

'I feel helpless': Ukrainian newcomers denied subsidized daycare in Quebec due to status ^[1]

Those welcomed to Canada through emergency program not considered refugees

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EXCERPTS

When Oleksandra Zhovtiuk chose to settle in Quebec after fleeing her war-torn city of Kherson in southern Ukraine, she said she chose the French province for one reason: its renowned low-cost government daycares.

"Here, I was told they have these \$8 daycares per day, so it's like the best option for Canada," said Zhovtiuk, a single mother who lives in Montreal's Côte-des-Neiges-Notre-Dame-de-Grâce borough.

With three children, ages two, four and seven, she thought, "OK, this I might [be able to] afford," she said.

After arriving in Quebec in July, Zhovtiuk quickly applied for spots for her two youngest at two local subsidized daycares and got accepted at both. She even got as far as signing an enrolment contract.

So it came as a shock to Zhovtiuk when both daycares abruptly withdrew the spots, telling her it was due to her newcomer status.

"They were ready to take my kids, but afterwards I got the call from [administration] ... that the government is not [allowing] Ukrainians to put their kids into daycares," she said.

Parents pay \$8.70 per child per day in subsidized Quebec daycares. The cost for a spot in a non-subsidized daycare ranges from \$35 to \$60 per child.

"I'm just very sad about this situation because it just puts me in a corner, it's so expensive ... I feel helpless," said Zhovtiuk.

Refugees, but 'not refugees here'

In order to qualify for subsidized daycares in Quebec, parents must be recognized as a refugee or protected person under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. They must also hold a certificate issued under the Quebec Immigration Act.

But despite having travelled to find safety, Ukrainian newcomers who entered Canada under a federal emergency immigration program – created to streamline the immigration process – do not qualify, as they are not considered refugees.

The program – called Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) – is a three-year temporary visa program, under which newcomers are classified as temporary residents.

"The CUAET is not a refugee program, as Ukrainians have indicated that they need temporary safe harbour, and many of them intend to return to their home country when it will be safe to do so," reads a statement from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

This means these people can work and study in Canada for three years. However, unlike refugees, they don't have permanent residency and therefore do not have access to the standard suite of services typically offered to people fleeing conflict.

"We're kind of in the middle, you know, like we are refugees, but we are not refugees here because we have working permit visas and we are not normal citizens," said Zhovtiuk.

According to Quebec's Immigration Ministry, the province welcomed more than 1,500 Ukrainian households between April 1 and Aug. 3, representing just under 3,000 people – the majority of whom arrived through the CUAET program.

No exceptions, Quebec says

According to a statement from Quebec's Family Ministry, there will be no exceptions for Ukrainian newcomers seeking subsidized daycare if they are not eligible for the service through their status.

"We are very sensitive to the situation that Ukrainians are currently experiencing. However, for all parents residing in Quebec, the same criteria apply to determine eligibility for the reduced contribution, including Ukrainian nationals," the statement reads.

The ministry said these people have access to daycare services offered by non-subsidized daycare centres, services offered by drop-in daycare centres and to a newly improved tax credit for child-care expenses.

Michael Shwec, president of the Quebec chapter of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, says these options aren't enough for newcomers, who often arrive with nothing.

"These are people that need a helping hand and if we don't help them with adequate care for their children while they are trying to establish themselves, it's going to be a gap for them," he said.

Shwec says while he recognizes that the new visa program was put together quickly, he wants the federal and provincial governments to discuss adding subsidized \$8.70 daycare to the CUAET program for newcomers arriving in Quebec.

"We want to enable them to succeed and ensure success and if we don't help them with daycare, that is put in jeopardy," he said.

'We really, really need it'

Maryna Lunhu knows firsthand how crucial subsidized daycare is for her and other Ukrainians in her position.

Her job hunt is on pause and her six-week intensive English course at McGill University is tougher to continue now that she needs to look after her youngest. He was kicked out of his subsidized daycare a month and a half into her contract.

"I have a little shock ... it's very, very, very, very difficult," said the mother of two, living in Montreal's Saint-Laurent borough.

With her husband back in Ukraine, her 10-year-old in summer camp and her four-year-old requiring full-time care, Lunhu is worried about her financial situation. She is looking into enrolling her youngest son in kindergarten early so that she can get a job to support her family once the school year starts.

"We want to stay here, [I] want the best future [for] my children ... But I need to go to work," she said.

Zhovtiuk said she's hoping the government will recognize the unique situation of thousands of Ukrainians, most of whom came to the country with empty pockets and depend on these low-cost daycares to smoothly introduce their children to a new culture.

"I'm actually ready to learn French just to stay here ... but I just need this time with the daycares because we all want to integrate," she said.

"And this possibility [was] taken away ... we really, really need it."

Region: Quebec ^[3]

Tags: immigrant and refugee ^[4]

childcare subsidies ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 17 Aug 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/08/i-feel-helpless-ukrainian-newcomers-denied-subsidized-daycare-quebec>

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