

## Canada

**Population:** 32.2 m. **Fertility rate:** 1.53. **GDP per capita:** USD 30 700. **Children under 6 years:** 2 074 860 (2005).

**Female labour force participation:** 73.5% of women (15-64) participate in the formal labour market, 27.2% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 10.9%) (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005).

**Labour force participation rate of women with children:** 67.7% of women with a child under 6 years are employed, accounting for 30% of total part-time employment (OECD, *Society at a Glance*, 2005). 58.7% of women with a child under 3 are employed (OECD, *Babies and Bosses*, 2005).

**Maternity and parental leave:** 15 weeks of maternity leave paid at 55% of earnings, plus a 2-week unpaid waiting period; 35 weeks parental leave paid at 55% of earnings.

**Average duration of parental leave:** In 2003-04, the average duration of maternity leave was 14.5 weeks. The average duration of parental leave (mothers) was 23.8 weeks; of parental leave (fathers), 14 weeks; of parental leave (adoptive mothers), 28.1 weeks; of parental leave (adoptive fathers), 17 weeks.

**Social expenditure:** 17.8% of GDP. **Child poverty rate (2000):** 14.9% after taxes and transfers measured as the percentage of children living in families with income below 50% of the national median (OECD average is 11.2%) (UNICEF, 2005).

**Compulsory school age:** 6 years.

**Funding of pre-primary education for 3- to 6-year-olds:** about 0.2% of GDP; for all child care, 0-12, funding amounts to 0.4% of GDP.

**Unit cost per child (in USD converted using PPPs):** for 2004 and 2005, information is not available in OECD *Education at a Glance*. The figure for 2003 is USD 6 120 (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2003).

**Funding of services for children under 3:** Information on expenditure as a % of GDP is not available.

**Average costs to parents:** Excluding Quebec, costs to parents using community services amount to c. 50% of costs across the country.

**Legal entitlement to a free service:** 5-6 years of age, depending on jurisdiction.

**Major service types and duration:** Family day care homes, child care centres, pre-kindergarten (3-5 years) and kindergartens (5-6 years).

**Rate of access to regulated services:** Access is low and varies greatly depending on the province and district. Across Canada, approximately 24% of children aged 0-6 have access to a regulated place. Rates are considerably higher in Quebec, which in 2004, accounted alone

for 43% of all regulated spaces. About 95% of 5-year-olds across Canada are enrolled in state-funded kindergarten, with access to junior kindergarten being assured in Ontario for almost all children from the age of 4 years.

**Designation and qualifications of key staff:** Ranges by province/territory. Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programmes organised by provincial/territorial public education systems employ teachers with a 4-year university degree, generally specialised in primary education teaching. In regulated pre-school and child care centres, early childhood educators are likely to have a two-year ECE credential.

**Child-staff ratios:** Ranges by province or territory (2001): 1-year-olds: 3:1 to 8:1; 3-year-olds: 7:1 to 10:1; 5-year-olds: 8:1 to 15:1.

**Maximum group size:** Ranges by province or territory (2001): 1-year-olds: 6-18 children; 3-year-olds: 14-25 children; 5-year-olds: 16-25 children. Some provinces/territories do not regulate group size.

### **Auspices**

Different levels of government have responsibilities for ECEC in Canada. Under constitutional arrangements, direct responsibility for social and educational programmes such as ECEC lies with the provincial and territorial governments, while the federal government assumes responsibility for specific populations, such as the Aboriginal people, military families and new immigrants or refugees. The federal government is also responsible for maternity and paternity leave benefits, and for the National Child Benefit.

Primary responsibility for ECEC programmes rests with the provincial and territorial governments. These governments, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, treat care and education separately. Child care regulation, policies, and fee subsidies and grants systems form one domain of engagement while public kindergarten policy and administration is another domain. In addition, provinces/territories are responsible for income support programmes for low-income families; health care; legislating length of job protected maternal and paternal leave; and training institutions for early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers.

Municipal governments and other local authorities are involved in ECEC at the discretion of the provincial governments. Municipal governments in Ontario have the delegated authority to provide and maintain ECEC services focused on child care at the local level; in almost all other jurisdictions there is no local authority involvement. Within education, local school boards operate under powers delegated by the provincial governments. These boards have responsibility for kindergarten programmes within schools.

