

Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2020

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Just over half (52%) of Canadian children younger than 6 were in regulated or unregulated child care from November 2020 to January 2021, down from 60% in 2019. In June 2020, early in the COVID-19 pandemic, and at the height of many lockdowns and restrictions on child care, 10% of parents who participated in a crowdsourcing survey reported using child care for their child aged 0 to 5.

These findings from the Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements (SELCCA) include any form of care for children aged 0 to 5, regulated or unregulated, by someone other than a parent or guardian. Examples include centre-based facilities and care in a home by a relative or non-relative, as well as before- and after-school programs. Occasional babysitting and kindergarten were not considered child care for purposes of this survey.

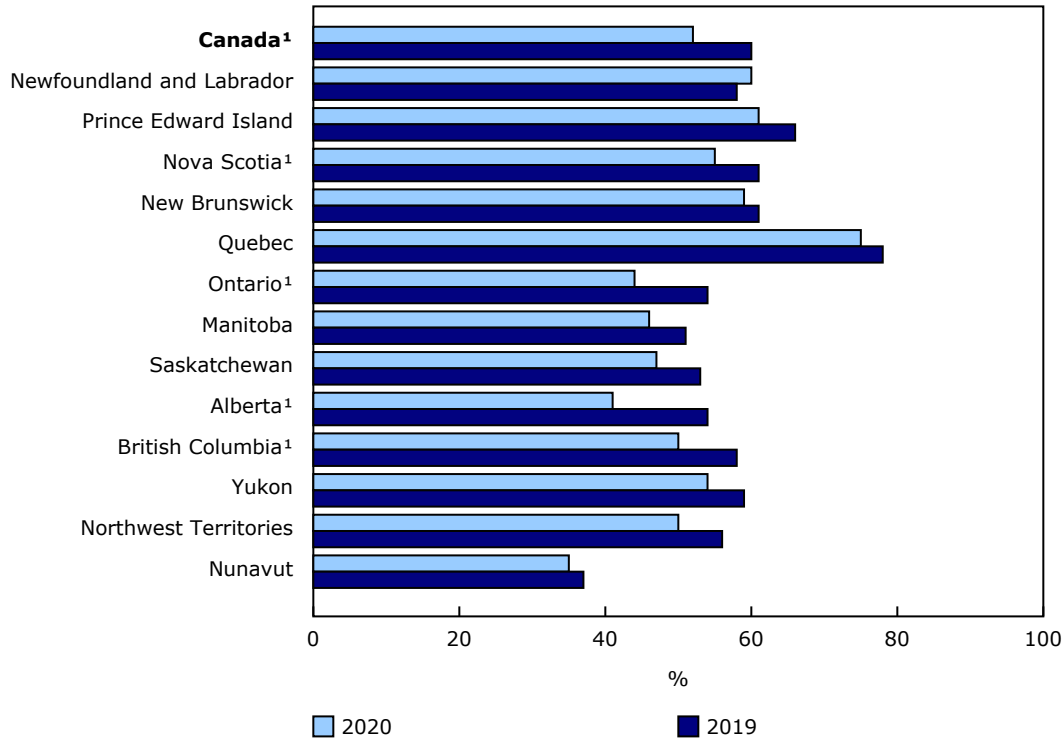
In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, most provinces and territories mandated the closure of licensed child care centres, although limited child care was available for essential workers. The status of regulated and unregulated home child care varied by province and territory, as did the prevalence of COVID-19 cases. However, by late 2020, when the SELCCA data were collected, many child care facilities were operational, albeit with additional safety measures in place, including enhanced health and safety practices and, in some cases, reduced capacity. The survey collection period also coincided with an increase in COVID-19 cases in Canada, particularly in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

Children younger than 6 living in Quebec are the most likely to be in child care, and the participation rate is similar to 2019

As was the case in 2019, there were differences in participation rates among the provinces and territories during the pandemic. Children younger than 6 living in Quebec (75%) were most likely to be in child care, a proportion similar to the 78% observed in 2019. By comparison, children aged 0 to 5 living in Alberta were much less likely to be in child care in late 2020 (41%) than in 2019 (54%).



