



POLICY BRIEF

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The Successes and Challenges of Canada's Welcome to Displaced Ukrainians

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 caused what has been described as the most serious contemporary migration crisis in Europe. In response to the crisis, Canada, home to the second largest Ukrainian diaspora in the world after Russia, created the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) which allowed Ukrainian citizens and their immediate families a temporary stay in Canada for three years, and enabled them to work and study during that period. The government did not impose a limit on the number of CUAET admissions, but the scheme closed in March 2024. Between 2022 and 2024, almost 300,000 CUAET holders arrived in Canada. In this brief, drawing on publicly available statistical data we discuss the demographics of displaced Ukrainians in Canada and the evolution of their migratory status in the absence of straightforward options for permanent residence. Secondly, drawing on ongoing empirical research, we examine the local settlement of displaced Ukrainians in two mid-sized cities: Winnipeg and Quebec City.

Drawing on our findings we provide recommendations to consider for the displaced Ukrainians who arrived in Canada as CUAET holders and are now in limbo, and for settlement in distinct local contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 caused what has been described as the most serious contemporary migration crisis in Europe. By mid-March 2022, over 4 million Ukrainians were internally displaced and 2.5 million had fled the country. In response to the crisis, many countries took exceptional measures to rapidly welcome displaced Ukrainians. Canada, home to the second largest Ukrainian diaspora in the world after Russia, worked quickly to create the [Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel](#) (CUAET). This

uncapped scheme allowed Ukrainian nationals and their immediate families a temporary stay in Canada for three years and enabled them to work and study in Canada. Applicants had to be outside Canada, but the Canadian government did not impose a limit on the number of CUAET admissions, contrary to other temporary or permanent admission programs including refugee admissions to Canada. However, applications for CUAET had to be received by July 15, 2023 and approved CUAET holders had to arrive in Canada by March 31, 2024 to benefit from federal support measures.

Canada's CUAET scheme was fairly similar to temporary protection schemes triggered in European

Union (EU) member states with the [activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive](#).

The CUAET did not provide refugee status or permanent residence in Canada. It provided a residence status of limited duration but was simple and quick to obtain in comparison to making an asylum claim or being selected for refugee resettlement. It also provided access to greater numbers than Canada's yearly refugee admissions. In addition, Canada made it easier for [Ukrainians with family](#) ties to Canadian citizens or permanent residents to obtain permanent

residence [if they applied before October 22, 2024](#). [Ukrainians already in Canada on temporary visas](#) were also able to extend their temporary residence status for 3 years. Between 2022 and 2024, almost 300,000 CUAET holders arrived in Canada. Figure 1 shows the arrival of CUAET holders until the end of the program on March 31, 2024. There was a visible acceleration of arrivals just before the arrival window closed (after which only CUAET holders who had experienced delays beyond their control were allowed to enter Canada as CUAET holders).

Figure 1: Arrival of CUAET holders to Canada between March 17, 2022 and April 1, 2024.



Source: Operation Ukrainian Safe Haven – Opération havre de paix pour les Ukrainiens, [Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel \(CUAET\) Survey](#) (April 2024).

In this brief, drawing on publicly available statistical data from Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and Operation Ukraine Safe Haven, we discuss the demographics of displaced Ukrainians in Canada and the evolution of their migratory status in the absence of straightforward options for permanent residence. Secondly, drawing on ongoing empirical research, we examine the local settlement of displaced Ukrainians in two mid-sized cities: Winnipeg and Quebec City.

Drawing on our findings, we provide recommendations to consider for the displaced Ukrainians who arrived in Canada as CUAET holders who are now in limbo and make settlement recommendations in distinct local contexts.

CUAET HOLDERS: KEY DEMOGRAPHICS AND STATUS TRANSITION

In this section we discuss publicly available representative data released by IRCC in its [Rapid Evaluation of the Ukraine response report](#), which surveyed a representative sample of CUAET holders aged 18 and above in March-April 2023; [Operation Ukraine Safe Haven](#), a national resource-sharing initiative funded by IRCC and involving government and non-government settlement stakeholders which conducted [a survey of CUAET holders' family units between October 2023 and April 2024](#) as well as IRCC monthly data on the admission of permanent residents by nationality and category up to the second quarter of 2025.

