Réseau d'intervenantes et d'intervenants en petite enfance

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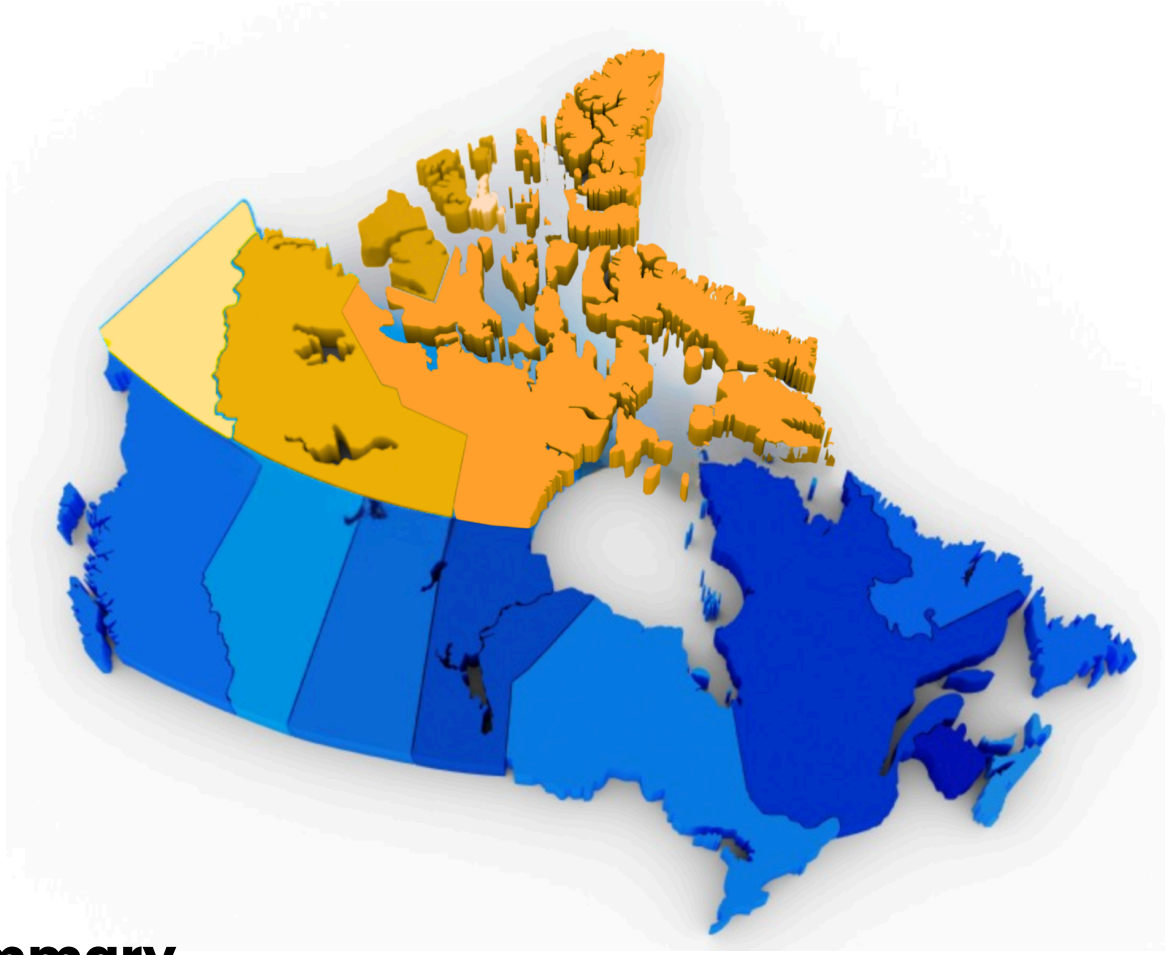
Demographic analysis and shortage of French-language early learning and childcare services

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

Canadian territories

La Commission nationale des parents francophones

September 2026



Summary

Several communities in the Canadian territories 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 in the Canadian territories 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 the 2021 *Census of Population*), but where there are not

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

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 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 the communities of the three Canadian territories, based on regions or municipalities/communities 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.

To obtain the number of spaces in French-language ELCC services, this study uses data obtained from the Garderie du petit cheval blanc in Whitehorse, the Fédération franco-ténoise and the Association des francophones du Nunavut [Francophone Daycare in Whitehorse, the NWT Francophone Association and the Nunavut Francophone Association]. The identified spaces are considered accurate as of September 1, 2025. We thus identified 135 full-time spaces in French-language ELCC services across the three territories[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 the territories, we used datasets that allowed us to locate children in the territories as precisely as possible. It was possible to specify municipalities/communities directly or regions.

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 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 790 children aged 0 to 4 eligible for French-language education in the three Canadian territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut). With 135 full-time spaces in French-language ELCC services, the average ratio for the territories stands at **0.17 spaces per child**, or 1 space for every 6 children. This means that for the territories to be well served by French-language ELCC services, the number of full-time spaces would need to quadruple. Table 1 presents a summary of available spaces in French-language ELCC services and the number of children across all three territories.

Table 1: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in the three Canadian territories*

Territory	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Yukon	45	325	**0.14**
Northwest Territories	38	295	**0.13**
Nunavut	52	170	**0.31**
TOTAL – CANADIAN TERRITORIES	**135**	**790**	**0.17**

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.