Chart 1
Proportion of children younger than 6 participating in any form of child care, provinces and territories, 2019 and 2020



1. Significant difference between 2019 and 2020.

Source(s): Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019 and 2020 (5287).

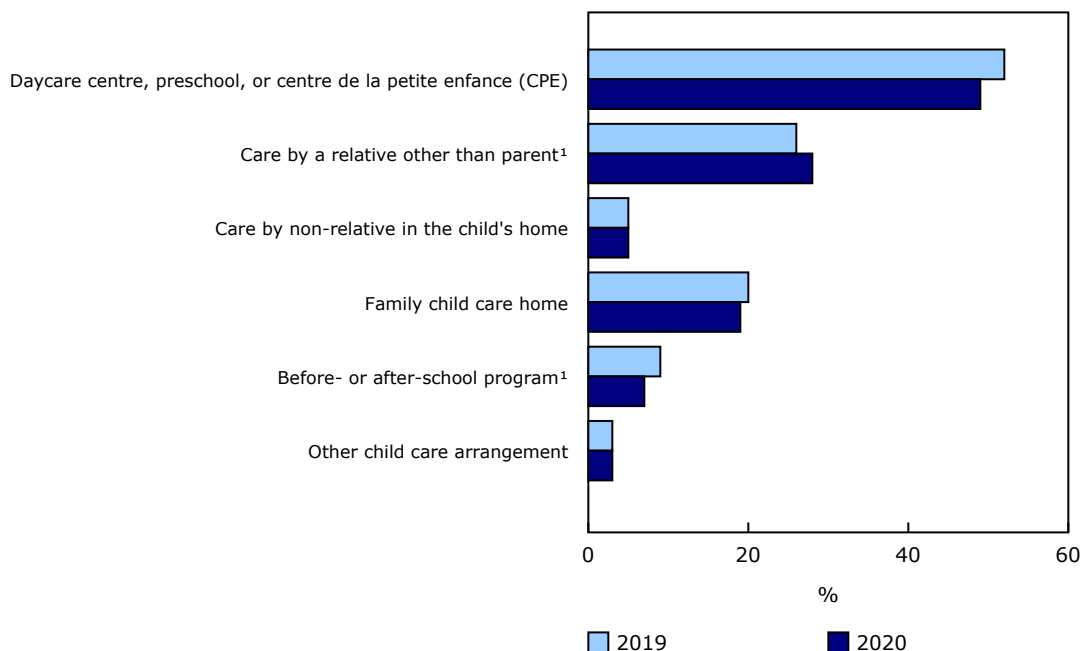
The use of child care also varied by the child's age, although the trends by age group were similar to those in 2019. One-fifth (20%) of children younger than 1 were in some type of child care, compared with three-fifths (60%) of 1- to 3-year-olds. More than half (57%) of 4- and 5-year-olds were in some form of child care, regardless of school or kindergarten attendance, with 63% of children who were not yet in school being in child care and 54% of those in school also in child care.

Daycare centres, preschools and centres de la petite enfance remain the most commonly used types of child care

The types and rates of child care used during the pandemic were similar to those observed in 2019, albeit with slight variations. As was the case prior to the pandemic, daycare centres, preschools and centres de la petite enfance (CPEs) remained the most commonly used type of arrangement (49% of children in child care), followed by care by a relative other than a parent (28%) and family child care homes (19%). Children were slightly more likely to be cared for by a relative in 2020 compared with 2019 and slightly less likely to be in a before- or after-school program.

Chart 2

Among children in child care, proportion of children younger than 6 in different types of child care arrangements, 2019 and 2020



1. Significant difference between 2019 and 2020.

Source(s): Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019 and 2020 (5287).

The age of a child also played a key role in the type of child care arrangement used. For the one in five children younger than 1 in child care, half were cared for by a relative. By comparison, about half of the 60% of children aged 1 to 3 in child care were in a daycare centre, preschool or CPE.

Among those aged 4 or 5 in child care, 65% of those who were **not in school or kindergarten** were attending a daycare centre, preschool or CPE. Among those aged 4 or 5 in child care and **in school**, about one-third of those in child care were in a daycare centre, preschool or CPE, and one-third were in a before- or after-school program.

