



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

City of Toronto Resettlement Program

Date:	September 17, 2015
To:	Executive Committee
From:	Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	EX8.39

SUMMARY

As of early September 2015, more than four million Syrians have fled their country due to the ongoing conflict in the region. With no prospect of returning home in the near future, and limited opportunity to rebuild their lives in their current conditions, tens of thousands of Syrian and other refugees have recently continued with their flight in attempt to reach the safety and stability of Western Europe. In doing so, they often put themselves in life-threatening situations, while overwhelming the refugee-reception capacity of receiving countries and other countries along the way. With the winter approaching, world leaders are struggling to find solutions to this growing humanitarian crisis.

This report responds to Councillor Cressy's request for investigation into options for a City of Toronto Syrian refugee resettlement program, and outlines a number of immediate and longer-term measures for the City to take.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance & Administration (SDFA) recommend that:

1. City Council approve the proposed activities of the City of Toronto Syrian refugee resettlement program outlined in this report;
2. City Council approve a one-time allocation of \$0.600 million from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve (XQ0703) to fund the settlement program;
3. City Council approve the addition of one temporary staff complement and an increase of \$0.025 million gross and zero net to the 2015 Approved Operating Budget and include the remainder of \$0.575 million gross and zero net in the 2016 Operating Budget Submission for Social Development and Finance Administration (SDFA).
4. City Council request that Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) provide the funding required to support the successful resettlement of Syrian refugees in Toronto; and
5. City Council direct the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to report back to the City Council on the progress of the implementation of the program expansion in January 2016.

Equity Impact

Newcomers to Toronto, including refugees, face a number of barriers that challenge their ability to successfully integrate into the social, economic and civic life of the city. Toronto City Council approved the Toronto Newcomer Strategy in 2013 in recognition of the important roles the City of Toronto plays in advancing the successful settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees in Toronto. The Syrian refugees coming to Toronto will require targeted and coordinated support from the City, community and institutional partners and Toronto residents. Targeted efforts will ensure that programs, services, and opportunities are available to meet the needs of Syrian refugees to assist them to effectively transition and settle into life in Toronto.

Financial Impact

One time funding of \$0.600 million for the settlement program will be provided from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve (XQ0703). The reserve will be replenished at year end to maintain the reserve target of funding to the equivalent of a 1% tax base. The 2015 Approved Operating Budget for Social Development, Finance & Administration will be increased by \$0.025 million gross and zero net and one temporary position; and the 2016

Operating Budget Submission will be adjusted by \$0.575 million gross and zero net to support the programming requirements.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In February 2013, City Council approved the mission, vision and guiding principles contained in the Toronto Newcomer Strategy, and requested the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee on its implementation. The full direction is available at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD18.7>

In June 2014, City Council adopted the Integrating Cities Charter and directed that Toronto become a signatory of the Charter:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.CD29.10>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

According to the United Nation's High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), more than half of Syria's population has been forced to flee their homes since the start of the conflict in March 2011. This is more than 12 million people, with more than half of them being children. Out of the total number, close to eight million are displaced within Syria, and more than four million have been registered by UNHCR as refugees in neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

As part of its Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, and in response to UNHCR's appeal to the international community, in 2013 Canada committed to resettling 1,300 refugees from Syria by the end of 2014. In January of this year, this commitment increased by 10,000 additional Syrian refugees to be resettled by the end of 2017, with the majority to be privately sponsored. A total of 2,406 Syrian refugees have been resettled as of early September 2015.

Recently, in response to the latest developments, all of the major federal party leaders have made promises as part of their pre-election campaigns to significantly increase the number of Syrian refugees to be resettled to Canada and to expedite their processing.

Regardless of the outcome of the federal election, it is very likely that Canada's commitment will increase and that Syrian refugees will start arriving sooner. In addition, the plight of Syrian refugees has inspired many of Toronto community members to come forward and offer support, through donations of time, money or resources, or by committing to take on a sponsorship role. In Toronto, a group of residents came together

in early 2015 and formed Lifeline Syria pledging to recruit, train and assist sponsor groups to welcome and support Syrian refugees over the next two years. The City, through Toronto Newcomer Office (TNO), has been involved with Lifeline Syria since its formation and has provided guidance and logistical support as a member of their Steering Committee.

