

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

2019 Portrait · Estrie



OBSERVATOIRE
des tout-petits

 Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon

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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.

F. Dagenais

Fannie Dagenais



Fannie Dagenais at 5 years old

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 in Estrie 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 in Estrie. 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 ESTRIE REGION

Key points*

SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES AS COMPARED TO THE WHOLE OF QUÉBEC*

- ▶ The Estrie has a lower proportion of children born into families in which at least one parent was born outside of Canada.
- ▶ In 2016-2017, the proportion of kindergarteners who spoke French (possibly in addition to another language) at home was higher in Estrie than in the rest of Québec.
- ▶ The proportion of children between 0 and 5 living in low-income families is lower in Estrie than in the rest of Québec.
- ▶ The proportion of kindergarteners who were under one year of age when they entered childcare on a regular basis was higher in Estrie than in the rest of Québec.
- ▶ The proportion of kindergarteners who had visited a library less than once a month with an adult in their household during the year before they started school was higher in Estrie than in the rest of Québec.

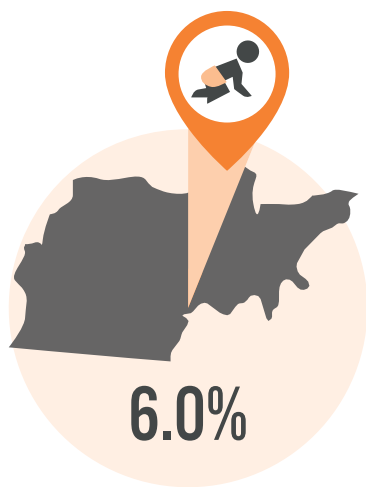
CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE PORTRAIT OF THE VERY YOUNG IN ESTRIE HAVE EVOLVED OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS:

- ▶ In recent years, the number of births in the region has been on the decline.
- ▶ Between 1996 and 2016, the proportion of children living in urban areas increased.
- ▶ Since 2004, the proportion of children between 0 and 5 living in low-income families has declined.
- ▶ Between 2001 and 2016, the employment rate of fathers of children between 0 and 5 dropped slightly, while that of mothers rose.

* The indicators mentioned in this section were chosen because the region stood out from the rest of the province in these areas.

WHO ARE THESE 0-5 YEAR-OLDS?





In 2018,
there were

19,569

children between the ages of 0 and 5
living in Estrie, accounting for **6.0%**
of the total **regional population**.

In 2008, the corresponding figure was
18,243, accounting for **6.0%** of the total
regional population.



In 2018,

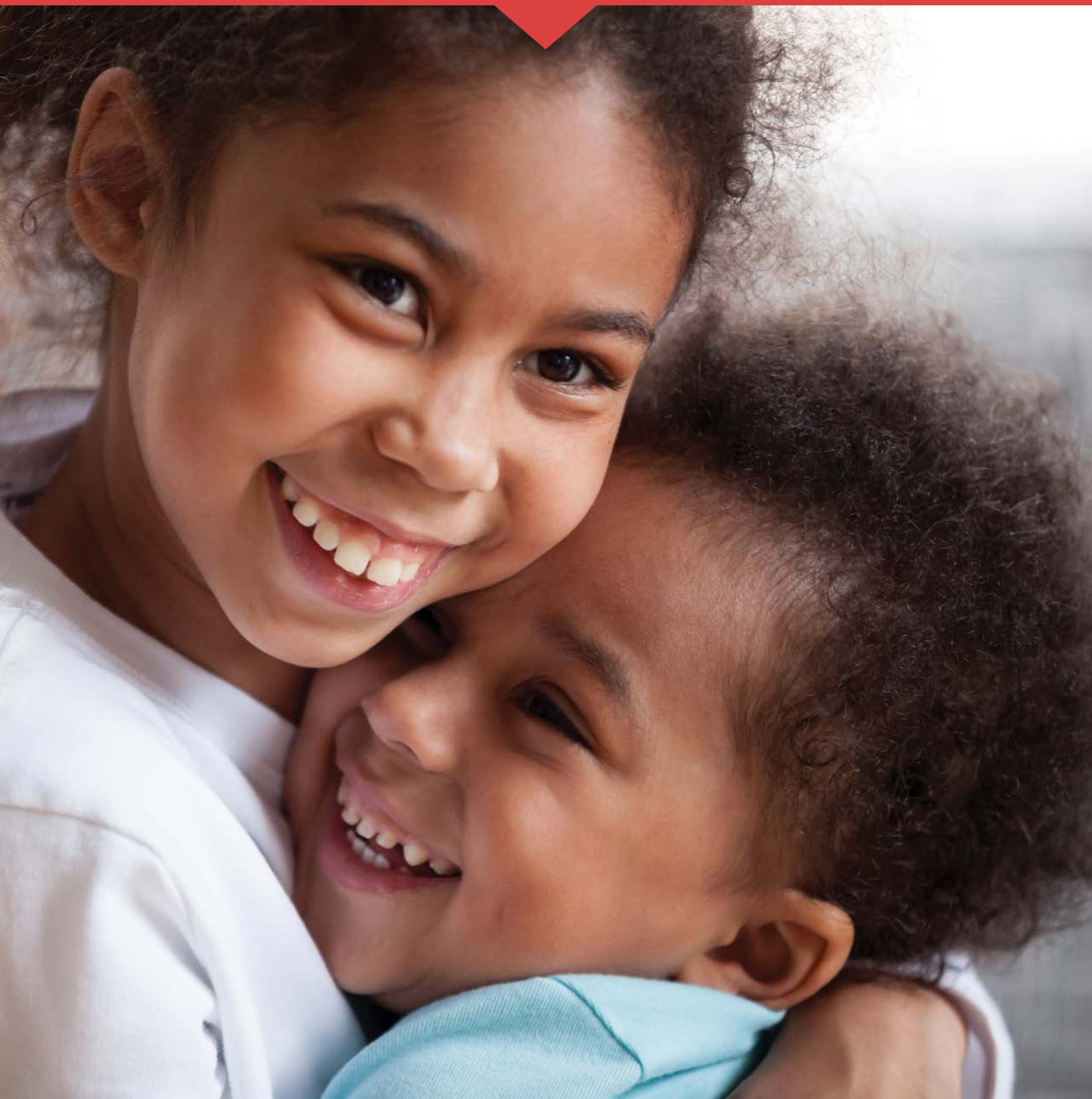
3,042

births were recorded.