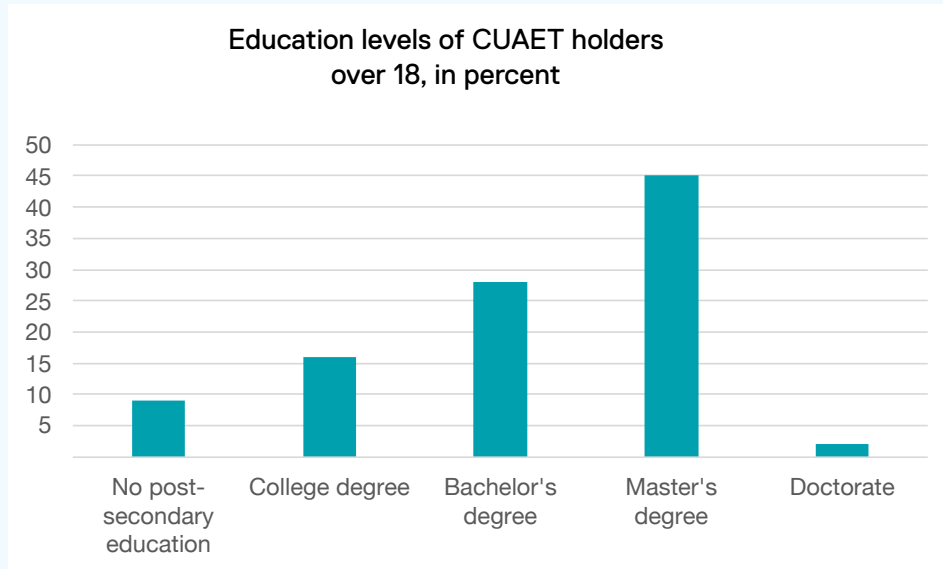
The Operation Ukraine Safe Haven survey data shows that, while [in Europe](#) there is an over-representation of women and children among the displaced, in Canada there are only slightly more women than men holding a CUAET visa. The age distribution is generally quite similar in Canada and Europe, with a high proportion of people of working age. CUAET holders have a comparatively high level of education. [IRCC's Rapid Evaluation of the Ukraine response report](#) shows that more than 90% of surveyed CUAET holders aged 18 and over hold some form of post-secondary education. By comparison, as per [2021 census data](#), less than 70% of Canadians aged 25-64 held some form of postsecondary education. Administrative data

on resettled refugees admitted to Canada between 2016 and 2022 and aged 18 to 75 released in the latest [IRCC evaluation of the refugee resettlement program](#), shows that 26% hold some form of post-secondary education. It is important to mention that whereas resettled refugees are selected by the Canadian and Quebec government according to criteria which [emphasize their vulnerability](#), the only overt selection criteria for CUAET holders was being a Ukrainian national.



There are slightly more women than men holding a CUAET visa, a high proportion of people of working age, and a comparatively high level of education with more than 90% of those surveyed having some form of postsecondary education.

Figure 2 breaks down the [IRCC's Rapid Evaluation report](#) data on CUAET holders' education, showing that a high percentage of CUAET holders over 18 holds university degrees.