Inter-governmental initiatives by the federal, provincial and territorial governments take place within a framework, the 1999 Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA). SUFA establishes the partnership between governments within which specific social programme initiatives are developed, and the related financial transfers are enacted. Recent framework agreements between the federal government, provinces and territories, for example, the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC), have generated a clearer focus on early child development and learning. Federal funding will enable provinces and territories to improve and expand early learning and child care, based

on the principles of quality, universal inclusion, accessibility and developmental. Funds are also being directed to enhancing early learning and child care for First Nations children living on reserve, and to extend the knowledge base and improve data collection so as to support better planning and accountability.

### **Context**

*Labour force rates:* The labour force participation rate for females (15-64) is 73.5%, rising from 68.3% in 1990 (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). 27.2% of women are in part-time employment, compared to 10.9% of men. 67.7% of women with a youngest child under 6 are employed, accounting for 30% of total part-time employment (OECD, *Society at a Glance*, 2005). Women with a youngest child under 3 had an employment rate of 58.7% (OECD, *Babies and Bosses*, 2005).

*Parental leave:* Responsibility for maternal/parental leave is shared by the federal and provincial/territorial governments. Provincial/territorial legislation sets the length and conditions of job protected leave while partial salary replacement is provided by the federal government through its Employment Insurance Programme. Access to maternity and parental benefits in Canada is high. Remunerated parental leave for almost a year was enacted in the Federal Employment Insurance Act of 2001. 91.1% of paid employees in December 2003 had sufficient hours to qualify for Employment Insurance special benefits. Currently, the self-employed do not pay into the Employment Insurance programme and thus are not eligible for maternity and parental benefits. Federal benefits are provided as partial salary replacement – 55% of wages up to a ceiling of CAD 413/week (EUR 265/USD 337) for up to 50 weeks for eligible new parents (many are not eligible) (Background Report for Canada, 2003).

### **Access and provision**

Because of the private nature of much Canadian child care, systematic information on rates of provision for younger children is lacking at both federal and provincial levels. Access to services is dependent on available places, meeting eligibility criteria for subsidy assistance, ability to pay fees, and finding a programme that meets child/family need. Access is low and varies depending on the province/territory. Approximately 24% of children aged 0-6 have access to regulated child care spaces, the majority of which are provided by non-profit, community organisations. These centre-based community services (including a small number of publicly-operated services) account for 80% of regulated child care provision for children 0-12 years. Except in Quebec, access to regulated child care is not treated as an entitlement in any province/territory (Background Report for Canada, 2003). In Quebec, 34% of 0- to 3-year-olds, 48% of 3- to 4-year-olds, and 50% of 4- to 5-year-olds have access to licensed services (OECD, *Babies and Bosses*, 2005). From 4 years onwards, nearly all children in Ontario have access to state-funded pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. In 1995 (most recent data available) some 62% of children under 6 who received regular, non-relative care while parents worked or studied, received this care in an unregulated setting (Background Report for Canada, 2003). However, across Canada, there is a well-established early education network within the primary school system for children over five years; every province/territory provides a publicly funded kindergarten programme in the year before primary school, usually part-time but full-time in Quebec. This service is considered a public responsibility and a public good in all Canadian provinces. Approximately 95% of Canadian children attend kindergarten from the age of

5-6 years. Kindergarten benefits from stable funding, trained teachers, structured programming and regular monitoring and evaluation. Age eligibilities vary by service and province. In Ontario and Quebec (48% in 2003), most 4-year-old children also participate in junior kindergarten, while in other jurisdictions access is limited to a small number of children at risk. Compulsory schooling generally begins at age 6.

*Children with disabilities:* Legislation or policy in all provinces and territories guarantees children with special needs access to public school kindergarten programmes; this is usually (but not always) through inclusion in regular classrooms. No province/territory guarantees children with special needs access to regulated child care, but children frequently obtain sufficient support to enable participation in regular kindergarten programmes. The Background Report for Canada (2003) notes that in 1998, some 40% of child care centres indicated that they had been unable to enrol a child with special needs due to structural limitations and/or concern of staff regarding the adequacy of their training.

