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English-language early childhood and child care services in Quebec, 2001 and 2016

By Catherine Frigon and Étienne Lemyre

In a minority context, child care facilities can be linguistically stimulating environments for the young children who attend them.¹ Moreover, the importance of child care services is included in the Government of Canada's *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023*, which provides for investments in the development of early childhood care services for official language minorities.

However, a 2019 survey revealed that more than one-third (36.4%) of Canadian parents had difficulty finding child care for their child.² In light of this, this fact sheet aims to estimate the gap that may exist between the potential demand and supply of English-language early childhood care services in various regions in Quebec.

The information presented in this fact sheet comes from the 2001 and 2016 censuses of population, specifically the responses to parts A and B of the questions on languages used at work and languages spoken at home, as well as the questions on labour market activities.

In this fact sheet, “English-speaking children” means children living in Quebec who are likely to attend an English-language child care facility. These are defined as all children aged 1 to 4 who lived in a census family³ with at least one parent⁴ who spoke English most often at home.⁵ As a result, the children included in this study are those who either lived in a two-parent family where both parents spoke English most often at home, in a two-parent family where only one parent spoke English most often at home, or in a single-parent family where the parent spoke English most often at home. Children under 1 year of age are excluded from this study as they are not accepted in many child care facilities. In Canada in 2017, 15% of parents with children under the age of 1 used child care, while this was the case for 51% of parents with children aged 1, as well as for over 70% of parents with children aged 2 to 4.⁶ In Quebec, 78% of children aged 5 or less attended child care in 2019.⁷

Although these children are considered the most likely to attend English-language child care, not all parents who speak English at home choose to use English-language child care. Similarly, parents who do not speak English at home may choose English-language child care. For these reasons, this fact sheet focuses on the potential demand for English-language child care rather than the actual demand.

“Child care workers” include home child care providers⁸ and early childhood educators and assistants (according to the *National Occupational Classification* [NOC]). Another study on child care staff in Canada used the same NOC codes.⁹ In contrast, the workers included in this fact sheet are limited to those who worked in the child day-care services industry (according to the *North American Industry Classification System*) at a fixed address in Quebec, and who used English most often at work.¹⁰ Although these workers are most likely to provide child care in English, there is no guarantee that they will do so. Similarly, workers who used English at least regularly at work could also provide English-language child care. It is also possible that they were working with children younger or older than 1 to 4 years of age. This fact sheet therefore focuses on the potential supply of English-language child care services rather than on the actual supply.

1. Gilbert, Anne and Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. “Vers l’institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone : entre judiciarisation et compromis politique – L’enfant et sa diversité : recherches et pratiques,” *Revue de l’Université de Moncton*, 35, no. 2, pp. 155–72. <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/rum/2004-v35-n2-rum862/010647ar/>
2. Statistics Canada. 2019. “Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019,” *The Daily*, component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190410/dq190410a-eng.htm>
3. Census families considered in this study are those that include a child or children living in the same household as a married or common-law couple or a single parent. Children may be children by birth, marriage, common-law union or adoption. This fact sheet does not include children living outside a census family or within a census family where no parent is present. Very few children were excluded for these reasons.
4. Including step-parents.
5. Includes responses to Part A of the question on languages spoken at home, including parents who spoke English most often at home equally with another language.
6. Zhang, S., R. Garner, L. Heidinger and L. Findlay. 2021. “Parents’ use of child care services and differences in use by mothers’ employment status,” *Insights on Canadian Society*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2021001/article/00007-eng.htm>
7. Statistics Canada. 2019. “Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019,” *The Daily*, component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190410/dq190410a-eng.htm>
8. Namely, “babysitters, nannies and parent’s helpers” according to the classification used for the 2001 Census.
9. Uppal, Sharanjit and Katherine Savage. 2021. “Child care workers in Canada,” *Insights on Canadian Society*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2021001/article/00005-eng.htm>
10. Includes responses to Part A of the question on languages used at work, including workers who used English most often at work along with another language.

Finally, this fact sheet proposes ratios of the number of English-speaking children per child care worker to assess the alignment between potential supply of and demand for English-language early childhood care services in different economic regions.¹¹

Table 1
Number and proportion of children aged 1 to 4 with at least one parent who spoke English most often at home, for selected economic regions, Quebec, 2001 and 2016

Economic regions	2001			2016		
	Children aged 1 to 4			Children aged 1 to 4		
	With at least one parent who spoke English most often at home			With at least one parent who spoke English most often at home		
	Total			Total		
	number	number	percentage	number	number	percentage
Total: Quebec	304,050	40,255	13.2	356,790	45,280	12.7
Estrie	12,085	990	8.2	13,255	910	6.9
Montréal	75,755	22,580	29.8	86,800	21,835	25.2
Outaouais	14,375	2,845	19.8	18,275	4,120	22.6
Nord-du-Québec	3,040	240	7.9	3,255	300	9.2
Laval	15,030	2,860	19.0	18,075	4,165	23.0
Laurentides	21,210	1,645	7.8	25,155	1,980	7.9
Montérégie	55,790	6,400	11.5	67,430	8,530	12.6
Elsewhere in Quebec	106,765	2,695	3.1	124,550	3,440	2.8

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2001 and 2016 censuses of population.

