

WHAT KIND OF
ENVIRONMENTS
ARE QUÉBEC'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN
GROWING UP IN?

2019 Portrait



OBSERVATOIRE
des tout-petits

 Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon

The contents of this publication were prepared and edited by the **Early Childhood Observatory (Observatoire des tout-petits)**, a project of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation.

This document is available online in the Publications section of the website of the Observatory at tout-petits.org/Portrait2019.

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To cite this document:

Early Childhood Observatory (2019). *What kind of environments are Québec's youngest children growing up in?* 2019 Portrait. Montréal, Québec, Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation

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Legal deposit (printed version) – 1st quarter 2020

Legal deposit (PDF) – 1st quarter 2020

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec

Library and Archives Canada

ISBN: 978-2-924875-39-1 (print)

ISBN: 978-2-924875-40-7 (PDF)

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



In 2018, there were a little over 530,000 children between the ages of 0 and 5 living in Québec. There was Léo, who's going to be a firefighter when he grows up, Charlie, who wants to be a magician, Alice, who's dreaming of being an explorer, Jacob, who can't decide whether he wants to be an inventor or a veterinarian.... and hundreds of thousands of others. These children are the future of Québec.

Unfortunately, not all young children in the province are beginning at the same starting line. Some are living in difficult economic conditions—even to the point of food insecurity. Others are growing up in homes that are too small or too expensive for their parents to afford, in neighbourhoods where they don't always feel safe. Some are unable to obtain a space in an early childcare facility, while others are attending educational daycares of less than acceptable quality.

The conditions that young children grow up in have a deciding influence on their development. For example, at age 3, children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods know 600 fewer words than their counterparts in more privileged communities. Such developmental gaps can have an influence on their academic results in primary school and high school—even in studies at an adult age.

As a society, it is essential that we concern ourselves with the environments in which young children are growing up. For this 2019 portrait of the youngest Quebecers, we have compiled the most rigorous data available to us on the subject, including potential solutions drawn from the scientific literature and experience on the ground. We hope this document will help to inform the debate and spark discussions on what we as a community can do in Québec to make sure every child gets the best possible start in life.



Fannie Dagenais



Fannie Dagenais at 5 years old

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HIGHLIGHTS

In general, the 2019 edition of the annual portrait of young children living in Québec shows that their growing-up environments have improved over the past 10 years. From 2004 to 2016, the proportion of young children living in low-income families dropped from 20.9% to 13.9%. From 2001 to 2016, the proportion of families in which both parents (or sole parent, in the case of single-parent families) were employed rose from 60.8% to 69.7%. During the same period, the employment rate for mothers rose more significantly than that of fathers. The 2019 portrait also tells us that 92.4% of children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years are living in neighbourhoods where there are safe places for them to play outside during the day.

In spite of the improvement in many indicators, however, our portrait also presents some disquieting data on the conditions in which young children are growing up—in their families, their living environments and the educational childcare facilities they attend. One family out of ten with at least one young child is still experiencing food insecurity. In addition, 13.9% of children between the ages of 0 and 5 are living in low-income families, accounting for approximately 75,000 children across the province. Parents' stress levels, especially related to their efforts to balance work and family responsibilities, are also cause for concern, particularly among mothers (39% as compared to 23% for fathers).

The portrait also reveals that 13.6% of families with at least one child between 0 and 5 are living in unaffordable housing, and 12% are in homes of unsuitable size. Material deprivation varies regionally across Québec. In 2016, the three regions with the largest proportions of children between 0 and 5 living in materially disadvantaged neighbourhoods were Nord-du-Québec (78.9%), Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (59.3%) and Côte-Nord (43.1%).

Finally, many young children are attending educational childcare facilities that still do not comply with government requirements for personnel qualification. In 2015, just 18.7% of unsubsidized daycares were in compliance with the Ministère de la Famille requirement that two out of every three educators have the necessary qualifications (as compared to 90.6% of CPEs and 74.6% of subsidized daycares). Although this situation is likely to improve over the next few years given the Ministère's stricter expectations of unsubsidized daycares, the current situation is worrying.

As a society, we can take action to improve the environments in which young children are growing up in Québec. For example, measures that would provide better financial support for disadvantaged families and improve access to affordable housing would help reduce poverty and food insecurity. Implementing better work-life balance policies would alleviate parental stress. Creating more safe, accessible playgrounds in municipalities of all sizes is an initiative that has been shown to be effective in improving young children's physical environments. Finally, better educator training could have positive repercussions on the quality of educational childcare services.



A PORTRAIT OF THE VERY YOUNG IN QUÉBEC

Created in April 2016, the Early Childhood Observatory is a project of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation. Its mission is to help ensure that the development and well-being of Quebec's very youngest children remains at the top of Québec society's list of social priorities.

To fulfill this mission, the Observatory compiles the most reliable and relevant data on children between the ages of 0 and 5, produces special reports and encourages dialogue on possible collective action in the area of early childhood. The Observatory's activities revolve around two fundamental questions:

HOW ARE QUÉBEC'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN FARING?

AND

WHAT KIND OF ENVIRONMENTS ARE THEY GROWING UP IN?

The 2019 portrait returns to the second question in order to assess how children's environments have evolved since the publication of the Observatory's first portrait on the same theme in 2016 and, more broadly, in the past 10 years.

The data presented in this portrait are drawn from administrative, census and population survey documents. We were unfortunately unable to cover certain characteristics of children's environments as they are not all measured in surveys or stored in administrative data banks.

The 2019 edition of the annual portrait of the youngest Quebecers therefore presents the most rigorous data available to us on the living conditions of very young children and their families. The information it contains gives us a better understanding of young children's current family and physical environments and of the educational childcare facilities they are attending. We have also included several potential solutions drawn from the scientific literature and experience on the ground.



THE SITUATION IN QUÉBEC



WHO ARE THESE 0-5 YEAR-OLDS?

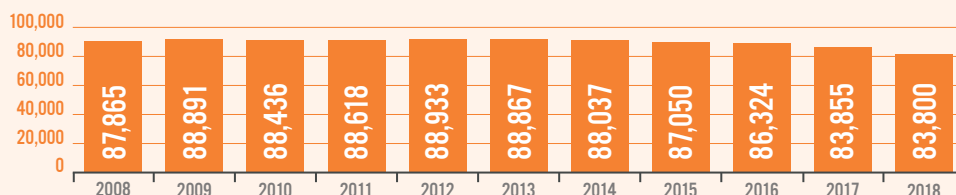


In Québec, the total number of births went from



The number of births is currently lower than it was between 2009 and 2014, when it fluctuated between 88,000 and 89,000.

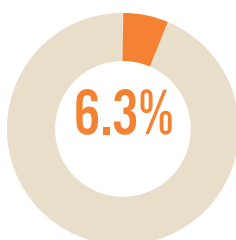
Annual number of births in Québec between 2008 and 2018



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Registre des événements démographiques*. Provisional data for 2018.



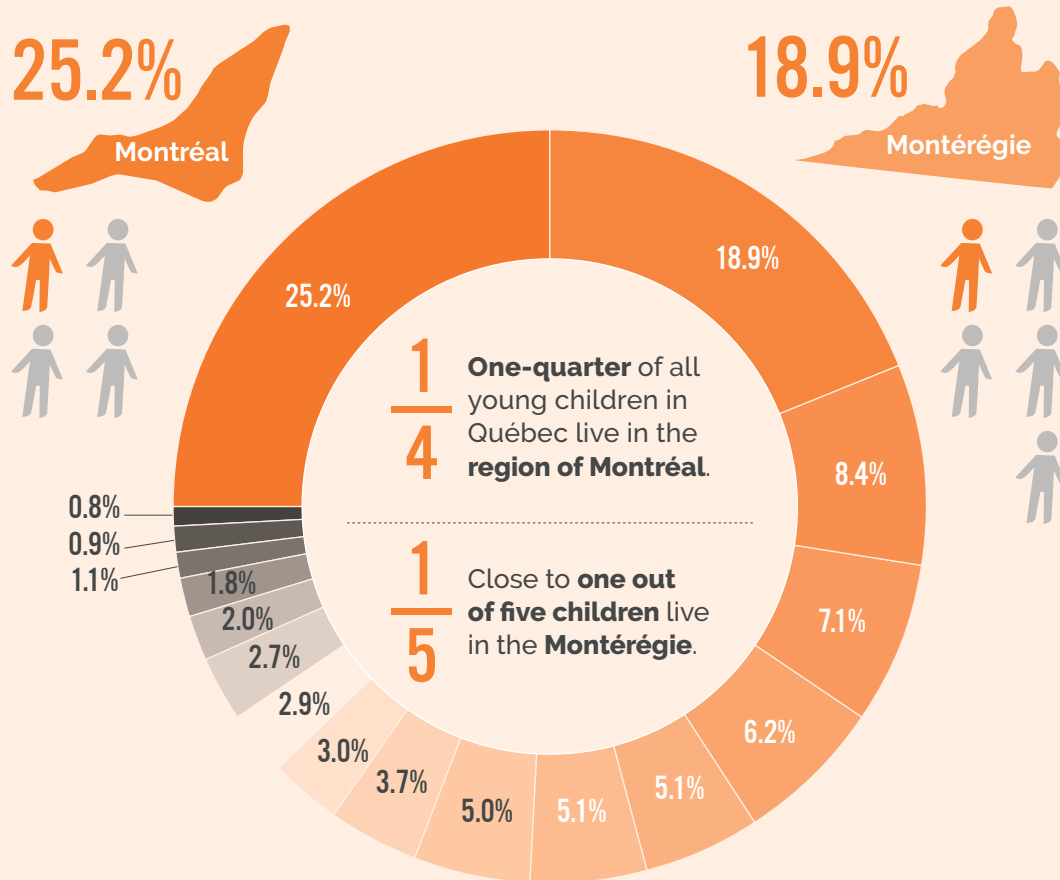
That was the number of children between the ages of 0 and 5 living in Québec in 2018. This figure has remained relatively stable since 2012¹.



The very young currently constitute a more significant portion of the population, up from 6.1% in 2008. The corresponding figure in 2018 was 6.3%.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec and Statistics Canada, Population estimates (January 2019 figures). Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

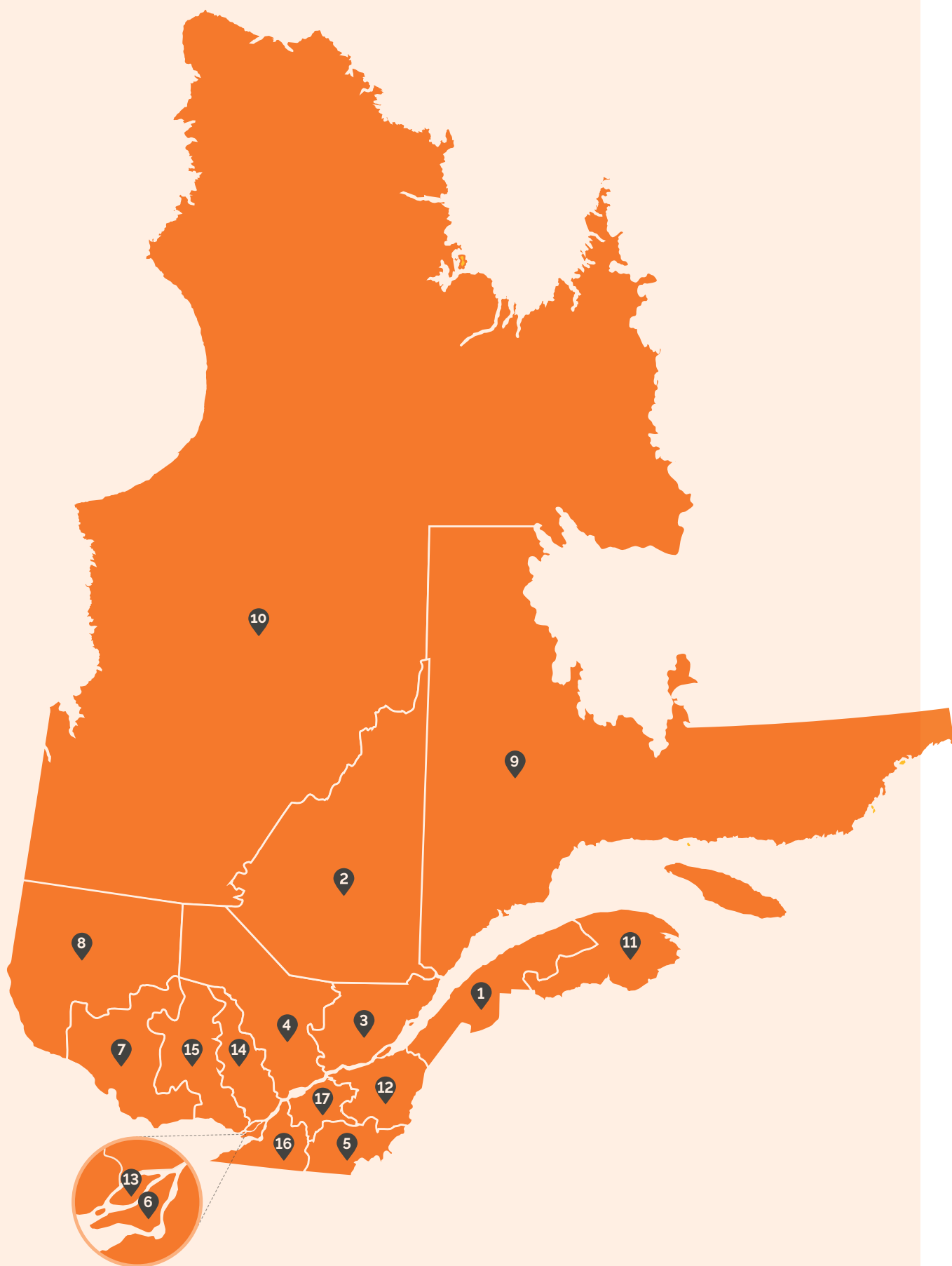
REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN IN QUÉBEC