These developments will undoubtedly have a direct local impact, creating an urgent need for the City of Toronto to take action in order to mobilize and be ready to provide necessary supports to our future residents fleeing the conflict in Syria, and to our community members and agencies who are facilitating their arrival and settlement.

COMMENTS

Advancement of the successful settlement and integration of newcomers, including refugees, is at the core of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy, approved by Council in 2013. Throughout its history, Toronto demonstrated this commitment many times, welcoming thousands of refugees that were fleeing political instability and conflict in their home countries: Ukrainians and Hungarians in the years right after the World War II; Ugandan Asians and Chileans in 1970-ies; Indochinese 'boat people' in 1979 and 1980; Somalis in late 1980-ies and early 1990-es; and people fleeing conflicts in former Yugoslavia (including Kosovo) in mid to late 1990-ies. The pace of their settlement and integration varied, as well as level of services and supports available.

The rapidly developing Syrian refugee crisis, and the related developments in Canada necessitate urgent action. The following outlines a plan of action for the City of Toronto, based on past experiences and best practices from similar situations, and takes into account the existing resources within the community sector as well as the City. The plan utilizes a two-phased approach, each incorporating a number of internal and external measures.

Mobilization and Preparedness

The following are activities to be undertaken immediately, as part of the City's preparedness measures.

1. Inter-Divisional Team

An inter-divisional team has been formed to work on identifying and mobilizing the internal resources and response activities. Divisions represented include:

- Shelter, Support & Housing Administration
- Toronto Employment & Social Services
- Toronto Public Health
- Children's Services
- Strategic Communications

- Equity, Diversity & Human Rights
- Parks, Forestry & Recreation
- Social Development, Finance & Administration

Social Development, Finance & Administration (SDFA) houses the Toronto Newcomer Office and will act as Chair for the Interdivisional Team. Terms of Reference are under development, and the first meeting scheduled for September 23rd, 2015. As the situation evolves, the composition of the Team may change.

2. Inter-Agency Task Force

An Inter-Agency Task Force is being developed to work on coordination and streamlining of external response activities, including communication and information-sharing. Proposed members include representatives from:

- Canadian Red Cross
- Salvation Army
- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants - OCASI
- UNHCR
- Toronto District School Board
- Toronto Central LHIN
- Lifeline Syria
- City of Toronto, SDFA

As with the Inter-divisional Team, Terms of Reference are under development and the first meeting planned for early October. The membership has been determined based on agency mandates, their potential roles, and the need to maintain the ability to respond quickly. The Toronto Newcomer Office in SDFA will serve as Secretariat for both the Interdivisional Team and the Inter-Agency Task Force.

3. Anti-rumours Campaign

Based on broader social inclusion considerations, in 2014, City Council directed that an anti-rumours campaign be developed to address stigma and stereotypes as barriers to greater newcomer participation and better integration. In the absence of resources, implementation has been slow. The current situation warrants that an adapted model is developed and implemented to address issues related to islamophobia, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiments which have the potential to undermine social cohesion and community-building.

4. Continued Support to Lifeline Syria, including exploration of an Assurance Fund

The City (Toronto Newcomer Office) will continue to participate on Lifeline Syria's Steering Committee. Other members include Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the provincial Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and International Trade (MCIIT), as well as a number of community agencies and individuals. The City's contribution will continue to include providing advice, meeting space and logistical support as needed. So

far, TNO helped organize two of Lifeline Syria's orientation sessions to potential sponsors, with the first one held in Council Chamber, which had a symbolic significance.

One of the early requests of Lifeline Syria to the City of Toronto was to establish an assurance fund that would serve as a security in case of a sponsorship breakdown. The idea comes from Winnipeg, where the municipality dedicated \$250,000 in 2002 for this purpose. Although the use of the program has been limited, it served as a safety net and an encouragement to community members to become sponsors.