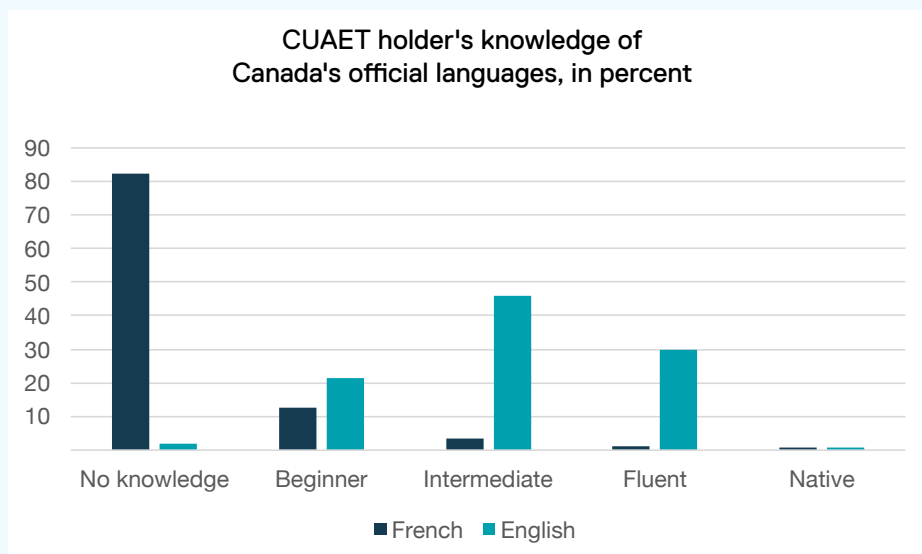


Source: Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, [Rapid Evaluation of the Ukraine Response](#) (November 2023)

As figure 3 shows, the majority of CUAET holders surveyed by Operation Ukraine Safe Haven reported some or good knowledge of English. However, in both Quebec and Canada more generally, over 80% reported no knowledge of French on arrival. [More limited knowledge of official languages is correlated with more limited earning prospects](#); hence it might

be harder for Ukrainians in primary French-language labour markets to find employment at their skill levels. Importantly, there is no representative data on language levels as measured in language tests, and it is possible that people overestimate their language level.

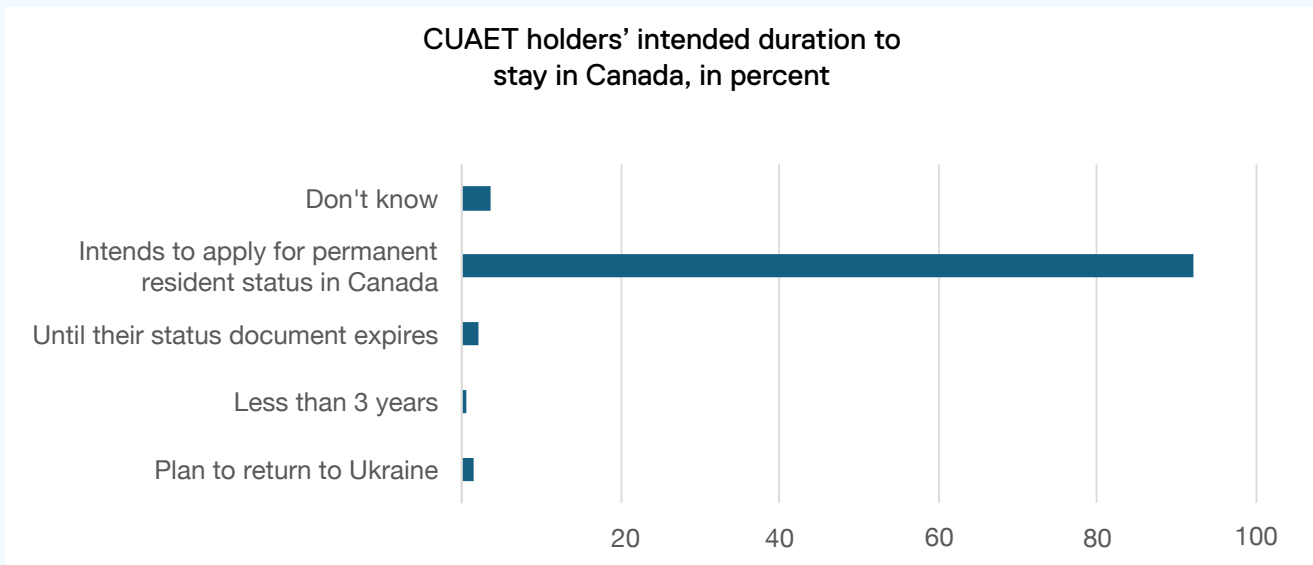
Figure 3: CUAET Holders surveyed between October 2023 and April 2024: Knowledge of Canada's official languages, in percent.



Source: Operation Ukrainian Safe Haven – Opération havre de paix pour les Ukrainiens, [Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel \(CUAET\) Survey](#) (April 2024).