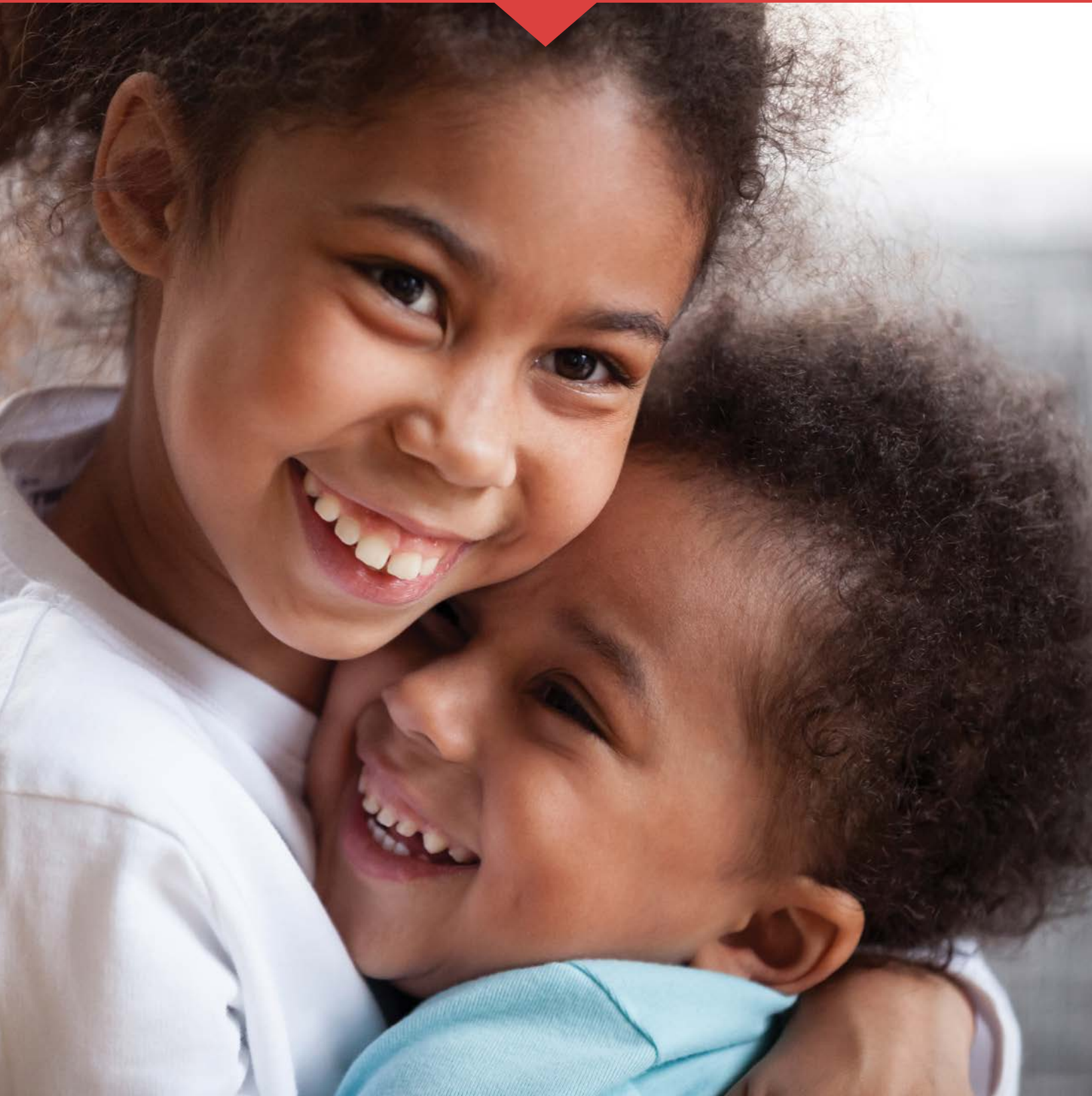
- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Bas-Saint-Laurent 2.0% | 10 Nord-du-Québec 0.9% |
| 2 Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean 3.0% | 11 Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine 0.8% |
| 3 Capitale-Nationale 8.4% | 12 Chaudière-Appalaches 5.1% |
| 4 Mauricie 2.7% | 13 Laval 5.1% |
| 5 Estrie 3.7% | 14 Lanaudière 6.2% |
| 6 Montréal 25.2% | 15 Laurentides 7.1% |
| 7 Outaouais 5.0% | 16 Montérégie 18.9% |
| 8 Abitibi-Témiscamingue 1.8% | 17 Centre-du-Québec 2.9% |
| 9 Côte-Nord 1.1% | |

Regional distribution remained relatively stable between 2008 and 2018.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec and Statistics Canada, Population estimates (March 2019 figures).
Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.



**WHAT DO
THEIR FAMILIES
LOOK LIKE?**

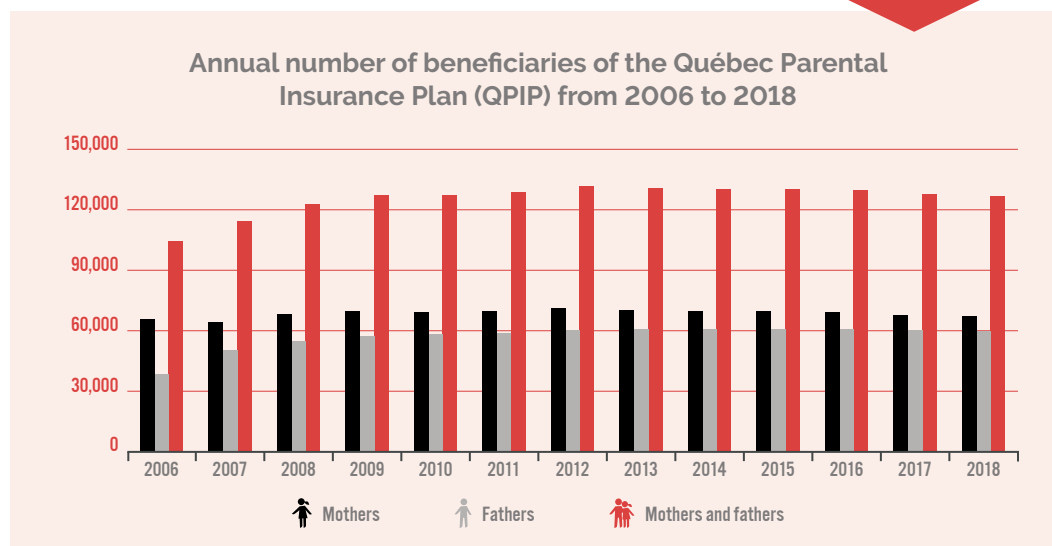


Since the family constitutes the first and primary source of stimulation to which children are exposed², the family environment has a critical influence on early childhood development.

ENVIRONMENT AT BIRTH

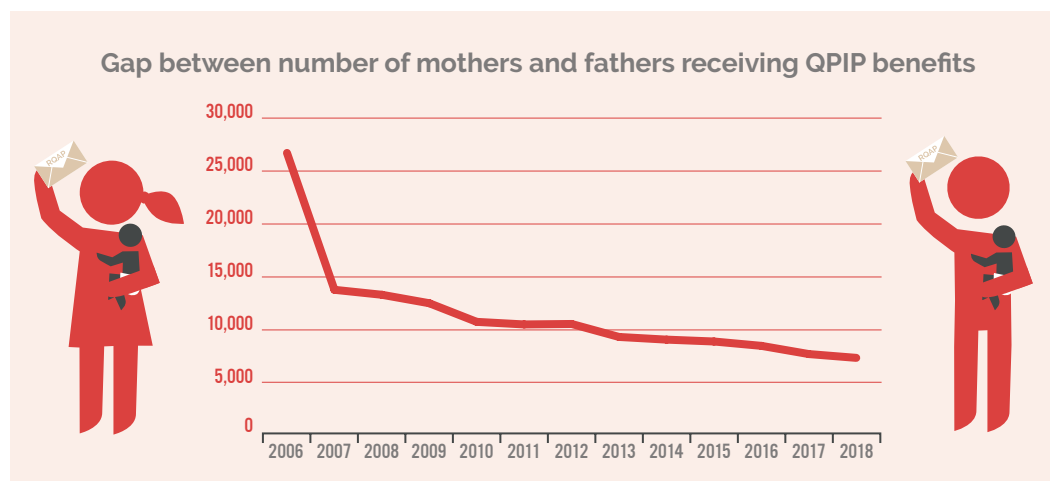
Use of the Québec Parental Insurance Plan

Following an increase in the number of beneficiaries of the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) between 2006 and 2013, their numbers dropped by 3% between 2013 and 2018: from 129,402 to 125,639 new beneficiaries. This decrease is not surprising given the decline in the number of births in the province during the same period.



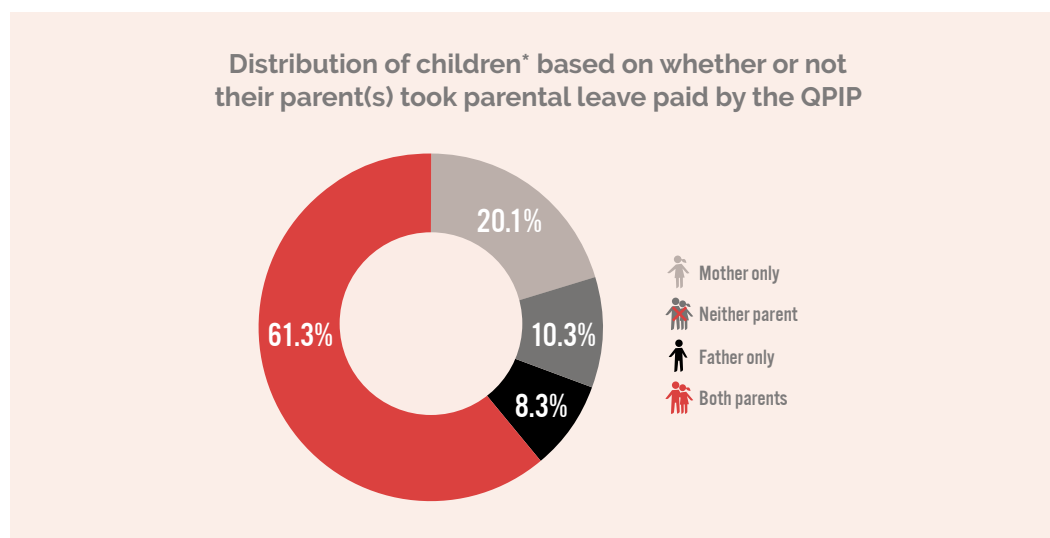
Source: Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, *Statistiques officielles sur les prestataires du Régime québécois d'assurance parentale*, 2006 à 2018.

This decrease was slightly more marked among mothers (4%) than fathers (1%).
As a result, the gap between the number of mothers and the number of fathers who received QPIP benefits has narrowed since 2006.



Source: Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, *Official statistics on beneficiaries of the Québec Parental Insurance Plan, 2006 to 2018.*

Among children born in Canada who were attending kindergarten in 2018-2017, 6 out of 10 had parents who had both taken parental leave paid by the QPIP after their children were born.

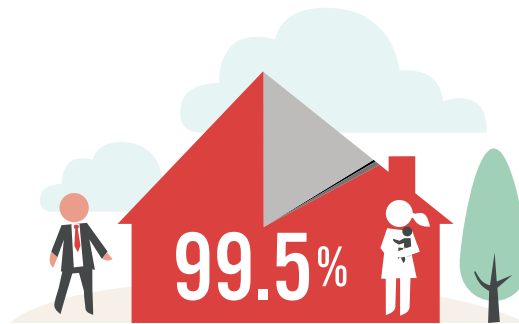


* Among children born in Canada who were attending kindergarten in 2016-2017.


Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.*

Time spent at home after birth or adoption

At least one parent of 99.5% of children enrolled in kindergarten in 2016-2017 had stayed at home following their birth. In most cases, both parents stayed home after their child's birth, but for varying amounts of time.