It is proposed that the City explore the implications of such a fund, and options for delivering should such a fund be feasible.

Post-Arrival Supports

Municipalities have a significant role in newcomer integration. They are providers of services that are often critical for the successful settlement: childcare, affordable housing, transit and many other essential services. The following outlines supports that the City will be providing directly to the resettled Syrian refugees, based on their needs, as well as activities that will facilitate coordination of supports available in the community.

5. Settlement Supports through City Divisions

While the exact needs of the resettled Syrian refugees will only be known once they arrive, considering the circumstances from which they are coming, the following are some of the municipal supports that will most likely be needed:

- public health services: psychosocial supports, urgent dental care and immunization
- provision of temporary housing solutions
- child care
- employment supports

The Inter-divisional Team will work on identifying ways to make these and other supports available to Syrian refugees, based on their needs and our capacity to respond.

6. Settlement Services in City Facilities

In 2014 and 2015, Toronto Newcomer Office and Parks, Forestry & Recreation, in partnership with five settlement agencies (Toronto Settlement Collaborative), pilot-tested of having settlement services available in five community centres. The settlement agencies provided their itinerant settlement workers, while PF&R provided space. The pilot-test established that by making services available at these non-traditional sites newcomers are better supported and feel more welcome, City staff are more aware of the needs of their clients who are newcomers, and settlement workers have better insights into City's programs and supports that may be of interest to newcomers.

A funding request was made to CIC for the enhanced capacity of TNO to facilitate an expansion of the pilot-test to include other City facilities. This may include civic centres,

City Hall, employment centres, City-run child care facilities. The outcome of the funding request will not be known before 2016. In the interim and in light of the current developments, it is proposed that the pilot expansion is accelerated, and that TNO is immediately staffed to start working on the pilot expansion. This will include identifying of new sites, liaising with City divisions and other partners, and providing support to set-up the program, including orientation to both settlement workers and on-site City staff.

7. Online Sector Supports

The City of Toronto's website currently includes an Immigration Portal, whose development was funded by MCIIT in 2010, and a webpage of Toronto Newcomer Office.

It is proposed that a special webpage is created and linked to TNO's, with a goal to strengthen service coordination and enhance the ability of stakeholder groups to access the most up-to-date information on available sector supports and services related to the resettlement of Syrian refugees. The webpage will be updated on a regular basis with relevant and timely information, tools and resources.

8. Continued Coordination through the Inter-divisional Team and Inter-agency Task Force

After the initial period, when the focus is on establishment of roles and responsibilities, the two groups will continue to meet in order to facilitate coordination and information exchange.

9. Ongoing Support to Lifeline Syria and other Community Agencies

The City of Toronto will continue to participate on Lifeline Syria's Steering Committee, and provide supports as necessary. The City will also provide supports to other similar agencies. This may include providing meeting space, and logistical support to organizing of events.

10. Inter-governmental Coordination

The City of Toronto will continue working with all orders of government to share information, facilitate coordination, and ensure that the local Toronto perspective is taken into account. Where appropriate, the Inter-Agency Task Force will also engage and coordinate with other orders of government.

In addition, municipalities through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities have been actively engaged in discussion to identify what cities can do to help address the Syrian refugee crisis from a local perspective. To this end, FCM Board of Directors at its September 2015 meeting adopted an emergency resolution to establish an FCM Task Force on refugee settlement in response to the Syrian refugee crisis.

Conclusion

Experience shows that the greatest number of refugees settle in large urban areas, where there are supports available, as well as already established ethnic communities. Although it will take another couple of months until it becomes clear how many Syrian refugees Canada will commit to resettle, it is clear that the City of Toronto needs to take urgent action to prepare for their arrival.

CONTACT

Vera Dodic
Project Manager, Toronto Newcomer Office
Social Development, Finance & Administration
416-392-5679
vdodic@toronto.ca

Denise Andrea Campbell
Director, Social Policy, Analysis & Research
Social Development, Finance & Administration
416-392-8614
dcampbe6@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Chris Brillinger
Executive Director
Social Development, Finance and Administration