As figure 4 shows, according to the Operation Ukraine Safe Haven survey of CUAET holders in 2023-2024, more than 90% of CUAET holders want to stay in Canada.

Figure 4: CUAET holders intended duration to stay in Canada, in percent.

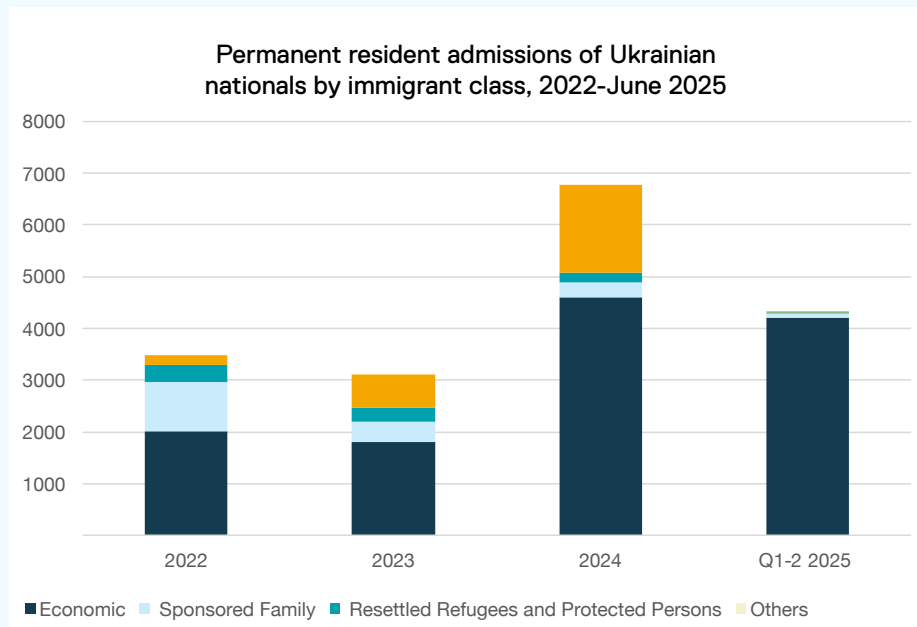


Source: Operation Ukrainian Safe Haven – Opération havre de paix pour les Ukrainiens, [Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel \(CUAET\) Survey](#) (April 2024).

There is no publicly available data on how many CUAET holders have returned to Ukraine. As part of its CUAET holders survey, Operation Ukraine Safe Haven [surveyed 301 families who had returned to Ukraine in 2023-2024](#). Of this sample, just over half (52.2%) had lived in Ukraine before coming to Canada and the other half had lived across Europe. Leaving Canada, less than half (45%) returned to Ukraine while the others mostly went to other European countries. As for why respondents had left Canada, the main reason given was challenges with finding employment (50%), followed by challenges with finding housing (33.2%), and then returning to Ukraine (30%). (Respondents could provide multiple answers). At the time of the survey, this did not seem to indicate a large-scale interest among CUAET holders, even among CUAET holders leaving Canada, to return to Ukraine.

Yet, there are limited means for Ukrainian nationals in Canada to access permanent residence. The only dedicated federal path for Ukrainian nationals to permanent residence was for family members

of permanent residents and Canadian citizens. This program [ended in October 2024](#). With special measures concluding, in order to remain permanently in Canada, CUAET holders must apply to existing Permanent Residence (PR) categories and within numerical targets set in the annual Levels Plan. Using IRCC monthly data on admission of permanent residents by nationality and immigrant class between 2022 and the second quarter of 2025, figure 5 shows a significant increase of Ukrainian permanent resident admissions since 2022, from 3595 in 2022 to 4240 during the first half of 2025. This increase is uneven across admission categories. Economic class admissions rose far more than all others, yet the second largest increase was, until 2024 in the 'others' category, of which the largest category is 'Humanitarian and Compassionate' grounds. Ukrainian permanent residents admitted under the 'other' category represented 9% of the total 19,345 applicants admitted in the 'others' category in 2024. Both family and refugee categories increased considerably less.