Yukon

The Yukon has 325 children eligible for French-language education and 45 spaces in French-language ELCC services. In this territory, this results in a **ratio of 0.14 spaces** per child, or just under 1 space for every 7 children. It is therefore a high-need area. Table 2 presents the distribution of spaces and children in the Yukon.

Table 2: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in the Yukon*

Municipality	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Whitehorse	45	230	**0.20**
Dawson	0	20	**0.00**
Ibex Valley	0	10	**0.00**
Rest of the territory	*0*	*65*	***0.00***
TOTAL – YUKON	**45**	**325**	**0.14**

The only French-language ELCC service in this territory is in the city of Whitehorse. With 230 children and 45 spaces, the ratio in this city is 0.20 spaces per child. Whitehorse is, therefore, a high-need area. An additional 116 spaces would be needed for the city to be well served.

Only two other communities in the Yukon have at least 10 children. There are 20 children in the town of Dawson (a shortfall of 14 spaces) and 10 children in the community of Ibex Valley (a shortfall of 7 spaces).

Overall, the Yukon has a shortfall of 182 spaces.

Northwest Territories

In the Northwest Territories, there are 295 children and 38 spaces in French-language ELCC services, all offered in a single French-language ELCC service. With a **ratio of 0.13 spaces** per child, the territory constitutes a high-need area. Table 3 presents the situation in the Northwest Territories.

Table 3: *Distribution of spaces in French-language ELCC services and children in the Northwest Territories*

Region	Municipality	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Region 1		**0**	**10**	**0.00**
Main municipality	Inuvik	0	10	**0.00**
Region 2		**0**	**10**	**0.00**
Region 4		**0**	**10**	**0.00**
Region 5		**0**	**50**	**0.00**
Main municipalities	Hay River	0	35	**0.00**
	Fort Smith	0	15	**0.00**
Region 6		**38**	**215**	**0.18**
Main municipality	Yellowknife	38	215	**0.18**
TOTAL – NORTHWEST TERRITORIES		**38**	**295**	**0.13**

All 38 spaces in the territory are in the city of Yellowknife (Region 6). With 215 children, this represents a ratio of 0.18, or just under 1 space for every 5 children. This makes the city of Yellowknife a high-need area, with a shortfall of 113 spaces.

In the other regions of the Northwest Territories, there are 80 children, located in the towns of Hay River (Region 5; 35 children; a shortfall of 25 spaces), Fort Smith (Region 5; 15 children; a shortfall of 11 spaces), and Inuvik (Region 1; 10 children; a shortfall of 7 spaces). Regions 2 and 4 each have 10 children (a shortfall of 7 spaces each). In total, 169 spaces would need to be added across the Northwest Territories to reach a ratio of 0.7 spaces per child and achieve well-served area status.

Nunavut

Nunavut has 170 children and 1 French-language ELCC service with 52 spaces. Located in Iqaluit (105 children), this service enables the municipality to reach medium-need area status. Nevertheless, 22 spaces would need to be added to reach the threshold of 0.7 spaces per child and for the municipality to be well served. Table 4 shows the distribution of spaces and eligible children in Nunavut.

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

Community	N° of spaces	N° of children	Ratio
Iqaluit	52	105	**0.50**
Kivalliq	0	25	**0.00**
Pond Inlet	0	10	**0.00**
Rankin Inlet	0	10	**0.00**
Kitikmeot	0	10	**0.00**
Rest of the territory	*0*	*10*	***0.00***
TOTAL – NUNAVUT	**52**	**170**	**0.31**

Communities outside Iqaluit have a total of 65 children. The communities of Kivalliq (25 children; a shortfall of 18 spaces), as well as Pond Inlet, Rankin Inlet, and Kitikmeot (10 children each; a shortfall of 7 spaces each), are where a certain concentration of children is found.

Overall, Nunavut has a shortfall of 67 spaces in French-language ELCC services.

5- Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the areas and municipalities/communities in the three Canadian territories 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 Canadian territories.

Overall, Francophone families in the Canadian territories do not have access to enough full-time spaces in French-language ELCC services. With a ratio of **0.17 spaces per eligible child** aged 0 to 4, coverage stands at 1 space for every 6 children. This represents a **shortage of 418 spaces** across all three Canadian territories.

Thus, the Yukon has a shortage of 182 spaces in French-language ELCC services. This shortage is 169 spaces in the Northwest Territories and 67 spaces in Nunavut.

Obviously, it is unrealistic to assume that every municipality/community can support viable French-language ELCC services, given the number of children eligible for French-language education. 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 the three Canadian territories offering full-time spaces as of September 1, 2025

Municipality/Community (Territory)	Name of the French-language ELCC service	N° of available spaces
Iqaluit (NU)	CPE Les Petits Nanooks	52
Whitehorse (Yn)	Garderie du petit cheval blanc	45
Yellowknife (T.N.-O.)	Garderie Plein Soleil	38
TOTAL – CANADIAN TERRITORIES		**135**

Appendix 2

Yukon



French-language ELCC service

Source: ID 82364710 @ Volina | Dreamstime.com

Northwest Territories



French-language ELCC service **Source:** ID 83424082 @ Volina | Dreamstime.com

Nunavut



French-language ELCC service

Source: ID 83425784 @ Volina | Dreamstime.com