



## REPORT FOR ACTION

# Refugee/Asylum Claimant Arrivals to Toronto - Current Situation Update

**Date:** June 25, 2018

**To:** City Council

**From:** Interim City Manager

**Wards:** All

### SUMMARY

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The City of Toronto has exhausted all facilities, personnel, and financial resources available to meet the current needs of refugee/asylum claimants in the municipal shelter system. This report recommends that Council formally request the provincial and federal governments to respond immediately and directly to the current acute pressure of refugee/asylum claimant arrivals to Toronto.

The situation is now urgent. The refugee/asylum claimants accommodated in college dormitories must vacate by August 9th and Toronto does not have the resources or spaces to relocate them. Although an exhaustive search for additional shelter capacity is being pursued with federal and provincial colleagues, still no appropriate sites for additional shelter space for refugee/asylum claimants have been identified. All the more concerning is the fact that, historically, the flow of refugee/asylum claimants has increased significantly towards the end of June.

The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has recently written to the Mayor indicating, "...my officials have been working closely with their Ontario counterparts to prepare for further irregular migration movement. This includes planning for a triage centre to manage flow and alleviate the housing pressure in major city centres, particularly Toronto. A triage system of this nature is already in place between the Government of Canada, Province of Quebec, and the City of Montreal, and allows for a highly coordinated approach around pending arrivals..."

While this is encouraging, Toronto has yet to be informed of any concrete action such as the location of an Ontario triage centre, the program model, or the identification of additional shelter or housing sites and resources.

The City of Toronto has responded to the increased flow of refugee/asylum claimants in a responsible and timely manner. Toronto City Council authorized increases in the last two operating budgets exceeding \$64.5 Million to meet immediate needs of refugee/asylum claimants. To date, neither Ontario nor Canada has provided any direct

funding to assist the City with these new costs, although the City is awaiting its share of recently announced federal funds to be flowed through the Province. The City of Toronto's shelter system cannot manage the pressure any further.

Toronto has a long history of supporting and welcoming refugee/asylum claimants including Vietnamese peoples in the 1970s, Somali peoples in the 1980s, and more recently, Syrian refugee/asylum claimants in 2016. Nothing has changed with respect to the City of Toronto's commitment to welcoming and supporting newcomers. However, Ontario and Canada must engage and lead this effort if it is going to be successful.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Interim City Manager recommends that:

1. City Council reiterate its desire to welcome all newcomers choosing to make Toronto their home, with the appropriate support and leadership of both Ontario and Canada.

2. City Council immediately advise the governments of Canada and Ontario that:

a) the municipal shelter system in Toronto is operating at capacity and the City is providing even further shelter support to refugee/asylum claimants, in excess of the City's capacity, through the provision of additional 2,000 hotel rooms

b) the City of Toronto has exhausted all facilities, personnel, and financial resources available to meet the immediate housing needs of the current population of refugee/asylum claimants in the shelter system;

c) neither Ontario nor Canada have provided any direct funding to assist the City of Toronto with the additional costs of providing housing supports to refugee/asylum claimants, although the City is awaiting its share of recently announced federal funds to be flowed through the Province; and

d) neither Ontario nor Canada have provided any facilities, or identified any facilities, that will be available to house refugee/asylum claimants beyond August 9, 2018.

3. City Council advise the governments of Canada and Ontario that the City of Toronto does not have the facilities, personnel, or financial resources necessary to provide on its own, housing supports to any additional refugee/asylum claimants who arrive in Toronto seeking services.

4. City Council advise the governments of Canada and Ontario that emergency contingency spaces provided at Centennial College and Humber College are available only until August 9, when they must accommodate the return of students, and that the City of Toronto does not have the facilities, personnel, or financial resources to relocate the refugee/asylum claimants that are currently receiving shelter supports at these colleges.

5. City Council reiterate its request to the governments of Canada and Ontario for an urgent regional response, including: the introduction of federal and provincial-level coordination to place new arrivals to locations outside of the City of Toronto's shelter system, where there is capacity; additional resources, including non-municipal facilities and human resources to operate those facilities; and reimbursement of direct costs (to date) associated with the City's response to the increased flow of refugee claimants/asylum seekers (\$64.5 Million).