This figure is down **8.2%** from 2008, when
3,312 children were born in the region.

Sources: Institut de la statistique du Québec and Statistics Canada, Population estimates, adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.
Registre des événements démographiques. Provisional data for 2018.

**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

Parental involvement during the first years of a child's life has a significant influence on their development. Taking advantage of parental leave is therefore a significant social measure that allows parents to contribute to their child's healthy development and lay the foundation for a positive work-family balance².



In 2018,
4,798 new parents in Estrie benefited from the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) (*Régime québécois d'assurance parentale* or RQAP).
In 2008, that number was **4,892**.

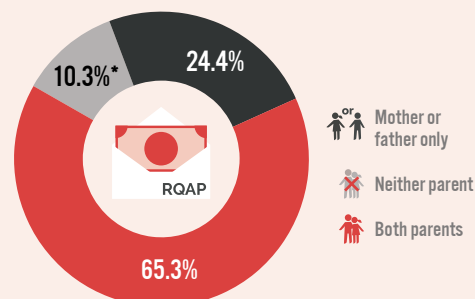
Source: Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, *Statistiques officielles sur les prestataires du Régime québécois d'assurance parentale*, 2008-2018.

Data compiled on the parents of children born in Canada who were attending kindergarten in 2016-2017 allowed researchers to calculate the proportion of children in the region whose mother, father or both parents took advantage of paid parental leave under the QPIP after the birth of their child (i.e., in 2010-2011).

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

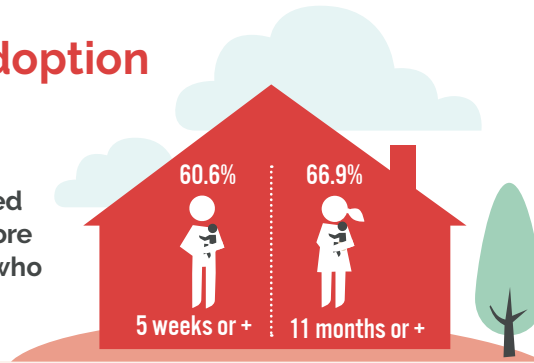
Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students*.

Number of beneficiaries of the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) in 2018

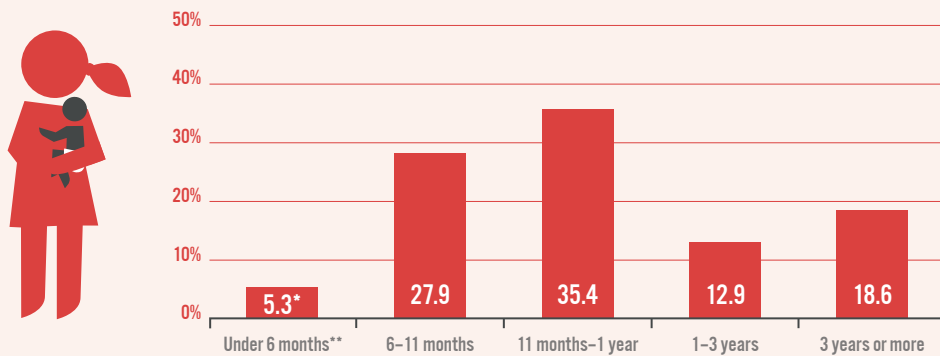


Time spent at home after a child's birth or adoption

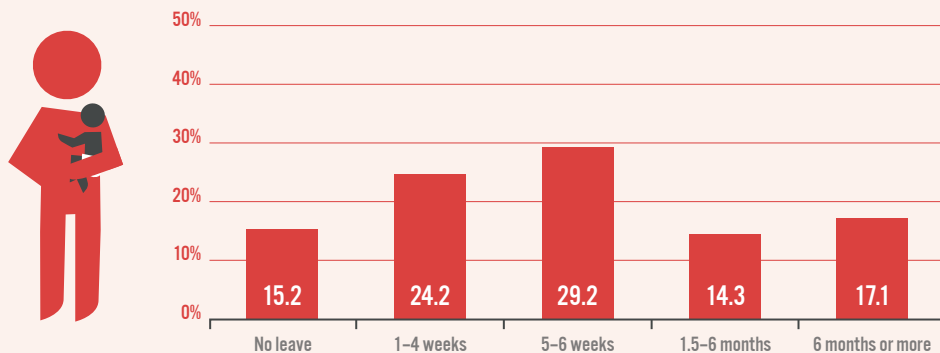
Among children in the region who were attending kindergarten in 2016-2017, **66.9%** had a mother who had stayed at home for 11 months or more after their birth, and **60.6%** had a father who stayed at home for 5 weeks or more.



