

Quebec a have-tot province ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

At 6 pounds, 9 ounces, Olivier Tremblay is a small baby, but he nevertheless carries on his tiny shoulders the weight of a demographic success.

Born at exactly midnight, Jan. 1, little Olivier was the first baby born in Quebec in 2009.

But he also heralds the reversal of a rather bleak demographic picture for the province, which once upon a time had Canada's biggest baby boom followed by its worst baby bust.

Now, new statistics show that Quebec has solidified an upward trend in the provincial birth rate, easing that foresaw population declines and francophone cultural uncertainty. In addition, births outside of wedlock are now the vast majority in Quebec, and are occurring at twice the rate compared to the rest of Canada.

The birth rate increased for the fifth year in a row in 2007, according to the most recent demographic report produced by the Quebec Institute of Statistics.

There were 84,200 births, 3 per cent more than 2006. And for the first time since 1959, Quebec's fertility rate of 1.65 children per woman outranks the Canadian average of 1.59. Demographers say there is now good reason to believe Quebec's family-friendly policies put in place over the last decade have contributed to the trend.

"If we take the idea that people are relatively similar across the provinces and Quebec has a broader set of policies that are different than the rest of Canada, it would lead me to say there's something going on with those policies in that they're doing what we would expect them to do," said Amélie Quesnel-Vallée, a social demographer at McGill University.

Quebec's government has created many programs over the last decade to convince parents they can both work and have children.

Parents may access a vast network of subsidized daycare for \$7 a day; there are extensive after-school programs; and its parental leave program is much more generous than the federal government provides elsewhere. The statistics show a large increase in women aged 35 to 44 giving birth, but also a change in that more women in their 20s are giving birth.

"This is something that is promising for the future," said Quesnel-Vallée, "because if these women want to have more than one child they would be in a better position to do so than women in their 30s."

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Canada ^[2]

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