In 2016, over 350,000 children aged 1 to 4 lived with at least one parent in a census family in Quebec. Among them, 45,280 had at least one parent who spoke English most often at home, up from 40,255 children in 2001. In contrast, the proportion of English-speaking children in the province decreased slightly from 2001 (13.2%) to 2016 (12.7%). However, this proportion increased during the period studied in the Outaouais, Laval, Montérégie and Nord-du-Québec regions. In Laval, the proportion of English-speaking children rose from 19.0% in 2001 to 23.0% in 2016, while in Montréal it dropped from 29.8% to 25.2% over the same period.

Table 2
Number and proportion of child care workers who used English most often at work, for selected economic regions, Quebec, 2001 and 2016

Economic regions	2001			2016		
	Child care workers			Child care workers		
	Total	Who used English most often at work		Total	Who used English most often at work	
		number	number	percentage	number	number
Total: Quebec	42,120	4,030	9.6	75,395	7,990	10.6
Estrie	1,625	30	1.9	2,870	125	4.3
Montréal	10,050	2,685	26.7	17,965	4,870	27.1
Outaouais	2,300	315	13.6	3,815	510	13.4
Nord-du-Québec	480	60	12.4	1,135	120	10.7
Laval	2,040	185	9.1	3,745	580	15.5
Laurentides	2,435	60	2.4	5,220	205	3.9
Montérégie	7,480	515	6.9	13,740	1,145	8.3
Elsewhere in Quebec	15,700	180	1.1	26,905	435	1.6

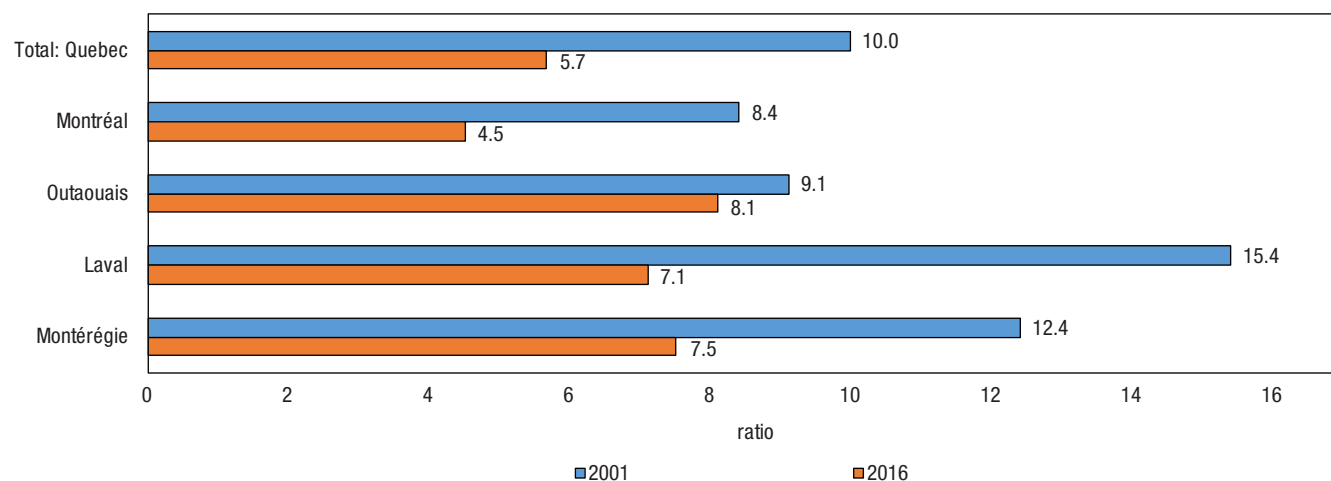
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2001 and 2016 censuses of population.

In 2016, there were approximately 75,000 child care workers in Quebec. Among them, 7,990 (10.6%) used English most often at work. In 2001, there were more than 42,000 child care workers in Quebec and 4,030 (9.6%) of them used English most often at work. This means that the number of child care workers in Quebec nearly doubled from 2001 to 2016, as did the number of those who used English most often at work. The proportions of child care workers who used English at work have increased in each of the regions studied, with the exception of Outaouais and Nord-du-Québec. The largest increase (in percentage points) was in Laval, where this proportion rose from 9.1% in 2001 to 15.5% in 2016.