 82.3% – Both parents

 16.9% – Mother only (including single parents)

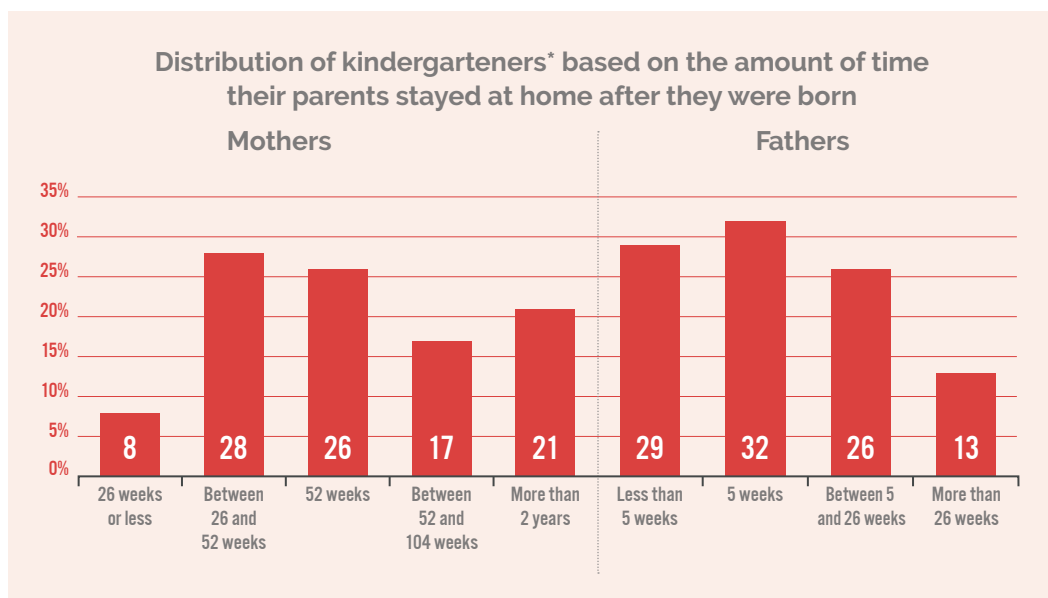
 0.3% – Father only (including single parents)*

 0.5% – Neither/no parent*

* Passable accuracy. Coefficient of variation between 15% and 25%; interpret with caution.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students

Among parents who stayed at home after the birth of their child, mothers spent an average of 1.7 years at home and fathers, 4 months.



* Among children whose mother and/or father stayed at home following their birth.

The proportion of children whose mother stayed home **for more than two years after their birth is higher among children with mothers with a lower level of education** and those in **low-income households**. A similar trend was observed among children whose father stayed home for more than 26 weeks after they were born.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

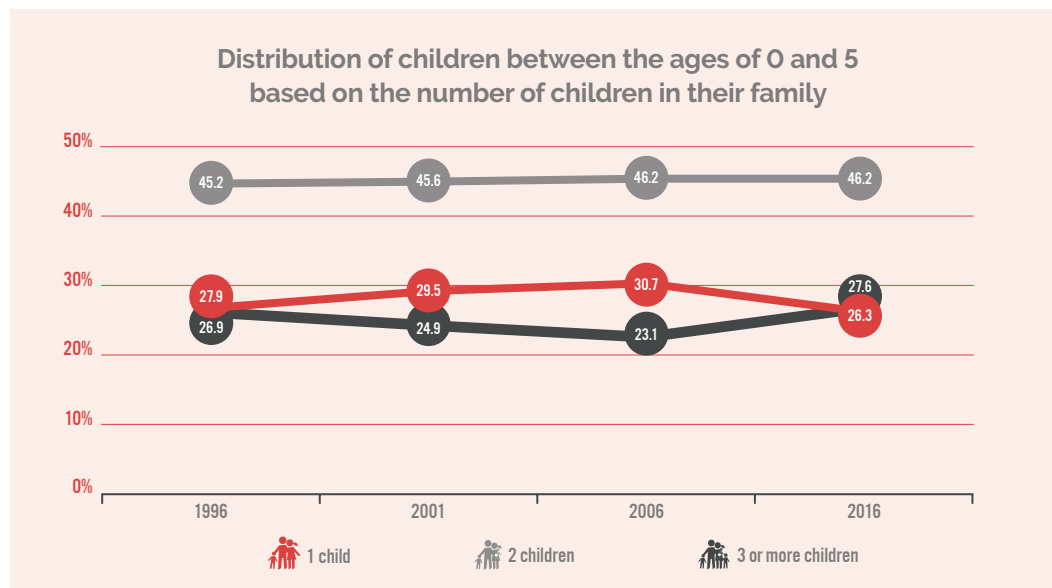
Siblings

In 2016, the youngest Quebecers lived in families with:



* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Between 1996 et 2006, the proportion of children between 0 and 5 **living in single-child families increased, and then declined between 2006 and 2016**. The opposite trend was observed for children living in families of three children or more.



Source: Statistics Canada, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

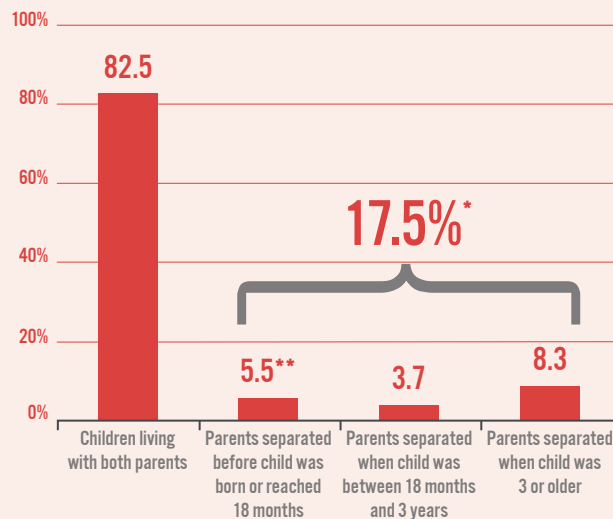
Separation and family structure

According to data from the *2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students*, children in kindergarten who are not living with both their parents (biological or adoptive) are at greater risk of vulnerability in at least one area of development than their classmates who are living with both parents³. Similar results were observed in the *Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development* for children whose parents had separated within the two years before they started school⁴.

17.5% of children attending kindergarten in 2016-2017 were not living with both their parents*.



Distribution of kindergarteners based on whether or not they were living with both their parents, or their age when they separated



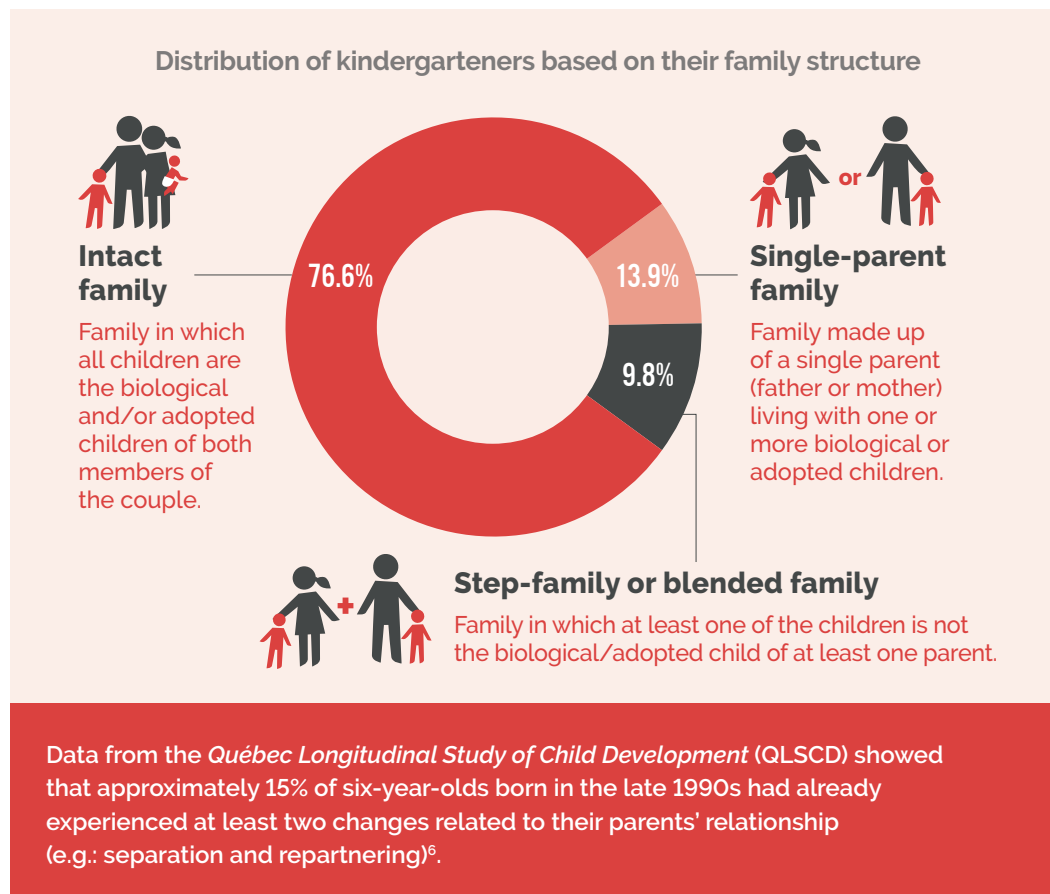
According to the *Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development* (QLSCD), which studied a cohort of children born in Québec in 1997-1998, the parents of 22% of children born into a two-parent family separated before their child reached the age of 6. It is important to note, however, that the parents of some of those children were subsequently reunited⁵.

* This percentage includes children living in families where the "separation" was due to the death of one of their parents.

** This percentage includes children whose parent was a single parent when they were born or adopted.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students*.

In 2016, the majority of children between 0 and 5 were living in intact families.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

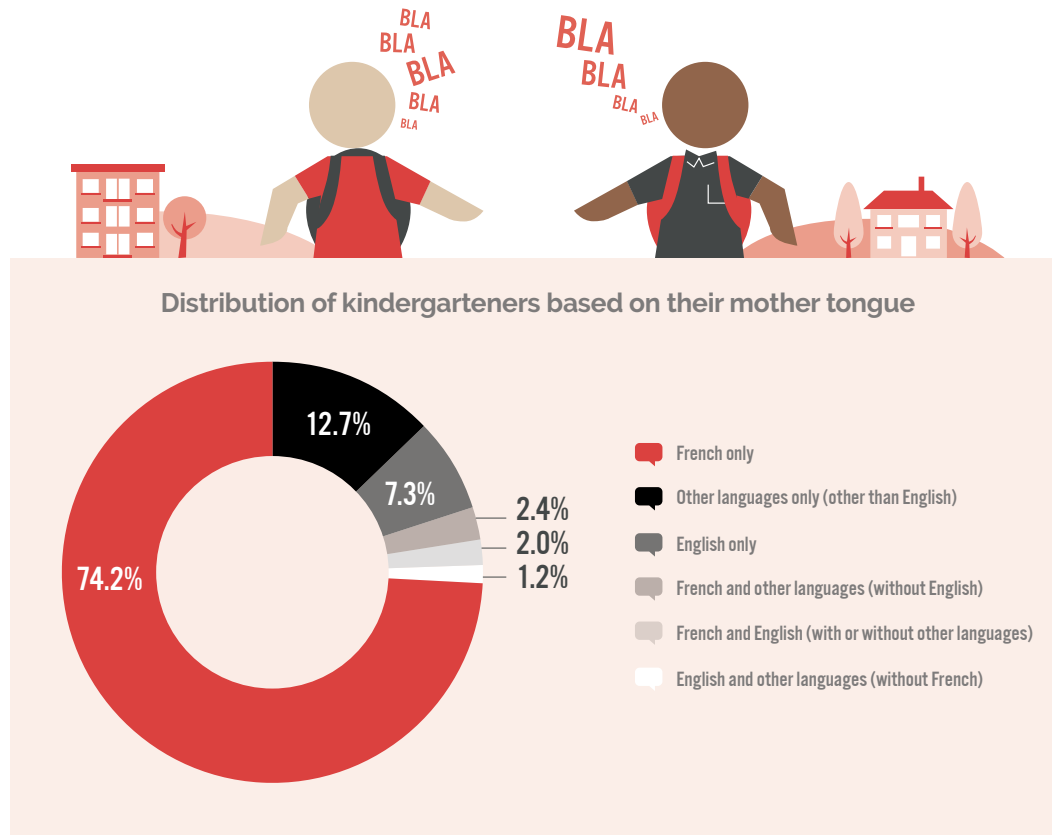
Languages spoken at home

The languages to which children are exposed at a very young age may have an influence on their development. For example, receiving an education in a language other than their mother tongue increases children's probability of vulnerability in certain areas of development, particularly those related to communication skills⁷. Children exposed to several languages may have more difficulty understanding vocabulary (in French or English) at the beginning of the school years than their peers⁸.

It is important to stress, however, that exposure to several languages can also have positive long-term effects on children's educational success and academic perseverance⁹.

In 2016-2017,

74.2% of kindergarteners in Québec had French as their mother tongue, while 7.3% had learned English first. The mother tongue of 12.7% of children was neither French nor English.



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

17.9% of kindergarteners in 2016-2017 were attending a school where the language of instruction was not their mother tongue (i.e., the first language learned and still understood). Of the children whose mother tongue was only English, 34.0% were attending a school where the language of instruction was French. The vast majority of kindergarteners whose mother tongue was neither French nor English (93.5%) were enrolled in a school in the French system.

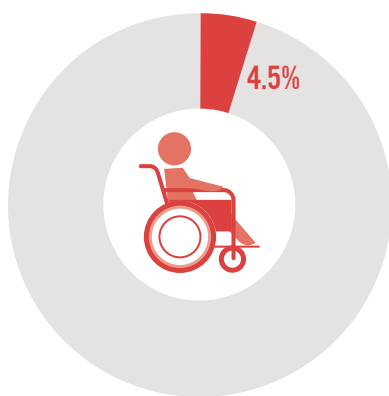
Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.



PARENTS' CHARACTERISTICS

Parents living with a physical or mental disability or chronic health problem

Parents with chronic health problems may have less energy and above-average stress levels. As a result, they may be less able to participate in certain activities with their child, which could affect the child's development. According to the *2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students*, the proportion of vulnerable children in kindergarten is higher among those who have at least one parent living with a disability or chronic health problem that could limit their ability to provide care and support for their child.



