

Syrian families may face challenges finding child care in Manitoba ^[1]

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Source: CTV News Winnipeg

Format: Article

Publication Date: 13 Jan 2016

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Leaving everything behind to start a new life in Canada is a big adjustment for refugee families.

Learning a new language, adapting to the Canadian climate and finding a place to live are among the major hurdles.

Once refugees are settled, they might face another challenge some Manitoba families know all too well – finding a child care space.

As of last September, 12,729 Manitoba children were on the province's Online Child Care Registry, meaning refugee families who need child care could also have a difficult time getting it.

"They're probably going to find that there isn't the kind of child care that they're looking for," said Pat Wege, executive director for the Manitoba Child Care Association.

"From what I understand, lots of the newcomer families have many children so it can be hard to find a spot for one or two children," she said. "If you're looking for an infant, a couple of preschool spaces...school-age, it is going to be a huge problem."

Families enrolled in an English language program usually receive child care on-site as long the parents are present in class.

Wege said the challenges could arise once refugees begin to get jobs.

"It is going to be a huge problem for newcomer families to access the licensed child care system," said Wege.

Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger said his government will work refugee families.

"Where families get jobs and need daycare, we will work with them to connect with those services," said Selinger. "That's part of the coordination that we're doing in our communities."

Like other Manitobans, Selinger said refugee families will have to use the province's Online Child Care Registry if they want a spot.

"They'll have to be part of the process and some daycares have spots and some don't, but we're rolling out new ones as we speak," the premier said.

In November's speech from the throne, Selinger said his government would create an additional 12,000 child care spaces within the next five to seven years.

-reprinted from CTV News Winnipeg

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