Figure 5: Permanent resident admissions of Ukrainian nationals by immigrant class, 2022-June 2025

Source : IRCC Monthly Operational Data - [Canada - Permanent Residents by Country of Citizenship and Immigration Category](#)

Within the economic class, the largest increase by far occurred in the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), whereas the Federal Skilled Worker class increased considerably less. Not all provinces release PNP data by nationality of permanent residents. Alberta, which has not released such data, prioritized Ukrainian PNP applications in the provincial PNP program, [Alberta Advantage Immigration Program](#) (AAIP), between 2022 and 2024. In [Nova Scotia](#) and [Manitoba](#), which do release provincial PNP data by nationality, Ukrainians were in the top 5 admitted nationalities in 2023 and 2024. Yet at the national level, Ukrainian admissions represented 3% of Canada's total 114,905 PNP admissions in 2024.

Overall levels for permanent resident admissions in all categories are [set to decrease in 2025-2027](#), and for the first-time ever levels have also been set for the admission of temporary residents. These will be far below [post-COVID years](#). Particularly concerning is the very significant decrease of PNP slots that is halved for 2025-2027 at 55,000 for each of these years. The 'others' category is set to decrease even more, to 4,300 by 2027.

Before we move to options for Ukrainians in limbo in Canada in the last section of this paper, we turn to our research in two distinct provincial contexts.

SETTLEMENT ISSUES: FINDINGS FROM A TWO-CITY COMPARISON

By only granting temporary protection, the creation of CUAET placed the Canadian government in an unprecedented situation. While resettled refugees selected abroad can access permanent residence on arrival and benefit from federally funded settlement and integration programs which recognize them as displaced people in need of special support, temporary migrants receive far less follow-up and support from the federal government. As [Xhardez and Sonneck](#) have noted, the Canadian government innovated with CUAET. CUAET holders were eligible [for one-time emergency financial assistance](#) of \$3000 per adult and \$1500 per child on arrival in Canada and received free accommodation for 14 days after admission (as opposed to the income and housing support for 12 months that resettled refugees receive). CUAET holders received access to federally funded settlement services which are normally only available for permanent residents. These services are no longer available to CUAET holders as of March 31, 2025. The Province of Quebec, which is far more autonomous

than other provinces in the provision of immigrant settlement services according to the [1991 Canada-Quebec Accord](#), had expanded settlement service eligibility to all temporary residents before the arrival of CUAET holders, [yet cut back access to many of such services](#) for most temporary residents including CUAET holders in February 2025. Provincial and territorial governments, which are responsible for healthcare, social assistance and education, made CUAET holders eligible for several support measures usually only available to permanent residents, yet eligibility conditions varied across the country. For instance, whereas there has been consistent access to provincially funded healthcare and subsidized childcare for CUAET holders in Manitoba, this is not the case in the province of Quebec.