Distribution of kindergarteners based on the amount of time their mothers stayed at home after they were born



Distribution of kindergarteners based on the amount of time their fathers stayed at home after they were born



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

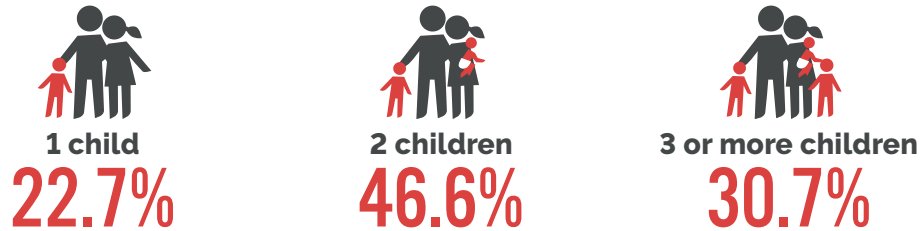
** The "Under 6 months" category includes children whose mother did not take any parental leave.

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

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

Siblings

In 2016, the youngest children in Estrie were living in families with:



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, 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.

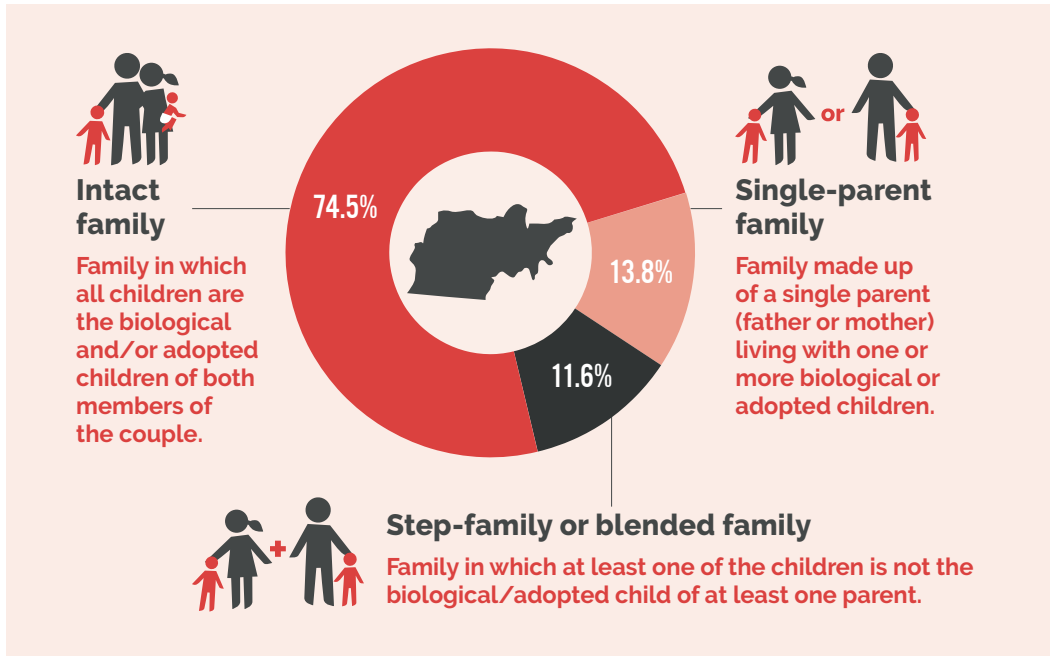
21.6% of children attending kindergarten in 2016-2017 were not living with both their parents*.



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

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

In 2016, young children in Estrie were living in...



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 skills⁵. Children exposed to several languages may have more difficulty understanding vocabulary (in French or English) at the beginning of the school years than their peers⁶.

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 perseverance⁷.

In 2016-2017, **92.1%** of kindergarteners in Estrie spoke French at home (with or without the addition of another language), while **4.6%**** spoke English but not French (with or without the addition of another language). The mother tongue (and sole language spoken at home) of **3.3%** of children was neither French nor English.



** Poor accuracy: coefficient of variation > 25%. Provided for information purposes only.

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 child⁸.



4.1%* of children attending kindergarten in 2016-2017 in Estrie 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.

* 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.

Mother's age at birth

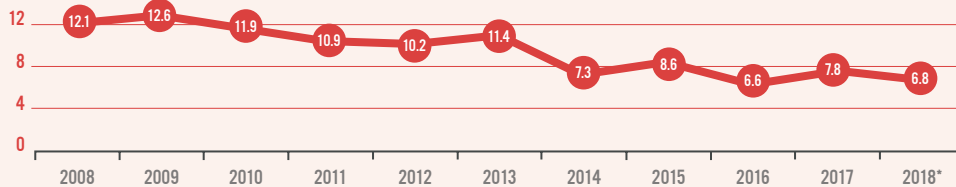
The scientific literature tells us that a young parental age (under 20) is associated with more behaviour problems in young children⁹. The younger the mother, the greater her child's risk of overall developmental vulnerability¹⁰.

6.8
1,000

out of every 1,000 young women under 20 gave birth in 2018. In 2008, the corresponding figure was 12.1 out of 1,000.



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



* Provisional data

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

Immigration

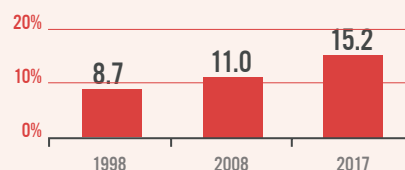
Proportionally speaking, more children born outside of Canada now living in Québec are vulnerable in at least one area of development than are their counterparts who were born in Canada. Furthermore, the proportion of kindergarteners who are vulnerable in at least one area of development is higher among children whose parents (or sole parent) were born outside of Canada¹¹.

15.2%

In Estrie in 2017, 15.2% of newborns had at least one parent who was born abroad. This proportion has been on the rise since 1998.

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

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

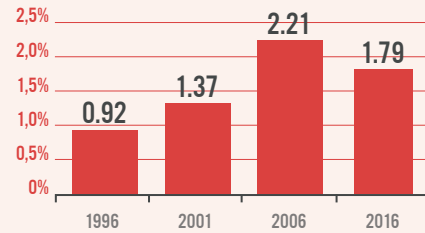


In 2016, in Estrie,



1.79% of children between 0 and 5 had parents who had been living in Canada for under 5 years. After increasing between 1996 and 2006, this figure declined in 2016.