In 2017, **4.5%** of kindergarteners were living in a family in which **at least one of their parents or their only parent was living with a physical or mental disability or a chronic health problem** that could somewhat limit their ability to provide certain types of care for their child.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

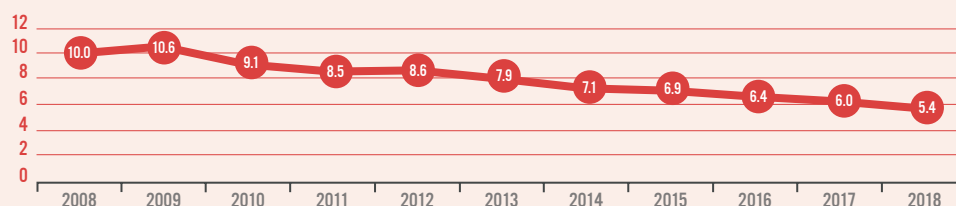
Mother's age at birth

The scientific literature tells us that a young parental age (under 20) is associated with more behaviour problems in young children¹⁰. The younger the mother, the greater her child's risk of overall developmental vulnerability¹¹.

5.4
1,000 young women under 20 gave birth in 2018. This is the lowest fertility rate every recorded in Québec for this age group. In 2008, the corresponding figure was 10.0 out of 1,000.



Fertility rate for women under 20 years of age* between 2008 and 2018
(for every 1,000 women)



* "Fertility rate for women under 20 years of age" means the proportion of women under 20 who gave birth during a single year.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Registre des événements démographiques*.

Immigration

Proportionally speaking, more children born outside of Canada now living in Québec are vulnerable in at least one area of development than are their counterparts who were born in Canada. The proportion of kindergarteners who are vulnerable in at least one area of development is also higher among children whose parents (or sole parent) were born outside of Canada¹².



32.6% of babies born in 2018 had at least one parent who was born abroad.

This proportion has been on the rise since 1998, when it was 19.7%.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Registre des événements démographiques*.

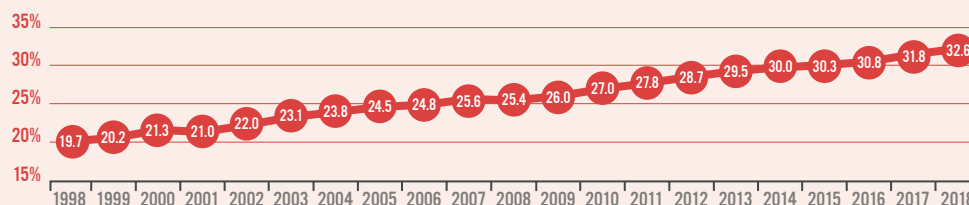
2.3%

12,275 children between 0 and 5 living in

Québec in 2016 were born outside of Canada, accounting for 2.3% of the population in this age group. After increasing slightly between 1996 and 2006, this proportion is currently on the decline.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.
Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

Proportion of babies born between 1998 and 2008 who had at least parent who was born abroad

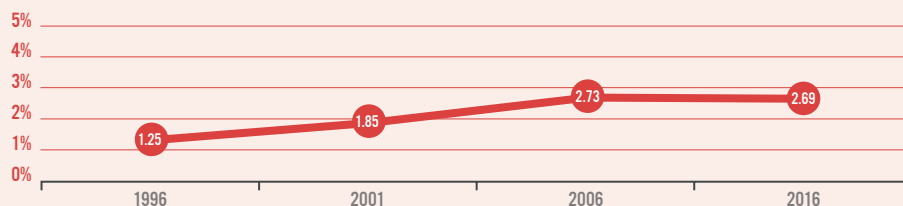


Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Registre des événements démographiques*.



In 2016, the parents of **14,385** young children had been living in Canada for less than five years. That figure represents 2.69% of all young children living in Québec at that time, up from 1.25% in 1996.

Proportion of young children whose parents have been living in Canada for under 5 years



After increasing between 1996 and 2006, the proportion of children whose parents had arrived in Canada less than five years earlier stabilized between 2006 and 2016.

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

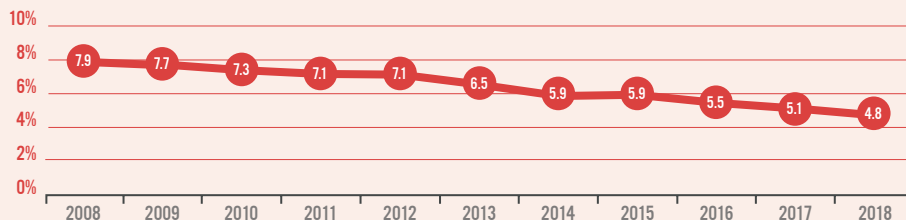
Education

According to the *2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students*, the proportion of children who are vulnerable in at least one area of development decreases as their parents' level of education rises¹³.

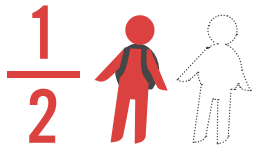


4.8% of all babies born in Québec in 2018 were born to mothers who did not have a high school diploma. Over the past few years, this figure has been on the decline.

Proportion of babies born to mothers who had not finished high school between 2008 and 2018

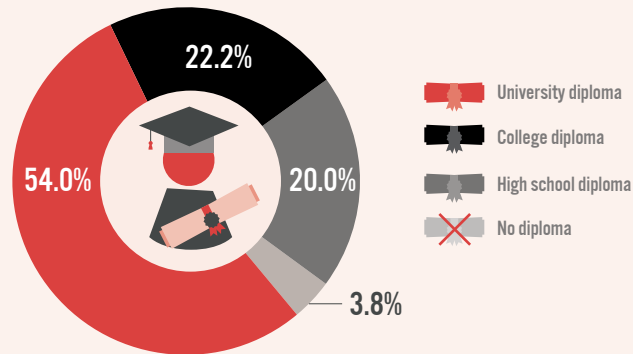


Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Registre des événements démographiques*.



Slightly more than **half of the children in kindergarten in 2016-2017 were living with at least one parent who had a university diploma**, while the parents (either both parents or the sole parent) of 3.8% of that cohort had no diplomas.

Distribution of kindergarteners based on the highest level of education of at least one of their parents

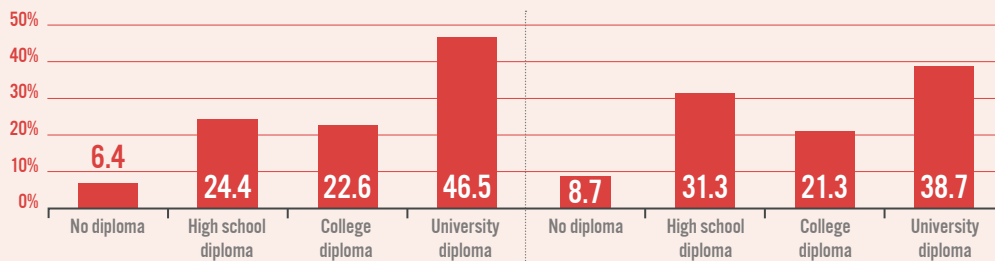


Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.



The mothers of these kindergarteners were, on average, more educated than their fathers. A larger proportion of mothers than fathers had a university diploma and fewer had either no diploma or just a high school diploma.

Distribution of kindergarteners based on the highest diploma obtained...*
 ...by their mother* ...by their father**



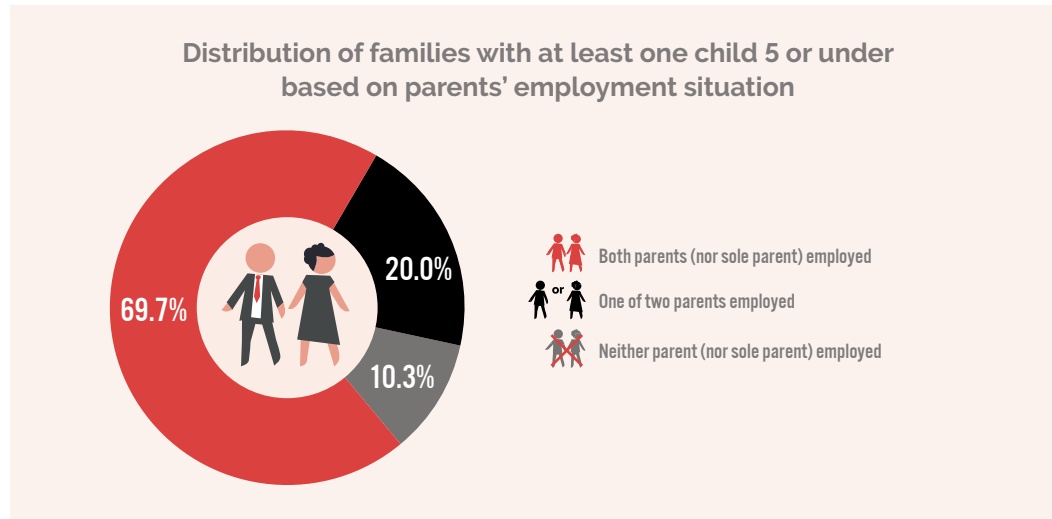
* The definition of "mother" includes the partners of biological or adoptive fathers. Children whose respondent parent was a single father were not included in this group.

** The definition of "father" includes the partners of biological or adoptive mothers. Children whose respondent parent was a single mother were not included in this group.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

Employment

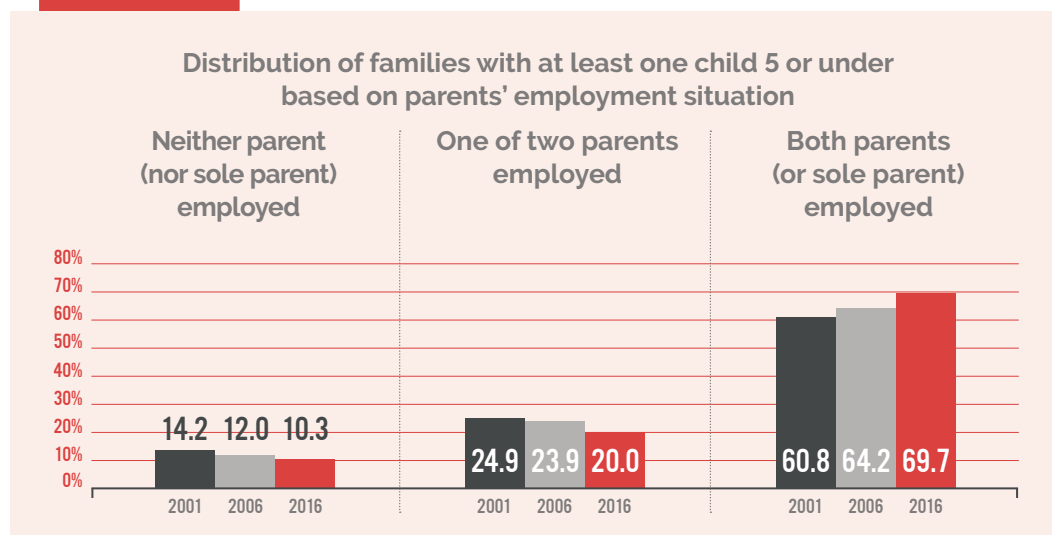
69.7% of families with at least one child 5 years of age or under included two parents (or a single parent) who were/was employed in 2016.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Censuses. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

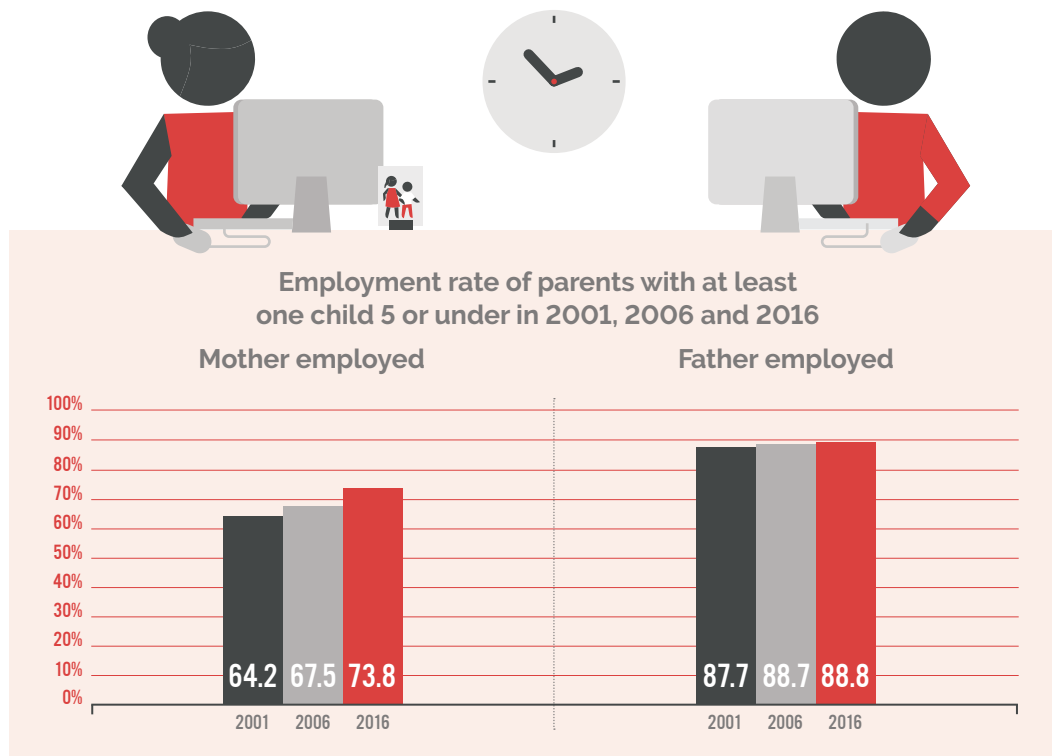


Between 2001 and 2006, the employment situation of Québec families with at least one child 5 or under generally improved. The proportion of families in which neither parent was employed decreased, while the proportion of families in which both parents were employed increased.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

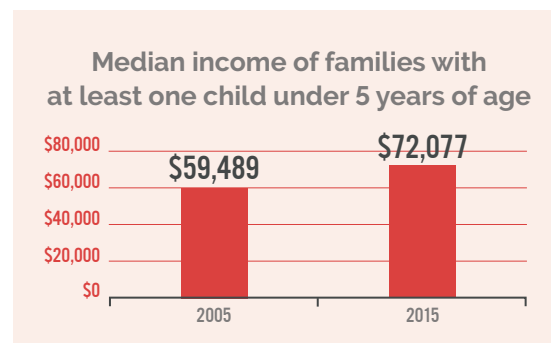
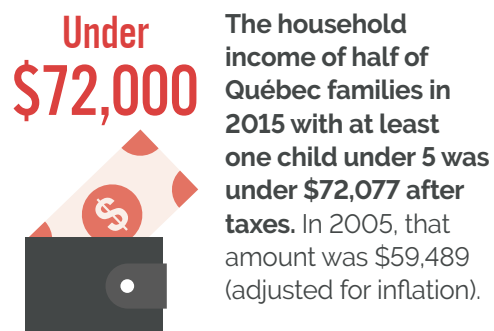
During this period, **the rate of maternal employment increased more significantly than that of fathers.** The proportion of fathers who are employed, however, continues to be higher than that of mothers in the same situation.