*Children from low-income families:* A limited subsidy system is available, with widely varying and complex eligibility criteria, accessed by 22% of lone parents and approximately 5% of married mothers from low-income families (1997 figures – Background Report for Canada, 2003). In 2001, 36% of children in regulated care, outside of Quebec, were receiving subsidies. These subsidies are not always effective at ensuring affordability for the low-income families towards whom they are targeted. A National Child Benefit (NCB) was introduced in 1998, combining two key elements: monthly payments from the Government of Canada to low-income families with children, and benefits and services designed and delivered by provinces and territories to meet the needs of low-income families with children in each jurisdiction. A key design element of the NCB is the flexibility it provides to provinces and territories to develop and deliver programmes and services that best meet the needs and priorities of their communities. As part of this flexibility, provinces and territories may adjust social assistance or child benefit payments by an amount equivalent to the National Child Benefit Supplement. This has permitted families on social assistance to maintain at least the same level of benefits as before, while providing additional funds for new or enhanced provincial and territorial programmes benefiting low-income families with children. Through this recovery/reinvestment mechanism, provinces and territories have allocated significant investments towards day care and child care initiatives (USD 225M in 2003-04), which include subsidies for low-income families with children.

*Aboriginal children and diversity:* In 2001 there were 33 155 children 0-4 years, and 36 945 children 5-9 years, living on First Nations reserves in Canada (Background Report for Canada, 2003). In the year 2001-02, 13 409 (95% of 4- and 5-year-olds) attended junior (pre) kindergarten or kindergarten programmes in schools on reserve, although these children may also seek access to kindergarten programmes in non-reserve schools. Child care may be funded for children living on reserve or in Inuit communities, but access to spaces has not been sufficient to meet demand. Expansion of programmes for First Nations children, primarily those living on reserve, has been underway since 2003. In the larger urban areas, where many of the low-income children are of Aboriginal or ethnic origin, specialised programmes for these children are often not available. In addition to children from Aboriginal communities, many other ethnic and racial groups live in communities of all sizes throughout Canada. Although there are no official policies regarding diversity in child care – a prominent feature of Canadian ECEC – Canada has an official policy of supporting multiculturalism.

## Quality

*Licensing and regulatory regimes:* Education and child care are regulated separately. Responsibility for ensuring that kindergarten programmes comply with provincial/territorial legislation is generally delegated to school boards. In turn, these boards delegate responsibility to superintendents of education, who establish budgets, hire staff, supervise schools and ensure programmes meet children's needs (Background Report for Canada, 2003). Child care is regulated as a private enterprise (not-for-profit and for-profit). Regulatory policy rests with departments of social and/or community services. Requirements generally specify the physical space and training levels of staff, maximum numbers of children, staff-child ratios. The elements vary across provinces and territories.

*Funding:* With the exception of limited grants for specific purposes, regulated child care services are not publicly funded, except in Quebec. A market-determined fee structure (except Manitoba and Quebec) combines with high levels of parental contribution (ranging from 34% to 82%) to meet child care costs. The average parental contribution in public and community services across the country, excluding Quebec, is just under 50% of costs. A limited fee subsidy approach supports the participation of some low-income families. Overall, public child care expenditure for children 0-12 years averaged USD 500 per child, and USD 3 223 dollars per child care place (Background Report for Canada, 2001 figures revised for 2003/04). Public child care spending ranged between provinces/territories from USD 104 to USD 1 448 per child and USD 816 to USD 4 849 per space, compared to USD 6 120 per child in kindergarten (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2003). According to the same source, Canada spends 0.2% of GDP on pre-primary educational services from 3-6 years, but it is not clear what this figure includes. During the 2001-04 period, increased federal funding and attention to ECEC had an impact on the renewal of services in several provinces. Expenditure by provinces/territories on care for children 0-12 years in Canada came to about 0.17% of GDP, but new federal figures for 2003-04 suggest that all public expenditure on services for children 0-12 years comes to approximately 0.4% of GDP. It is not clear what proportion of this expenditure was spent on children 0-6 years.

*Staffing and training:* Staffing protocols divide according to the "education" or "care" designation of services. Pre-kindergarten programmes organised by the provincial/territorial public education systems and kindergarten programmes employ teachers with a 4-year university degree, generally with a specialisation in primary education. There are no requirements for kindergarten teachers to have specific training in the development or pedagogy of children under 6 years. In regulated child care settings in 1998 (most recent data available), 66% of early childhood educators have a two-year ECE credential or more, and 29% have one year or less of ECE training. With the exception of two territories, all jurisdictions have minimum qualification requirements for work in child care settings, but a Canada-wide standard for training does not exist. In general, educators receive their diploma from a community college. Typically, programmes include "coursework on health and safety, early childhood development, education theory, programming strategies, and strategies for behaviour guidance plus some supervised experience in a child care setting" (Background Report for Canada, 2003). Assistants in both kindergartens and child care settings are generally not required to hold formal qualifications. The required qualification for (school) principals is a 4-year-university degree but with no specific requirement to specialise in early education. Only Manitoba has a requirement for child care directors, set at community college level with a specialisation in ECEC. Family child care providers

– either those who are supervised by agencies in some provinces/territories or those who are individually licensed – are not required to have any post-secondary, early childhood training although some provinces may require limited training or orientation courses.