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



In 2016, 320 children between 0 and 5 living in Estrie were born outside of Canada, accounting for 1.59% of all children in that age group in the region.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses, adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec, and the Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Registre des événements démographiques*.

Education

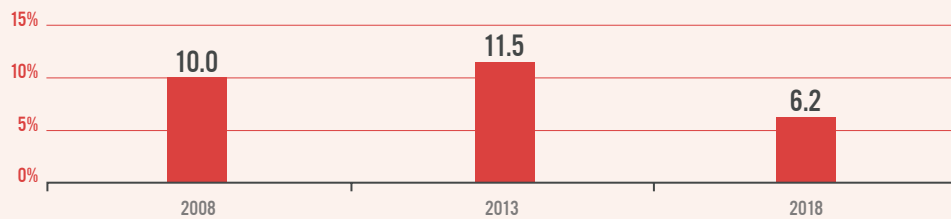
According to the 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students, the proportion of children who are vulnerable in at least one area of development decreases as their parents' level of education rises¹².



In 2018, **6.2%** of all babies born in Estrie were born to mothers who had not finished high school.

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

Proportion of babies born in 2008, 2013 and 2018 to mothers who had not finished high school





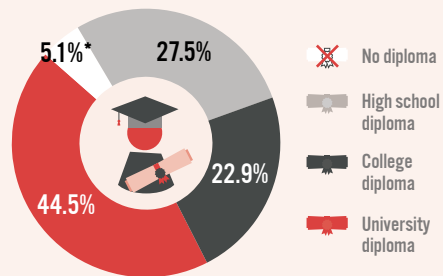
The majority of children attending kindergarten in Estrie in 2016-2017 had at least

one parent with a college or university diploma.

* 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.

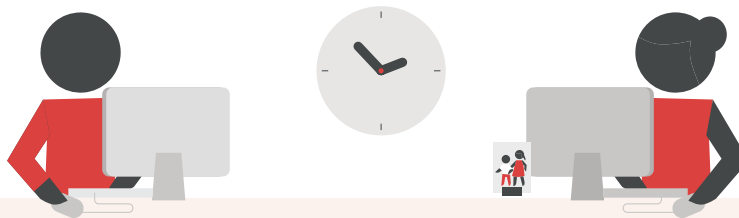
Highest diploma obtained by at least one parent



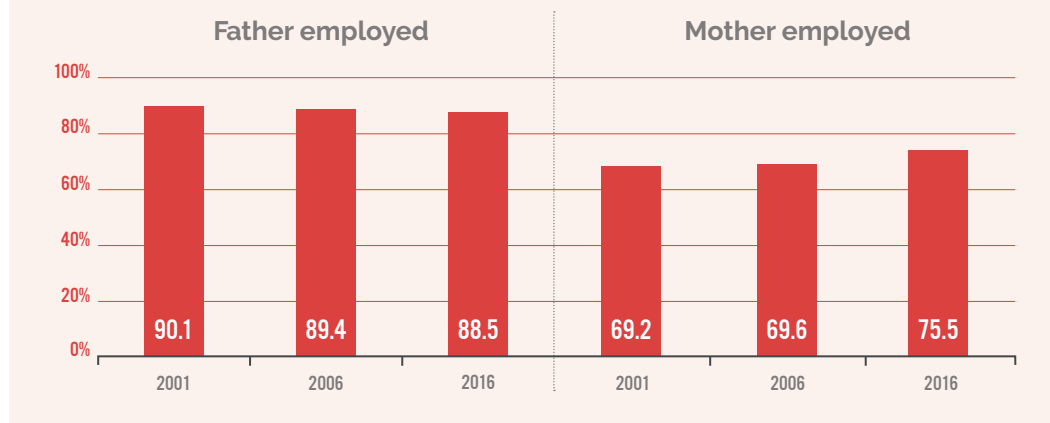
Employment

In 2016, **71.3%** of families in Estrie with at least one child 5 years of age or under included two parents (or a sole parent, in the case of single-parent families) who were/was employed, while **10.4%** had no parent with paid employment.

Development in the rate of employment between 2001 and 2006 for fathers and mothers of children between 0 and 5 is shown below.



Rate of employment of fathers and mothers with at least one child 5 or under in 2001, 2006 and 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006 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 one¹³.

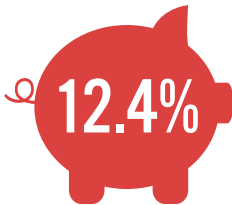
Under
\$69,820



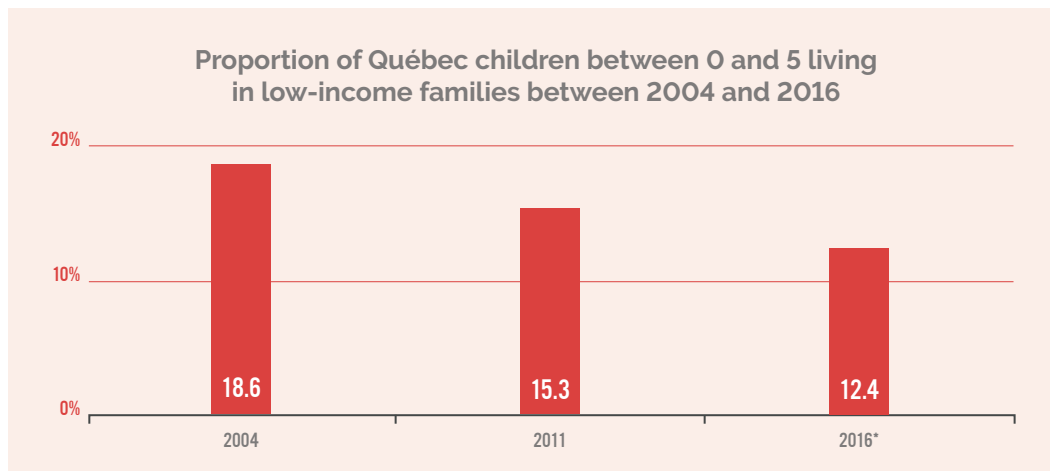
The 2015 household income of half of families in Estrie with at least one child under 5 was under \$69,820 after taxes.