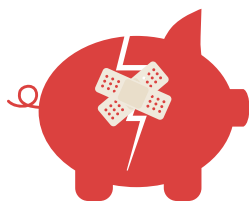
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

Income and poverty

Studies show that children growing up in low-income households are considered to be more vulnerable by their kindergarten teachers when they start school and that they obtain below-average academic results in grade one¹⁴.

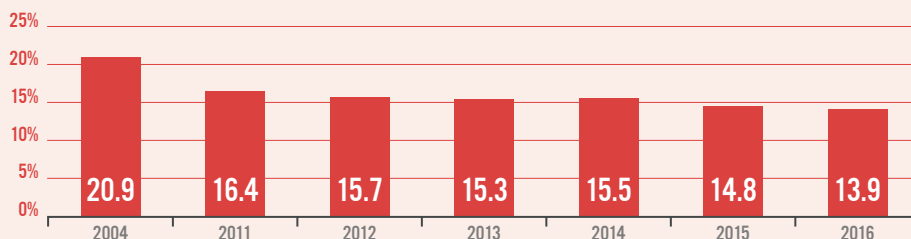


Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses for 2006 and 2016. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.



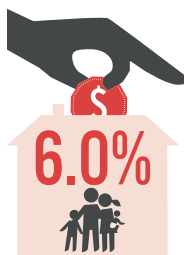
13.9% of children between 0 and 5 living in Québec were living in a low-income family in 2016, accounting for about 75,000 young children (based on the Low-Income Measure or LIM). Between 2004 and 2016, the Québec-wide low-income rate dropped from 20.9% to 13.9%: a total of 7 percentage points.

Proportion of Québec children between 0 and 5 living in low-income families between 2004 and 2016*



* Based on the Low-Income Measure (LIM)

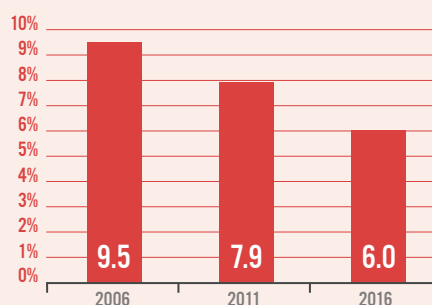
Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File (T1FF). Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.



6.0% of families with children under 6 benefited from social assistance in 2016. There was a decrease in the number of families on welfare between 2006 and 2016.

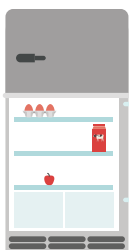
The proportion of families with children under 6 that benefited from last-resort financial assistance was higher among single-parent families than two-parent families.

Proportion of families with children under 6 that benefited from social assistance in 2006, 2011 and 2016



Food insecurity

Children who suffer from food insecurity are at greater risk of presenting delays in their cognitive, motor and neurophysiological development (amongst other things). Food insecurity is also a predictor of chronic diseases in early childhood¹⁵.



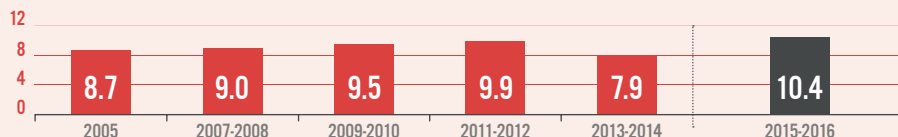
About one out of 10 Québec households with at least one child under 6 were in a **situation of food security** in 2015-2016*.



* Because of the redesign of the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) in 2015, it is recommended that 2015-2016 data not be compared to that of previous cycles.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), File Sharing. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

Proportion of Québec households with at least one child under 6 experiencing food insecurity



PARENTS' LIFESTYLES AND PARENTING PRACTICES

Alcohol use

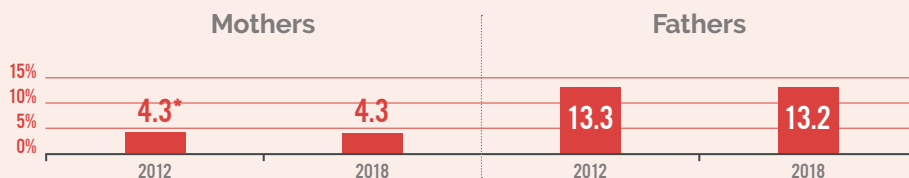
Parents' at-risk use of alcohol has a negative influence on child development, potentially leading to problems related to attachment, behaviour and emotion management¹⁶.



13.2% of fathers of children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years were **at-risk alcohol users** in 2018. This proportion is higher than that observed among mothers of children in the same age group. Both proportions have remained stable since 2012.



Proportion of parents who are at-risk alcohol users



* Passable accuracy. Coefficient of variation between 15% and 25% interpret with caution.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec, 2012 et 2018. Les attitudes parentales et les pratiques familiales.*

The level of parental alcohol use is established based on parents' answers to three questions on their current consumption and seven question used to assess the possibility of alcohol dependence and the harmful effects of alcohol use on a scale of 1 to 5 (from "Never" to "Daily or almost daily"). A score of 8 or more is considered to indicate hazardous or harmful alcohol use according to the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT).

Drug use



The proportions of parents of children between 6 months and 5 years with **problems related to drug** use were relatively small in 2018: 1.4%* of mothers and 3.8%* of fathers. These figures did not vary significantly between 2012 and 2018.

** Coefficient of variation greater than 25%: imprecise estimate to be used for information purposes only.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec, 2012 et 2018. Les attitudes parentales et les pratiques familiales.*



Parental stress and difficulty with daily activities

Parents affected by stress are at greater risk of disengaging from their child. Chronic stress can cause parents to develop a negative perception of their relationship with their child, have trouble managing their own emotions, have problems picking up on and responding to their child's distress signals, and to lose confidence in their parenting skills¹⁷.

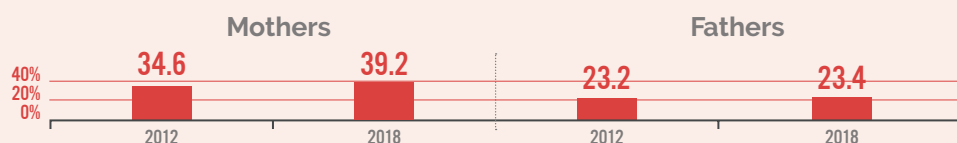
Almost

40.0%

of mothers of children between 6 months and 5 years present **high levels of stress** related to work-family balance. The corresponding figure for fathers is 23%. Among mothers, this proportion has been rising since 2012; it has remained stable for fathers.



Proportion of parents presenting high levels of stress related to work-family balance



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec, 2012 et 2018. Les attitudes parentales et les pratiques familiales.*

Among children attending kindergarten in 2016-2017...

26.1% had parents who found it **difficult** to find time to play with them.



17.9% had parents who said they had **difficulty** accompanying their children to their activities.

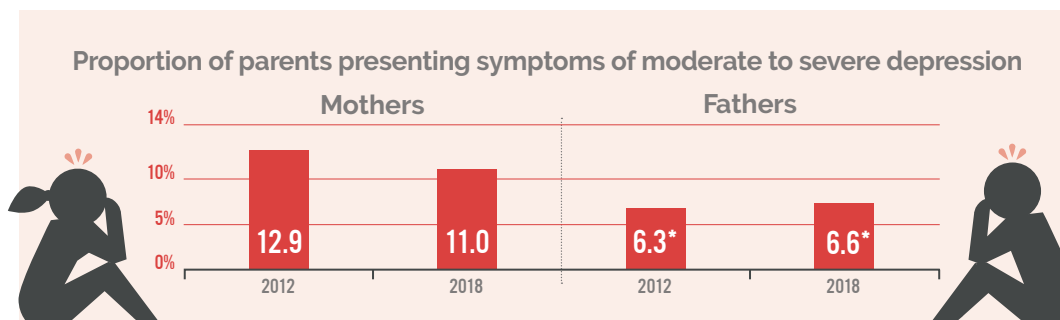
11.2% had parents who found it **difficult to prepare** their children for the day (i.e., making sure they had enough to eat and were appropriately dressed).

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

Among parents who report higher levels of conflict related to work-family balance, there are fewer who play with their children once a day. These data are worrying, as playing with their children helps parents create and maintain a bond with them and stimulate their development.

Symptoms of depression

Among parents of children between 6 months and 5 years, more mothers than fathers present **symptoms of moderate to severe depression**: 11% in 2018, as compared to 7% of fathers.



* Coefficient of variation between 15% and 25%; interpret with caution.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec, 2012 et 2018. Les attitudes parentales et les pratiques familiales.

Social support

Parents with good social networks find it easier to balance their daily obligations. Kindergarteners living in families with poor social support are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable¹⁸.

A relatively large number of parents of kindergarteners have good social support networks.

Among children who were attending kindergarten in 2016-2017...



91.9% had parents who had someone they trusted whom they could turn to for advice.



95.4% had parents who said they had **people they could count on** in an emergency.



90.5% had parents who said that their family and friends helped them feel safe, secure and happy.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

Parenting practices that encourage literacy and numeracy

Several studies have shown that parents have an important role to play in sparking their child's interest in reading and writing¹⁹. Talking to children while reading out loud or looking at pictures with them helps reduce the probability they will be developmentally vulnerable in kindergarten, particularly in the area of "Communication skills and general knowledge"²⁰.

During the year before children in kindergarten in 2016-2017 started school...



80.3% had been **read to or told stories** at least a few times a week—and 41% every day.

67.1% had practised saying or recognizing the letters of the alphabet at least a few times a week.



71.1% had practised saying or recognizing their numbers at least a few times a week.

69.8% had been **encouraged to use numbers in their daily activities** at least a few times a week.

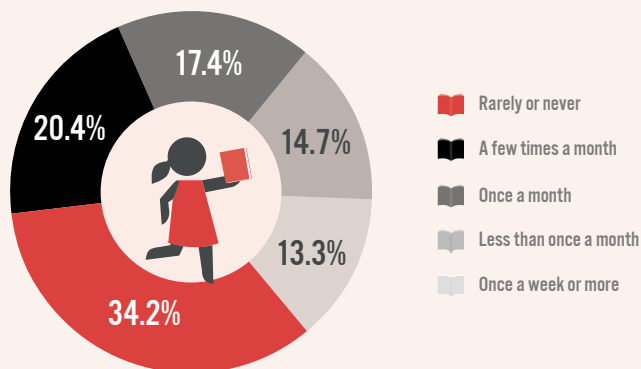


Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.



One out of two children had visited the library at least once a month during the year before they started kindergarten.

Distribution of kindergarteners based on frequency of library visits*



* With an adult in their household, during the year before they entered kindergarten

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

Key points

The family situation of very young Quebecers has improved in many respects.

- ▶ The proportion of young children living in low-income families declined from 20.9% to 13.9% between 2004 and 2016.
- ▶ Between 2001 and 2016, the employment situation of Québec families with at least one child 5 or under improved. The proportion of families in which both parents (or sole parent) work rose from 60.8% to 69.7%. During the same period, it was the rate of maternal employment that saw the most significant increase. In 2016, however, there were still 10.3% of families with at least one young child in which both parents were unemployed.
- ▶ The proportion of babies born to mothers who had not finished high school dropped from 7.9% to 4.8% between 2008 and 2018. This is an encouraging result, given that the proportion of developmentally vulnerable children decreases when parents' education levels increase.
- ▶ Many parents of children in kindergarten reap the benefits of having a good social network: 90.5% said their family and friends helped them feel safe, secure and happy.

Certain elements continue to be cause for concern, however:

- ▶ 39% of mothers of children between 6 months and 5 years of age present high levels of stress related to work-family balance, as compared to 23% of fathers. Mothers' figures have been rising since 2012, while fathers' have remained stable. It is interesting to note that, according to the *2015 Québec Survey on the Experience of Parents of Children Aged 0 to 5*, parents who are satisfied with the division of household tasks with their partner have lower stress levels due to conflict related to work-family balance.
- ▶ Proportionally more mothers than fathers report moderate to severe symptoms of depression.
- ▶ In 2015-2016, 10.4% of Québec households with at least one child under 6 were in a situation of food insecurity.
- ▶ 13% of fathers of children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years are at-risk alcohol users, a proportion much higher than that observed among mothers.