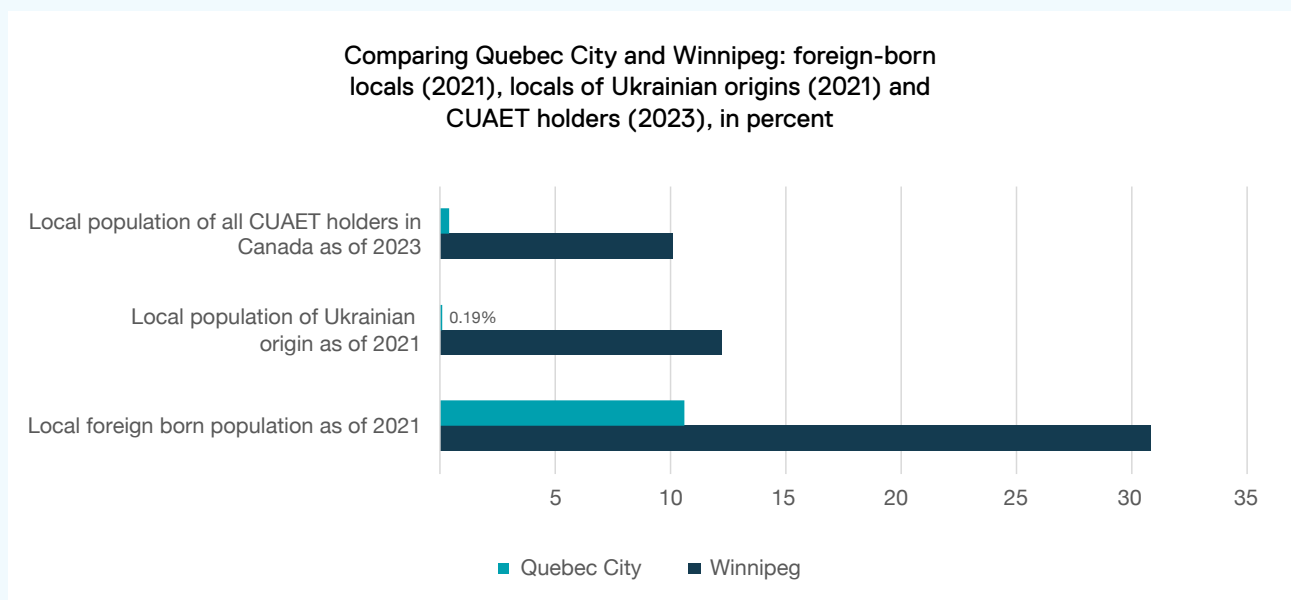
In [ongoing SSHRC-funded research](#), our team is comparing the reception of displaced Ukrainians in the mid-sized cities of Quebec City and Winnipeg. In both cities, we conducted interviews with CUAET holders, Ukrainian Canadians who supported the arrival of

Ukrainian displaced people, and representatives from different community organizations and levels of government. The comparison allows an understanding of the range of arrival and settlement experiences across different provincial contexts.

Winnipeg and Quebec City offer a particularly rich comparison. While Quebec City and Winnipeg are similar in size, Winnipeg received 80% of the CUAET holders in Manitoba amounting to 10% of all Ukrainian CUAET holders arriving in Canada, and the vast majority of CUAET holders in the province of Manitoba. Quebec City, in contrast, received 4% of Quebec's CUAET holders while most settled in Montreal, and 0.4% of the total arrivals in Canada. There is no publicly available data on CUAET holders' secondary migration, hence it is likely that these numbers have evolved.

As Figure 7 shows, as per 2021 census data Winnipeg is a very diverse city and has a strong Ukrainian diaspora, whereas Quebec City is not very diverse and the local Ukrainian diaspora was very small.

Figure 7: Percentage of foreign-born population and population of Ukrainian origin in Quebec City (pop. 540,000) and Winnipeg (pop. 750,000) in 2021 and percentage of CUAET holders according to the Operation Safe Haven Ukraine CUAET survey in 2023-2024.



Sources: Statistics Canada, [2021 Census data on Quebec City and Winnipeg](#); Operation Ukrainian Safe Haven – Opération havre de paix pour les Ukrainiens, [Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel \(CUAET\) Survey](#) (April 2024).

Winnipeg

In Winnipeg, participants in our study reported a strongly coordinated response from the Manitoba provincial government, local settlement agencies as well as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. Advisory mechanisms such as interagency meetings were developed to facilitate high-level coordination.

Significant provincial resources were also deployed. For instance, in addition to providing two-weeks free hotel access using federal funding, the Province of Manitoba paid for several more weeks of free accommodation for CUAET holders coming to Winnipeg. The availability of such resources was a factor in the decision of several participants without any prior connection to Winnipeg, to choose Winnipeg as their place of arrival. One issue encountered in Winnipeg was that most CUAET holders transited via Toronto and accessed a few days of the federally funded accommodation in Toronto before moving to Winnipeg and therefore lost their federally funded accommodation eligibility in Winnipeg given prior access to that in another province.