6. City Council authorize the Executive Director, Social Development Finance and Administration to enter into agreements with refugee-serving, non-governmental organizations to organize and facilitate information and referral services for refugee/asylum claimants, within the approved 2018 operating budget.

7. City Council direct the General Manager, Shelter Support and Housing Administration to assess and report through the 2019 budget process on the reallocation of base funding for hotel programs to transitional housing programs, when and if a federal response allows a reduction in demand, as experienced in 2001 and 2007.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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The \$64.5 Million was a projection based on 40% of the shelter system occupied by refugee/asylum claimants. This percentage has increased since the original projection and staff will provide an update on the revised dollar figure.

In 2017, the City of Toronto incurred an additional \$15.6 Million in unanticipated, direct costs (food, accommodation and staffing) related to the refugee/asylum claimant response. The Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) base operating budget was increased by \$18 Million in 2018 to sustain the continued operations of the motel programs dedicated to new arrivals. In the first quarter of 2018, the City spent \$7.6 Million in direct costs for its refugee/asylum claimant response. At the current spend rate, the existing budget for these costs will likely be exhausted by the end of June, leading to an anticipated further \$30 Million operating budget shortfall for 2018. Taken as a whole, these direct costs for the City's shelter refugee/asylum claimant response for 2017 and 2018 will exceed \$64.5 Million.

These costs do not include the potential capital costs associated with securing new sites for refugee/asylum claimants in addition to the capital expansion already included in the approved 2018-2027 capital plan.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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**April 24, 2018** – CD27.3 Proposed Canada-Ontario-Toronto Memorandum of Understanding on Immigration and Settlement (MOU):  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.CD27.3>

City Council requested an urgent federal and provincial response to the increased refugee arrivals in the Toronto shelter system, including the following:

- Introduce federal and provincial-level coordination to facilitate placement of new arrivals to other locations outside of the City of Toronto's shelter system, where there is capacity.
- Consider engaging the Urban Commissioners for a coordinated regional response.
- Introduce a sustainable federal and provincial funding mechanism to address increases in housing/shelter demand at the municipal level and pressures related to irregular migration/refugee/asylum claimants.
- Additional resources – including non-municipal facilities and human resources to operate those facilities.
- Reimbursement for all costs – including those incurred in 2017 and projected for 2018 – in responding to the needs of refugee-claimants in Toronto, including the \$64.5M for direct operations.
- Federal-level action to better manage inter-provincial flows, and facilitate faster processing of refugee claims through adequate Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) resources directed to process refugee claims in as short a period as possible.
- Establishing a federally managed information sharing system that would notify cities outside of Quebec of upcoming arrivals.
- Dedicated provincial staff to facilitate this coordinated service delivery and placement
- An increase in the total contribution for the Portable Housing Benefit to assist in facilitating housing for many refugee/asylum claimants
- Exemption of any City financial benefits to migrant families as income for the purposes of determining OW eligibility
- Consideration of additional financial benefits that may be extended to service users in cases of demonstrated and extreme need.

**March 26, 2018** – CD26.5 Emergency Shelter Services – Update:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.CD26.5>

City Council requested the provincial government to provide a response to City Council's previous request to immediately re-introduce funding mechanisms to offset the cost of sudden and prolonged increases in demand for emergency shelter space in Toronto.

**January 31, 2018** – CD25.5 Review of Current Winter Respite and Shelter Services during the Recent Cold Weather:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.CD25.5>

City Council requested the federal government to consider the uploading and/or sharing of costs, operations and management of housing and shelter-related services including hotel contracts, for specialized populations which the Government of Canada is currently responsible for such as for asylum seekers, refugee/asylum claimants, veterans and Indigenous persons. City Council also requested Ontario to immediately

develop a comprehensive and funded plan to provide adequate health services throughout the shelter system.