In 2005, that amount was \$55,876 (adjusted for inflation).

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



of children between 0 and 5 in Estrie were living in a low-income (before tax) family in 2016*, accounting for about 2,470 young children. Over the past few years, however, this figure has been on the decline.



* Low income rate based on the low-income measure

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

Difficulty with daily activities and 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 vulnerable¹⁴.

Among parents of children attending kindergarten in 2016-2017...



21.7% said they had **difficulty accompanying their children to their activities.**



11.4% found it **difficult to prepare their children for the day** (i.e., making sure they had enough to eat and were appropriately dressed).

25.2% found it **difficult to find time to play with them.**

For comparative purposes, the corresponding figure for the whole of Québec is 26.1%.

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



These data are worrying, as playing with their children helps parents create and maintain a bond with them and stimulate their development.

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

Among parents of children attending kindergarten in 2016-2017...



94.1% had someone **they trusted whom they could turn to** for advice if they had problems.



96.5% said they **had people they could count on** in an emergency.



89.9% 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

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 writing¹⁵. Talking to children while reading out loud or looking at pictures with them helps reduce the probability they will be seen as vulnerable in kindergarten, particularly in the area of "Communication skills and general knowledge"¹⁶.

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



44.0% had been **read to or told stories** every day by an adult in the household.

16.5% had practised **saying or recognizing the letters of the alphabet** every day with an adult in the household.



18.5% had practised **saying or recognizing their numbers** every day with an adult in the household.



27.3% had been **encouraged to use numbers in their daily activities** every day.



44.0% had **visited the library at least once a month** with an adult in the household.

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

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 hours¹⁷, **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 education¹⁸. That is exactly what Québec's *Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité*¹⁹ 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 leave²⁰. Such a measure would promote a more equitable sharing of parents' work at home, however, while strengthening fathers' feeling of parenting competence²¹.



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)²². The efficiency of similar programs has already been proven²³. **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 stores²⁴.

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?

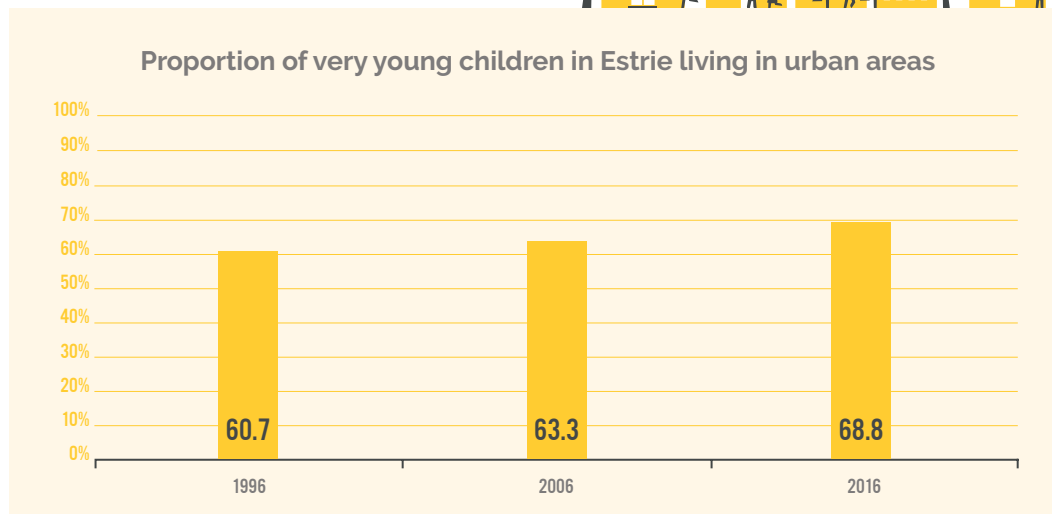


The environment children grow up has an impact on their development. Having access to high-quality physical spaces gives them the opportunity to explore and learn.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT

Urban or rural?

In 2016, **68.8%** of very young children in Estrie lived in urban areas and 31.2% in rural areas in 2016. The proportion of children living in urban areas increased between 1996 and 2016.



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

An illustration at the top of the block showing urban buildings on the left and rural buildings (a house and a barn) on the right, with a dashed vertical line separating the two sections.

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

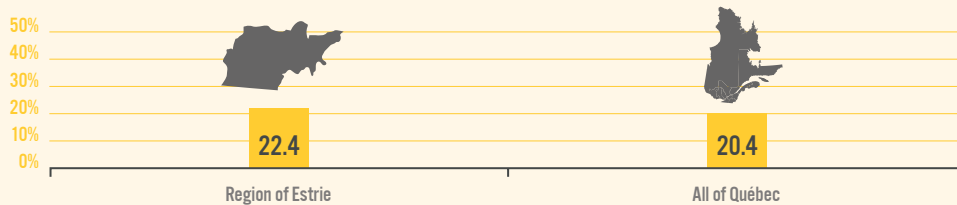
Children living in higher-income neighbourhoods have better verbal skills and fewer behaviour problems²⁵. According to the QLSCD, those children are less likely to have trouble handling the demands of an academic environment than their counterparts in less privileged neighbourhoods²⁶.

