part of the province.

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

Census division		No of spaces	No of children	Ratio
Division No. 10 – Labrador—Happy Valley-Goose Bay		**0**	**90**	**0.00**
Main municipalities	Labrador City	0	35	**0.00**
	Wabush	0	25	**0.00**
	Happy Valley-Goose Bay	0	25	**0.00**
	Rest of the division	*0*	*5*	***0.00***
Division No. 11 – Nunatsiavut-Nain		**0**	**0**	**0.00**
Total Labrador Area		**0**	**90**	**0.00**

It is immediately apparent that children in the area are more concentrated than those on the island of Newfoundland outside of St. John's. Thus, French-language ELCC services ranging from 18 spaces (in Wabush and Happy Valley-Goose Bay) to 25 spaces (in Labrador City) could be considered to fill the shortage of spaces for each of the three communities in census division No. 10.

5- Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the areas and municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador that experience a shortage of French-language early learning and childcare services (ELCC), 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.

Overall, Francophone families in Newfoundland and Labrador do not have access to enough full-time French-language spaces in French-language ELCC services. The province's only three French-language ELCC services are in the St. John's CMA, at one end of the province and logistically inaccessible to one third of the children. At the same time, the dispersion of children makes it difficult to establish very large French-language ELCC services, meaning that, in several localities, the shortfall will likely need to be filled by small French-language ELCC services or home-based French-language ELCC services, which would offer greater flexibility in service delivery.

Appendix 1 – French-language ELCC services in Newfoundland and Labrador offering full-time spaces as of September 1, 2025

Municipality	Name of French-language ELCC service	No of available spaces
St. John's	Les p'tits Cerfs-volants	26
	Prématernelle Grands-Vents	20
	Prématernelle Rocher-du-Nord	20
Total		**66**

Appendix 2 – Newfoundland and Labrador census divisions



French-language ELCC service

Source: ID 83402173 @ Volina | Dreamstime.com