**December 5, 2017** – CD24.7 2018 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Progress Report:  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.CD24.7>

City Council requested the Province to increase health service supports to the shelter system and reintroduce funding mechanisms to offset the cost of sudden and prolonged increases in demand for emergency shelter space in Toronto. City Council also requested the federal government to expedite the implementation of the National Housing Strategy and to pay for all necessary resources, including affordable housing and shelter costs, for any refugee/asylum claimants that have moved to Toronto over the last three years.

**November 7, 2017** – CD23.12 Managing Refugee Flows:  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.CD23.12>

City Council requested the federal and provincial governments to provide additional funding to the City of Toronto and partner stakeholder agencies within Toronto and surrounding areas, so that the City and the settlement sector are resourced appropriately to welcome newcomers, including refugee/asylum claimants, to Toronto to assist them with settlement, language training, education, employment and housing.

**April 26, 2017** – CD19.11 Service Level Impact of the 2017 Service Adjustments to Shelter, Support and Housing Administration:  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.CD19.11>

City Council requested the federal government to work with the City of Toronto to explore transferring federal lands, including the armouries, to be used as sites for affordable housing.

**April 26, 2017** – CD19.9 Refugees, Refugee Claimants and Undocumented Torontonians - Recent Trends and Issues:  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.CD19.9>

City Council requested the federal and provincial governments to provide additional funding to the City of Toronto to better support necessary programs, given the increased pressure on the shelter system, the Toronto Newcomer Office and social programming systems from refugee/asylum claimants.

## **COMMENTS**

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### **Background:**

The City of Toronto is committed to being a welcoming place for all newcomers. All sectors in Toronto, government, private sector, and non-governmental organizations have recognized the value and importance of immigration to the continued social,

economic and cultural success of the city. As the main destination for immigrants to Canada, Toronto receives on average 50,000 new arrivals annually.

Toronto also receives the highest number of newcomers with more complex settlement needs, such as refugee/asylum claimants (in this report the term 'refugee' also refers to refugee/asylum claimants), international students and other temporary residents. Toronto has a long history of accepting refugee/asylum claimants including the Vietnamese in the 1970s, Somalis in the 1980s and, in 2016, Toronto successfully welcomed close to seven thousand Syrian refugee/asylum claimants, many with complex social and health needs.

Many of the refugee/asylum claimants arriving in Toronto are selected abroad and become permanent residents as soon as they arrive in Canada. Toronto has historically also received a large number of refugee claimants who enter the country through an established port of entry. In the last few years, however, there has been a dramatic increase in "irregular" migration by refugee/asylum claimants who enter Canada without going through an established port of entry. This trend intensified in 2017 and has surged in 2018. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship notes in his recent communication to the Mayor "Canada is experiencing historically high numbers of asylum claimants."

Given our geography and single land border, "irregular migration" to Canada has historically been quite limited. However, recent public policy and government actions in the United States, as well as events elsewhere in the world are contributing to the surge in irregular migration to Canada. The current settlement framework (legislation, regulation, policy, and programs) does not appear to address the growing local impacts of this trend.

### **Local Impact:**

Surges in refugee arrivals and their unpredictability create significant pressures on local support systems, often stretching their capacity beyond their limits.

In November 2017, City Council recognized the need for the City of Toronto to develop a plan to create municipal capacity to deal with surges in arrivals in a more systemic way, and directed staff to work with appropriate stakeholders to create a refugee capacity plan. As staff undertook the work to develop a plan, the actual arrival numbers continued to increase and in effect, staff are implementing the plan as it is being created.

The two areas of focus are: managing the demand for immediate shelter needs (primarily a City responsibility); and responding to needs for refugee support services, including initial legal supports and basic living supports (a shared responsibility involving provincial and federal governments and non-governmental agencies).