Children who live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are at greater risk of being exposed to various pollutants, excessive noise, overcrowded housing and sub-standard housing²⁷. Studies done in 1975 and 2005 even show a connection between neighbourhood socio-economic levels and child maltreatment²⁸.



In 2016, **22.4%** of very young children in Estrie were living in neighbourhoods considered to have the greatest material deprivation. The corresponding figure for the whole of Québec was 20.4%

Proportion of children living in neighbourhoods considered to be the most materially disadvantaged in 2016



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 age 15 in a given residential area²⁹.

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 children³⁰.

In 2016, according to their parents,
88.7% of kindergarteners in Estrie
were living in a neighbourhood
where it was safe to walk alone after dark.



95.5% of kindergarteners
in Estrie were living
in a neighbourhood where it was
safe to play outside during the day.



87.5% of kindergarteners
in Estrie were
living in a neighbourhood where
there were safe parks, playgrounds
and other places to play.



However,
13.1% of kindergarteners in Estrie were living in a
neighbourhood that their parents considered to be less
than safe. This figure is comparable to that for the rest of Québec.

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 disorders³¹.

There is also a connection between housing characteristics and the risk of child maltreatment. Studies have revealed a link between housing characteristics (such as noise, overcrowding, numerous comings and goings) and the quality of parent-child verbal interaction, parental sensitivity and feelings of parental competence³².

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



10.0% were living in unaffordable housing.

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



6.1% were living in a dwelling of unsuitable size.

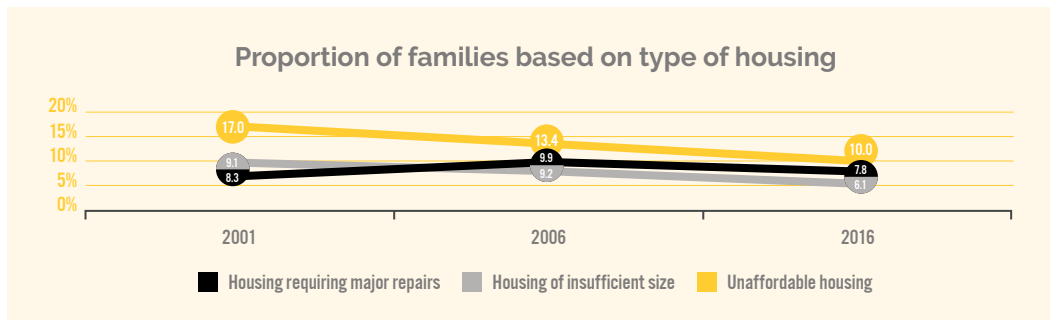
A dwelling is considered to be of suitable size if it has enough rooms to accommodate the needs of the household based on size and composition*.



7.8% 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.

* Based on National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.

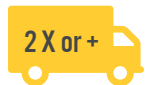


Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses, adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

Moving house

Frequent moves during early childhood are associated with emotional and social difficulties³³. 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 can also be associated with another potentially stressful event for a child, such as parents separating, family reorganization or the arrival of a new baby³⁴.



In 2016-2017, the parents of **19.6%** of children attending 5-year-old kindergarten **had moved at least twice in the previous 5 years**.

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

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 households³⁵. **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 beneficial³⁶. **Stricter penalties for landlords who fail to respect housing sanitation regulations** would improve young children's living environments. It would also help economically vulnerable families³⁷ that are often forced to move frequently, which can affect the stability that is necessary for healthy development in childhood³⁸.



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 playgrounds³⁹. Municipals programs like *Prendre soin de notre monde* promote the development of healthy environments that improve families' quality of life in Québec municipalities⁴⁰. 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 EDUCATIONAL 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 development⁴¹.

USE OF EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES

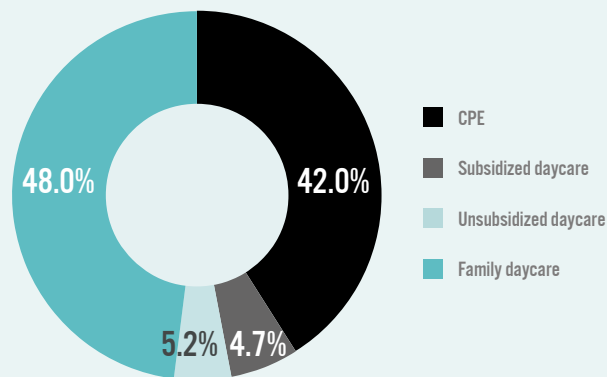
Attendance of recognized childcare services

56.2% of children under 5 living in the Estrie region in 2105 attended a **childcare facility recognized by the Ministère de la Famille**, either a CPE (publicly funded childcare centre), daycare (subsidized or not) or family daycare. This figure was 55.9% in 2006.

In 2015, children attending a recognized childcare facility were distributed as shown in the table below.

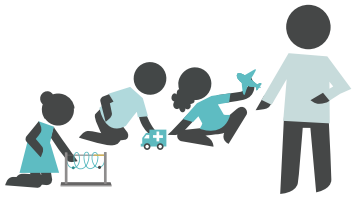


Proportion of children under 5 who were attending a recognized childcare facility in 2015



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*.

Studies have shown that children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have much to gain from attending high-quality educational childcare facilities⁴².



In the Estrie region, **92.0%** of children in kindergarten in 2016-2017 had been in some kind of regular childcare for at least three months before starting school.

For **57.8%** of children in the region who were not in some kind of regular childcare before the age of 5, one of the reasons was one parent choosing to stay home.