Location is the most commonly cited reason for choosing a specific type of care arrangement

Reasons for choosing a particular child care arrangement were similar before and during the pandemic, with the most common remaining location (cited by 55% of parents using child care), followed by the person providing the care (47%), affordable cost (40%) and hours of operation (36%).

However, at the time of the survey in late 2020, 14% of parents and guardians using child care reported that limited availability during the pandemic was one of the reasons for using their current child care arrangement. The survey did not ask whether parents or guardians needed to or chose to change their arrangement during this time.

Approximately two-fifths of parents using child care during the pandemic report difficulties finding child care

Approximately 4 in 10 parents who were using regulated or unregulated child care in late 2020 reported having had difficulty finding child care. Among parents who self-reported using licensed care as their main child care arrangement, 38% reported having had difficulties finding care, and, among those using unlicensed care (which includes care by a relative), 46% reported at least one difficulty. Parents of 1- to 3-year-olds were the most likely to report difficulties finding child care (41%), while those with children aged 4 or 5 attending school were the least likely to do so (28%).

The majority of parents who were not using care had not looked for child care (63%). However, of those not using child care but who had looked for it, more than half reported difficulties finding care.

In terms of the types of difficulties that parents had, among parents using child care and reporting difficulties finding it, 56% said they had had difficulty finding care in their community, while 43% had had difficulty finding affordable care. Just over one-quarter of these parents said they had had difficulty finding care during the pandemic.

For parents who were **not** using child care and who reported having had difficulty finding care, 59% said the difficulty was finding affordable care, while 43% had had difficulty finding care during the pandemic.

Having difficulties finding child care can affect parents' ability to work

Difficulty finding child care can result in one or more negative consequences for parents, including their ability to work.

For parents using child care who reported having had difficulties finding it, the most common consequences included changing their work schedule (36%), working fewer hours (31%), or having to use multiple or temporary arrangements (29%). Among parents who had difficulties finding child care and who were not currently using it, 41% had postponed their return to work.

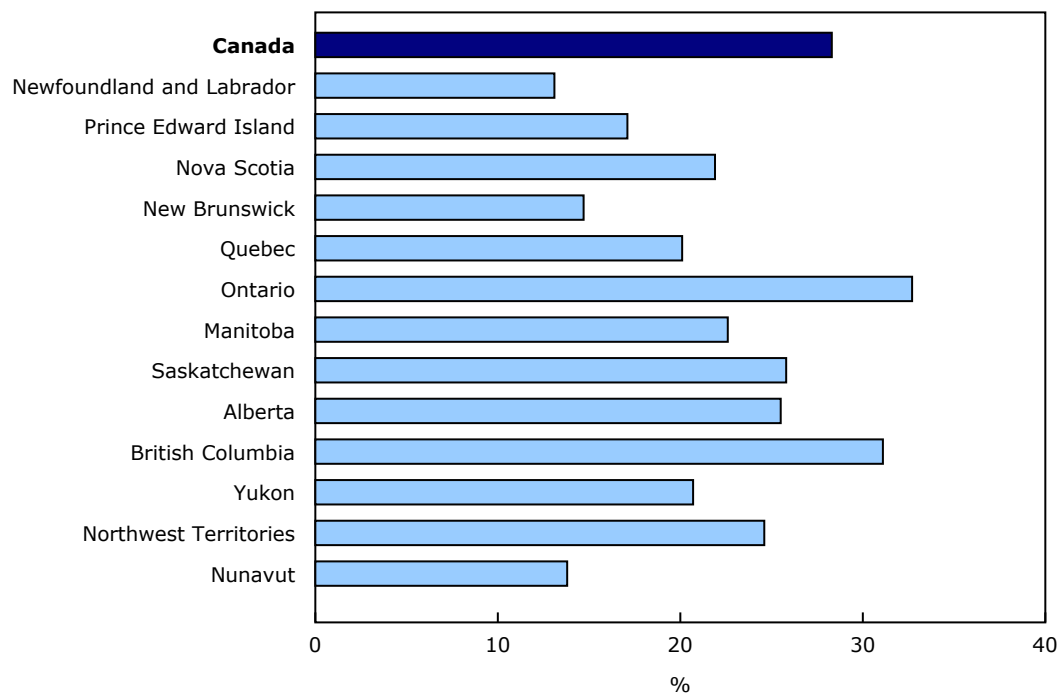
One-quarter of parents not using child care feel that child care is not safe during the pandemic