*Work conditions:* Substantial differences exist in work conditions of kindergarten teachers and child care staff regarding salary, sick leave, medical and dental insurance, disability insurance, retirement pension, life insurance and unionisation. Teachers view themselves, and are viewed as, professionals. During 2002 and 2003, an extensive consultation process reviewed proposed occupational standards for early childhood educators. These were endorsed and later ratified during the Canadian Child Care Federation’s annual meeting in June 2004. Currently, the sector is engaged in awareness-raising and seeking endorsement from provincial and territorial government as certification and entry qualification requirements are determined at this level. Seven jurisdictions now take responsibility for ECE certification. In some jurisdictions, professional organisations have adopted voluntary codes of practice. The annual turnover rate for staff in Canadian child care centres is an average of 28% (range 15% to 45%). Almost all (98%) staff in child care settings are women, as are 81% of elementary school teachers. In proportion to their place in the population, cultural and racial minorities are not sufficiently represented among ECEC staff (Background Report for Canada, 2003).

*Child-staff ratios:* Considerable variation exists across provinces/territories. Child to staff ratios range from 3:1 to 8:1 for 1-year-olds, 7:1 to 10:1 for 3-year-olds, and 8:1 to 15:1 for 5-year-olds. Maximum group size varies by province/territory from 6-18 for 1-year-olds, 14-25 for 3-year-olds, and 16-25 for 5-year-olds.

*Curriculum and pedagogy:* In kindergarten, there is no national approach to curriculum although substantial consensus is reported across the expected learning outcomes articulated in provincial/territorial statements. Kindergarten curricula are generally linked to elementary school curricula and evidence is available of collaboration among some provinces in curriculum framework, assessment and performance standards. Evidence is not available about the pedagogical approaches in ECEC programmes although some provincial statements refer to desired pedagogical orientations. With the exception of Quebec, specific curricula are not required for child care programmes.

*Monitoring, evaluation and research:* Some national monitoring and reporting data are available from the *National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (NLSCY)*, the *Understanding the Early Years (UEY)* study, and the annual series *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada* researched by the CRRU unit of the University of Toronto. Provinces also collect a considerable amount of data, but according to the Background Report for Canada, “the methodology used differs and results in data that are not comparable from one jurisdiction to another. There is no regular collection of national data by government or others about the use and characteristics of kindergarten, nursery schools, regulated child care or family resource programmes, or about the children and families using them. Nor are data collected on the demand or need for ECEC services” (p. 85).

*Parent and community involvement:* The involvement of parents and communities in the design and delivery of early childhood education and care programmes and services varies across provinces/territories and within individual communities. Although a strong rhetoric of parental responsibility for children is heard in Canada, little information on actual policies to involve parents in ECEC is found in the public domain.

**OECD policy issues**

Among the issues for policy attention identified (in 2003) by the OECD review team for Canada were to:

- Strengthen the present federal/provincial/territorial agreements and focus them as much as possible on child development and learning.
- Encourage provincial governments to develop, with the major stakeholder groups, an early childhood strategy with priority targets, benchmarks and timelines, and with guaranteed budgets to fund appropriate governance and expansion.
- Build bridges between child care and kindergarten education, with the aim of integrating ECEC both at ground level and at policy and management levels.
- Substantially increase public funding of services for young children, ensuring the creation of a transparent and accountable funding system, and for parents, a fairer sharing of ECEC funding. Devise an efficient means of funding a universal early childhood service for children 1-6 years, delivered equitably by mixed providers, governed by public agencies.

**Developments signalled by Human Resources and Social Development Canada**

From 2000, significant ECEC policy and funding changes had begun to be initiated across the country. A 2003 federal/provincial/territorial agreement on early learning and child care (USD 350 million per year by 2007-08) has increased the level of investment in early childhood education and care services. Funds are also being directed to enhancing early learning and child care for First Nations children living on-reserve.