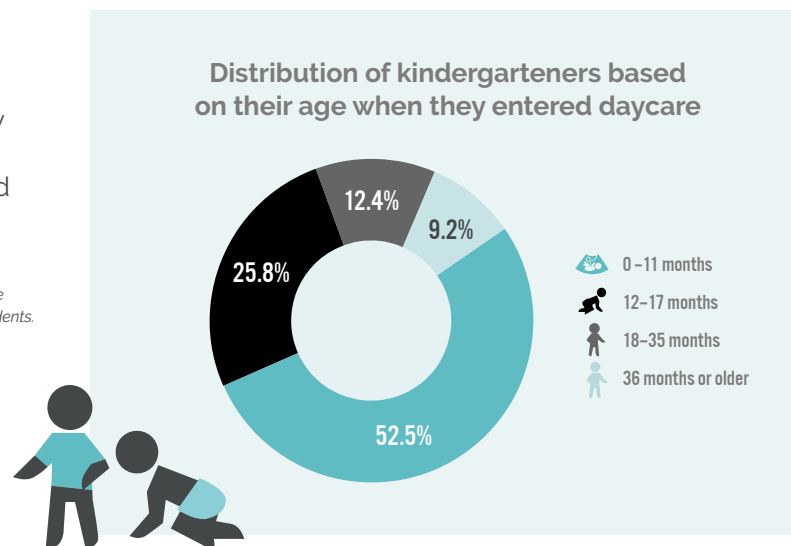
Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

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 were their peers who entered daycare on a regular basis before they were 12 months old⁴³.

The age at which kindergarteners in Estrie in 2016-2017 had started regularly attending daycare varied from one child to another.

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



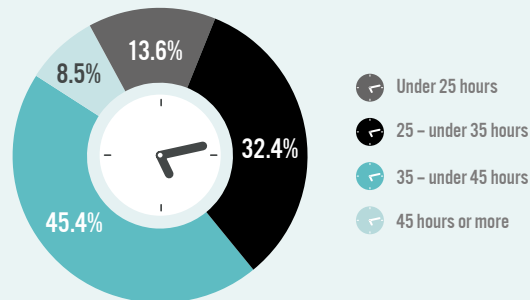
Time spent in childcare before starting school

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 problems⁴⁴. 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”⁴⁵.

In the Estrie region, **53.9%** of children attending kindergarten in 2016-2017 had spent **an average of 35 hours or more in childcare** during their early childhood.

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

Distribution of kindergarteners based on the number of hours/week spent in childcare



CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDCARE SERVICES

In order to have a positive effect on children's development, the 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 based on best practices is also associated with the ability to offer higher-quality educational services⁴⁶.

In 2015,

92.0% of the educational personnel in CPEs in the region

and

74.6% of educational personnel in subsidized daycares



were considered to be qualified. In 2005, the corresponding figures were 82.3% and 60.5%.



In order to be considered a qualified member of childcare personnel, an educator must hold a **DEC (college diploma) in early childhood education or the equivalent** recognized by the Ministère de la Famille.



Since September 2012, **at least two out of three members of the educational personnel of CPEs and private daycares have been required to be qualified.** In 2015, 100% of CPEs in Estrie were in compliance with this regulation. Private subsidized daycares were also 100% in compliance.

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

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 services⁴⁷ 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 school⁴⁸. 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 example⁴⁹.



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 overall⁵⁰. **Recognizing and facilitating educators' access to training** would also improve the quality of services offered⁵¹, 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 practices⁵².



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 opportunity⁵³. 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 effective⁵⁴. *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.

HOW THE ESTRIE REGION COMPARES WITH QUÉBEC AS A WHOLE

Caution must be used when interpreting this data. Certain differences between the region and the whole of Québec could be due to random fluctuations. In the case of survey data, particularly from the 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students (QSPPKS), the "+" and "-" signs indicate that the proportion observed in the region is either higher or lower than that observed in the rest of the province.

INDICATORS		Estrie 05	All of Québec
WHO ARE THESE 0-5 YEAR-OLDS?	Number of children between the ages of 0 and 5 (2018)	19,569	530,091
	Proportion of children between 0 and 5 in the total population (2018)	6.0%	6.3%
	Number of births (2018)	3,042	83,800
FAMILY ENVIRONMENT	Number of new beneficiaries of the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) (2018)	4,798	125,639
	Proportion of kindergarteners whose mother stayed at home for 6 months or longer after they were born	94.7%	95.0%
	Proportion of kindergarteners whose father stayed at home for 1 week or longer after they were born	84.8%	82.4%
	Distribution of kindergarteners born in Canada (whose mother or father are their biological or adoptive parents) based on whether their mother or father took paid parental leave under the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (2017)	Mother or father only: 24.4% Both: 65.3% Neither: 10.3%*	Mother or father only: 28.4% Both: 61.3% Neither: 10.3%
	Number of children per family (2016)	1 child: 22.7% 2 children: 46.6% 3 or more children: 30.7%	1 child: 26.3% 2 children: 46.2% 3 or more children: 27.6%
	Proportion of kindergartners whose parents are not living together (2017)	21.6%	17.5%
	Family structure of children between 0 and 5 (2016)	Intact: 74.5% Single-parent: 13.8% Step/blended family: 11.6%	Intact: 76.3% Single-parent: 13.9% Step/blended family: 9.8%