Regarding on-the-ground coordination, a welcome hub for displaced Ukrainians was set up at Winnipeg Airport and arrivals could access service in either the Ukrainian or Russian language. An [early settlement services hub](#) was also established at a hotel very close to the airport. Displaced Ukrainians had access to a 'one-stop-shop' of services including social insurance and health card registration, and a settlement interview capturing their demographics, job profile and housing needs. One of our research participants, who had been a primary school English teacher in Ukraine, was offered a job through one of these interviews and became an interpreter, and then an intake settlement worker for one of Winnipeg's large settlement agencies within a few months. At the time of the interviews, her clients included newly arrived Ukrainians as well as other newcomers to Winnipeg.

The comparatively large Ukrainian diaspora in Winnipeg was able to play a direct role in Manitoba's response to the arrival of displaced Ukrainians. Local politicians strongly pledged their support to Ukraine as well as to the newly arrived Ukrainians. The City of Winnipeg provided local resources such as subsidized bus passes. Yet our research participants mentioned long delays in registering for and accessing federally funded language training classes, and [as mentioned in IRCC's Rapid evaluation report](#), CUAET holders were not eligible for provincially-funded language training

in Manitoba. Participants also reported that employers took longer than what they were used to in Ukraine or Europe to respond to job applications.

We met with several participants who were already on the path to permanent residence. For instance, the above-mentioned participant had managed to secure a six-months work contract that met the requirement to apply for Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program.

Quebec City

In contrast, in Quebec City, participants reported the absence of an organized response by the authorities. In the Province of Quebec, free on-arrival hotel rooms were only available in Montreal. The Province of Quebec manages its own settlement programs and settlement funding. The settlement agency mandated to offer settlement services to Ukrainians in Quebec City reported delays before receiving provincial instructions in the deployment of services and the lack of services was reported by all our displaced study participants. There was also a lack of clarity as to which provincial subsidies displaced Ukrainians were eligible for. This particularly affected parents of daycare-aged children, as many were barred from accessing subsidized daycare while others did get access, and still others were granted subsidized access that was subsequently denied. Study participants also reported a lack of engagement from the City of Quebec.

The small local Ukrainian diaspora as well as newly arrived Ukrainians made significant efforts to set up their own initiatives. This included online fora offering Quebec City-specific information and advocating for support to provincial members of Quebec's Assemblée Nationale and federal MPs in Quebec City ridings. Other examples included a Ukrainian woman living in Quebec City for several years, who collaborated with volunteers at one of the city's catholic churches to offer free accommodation to Ukrainian women and children, whose husbands were fighting in the Ukrainian army. Several local Quebecers who had never engaged in immigrant support also strongly mobilized on their own: participants reported having chosen to come to Quebec City because individuals, in online fora, had offered them months of free accommodation and help. Several local Ukrainian associations established themselves in response to the arrivals and in the absence of clear governmental organization or support. Yet acquiring funding for their work proved difficult.

For Ukrainians in Quebec, accessing permanent

residence was particularly daunting. Whereas Canada was still increasing immigration levels until 2024, the Province of Quebec's government has been focused on reducing permanent immigration to the province [since taking office in 2018](#). Additionally, language and job requirements for economic pathways to permanent residence were stricter than in the rest of Canada. One research participant had managed to submit a permanent residence application at the time of our interview yet the waiting period – which is longer for Quebec permanent residence candidates than elsewhere in Canada – had led her mental health to deteriorate and she was on sick leave. Several participants planned to apply for admission under humanitarian and compassionate grounds as they thought they had no other options which would allow them to stay in the province. One participant, who at the time was strongly involved in supporting the locally displaced community, reported that 20 to 30% of Quebec City CUAET holders were considering moving to another province.

For a more detailed picture of the settlement experiences, our research project has produced [story maps of the trajectories of two displaced Ukrainian families from Ukraine to Quebec City and Winnipeg](#).

What our qualitative research shows is that the local context matters with regard to the services and supports offered, the involvement of local community members, and the choices made by the migrants about where to settle and whether to stay.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In framing our recommendations, we feel it is important to both draw on the key quantitative demographics and status transition trends at the federal level, as well as our qualitative settlement findings at the municipal level in two distinct provincial contexts.