SOMETHING CAN BE DONE

There are many possibilities for collective action that could improve the family environments of young children—solutions that have been shown to be effective in practice on the ground and in the scientific literature both in Québec and around the world. Here are a few examples:



Offering parents of young children, including those who work atypical hours²¹, **work-life balance measures** is one way to help reduce parental stress. New measures could also be explored, such as **allowing parents more flexible conditions when returning to work after a parental leave** (working part-time, more paid days off for family responsibilities, flexible hours, working from home, etc.).



Adopting strategies that integrate fathers into all policies, services and programs designed to benefit families with young children can increase fathers' involvement in their children's education²². That is exactly what Québec's *Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité*²³ promotes. **Developing parental support programs and services aimed specifically at fathers** helps them play a more active parental role, starting with their partner's pregnancy. **Recognizing the importance of extended paternity leave and encouraging fathers to take advantage of it** also helps fathers play a more active parental role. As things currently stand in Québec, certain professional milieus are still reticent about the idea of men taking parental leave²⁴. Such a measure would promote a more equitable sharing of parents' work at home, however, while strengthening fathers' feeling of parenting competence²⁵.



Action can be taken to improve the unfavourable economic conditions of some young children's families by **providing financial support for financially disadvantaged families**, focusing on regions or neighbourhoods with large numbers of low-income households. This type of assistance would also help to fight food insecurity.



Promoting the *Alcochoix* + program among fathers could help those whose alcohol consumption prevents them from playing their role as a parent (low energy, poor concentration, aggressivity)²⁶. The efficiency of similar programs has already been proven²⁷. **Restricting the privatization of retail alcohol sales as much as possible** reduces parents' at-risk alcohol use, especially that of fathers, as it limits easy access to various types of alcohol at convenience and grocery stores²⁸.

Some of these measures have already been implemented in Québec. They need to be maintained and consolidated to safeguard the progress that has been made in this area.

How could these measures be more effectively applied? What else can be done? We hope this portrait of the situation will spark public reflection on these questions.

WHAT KIND OF ENVIRONMENTS ARE THEY LIVING IN?



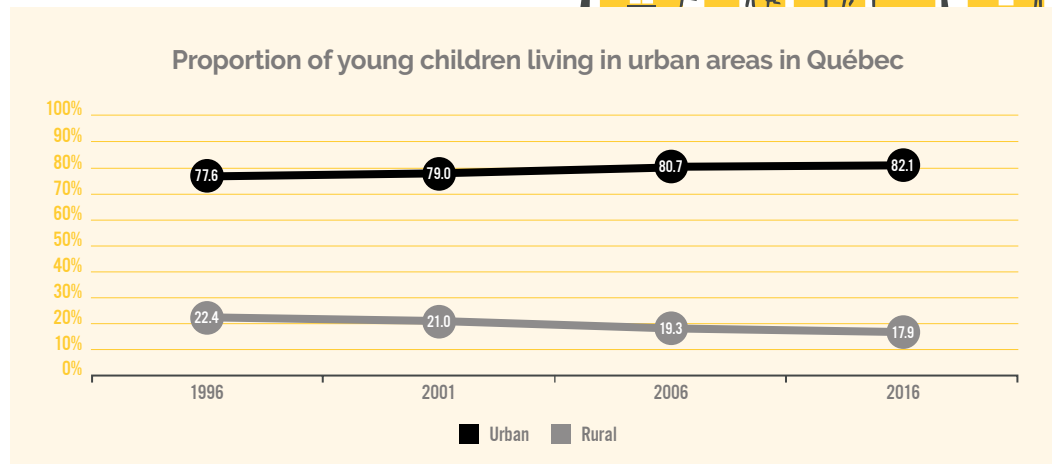
The environment children grow up in has an impact on their development. Having access to high-quality physical spaces gives them the opportunity to explore and learn.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT


Urban or rural?

82.1% of very young Quebecers lived in urban areas in 2016.

This figure has increased significantly over the past 20 years.




Source: Statistics Canada, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses.



URBAN AREA

Area consisting of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban centre. A census metropolitan area must have a total population of at least 10,000.

VS



RURAL AREA

Cities and municipalities located outside of major urban centres.

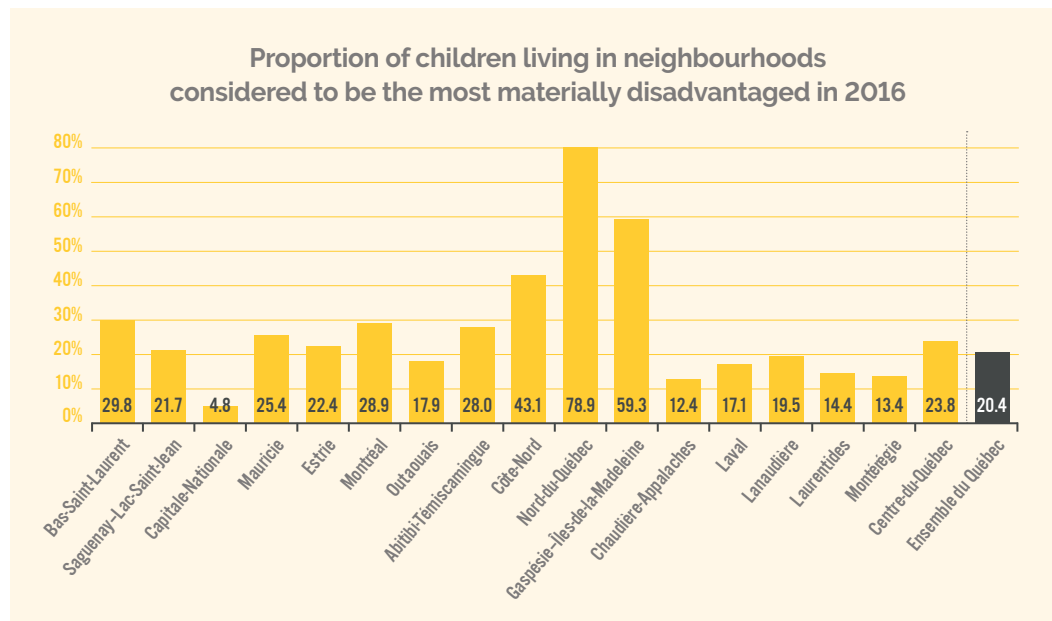
Deprivation

Children living in higher-income neighbourhoods have better verbal skills and fewer behaviour problems. According to the QLSCD, those children are less likely to have trouble handling the demands of an academic environment than their counterparts in less privileged neighbourhoods²⁹.

Children who live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are at greater risk of being exposed to various pollutants, excessive noise, overcrowded housing and sub-standard housing³⁰. Studies done in 1975 and 2005 even show a connection between neighbourhood socio-economic levels and child maltreatment³¹.

Levels of material deprivation vary across Québec. In 2016, the three regions with the highest proportions of **children between 0 and 5 living in neighbourhoods considered to have the greatest material deprivation** were Nord-du-Québec (78.9%), Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (59.3%) and Côte-Nord (43.1%).*

* Note that regional variations would be different if we used the Low-Income Measure (LIM) as an indicator. According to the LIM, the most materially disadvantaged region in the province would still be Nord-du-Québec, but the region of Montréal would be in second place.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

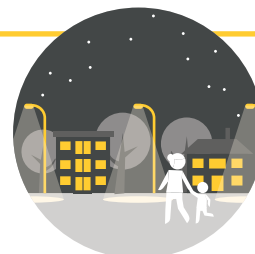
The Material Deprivation Index is a geographical index based on the proportion of individuals without a high school diploma, the employment/population ratio, and the average income of individuals over 15 in a given residential area³².

Neighbourhood safety

Living in a safe neighbourhood with strong social cohesion—little conflict and a strong culture of mutual assistance—can be beneficial for the development and well-being of very young children³³.

In 2016, according to their parents:

90.1% of children in kindergarten were living in a neighbourhood where it was safe to walk alone after dark.



92.4% were living in a neighbourhood where it was safe to play outside during the day.

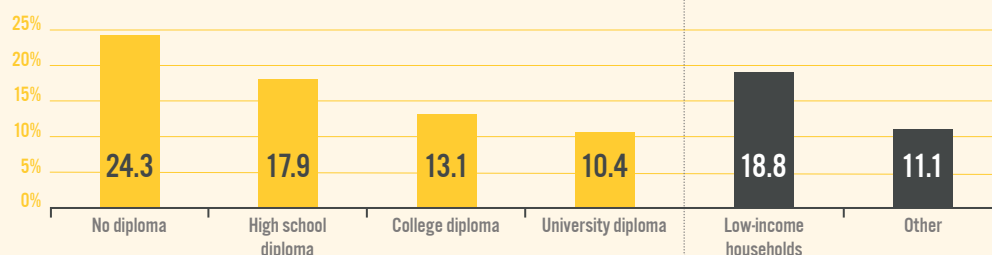


90.8% were living in a neighbourhood where there are safe parks, playgrounds and other places to play.

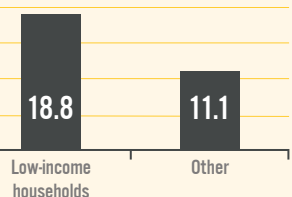


Perception of safety varies, however, depending on parents' level of education and household income.

Proportion of children living in neighbourhoods considered to be less than safe...
based on the highest diploma obtained by one or other of their parents



based on the Low-Income Measure



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

RESIDENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Housing

The type of housing young children live in can influence their development. For example, high housing costs increase the risk of experiencing food insecurity and stress, both of which have a negative impact on development. Living in inadequate housing makes young children more vulnerable to developing cognitive, language or socio-affective disorders³⁴.

There is also a connection between housing characteristics and the risk of child maltreatment. Studies have revealed a link between certain housing characteristics (such as noise, overcrowding, numerous comings and goings) and the quality of parent-child verbal interaction, parental sensitivity and feelings of parental competence³⁵.

In 2016, among families with at least one child between 0 and 5:



13.6% were living in **unaffordable housing**.

Housing is considered to be unaffordable if it costs more than 30% of the total household income (before taxes).



12.0% were living in **housing of unsuitable size**.

A dwelling is considered to be of suitable size if it has enough rooms to accommodate the needs of the household based on size and composition*.

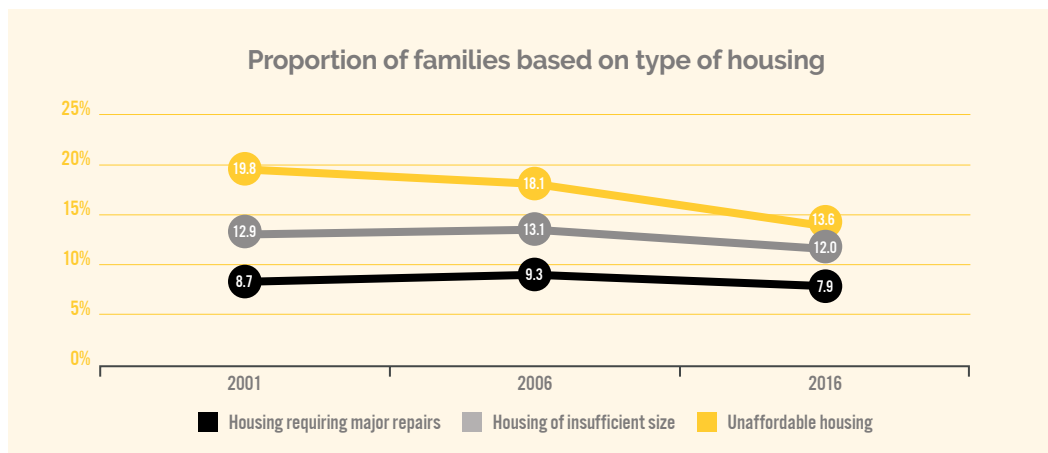


7.9% were living in **housing that needed major repairs**.

This category includes housing with defective plumbing or wiring, or that requires structural repairs to the walls, floors or ceilings.

The situation improved, however, between 2001 and 2016, especially with respect to unaffordable housing.

* Based on National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

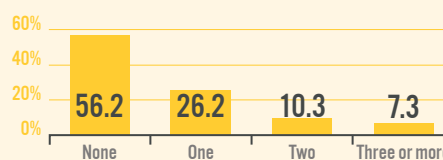
Moving house

Frequent moves during early childhood are associated with emotional and social difficulties³⁶. The proportion of children considered to be vulnerable in at least one area of development was higher among children whose parents had moved house twice or more during the five years preceding the study than those who had moved once or less.

It is important to clarify that moving may also be associated with another potentially stressful event for a child, such as parental separation, family reorganization or the arrival of a new baby³⁷.

In 2016-2017, the parents of **more than half of children enrolled in kindergarten had not moved house during the five years preceding the study**. However, 17.6% had moved twice or more during the same period, which could have been a source of stress for their children.

Distribution of kindergarteners based on number of moves in the previous five years



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.