11. Due to small numbers, ratios for all regions are not presented in this fact sheet.

Chart 1

Number of English-speaking children per child care worker using English most often at work, for selected¹ economic regions, Quebec, 2001 and 2016



1. In selected economic regions, 100 or more child care workers used English most often at work in 2001 and 2016.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2001 and 2016 censuses of population.

Ratios of English-speaking children to child care workers declined in Quebec from 2001 to 2016. This ratio dropped from 10.0 children for every worker in 2001 to 5.7 in 2016. This change is partly attributable to the large increase in the number of child care workers using English most often at work over the period observed. For context, Quebec's child care regulations state that in regulated centres, the educator-to-children ratio must be a maximum of 1 child care worker for every 5 children under 18 months of age. When children are between 18 months and 4 years of age, 1 child care staff member is required for every 8 children. Finally, from age 4 to school age, the regulatory ratio is 10 children for every 1 educator.¹² The ratios observed tend to indicate an increase in the relative availability of English-language child care services in Quebec from 2001 to 2016.

The greatest variation in the ratio of English-speaking children per child care worker was in Laval. The ratio there decreased by half, from 15.4 children per worker in 2001 to 7.1 in 2016. Also, unlike the province as a whole, the ratio for the Outaouais region fell only slightly from 2001 (9.1) to 2016 (8.1).

In 2016, among the regions where 100 or more child care workers used English most often at work, the ratio of English-speaking children per child care worker was lowest in Nord-du-Québec (2.5) and highest in the Laurentides region (9.6) (data not shown). This region had the smallest proportion of child care workers who used English at work in 2016 (3.9%). The ratio of English-speaking children to each worker in Montréal (4.5) was lower than in the province as a whole in 2016. This region also had the highest numbers and proportions of English-speaking children and child care workers who used English most often at work. There could therefore be a link between the proportion of the population that is English-speaking, the geographic dispersion of that population and the balance between the potential supply of and demand for child care services in that language.

In Quebec, the ratio of English-speaking children per child care worker was higher in 2016 than the total ratio of children per worker, regardless of language (4.7 children per worker versus 5.7 English-speaking children per worker). This was the case in each of the regions studied, with the exception of Nord-du-Québec. Therefore, the availability of early childhood care services for English-speaking children seemed somewhat lower than for the general population.

12. Ministère de la famille du Québec. 2016. *A sufficient number of qualified staff*. <https://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/en/services-de-garde/legal-illegal-reconnu/services-garde-reconnus/Pages/personnel-en-nombre-suffisant-et-qualifie.aspx> (accessed June 7, 2021).

Many other children were likely to attend English-language child care, especially those with at least one parent who spoke English at home at least regularly.¹³ Also, workers who used English at work at least regularly¹⁴ were also likely to provide child care in that language. In 2016, 83,130 children aged 1 to 4 had at least one parent who spoke English at home at least regularly, representing 23.1% of children in Quebec. In addition, 14,870 (19.7%) of the 75,400 child care workers in the province used English at work at least regularly. The ratios of English-speaking children to child care worker calculated from these numbers are generally lower than those presented previously. Insights may therefore vary depending on the criteria used.

For all the ratios presented of children to workers, the geography used is relatively broad. However, proximity to child care is among the main reasons parents choose a child care facility.¹⁵ Thus, even if the ratios are low, this does not necessarily mean that services are available locally. Regulations also vary depending on the age of the children. A more detailed study could be used to assess the extent to which the supply of services meets the demand for each age group and family composition, at a more local level.

This fact sheet showed that the ratios of children likely to attend English-language child care to each child care worker who uses English most often at work decreased from 2001 to 2016 in Quebec in each of the regions studied. The availability of English-language child care services thus seems to have improved over the period under study. However, the ratio of English-speaking children to child care worker was higher in some regions, such as the Laurentides region.

Once available, information from the 2022 *Survey on the Official Language Minority Population* will make it possible to conduct a more in-depth study on the subject, particularly through new questions on early childhood.

13. Includes responses to parts A and B of the question on languages spoken at home, including parents who spoke English most often at home equally with another language.

14. Includes responses to parts A and B of the question on languages used at work, including workers who used English most often at work equally with another language.

15. Statistics Canada. 2019. "[Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2019](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190410/dq190410a-eng.htm)," *The Daily*, component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-001-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190410/dq190410a-eng.htm>