

Quebec birth rate edges up again [CA-QC] ^[1]

Author: Geran, Leslie

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EXCERPTS

Quebec's birth rate has edged up for the third year in a row after falling to an all-time low in 2000, newly released statistics show.

What's more, there are signs the birth rate will continue going up, say observers, in part because of the provincial government's more flexible and generous parental-leave program that came into effect this year.

The province registered 76,100 births last year, up from 74,200 in 2004, according to a report by the Institut de la statistique du Quebec, far below the record of more than 97,000 in 1991.

A report released by Statistics Canada yesterday shows the number of births is on the increase in Nova Scotia, Ontario and Alberta as well.

However, Canada's total population is rising faster than the increase in the number of births. The result is that the national birth rate dropped to an all-time low of 10.5 births per 1,000 population in 2004 from 10.6 the year before.

Quebec's birth rate, by comparison, is climbing steadily. It increased to 10 births per 1,000 population last year from 9.8. (Quebec figures are one year more up-to-date than those provided by StatsCan.)

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It's too early to gauge whether Quebec's parental-leave program is having a positive impact on the birth rate. However, Geran cited a December 2005 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that draws a link between higher birth rates and "family-friendly" government policies.

"Cross-country analysis suggests that total fertility rates are higher in OECD countries with wider child-care availability, lower direct costs of children, higher part-time availability and longer leaves," the study concludes.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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