Certain kindergarteners were more likely to have moved twice or more during the previous five years:



those whose parents did not have a diploma or only a high school diploma



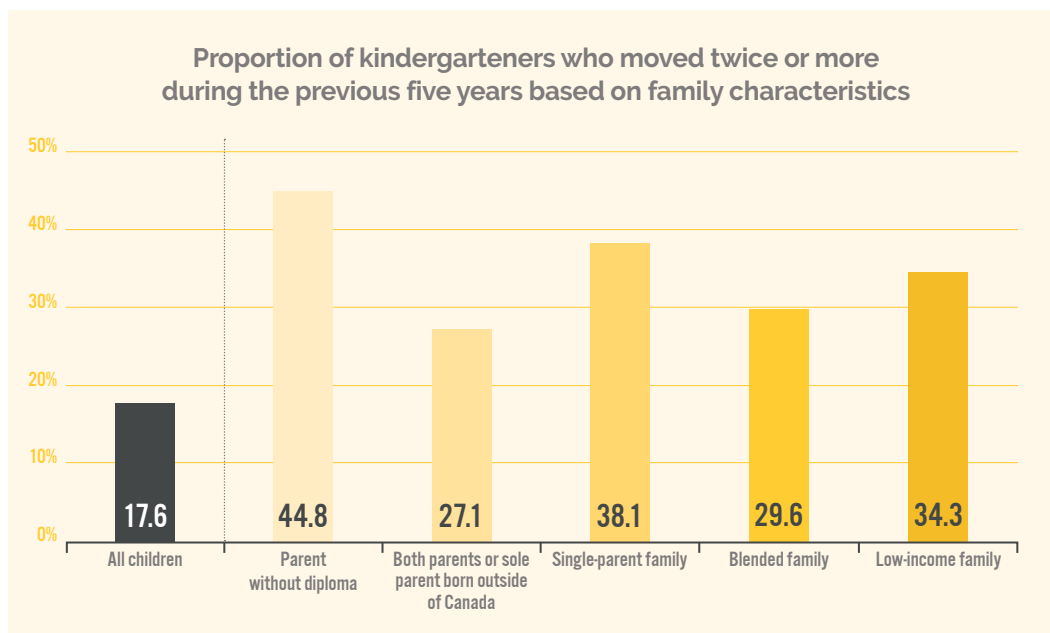
those whose parents were born outside of Canada



those living in single-parent or blended families



those living in low-income households.



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 *Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students*.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Key points

There has been improvement in many aspects of the residential environments of very young children living in Québec.

- ▶ 92.4% of children attending kindergarten in 2016-107 were living in neighbourhoods where it was safe to play outside during the day, and 90.8% were living in neighbourhoods where there were parks, playgrounds and other safe places to play.
- ▶ Children's housing situation improved between 2001 and 2016, particularly with respect to unaffordable housing. The proportion of children between 0 and 5 living in unaffordable housing declined from 19.8% to 13.6% during this period.

Certain aspects continue to be cause for concern, however, with respect to children's overall development.

- ▶ 24.3% of children of kindergarten age whose parents do not have a diploma live in neighbourhoods their parents consider to be less than safe. The corresponding figure for children who have at least one parent with a university diploma is 10.4%.
- ▶ 13.6% of families with at least one child between 0 and 5 are living in unaffordable housing, and 12.0% live in dwellings of inadequate size.
- ▶ Levels of material deprivation vary across Québec. In 2016, the three regions with the highest proportions of children between 0 and 5 living in neighbourhoods considered to have the greatest material deprivation were Nord-du-Québec (78.9%), Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (59.3%) and Côte-Nord (43.1%). Material deprivation is calculated based on average personal income, the proportion of individuals without a high school diploma and the employment/population ratio. Regional variations would be different if we used the Low-Income Measure (LIM) as an indicator. According to the LIM, the most materially disadvantaged region in the province would still be Nord-du-Québec, but the region of Montréal would be in second place.
- ▶ 44.8% of children in kindergarten whose parents do not have a diploma moved house twice or more during the five years preceding the study. The corresponding figure for all kindergarteners in 2016-2017 was just 17.6%.

SOMETHING CAN BE DONE

There are many possibilities for collective action that could improve the physical environments of young children—solutions that have been shown to be effective in practice on the ground and in the scientific literature both in Québec and around the world. Here are a few examples:



Providing financial support for economically disadvantaged families would help to improve young children's living conditions, particularly when support is focused on regions or neighbourhoods with large numbers of low-income households³⁸. **Investing in programs that provide affordable housing for families** offers young children safe, supportive communities to live in while improving families' financial situations and reducing food insecurity. Increased rent supplements and more housing cooperatives would be equally beneficial³⁹. **Stricter penalties for landlords who fail to respect housing sanitation regulations** would improve young children's living environments. It would also help economically vulnerable families⁴⁰ that are often forced to move frequently, which can affect the stability that is necessary for healthy development in childhood⁴¹.



Creating safe, accessible playgrounds in municipalities of all sizes would effectively improve the physical environments that young children are growing up in, particularly if the characteristics of different neighbourhoods are taken into account (rural, suburban, urban) and the general public is informed of the type and location of the playgrounds⁴². Municipals programs like *Prendre soin de notre monde* promote the development of healthy environments that improve families' quality of life in Québec municipalities⁴³. The city of Belœil's *Dans ma rue, on joue* initiative is another concrete measure that encourages children to get outside and play, especially in urban neighbourhoods.

Some of these measures have already been implemented in Québec. They need to be maintained and consolidated to safeguard the progress that has been made in this area.

How could these measures be more effectively applied? What else can be done? We hope this portrait of the situation will spark public reflection on these questions.

WHAT KIND OF CHILDCARE FACILITIES ARE THEY ATTENDING?



Several studies have shown that attending a high-quality educational childcare facility during early childhood can have positive effects on young children's development⁴⁴.

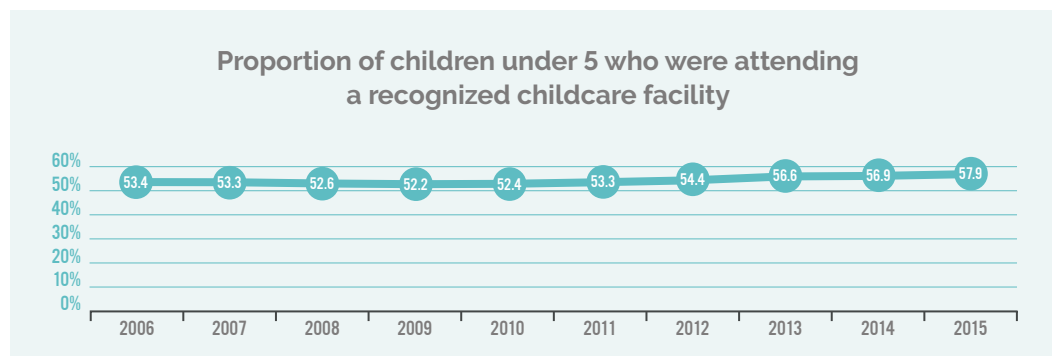
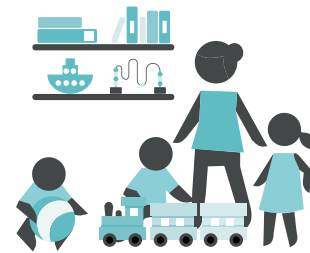
USE OF EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES

Attendance of recognized childcare services

According to provisional data compiled in 2018, 7,169 children between the ages of 0 and 4 were attending 4-year-old kindergarten (7.9% of all children in that age group). More specifically, 2,790 (3.1%) were in half-day 4-year-old kindergarten, while 4,379 (4.8%) were in all-day facilities (the latter only in disadvantaged neighbourhoods). We estimate that virtually all 5-year-olds were enrolled in 5-year-old kindergarten.

Sources: Ministère de la Famille, Système Clientèle des services de garde (CSG) et rapports d'activités des SGEE 2016-2017. Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES), provisional data on 4-year-old preschool for 2018-2019. Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ), demographic projections as at July 1, 2018 (provisional data).

57.9% of children under 5 in Québec attended a **childcare facility recognized by the Ministère de la Famille** in 2015, either a CPE (publicly funded childcare centre), daycare (subsidized or not) or family daycare. This figure is up slightly from 2006, when it was 53.4%.



Sources: Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2005-2006 à 2014-2015*, and the Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Estimation de la population québécoise des moins de 5 ans au 1^{er} juillet de l'année mentionnée, dérivée au 1^{er} avril par le ministère de la Famille*.

The proportion of children attending a CPE or recognized family daycare has declined since 2006.

The proportion of children in subsidized daycare has remained relatively stable.

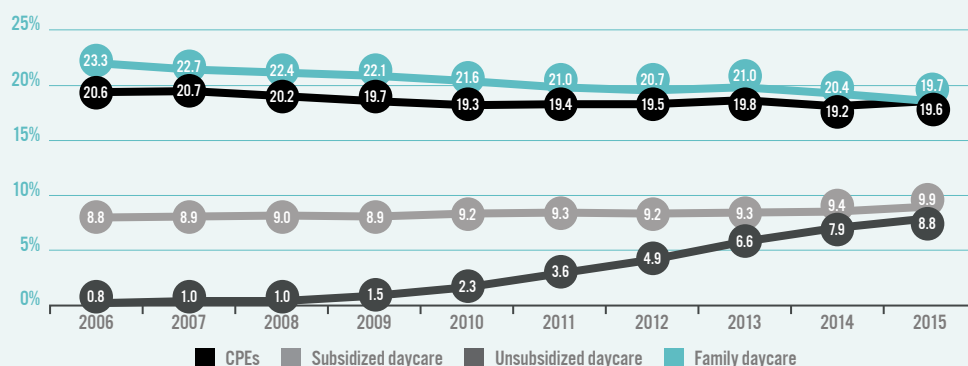
The proportion of children in unsubsidized daycare increased significantly between 2006 and 2015, going from 0.8% to 8.8%.



This phenomenon may reflect families' difficulty in obtaining a space in other types of childcare services*.



Distribution of children based on type of childcare facility



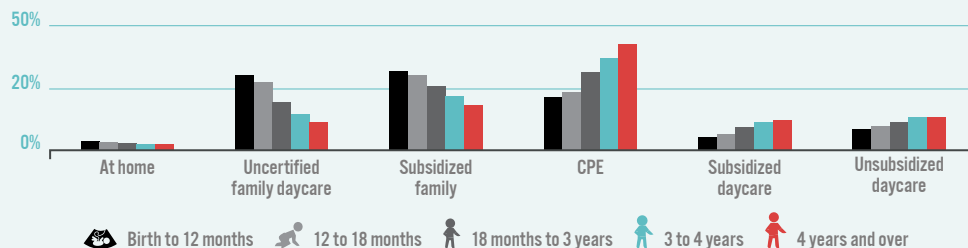
* Data for 2016 were not available when the 2019 Portrait went to print. They are available for consultation online, however, on the Early Childhood Observatory scorecard.

Sources: Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2005-2006 à 2014-2015*, and the Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Estimation de la population québécoise des moins de 5 ans au 1^{er} juillet de l'année mentionnée, dérivée au 1^{er} avril par le ministère de la Famille*.

Data from the 2017 QSPPKS, however, showed that the type of childcare facility attended varied depending on the age of the child. **Up until the age of 18 months, the proportion of children in a family daycare (subsidized or uncertified) was higher than that of children attending a childcare facility (CPE or subsidized/unsubsidized daycare).** This trend reverses after 18 months of age.



Distribution of children in different childcare facilities based on age

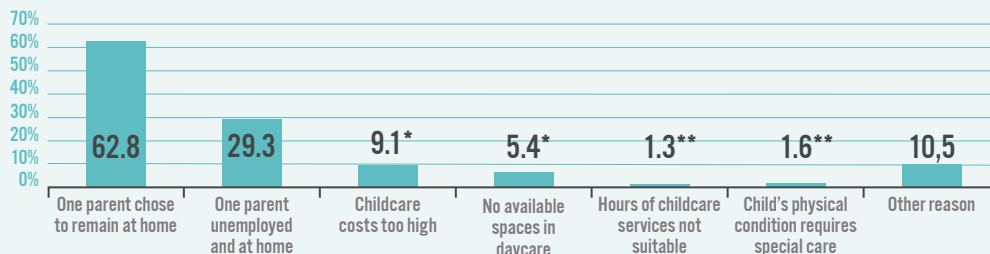


Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

Studies have shown that children in disadvantaged families have much to gain from attending high-quality educational childcare services⁴⁵.

According to the 2017 QSPPKS, 8% of kindergarteners had not regularly attended any type of childcare facility before starting school. The main explanation for this was one parent choosing to stay home for an extended period following their child's birth.

Proportion of kindergarteners who did not attend any type of childcare facility before starting school, based on the reason for non-attendance



* Coefficient of variation between 15% and 25%; interpret with caution.

** Coefficient of variation greater than 25%; imprecise estimate to be used for information purposes only.

Since parents were allowed to provide up to two main reasons, the total exceeds 100%.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

Age when children start attending a childcare facility

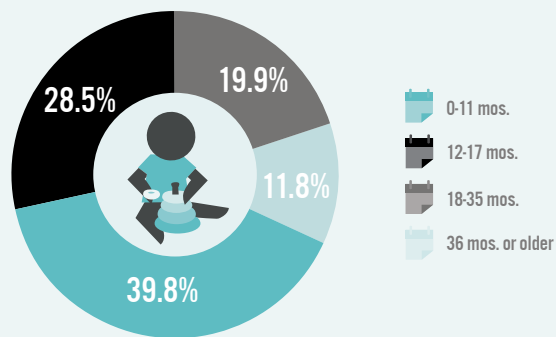
According to the results of the 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students, children who began attending a childcare facility after age 3 were more likely to be vulnerable in the areas of "Physical health and well-being" and "Communication skills and general knowledge" than their peers who entered daycare on a regular basis before 12 months of age⁴⁶.



Almost

40.0% of children in 5-year-old kindergarten in 2017 had entered daycare on a regular basis before the age of 1 year. Just 12% of the same cohort had entered daycare after 3 years of age.