There were many reasons why parents chose not to use non-parental child care arrangements during the pandemic, yet these reasons largely mirrored those reported in 2019. The most common reasons for not using any child care arrangement (regulated or unregulated) prior to and during the pandemic were that a parent or guardian reported that they had decided to stay at home (37% of those not using child care in late 2020, compared with 43% in 2019), a parent was on maternity or parental leave (25% versus 28% in 2019), or a parent was unemployed (14% versus 16% in 2019). Almost one in four parents (23% in 2020 and 25% in 2019) of children younger than 6 who were not in child care said that the reason was that the cost was too high.

Parents also reported specific reasons for not using child care during the pandemic. More than one-quarter (28%) of parents who were not using any child care said they did not feel it was safe during the pandemic, although there were differences by province and territory. Approximately one in eight parents in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nunavut who were not using child care said it was unsafe to do so during the pandemic, compared with about one in three parents in Ontario or British Columbia.

Chart 3

Proportion of parents of children younger than 6 who were not using child care in 2020 and felt it was unsafe during the pandemic, by province and territory



Source(s): Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2020 (5287).

Almost one-third (29%) of parents who were not using child care in late 2020 said that they had used it previously, although precisely when they had used child care, as well as the type of care used prior to the pandemic, was not asked.

Looking ahead

The SELCCA provides current information on child care participation during the pandemic that can be compared with patterns of pre-pandemic use. The findings suggest an 8 percentage point decrease in child care participation during the pandemic. However, there are many complexities related to the use and type of care that children may be in during the pandemic; parents may be working at home or have different options available to them because of pandemic-related closures, reopenings, and regulations across the provinces and territories.

These results point to the impact that COVID-19 has had on parents in finding and using child care during these unprecedented times. Child care availability and school closures are an unintended consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic trade-off of such closures is the increased difficulty for parents, particularly parents with young children, to work. This may especially affect women, who are more likely to bear the weight of child care responsibilities. Furthermore, academic, emotional and social consequences for children because of isolation and the lack of developmental opportunities need further research.

Table 1
Among those using child care, type of child care arrangement by age group, children aged 0 to 5, Canada, 2020

	Population estimate	Estimate	Lower confidence limit at 95%	Upper confidence limit at 95%
	number	%		
Overall				
Daycare centre, preschool, or centre de la petite enfance (CPE)	594,052	49.2	47.4	51
Care by a relative other than parent	337,801	28.0	26.4	29.6
Care by non-relative in the child's home	59,945	5.0	4.2	5.8
Family child care home	228,975	19.0	17.6	20.4
Before- or after-school program	89,172	7.4	6.6	8.3
Other child care arrangement	39,851	3.3	2.8	3.9
Children younger than 1 year of age				
Daycare centre, preschool, or centre de la petite enfance (CPE)	23,064	29.7	21.2	39.9
Care by a relative other than parent	38,704	49.9	39.4	60.4
Care by non-relative in the child's home	7,069	9.1	4.3	18.4
Family child care home	14,034	18.1	10.8	28.8
Before- or after-school program
Other child care arrangement	F	F	F	F
Children 1 to 3 years of age				
Daycare centre, preschool, or centre de la petite enfance (CPE)	343,974	52.3	49.9	54.7
Care by a relative other than parent	181,971	27.7	25.7	29.8
Care by non-relative in the child's home	28,177	4.3	3.4	5.3
Family child care home	156,282	23.8	21.9	25.8
Before- or after-school program	F	F	F	F
Other child care arrangement	16,211	2.5	1.9	3.3
Children 4 or 5 years of age and not attending school				
Daycare centre, preschool, or centre de la petite enfance (CPE)	118,723	65.2	61.1	69.1
Care by a relative other than parent	38,612	21.2	17.9	24.9
Care by non-relative in the child's home	5,600	3.1	1.9	4.9
Family child care home	29,653	16.3	13.4	19.6
Before- or after-school program	F	F	F	F
Other child care arrangement	5,888	3.2	1.9	5.3
Children 4 or 5 years of age and attending school				
Daycare centre, preschool, or centre de la petite enfance (CPE)	96,999	35.9	32.6	39.3
Care by a relative other than parent	75,110	27.8	24.6	31.1
Care by non-relative in the child's home	18,681	6.9	5.3	8.9
Family child care home	25,833	9.6	7.6	12
Before- or after-school program	85,241	31.5	28.4	34.8
Other child care arrangement	16,290	6.0	4.6	7.8