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT	Distribution of kindergarteners based on the language most often spoken at home (2017)	French (with/without other language): 92.1% (+) English and/or other languages: 7.9%* (-)	French (with/without other language): 85.4% English and/or other languages: 14.6%
	Proportion of women under 20 who gave birth (2018)	6.8/1,000 women	5.4/1,000 women
	Proportion of kindergarteners who have at least one parent living with a physical or mental disability or a chronic health problem that could limit their ability to provide care and support for their child (2017)	4.1%*	4.5%
	Proportion of babies born to mothers who had not finished high school (2018)	6.2%	4.8%
	Distribution of kindergarteners based on the highest diploma obtained by one or other of their parents (or sole parent) (2017)	No diploma: 5.1%* High school diploma: 27.5% (+) College diploma: 22.9% University diploma: 44.5% (-)	No diploma: 3.8% High school diploma: 20.0% College diploma: 22.2% University diploma: 54.0%
	Proportion of children between 0 and 5 whose two parents (or sole parent) have been living in Canada for at least 5 years (2016)	1.79%	2.69%
	Proportion of newborns with at least one parent who was born abroad (2017)	15.2%	31.8%
	Proportion of children between 0 and 5 who are immigrants (born outside of Canada) (2016)	1.59%	2.29%
	Distribution of families with at least one child between 0 and 5 based on their parents' employment (2016)	Neither parent (or sole parent) employed: 10.4% One of two parents employed: 18.4% Both parents (or sole parent) employed: 71.3%	Neither parent (or sole parent) employed: 10.3% One of two parents employed: 20.0% Both parents (or sole parent) employed: 69.7%
	Employment rate of parents with at least one child between 0 and 5 (2016)	Father employed: 88.5% Mother employed: 75.5%	Father employed: 88.8% Mother employed: 73.8%
	Median after-tax income of families with at least one child between 0 and 5 (2015)	\$69,820	\$72,077
	Proportion of children between 0 and 5 living in a low-income family (based on the low-income measure) (2016)	12.4%	13.9%

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT	Proportion of kindergarteners whose parents say they have difficulty getting their child ready for their day (2017)	11.4%	11.2%
	Proportion of kindergarteners whose parents say they find it difficult to accompany their child to their activities (2017)	21.7%	17.9%
	Proportion of kindergarteners whose parents say it is hard for them to find time to play with their child (2017)	25.2%	26.1%
	Proportion of kindergarteners whose parents say they have family and friends that help them feel safe, secure and happy (2017)	89.9%	90.5%
	Proportion of kindergarteners whose parents say they have someone they trust whom they could turn to for advice if they had problems. (2017)	94.1%	91.9%
	Proportion of kindergarteners whose parents say they have people they could count on in an emergency (2017)	96.5%	95.4%
	Proportion of kindergarteners who were read to or told stories every day during the year before they started kindergarten (2017)	44.0%	41.0%
	Proportion of kindergarteners who were taught to say or recognize the letters of the alphabet every day during the year before they started kindergarten (2017)	16.5%	19.1%
	Proportion of kindergarteners who were taught to say or recognize their numbers every day during the year before they started kindergarten (2017)	18.5%	21.4%
	Proportion of kindergarteners who were encouraged to use numbers in their daily activities every day during the year before they started kindergarten (2017)	27.3%	28.3%
	Proportion of children who visited the library with an adult in their household at least once a month during the year before they started kindergarten (2017)	44.0% (-)	51.1%

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	Proportion of children between 0 and 5 living in urban centres or rural areas (2016)	Urban: 68.8% Rural: 31.2%	Urban: 82.1% Rural: 17.9%
	Proportion of children between 0 and 5 living in neighbourhoods considered to be among the most materially disadvantaged (2016)	22.4%	20.4%
	Proportion of kindergarteners living in a neighbourhood considered less than safe by their parents (2017)	13.1%	13.1%
	Distribution of kindergarteners based on their parents' agreement/disagreement with certain statements about the safety of their neighbourhood: It is safe to walk alone in the neighbourhood after dark. (2017)	88.7%	90.2%
	Distribution of kindergarteners based on their parents' agreement/disagreement with certain statements about the safety of their neighbourhood: It is safe for children to play outside during the day. (2017)	95.5% (+)	92.4%
	Distribution of kindergarteners based on their parents' agreement/ disagreement with certain statements about the safety of their neighbourhood: There are parks, playgrounds and other safe places to play in this neighbourhood. (2017)	87.5% (-)	90.8%
	Proportion of kindergarteners whose parents had moved twice or more during the five years preceding the survey (2017)	19.6%	17.6%
	Proportion de families with at least one child between 0 and 5 living in housing considered to be unaffordable (2016)	10.0%	13.6%
	Proportion of families with at least one child between 0 and 5 living in a dwelling of unsuitable size (2016)	6.1%	12.0%
	Proportion of families with at least one child between 0 and 5 living in housing that needs major repairs (2016)	7.8%	7.9%

EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES	Proportion of children under 5 attending a recognized childcare facility (2015)	56.2%	57.9%
	Proportion of kindergarteners who did not attend any type of childcare facility prior to starting school because one of their parents chose to stay at home (2017)	57.8%	62.8%
	Proportion of kindergarteners who spent an average of 35 hours or more a week in childcare before they entered kindergarten (2017)	53.9% (-)	61.1%
	Distribution of kindergarteners who regularly attended childcare during their early childhood based on the age they started (2017)	0-11 months: 52.5% (+) 12-17 months: 25.8% 18-35 months: 12.4% (-) 36 months or older: 9.2%	0-11 months: 39.8% 12-17 months: 28.5% 18-35 months: 19.9% 36 months or older: 11.8%
	Average proportion of qualified educational personnel in CPEs and daycares (2015)	CPEs: 92.0% Private subsidized daycares: 74.6%	CPEs: 84.2% Private subsidized daycares: 73.5%
	Proportion of establishments that comply with government requirements regarding the training of educational personnel (2015)	CPEs: 100% Subsidized daycares: 100%	CPEs: 90.6% Subsidized daycares: 74.6%

* Passable accuracy: coefficient of variation between 15% and 25%. Interpret with caution.

** Poor accuracy: coefficient of variation > 25%. Provided for information purposes only.

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.

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



A comprehensive 64-page report on the province as a whole



A brochure presenting the highlights of the 2019 portrait



Regional portraits for each of Québec's 17 regions (Montréal, Estrie, Outaouais and Laval are available in English)



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

OBSERVATOIRE des tout-petits

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.

Tout-petits.org