Distribution of kindergarteners based on their age when they entered daycare



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

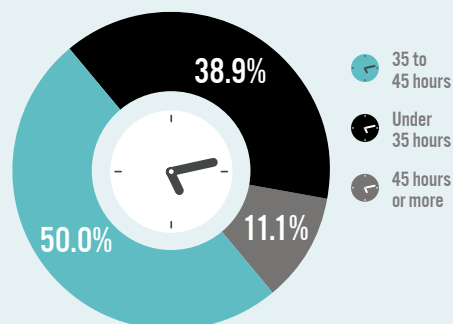
Time spent in daycare

When the childcare service is of inferior quality and children are part of a large group, the number of hours spent in daycare is associated with behaviour problems⁴⁷. For example, when compared with children who spent less than 25 hours a week in daycare, children who were in care for more than 35 hours were more likely to be vulnerable in at least one area of development, as well as in the areas of “Social skills” and “Emotional maturity”⁴⁸.

Half of the children in kindergarten had spent an average of between 35 and 45 hours a week in daycare before they started school. A total of **61.1% of the children had spent 35 hours or more a week in daycare**. Studies conducted over the past several years in Québec and elsewhere around the world have shown that educational childcare services can have a positive influence on early childhood development, especially in the case of children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This beneficial effect has been observed in high-quality educational childcare facilities.



Distribution of kindergarteners based on the number of hours/week spent in daycare before starting school



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDCARE SERVICES

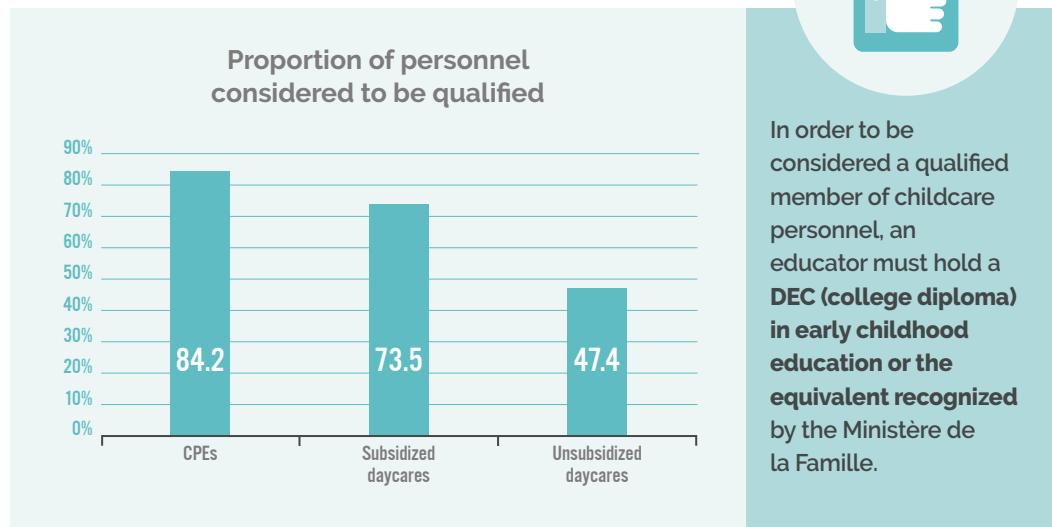
In order to have a positive effect on children's development, a childcare facility must be of high quality, staffed by educators with suitable training, such as a DEC (college diploma) in early childhood education.

Studies have proven the importance of having trained educators in early childcare facilities.

- Suitably trained educators are able to provide children with better personal care, are more sensitive to their needs and interact more with them.
- Specialized training in early childhood education enables personnel to offer an environment that is stimulating and appropriate for children. It also helps educators to better plan activities and create an environment that fosters children's social, language and cognitive development.
- Participating in ongoing training activities reflecting best practices is also associated with the ability to offer higher-quality educational services⁴⁹.

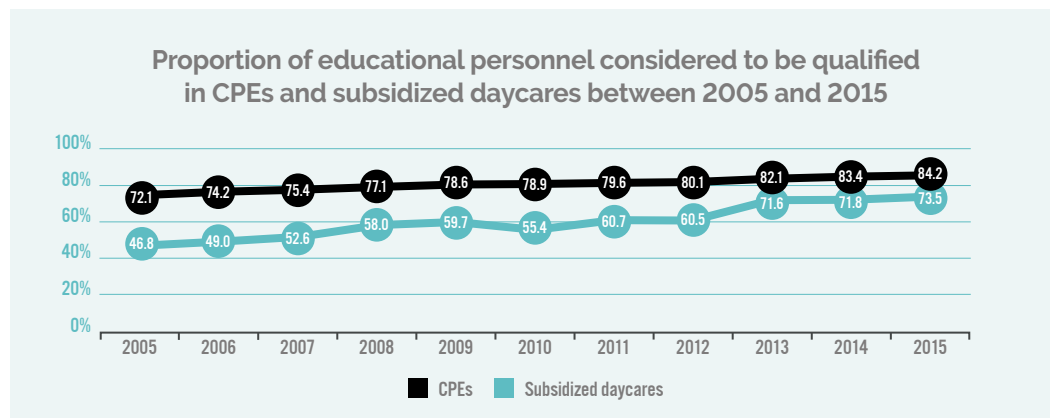
Qualified personnel

In 2015, the average proportion of educational personnel considered to be qualified in early childhood education varied depending on the type of facility.



Source: Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2005 à 2015*.

In the case of CPEs and subsidized daycare facilities, these figures have been rising steadily since 2005.



Source: Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2005 à 2015*.

Regulated establishments

As of September 2012, in CPEs and private daycares, at least two out of three members of the educational personnel are required to be qualified. Prior to August 31, 2012, however, only one out of three educators had to be trained. After the regulation was changed, CPEs and newly established daycares were given five years to comply with the new requirement. It is therefore important to take this regulatory change into account when interpreting results.

In 2015,
90.6% of CPEs were in compliance with this regulation:

74.6% of
subsidized daycares



and

18.7% of
unsubsidized daycares

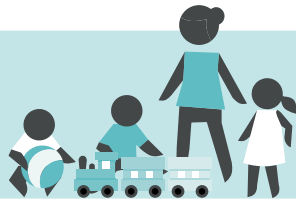







Source: Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2005 à 2015*.

Current orientations and practices in educational childcare services

According to the 2014 Québec Survey on the Quality of Educational Childcare (*Grandir en qualité*), knowledge of the curriculum framework “*Accueillir la petite enfance*” and recognition of its usefulness by educators in a given facility is associated with a higher quality of services overall⁵⁰. For methodological reasons, the results of this study do not include services provided by family daycare facilities.

In 2014-2015, the proportion of establishments that stated that they...

		CPEs	Subsidized daycares	Unsubsidized daycares
	applied the “ <i>Accueillir la petite enfance</i> ” program	97.4%	86.7%	86.5%
	had an official orientation document on healthy eating habits	52.6%	23.6%	36.1%
	had an official orientation document on active play and motor development	30.2%	22.3%	24.9%
	offered activities designed to facilitate children's transition to school	83.8%	77.0%	74.7%
	made use of municipal facilities (park or playground, for example)	75.6%	59.1%	61.6%

In 2014-2015, 14.4% of childcare facilities had not established any framework for promoting healthy eating habits. The figure for subsidized daycares was 22.2%, 17.3% for unsubsidized daycares and just 6.2% for CPEs.

Source: Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2004 à 2015*.

EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES

Key points

The quality of educational childcare services in Québec has improved in many respects:

- ▶ The proportion of children under 5 years of age who attend a recognized daycare facility has increased slightly over the past several years, rising from 52.2% in 2009 to 57.9% in 2015.
- ▶ The proportion of educational personnel considered to be qualified working in educational childcare rose between 2005 and 2015 from 72.1% to 84.2% in CPEs, and from 46.8% to 73.5% in subsidized daycare facilities.
- ▶ A strong proportion of educational childcare services offer activities designed to facilitate children's transition to school, helping them to gradually adapt to a new environment. In 2014-2015, this program was offered by 83.8% of CPEs, 77.0% of subsidized daycare and 74.7% of unsubsidized daycare facilities.

Certain elements, however, continue to give cause for concern:

- ▶ Just 18.7% of unsubsidized daycares comply with the Ministère de la Famille regulation that requires two out of three educators to have the necessary qualifications, as compared to 90.6% of CPEs and 74.6% of subsidized daycares. It is important to note, however, that prior to August 31, 2012, however, only one out of three educators had to be trained. After the regulation was changed, CPEs and newly established daycares were given five years to comply with the new requirement.
- ▶ 61.1% of children in kindergarten had spent over 35 hours a week in childcare during their early years. On the one hand, this figure could be cause for concern, given that a large number of hours spent in daycare increases a child's risk of vulnerability in the areas of social skills and emotional maturity. On the other hand, children who attend high-quality daycares may be less developmentally vulnerable, but this situation has yet to be adequately documented.
- ▶ Only 30.2% of CPEs, 24.9% of unsubsidized daycares and 22.3% of subsidized daycares make use of the official document that provides a framework for active play and motor development. Although applying these guidelines is only one of the factors that influence the quality of a childcare facility, we feel it is important to point out this fact.

SOMETHING CAN BE DONE

There are many possibilities for collective action that could improve educational childcare services—solutions that have been shown to be effective in practice on the ground and in the scientific literature both in Québec and around the world. Here are a few examples:



Creating additional spaces in high-quality educational childcare facilities (4-year-old kindergarten and educational daycare) specifically for children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods with fewer services⁵¹ would be an excellent step to take. A program like "*Interventions éducatives précoces*" (IÉP) can help ensure that vulnerable children have access to educational childcare services of superior quality. The purpose of this program is to improve young children's cognitive, language, socio-affective and psychomotor development and to facilitate their transition to school⁵². Supporting the efforts and quality of **supplementary services for neighbourhood organizations, like drop-in childcare and *Organismes communautaires Famille (OCF)***, is an effective way to help parents of young children who have difficulty accessing daycare services—newcomers, for example⁵³.



Continuing efforts to ensure that all educational childcare facilities reach the objective of **two qualified educators out of every three** could help to improve the quality of educational childcare overall⁵⁴. **Recognizing and facilitating educators' access to training** would also improve the quality of services offered⁵⁵, as would **providing educators with support and the tools they need in their everyday work environment**. The latter measure is particularly effective when educators are given access to a pedagogical consultant or information on best practices⁵⁶.



Since young children spend an average of 35 hours/week in daycare, educational childcare facilities offer the perfect environment to encourage healthy lifestyle habits. Initiatives like ***Attention! Enfants en mouvement*** make the most of that opportunity⁵⁷. This training program, was developed in Laval to support childcare services intent on giving their young charges more opportunities for physical activity. **Encouraging childcare services to apply a framework like *Gazelle et Potiron***—by offering incentive subsidies, for example—is a concrete action that has been shown to be effective⁵⁸. *Gazelle et Potiron* focuses on creating environments that promote healthy eating, active play and motor development.

Some of these measures have already been implemented in Québec. They need to be maintained and consolidated to safeguard the progress that has been made in this area.

How could these measures be more effectively applied? What else can be done? We hope this portrait of the situation will spark public reflection on these questions.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 edition of our annual portrait provides evidence of a general improvement in young children's growing-up environments in Québec. Over the past ten years, the proportion of very young children living in low-income families declined, while that of families in which both parents (or the sole parent, in the case of single-parent families) are employed increased. The 2019 portrait also shows that the vast majority of young children live in neighbourhoods where there are safe places to play outside during the day. The proportion of children between the ages of 0 and 5 enrolled in educational childcare services is on the rise, as is the ratio of qualified educators working in those facilities.

There are, however, some causes for concern. One out of ten families with at least one very young child is still experiencing food insecurity. Parents' stress levels, especially that of mothers, are worrying. Certain regions of Québec are more materially disadvantaged than others. We have learned, also, that there is still much to be done to improve the quality of educational childcare services across the province.

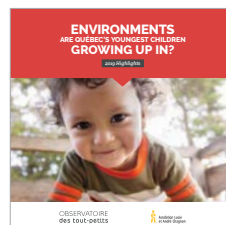
As a society, we need to be concerned about the environments our children are growing up in: those environments have a deciding influence on early childhood development. Offering better work-life balance measures to all parents of young children and providing more flexible arrangements when they return to work after parental leave are two examples of potential solutions that could help to alleviate parents' stress. Providing financial support for economically disadvantaged families and investing in affordable housing programs would improve young children's living conditions. Finally, giving educators the support and the tools they need to work effectively, as well as more opportunities for training, could play an important role in improving the quality of educational childcare services.

The scientific literature and practical experience on the ground has shown us that steps can be taken to help ensure that every young child in Québec has the best possible start in life. Every sector of society has to be on board. Our futures depend on it.

The Early Childhood Observatory has produced a series of documents to accompany the *2019 Portrait*:



Regional portraits for each of Québec's 17 regions, four of which have been translated into English: Montréal, Outaouais, Estrie and Laval.



A brochure presenting the highlights of the *2019 portrait*



Visuals for your presentations or social media

These documents are all available on our website at
tout-petits.org/portrait2019

Our 2016 and 2017 Portraits are also available for consultation.



These reports and all related documents are available on our website at the following addresses:
tout-petits.org/portrait2016
tout-petits.org/portrait2017

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The mission of the Early Childhood Observatory is to help ensure that the development and well-being of Quebec's very youngest children has a place on the province's list of social priorities. In order to do so, the Observatory compiles the most rigorous data on 0-5 year-olds which it then disseminates to incite dialogue on collective actions in this area.

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