... not applicable

F too unreliable to be published

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2020 (5287).

Table 2
Parent and guardian reasons for selecting main child care arrangement, children aged 0 to 5, Canada, 2020

	Population estimate	Estimate	Lower confidence limit at 95%	Upper confidence limit at 95%
	number		%	
Location	662,573	55.0	53.2	56.8
Characteristics of the individual providing care	569,600	47.3	45.5	49.0
Affordable cost	486,862	40.4	38.6	42.2
Hours of operation	438,982	36.4	34.7	38.2
Program characteristics	369,006	30.6	29.1	32.2
Recommendation or own research	258,951	21.5	20.0	23.0
To keep all children in the same arrangement	225,950	18.7	17.4	20.2
My other children have gone there	217,961	18.1	16.7	19.6
Only option available	216,058	17.9	16.6	19.4
Limited availability because of COVID-19 pandemic	168,280	14.0	12.7	15.3
Other	144,762	12.0	10.9	13.2
Ability to meet child's special needs	32,100	2.7	2.1	3.4
None of the above	27,540	2.3	1.8	2.9

Note(s): Reasons add up to more than 100% because parents could select multiple options.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2020 (5287).

Table 3
Difficulties for parents and guardians in finding a child care arrangement, children aged 0 to 5, Canada, 2020

	Among children aged 0 to 5 in child care				Among children aged 0 to 5 not in child care			
	Population estimate	Estimate	Lower confidence limit at 95%	Upper confidence limit at 95%	Population estimate	Estimate	Lower confidence limit at 95%	Upper confidence limit at 95%
	number	%			number	%		
Did you have difficulty finding child care?								
No	666,666	55.3	53.5	57.0	177,873	16.1	14.6	17.8
Yes	441,143	36.6	34.9	38.3	232,755	21.1	19.2	23.2
Did not look for child care	98,296	8.1	7.2	9.2	691,770	62.8	60.5	65.0
What difficulties did you have?¹								
Care available in your community	247,104	56.3	53.1	59.4	118,214	50.9	45.9	55.8
Affordable child care	190,681	43.4	40.7	46.2	136,232	58.6	53.7	63.4
Care that fits your work or study schedule	144,825	33.0	30.3	35.8	58,847	25.3	21.1	30.1
Finding the quality of care that you desire	129,315	29.4	27.0	32.1	56,359	24.3	20.2	28.8
Finding licensed care	119,900	27.3	24.8	30.0	54,545	23.5	19.4	28.1
Qualified care provider	95,698	21.8	19.5	24.2	42,566	18.3	14.8	22.4
Care that could accommodate more than one child in your family	71,428	16.3	14.1	18.7	41,288	17.8	13.8	22.6
Care that meets your child's special needs	13,495	3.1	2.3	4.1	6,495	2.8	1.8	4.3
Finding care during the COVID-19 pandemic	119,109	27.1	24.5	29.9	99,081	42.6	37.9	47.5
Other	84,670	19.3	17.1	21.7	35,001	15.1	12.0	18.7
Did the difficulty result in any of the following?¹								
Changing your work schedule	155,298	35.6	32.8	38.5	59,530	25.6	21.5	30.2
Using multiple care arrangements or a temporary arrangement	128,332	29.4	26.9	32.1	40,303	17.3	12.9	22.8
Working fewer hours	133,601	30.6	28.0	33.4	55,702	23.9	19.8	28.6
Postponing your return to work	115,657	26.5	23.9	29.2	94,592	40.6	35.5	46.0
Deciding to split care with your spouse or partner	100,492	23.0	20.6	25.7	51,309	22.0	18.3	26.3
Postponing or discontinuing school or training	34,917	8.0	6.5	9.8	21,912	9.4	7.2	12.2
Deciding to work at home	54,639	12.5	10.5	14.8	42,629	18.3	14.8	22.5
I gave up looking	29,089	6.7	5.0	8.9	38,367	16.5	13.4	20.1
Other	56,403	12.9	11.1	15.0	34,279	14.7	11.8	18.2
None of the above	89,468	20.5	18.4	22.8	24,401	10.5	7.9	13.8

