

Daycare for refugees ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Quebec government is assessing how many subsidized daycare spaces in its already crowded network it can offer Syrian refugees, but a spokesperson for the family minister says current waiting lists will be respected.

All of Quebec's so-called institutional childcare centres are full, and some parents have been waiting years to place their children in one of the highly coveted spots.

The only available subsidized daycare spaces are in family-run centres, which are located in private homes and can receive up to six children a day, said Nadia Caron, a spokeswoman for Quebec's family minister.

She added however, that the government doesn't know how many of those spots are free.

Affordable daycare services will become increasingly important for many of the 7,000 Syrian refugees expected to arrive in Quebec by the end of 2016 as parents begin French-language courses and integrate into the labour market.

Quebec heavily subsidizes roughly 228,000 daycare spaces across the province and charges parents on a sliding scale, depending on family income.

The cheapest spots are \$7.55 a day, per child. Parents who benefit from government assistance don't pay for three days out of five.

Caron said Syrian refugees are eligible for subsidized daycare spaces and also for government assistance, which would reduce significantly the price of a spot - if they can find one.

She said, however, that refugees will not be skipping the line.

"It's clear the waiting lists that exist will remain, out of respect for the families who are already waiting for the subsidized spots," she said.

There are roughly 137,000 so-called institutional subsidized daycare spots in Quebec. All are wait list-only.

Additionally, according to Caron, family, home-run daycares have 91,000 places available, and her department is trying to assess how many spots are open in the regions where the bulk of the refugees are expected to settle in the coming months.

"The count is happening now," she said. "We will then create a brochure and have all the information, including how and where to find a daycare space for the Syrian families who request it."

It is unclear exactly how many Syrians in Quebec require daycare spaces. The United Nations Refugee Agency estimates 52 per cent of Syrian refugees are under the age of 18.

Marie-Eve Dolbec, a spokeswoman for the organization that co-ordinates subsidized daycare spots for the government, said refugees will not be given special treatment in the hunt for the prized reduced-rate spot.

She said certain daycare centres that have ties to community organizations could, in theory, give priority to Syrian refugees.

"But I have not heard of any request to do that," she said.

There are also reduced-rate daycare spots in some community centres where refugees and immigrants learn French, but those places are temporary and parents can no longer have access to the system once they complete their language courses.

Chantal Hudson, with the Syrian Canadian Council, said 98 per cent of the roughly 2,600 Syrian refugees who have already arrived in Quebec have been privately sponsored by families or community organizations.

She said as more government-sponsored refugees arrive over the next weeks and months - people who have minimal contacts in the province - there will likely be more pressure on the province for childcare options.

Hudson said her organization has already helped roughly 60 Syrian refugees "and the majority of the families we have so far worked with have children who are quite young."

The Quebec government has set aside \$29 million to settle 7,000 refugees by the end of 2016. It is unclear if that sum includes funds for daycare or if the province will be asking the federal government for financial help for additional child services.

-reprinted from Castanet

Region: Quebec ^[3]

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