

Immigration

Canada-Ukraine emergency travel program ends, but questions remain | Sergio R. Karas

By **Sergio R. Karas**

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(May 30, 2023, 11:45 AM EDT) -- Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been ongoing for more than a year and has left over eight million Ukrainians displaced thus far. To provide support to them during this unfortunate time, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) introduced new immigration streams for them to obtain temporary or permanent residency.

IRCC created the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) in March 2022, for Ukrainians to come to Canada. This emergency program allowed Ukrainian nationals to travel to Canada and obtain temporary residency visas, open work permits, or be sponsored by immediate family members who are Canadian citizens or permanent residents. Upon arrival in Canada, each Ukrainian adult can receive \$3,000 and each child \$1,500 as settlement funds.

The implementation of the CUAET program has raised some concerns about its transparency. During the initial stages of the program, IRCC was less than clear on how it vetted Ukrainians before allowing them to obtain travel authorization. IRCC seems to have used shortcuts in conducting background checks and security screening that usually take several weeks or longer.

The only statistics provided by IRCC and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) correspond to Ukrainian citizens and returning Canadian permanent residents of Ukrainian origin who entered Canada by land or air between Jan. 1, 2022, and May 14, 2023, the number of applications received, approved and the number of people who arrived in Canada under CUAET between March 17, 2022, and May 6, 2023. Approximately 30,000 Ukrainians arrived in Canada by land, and more than 190,000 arrived by air. However, more than one million applications were received, and more than 700,000 were approved. IRCC and CBSA statistics show that more than 150,000 applicants arrived in Canada under CUAET, and the rest arrived by other means.

The statistics provided by IRCC appear to be incomplete. Instead of disclosing the composition of the Ukrainian population arriving in Canada, including the number of males, females, children and seniors, their destination in Canada, and whether they obtained temporary resident, work, or study permits, IRCC is only providing statistics related to Ukrainians entering Canada by land and air. This does not give an accurate picture of the arriving cohort. Also, it does not take into consideration that many Ukrainians may have entered Canada, returned to Ukraine and then re-entered. Further, the statistics do not show what countries Ukrainians are coming from. This raises questions as to whether Ukrainians with permanent residency in other countries are simply using the program as an insurance policy. Ukrainians with permanent residency in other countries should not be allowed to use CUAET as that was not the intent of the program.

Without accurate statistics, it is unknown how many applicants obtained work permits under the program. It is also unknown how many applicants who obtained work permits are actively seeking or have found employment. It has been suggested by some of our clients that some applicants are obtaining open work permits only to receive the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) coverage and

a social insurance number but have no intention of finding a job in Canada, but that cannot be verified because the IRCC statistics do not track what percentage of Work Permit holders are working. Job Bank Canada has a dedicated webpage for Ukrainian job seekers and for employers hiring them. However, no information has been provided on the number of Ukrainians hired through that webpage and how effective this method has been to assist applicants in finding employment.

IRCC grants Ukrainians entering Canada a one-time temporary resident visa. However, neither IRCC nor CBSA is tracking how many people have returned to Ukraine after receiving their permits in Canada. While 700,000 applications were approved, only 150,000 applicants arrived in Canada under CUAET. This raises the question as to why individuals who obtained visas are not travelling to Canada. Applicants who were granted a one-time entry into Canada may be residing in other European countries and using the temporary visa as an insurance policy.

It is unknown what the cost of the program really is and how the funds are being distributed. IRCC has announced that the last day to apply for CUAET from overseas will be July 15, 2023, and the last day to travel to Canada with a visa issued under CUAET will be March 31, 2024. The last day for Ukrainians and their family members, who are in Canada and seek to benefit from settlement services will be March 31, 2025.

While it is understandable that IRCC launched CUAET hastily due to the circumstances and public pressure, it would have been greatly beneficial to have clear statistics of the applicant population and of those arriving in Canada to determine whether the program accomplished its original goals and whether the type of services provided met the expectations set by the government. The public has the right to know what the total cost of the program has been, the intended destination for the applicants and their ability to integrate as future prospective immigrants.

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