A. Recommendations to consider for Ukrainians in limbo currently in Canada

While the evidence points to a strong desire by the majority of CUAET holders to stay in Canada, we recognize that not all arriving Ukrainians desire permanent residence in Canada and may plan to return to Ukraine if /when it is safe to do so or to settle in a different country. Some may not have the funds to

move back and re-establish themselves after years away. However, most have now spent years working to establish themselves in Canada, finding work, making connections and learning/improving their language skills with supports from all levels of government, the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada and other volunteers. The length of uncertainty and limbo some Ukrainians have been left in during their stay in Canada, and the disparity between those who have managed to obtain permanent status and those who have not, needs to be remedied. We therefore recommend that the following be considered by the Federal government:

1. Gather additional data on the status trajectories of CUAET holders, including data on secondary migration and data on CUAET holders leaving Canada
2. Expand PNP spaces so that provinces may offer permanent residence to more CUAET holders in their jurisdictions
3. Establish a pathway to permanent residence for those CUAET holders who do not qualify for current program criteria with early, clear and transparent communication on eligibility
4. Ensure that access to this pathway includes the Province of Quebec and is applied there
5. Beyond the specific case of CUAET holders, explore whether time spent in Canada could be a core criterion for access to permanent residence for those who do not qualify for existing pathways to permanent residence.

B. Recommendations for settlement best practices based on two-city comparison

1. Provinces should ensure regular information sharing at senior levels involving municipal authorities and interagency meetings
2. Federal and provincial governments should cooperate to ensure that measures such as on-arrival free accommodation for a limited time are available across the country
3. The federal, provincial and municipal governments and local settlement agencies should cooperate to offer one-stop shops for settlement services on arrival and work to ensure that volunteer engagement is facilitated

4. Agencies mandated to provide settlement services to particular groups should clearly communicate and coordinate with municipal authorities and local organizations representing newcomers
5. Federal, provincial and municipal governments should provide quick access to institutional resources and funding to newly established organizations representing and serving new groups of newcomers
6. Provinces and municipalities should grant access to subsidized daycare regardless of parents' immigration status
7. Settlement agencies and newcomer organizations should provide accurate information so that newcomers develop realistic expectations regarding temporary status and transition to permanent residence, and access to language training and the labour market.

CONCLUSION

Canada's welcome to displaced Ukrainians sits uncomfortably between our traditional admissions categories. This blurring of temporary entry and humanitarian, economic and family admissions has left too many Ukrainians without a clear option for permanence in Canada. This is despite the deployment of services, funds and volunteer energies to support their settlement, the successful contributions they have made to date, and the continuing war and destruction in their homeland. Moreover, this positions Ukrainians who gratefully accepted Canada's CUAET invitation in competition with others seeking admission to Canada at a time when access to Canada is diminishing.

About the Authors

Adèle Garnier is Associate Professor and Undergraduate Program Director, Department of Geography, Université Laval. She is also the Director of the Centre de Recherche Cultures-Arts-Sociétés (CELAT).

Shauna Labman is Executive Director, Global College, and Associate Professor of Human Rights at The University of Winnipeg.

About the Research

The research project **"Transforming Protection: The multiscalar impact of Canada's welcome to displaced Ukrainians"** aims to gain a multiscalar and multidisciplinary understanding of Canada's response to Ukrainian displacement. At the macrolevel, we analyse the impact of this response on Canada's refugee and migration policy. At the mesolevel, we investigate Canada's response in two midsized cities: Quebec City and Winnipeg, taking in account their provincial context and the local significance of the pre-existing Ukrainian diaspora. At the microlevel, we explore the immigration and settlement trajectories of displaced Ukrainians in the two cities. The project team conducted more than 40 interviews with displaced Ukrainians, Ukrainian Canadians who helped the displaced, as well as government and community experts in English, French, Ukrainian and Russian. Adèle Garnier (Department of Geography, Université Laval) is lead investigator and Shauna Labman (Global College, University of Winnipeg) is co-investigator. Project collaborators include Danièle Bélanger, Department of Geography, Université Laval, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Global Migration Processes, anthropologist Agnès Blais (Université Laval) and legal scholar, and herself a displaced Ukrainian, and Natella Malazoniia (University of Winnipeg).

Suggested Readings

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