

Ukrainian community asks Quebec to subsidize daycare for those fleeing the war ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The Ukrainian community is pleading with the Quebec government to allow those fleeing the war in their home country to access subsidized daycare spots.

As most Ukrainian men age 18 to 60 are not permitted to leave their country, a large number of families coming from Ukraine include just one parent. That makes it even more critical to secure subsidized daycare spots, said Michael Shwec, president of the provincial council of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. However, he said, the status of those arriving from Ukraine makes them ineligible for the subsidized daycare program.

Ukrainians coming to Canada are doing so under temporary resident visas, but don't qualify for subsidized daycare. Had they been considered refugees or even foreign workers, they would have been eligible.

"In the initial discussions, we understood that this new class of visa will qualify for the \$8-per-day daycare in Quebec, but that (qualification) was removed," Shwec said. "So it's a problem. They have to go to French classes, but if they're going there, who do they leave their kids with?"

Shwec said the community raised the issue with the province in the spring and asked for some changes to be made, but has received no news since that meeting.

Reached by email, Antoine de la Durantaye, a spokesperson for Families Minister Mathieu Lacombe, said the CAQ government is merely respecting the rules put in place by previous governments.

"We're very sensitive to the situation that Ukrainians are going through and the difficulties they are facing," he wrote. "We have to remember that they already have access to respite daycare, to non-subsidized places, and can also benefit from tax credits that were increased by our government to help defray the costs. It's also important to note that these rules have been in place since the creation of the subsidized daycare program in 1997."

Dollard-des-Ormeaux resident Tatiana Romano has been hosting new arrivals since the conflict broke out in February, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

She said she doesn't see the logic behind denying daycare spaces to those newcomers.

"We offer them free schooling and government-paid health care. We're offering them so much, but we can't do that extra step? I don't understand it."

Romano said she is aware of one woman who has three children, two of whom are preschool age, and the woman was told by the daycare centre across the street from where she is living that they can't accept her kids. She can't afford a non-subsidized spot, which can cost \$40 per day or more.

"With two kids, she will have to find another daycare and pay at least \$80 per day. There is no way she can make that kind of money," Romano said.

"There's a lot of stress coming to a new country, and when you need someone to care for your kid, you don't have an aunt or cousin," she said. "Add to that the stress of trying to find daycare that they can afford."

Next month, Romano will have two mothers with children six and seven months old living with her. She said she's concerned for the welfare of the mothers, as well as her own ability to help them if they don't get childcare.

"I really hope the government changes this situation," she said. "I work from home right now, and having two screaming toddlers would not create a good working environment. My work allows me to help these people, so I hope my government steps up."

Romano said many of those coming from Ukraine are highly skilled and educated, so keeping them at home is a disservice to society at large.

“These mothers want to work; they want to contribute to the Canadian economy,” she said. “There are so many job vacancies now, there is a real need for them to be freed up to work.”

Shwec said many in the first wave of those fleeing Ukraine have been put up by family members, so they have been able to get some help with childcare. The next wave, however, is likely to include Ukrainians with fewer family ties.

“If you have an immigrant coming here, you have to set them up for success,” Shwec said, “and part of that is that if you want that mother to work, she needs to know that her child is in good care, and that it’s affordable. It’s very tough.”

Region: Quebec ^[3]

Tags: family policy ^[4]

eligibility ^[5]

\$10-a-day ^[6]

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