1. Proportion is among those who reported having difficulty.

Note(s): Reasons add up to more than 100% because parents can select multiple options.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2020 (5287).

Table 4
Parent and guardian reasons for not using any child care arrangement, children aged 0 to 5 not in child care, Canada, 2020

	Population estimate	Estimate	Lower confidence limit at 95%	Upper confidence limit at 95%
	number		%	
One parent decided to stay home	407,657	37.1	34.9	39.3
I feel it is unsafe during the COVID-19 pandemic	311,002	28.3	26.3	30.3
Maternity or parental leave	272,695	24.8	22.8	26.9
The cost is too high	249,276	22.7	20.6	24.8
Unemployed	156,850	14.3	12.6	16.1
Child is in kindergarten	119,963	10.9	9.8	12.1
Shortage of spaces or waiting list	101,520	9.2	8.0	10.6
Prefer to adjust work or study schedules	99,114	9.0	7.9	10.3
No child care available because of the COVID-19 pandemic	58,331	5.3	4.4	6.4
Lack of flexibility of hours	32,163	2.9	2.3	3.7
Work or school schedules too unpredictable	29,227	2.7	2.0	3.5
Child care is located too far	27,550	2.5	1.9	3.3
Lack of transportation	22,866	2.1	1.5	2.9
Could not find licensed care	20,160	1.8	1.4	2.4
Services not adapted to special needs	8,294	0.8	0.5	1.1
Other reason	139,385	12.7	11.1	14.4

Note(s): Reasons add up to more than 100% because parents can select multiple options.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2020 (5287).

Note to readers

The Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements (SELCCA) provides a current snapshot of early child care use in Canada, and it can be used to better understand the reasons why families choose to use or not use different types of child care arrangements.

The SELCCA was conducted as part of the Rapid Stats program offered by Statistics Canada's Centre for Social Data Integration and Development to rapidly respond to pressing data needs.

The data were collected in the provinces and territories from November 10, 2020, to January 11, 2021. The response rate was 55% in the provinces and 40% in the territories, yielding a sample size of 10,605 children, which represents about 2.3 million children in Canada. This response rate is similar to those of other Rapid Stats surveys.

The target population was children aged 0 to 5 years, although the information was obtained from a parent, guardian or person who was knowledgeable about the child's care arrangements (or lack thereof). The majority of the respondents were women (91%). Children living in institutions or on reserve were excluded from the target population.

Survey sampling weights were applied to render the analyses representative of Canadian children aged 0 to 5 living in the provinces or territories. Bootstrap weights were also applied when testing for significant differences ($p < 0.05$) to account for the complex survey design.

New infographic and Early Learning and Child Care Hub are now available

This report is part of an ongoing series of products released by Statistics Canada related to early learning and child care.

An accompanying infographic "[Child care arrangements for children aged 0 to 5 years, 2020](#)" is also available.

All 2019 information and products released to date can be found on the new [Early Learning and Child Care Information Hub](#), also available today. SELCCA data for 2020 will be available Friday, April 9, 2021.

Available tables: [42-10-0012-01](#) to [42-10-0015-01](#) .

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5287](#).

The infographic, "[Child care arrangements for children aged 0 to 5 years, 2020](#)," is also available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).