### **Municipal Shelter Supports for Refugee/Asylum claimants in Toronto:**

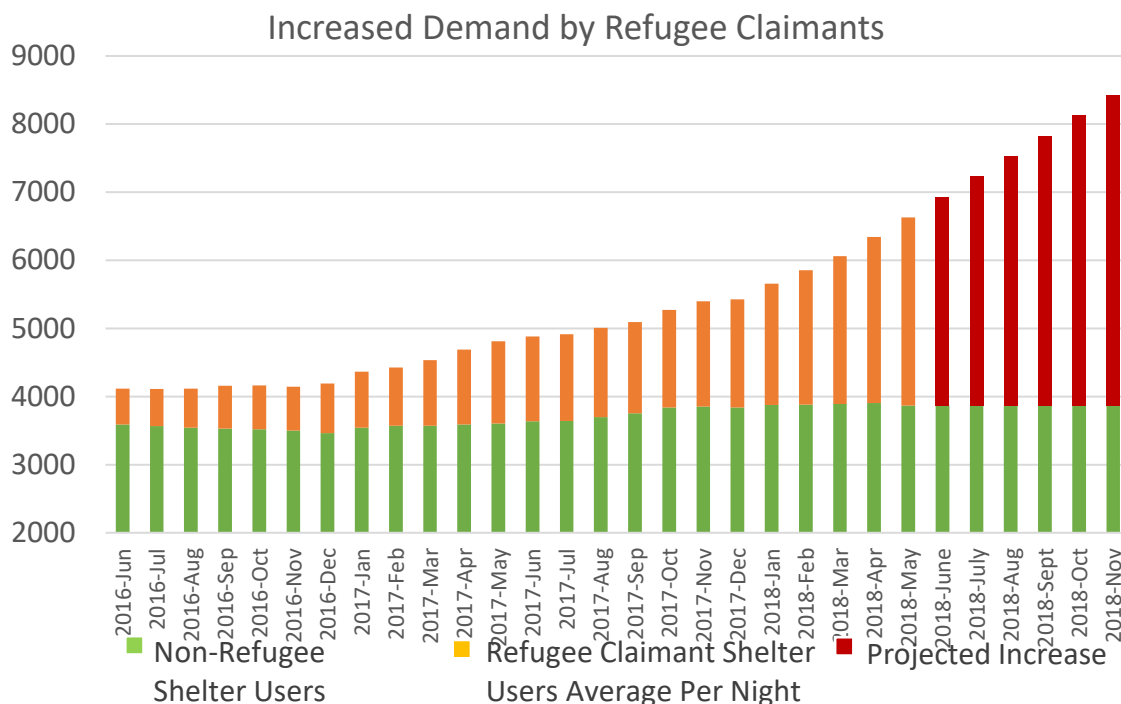
The shelter system in Toronto is the largest shelter system in Canada with more shelter beds per capita than any other jurisdiction. It is important to note that Toronto was

working to address capacity issues in the shelter system related to existing need before the additional pressure related to refugee/asylum claimants.

Since early 2016, the City's shelter system has been impacted dramatically by the sharp increase in refugee/asylum claimants accessing emergency shelter services and the family shelter sector has been stretched to its limit. The number of refugee/asylum claimants in Toronto's shelter system has increased from 459 in 2016 (11.2% of the total system) to 3,209 as of June 20, 2018 (45.8% of the total system).

On May 23, 2018, the City of Toronto, through the Office of Emergency Management, activated its Contingency Plan for Emergency Social Services. As part of this response, the City, with financial support from the Province of Ontario, provided to the Red Cross, secured an additional 800 spaces for refugee/asylum claimants at college dormitories in Toronto (400 at Centennial College, and an additional 400 at Humber College). As of June 21, 2018, the family programs at both Centennial College and Humber College have reached their capacity. Approximately 200 spaces remain at the Humber College program for singles.

In order to ensure that Toronto remains a safe, welcoming and accessible place for all, the City of Toronto has requested urgent action be taken by the provincial and federal governments to facilitate a coordinated and regional response to this challenge. To date, neither Ontario nor Canada have provided any direct funding to assist the City with these costs to provide housing supports for refugee/asylum claimants.



**Support Services for Refugee/asylum claimants in Toronto:**

Settlement services are a shared responsibility between Canada and Ontario. Canada provides a range of supports for newcomers who have been granted permanent

resident status. There are few federal supports for asylum seekers and refugee/asylum claimants, primarily interim health benefits. Ontario provides both support services (through its contracted non-governmental partners) and income security (through Ontario Works) when an application for refugee status is initiated with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

While the federal and provincial governments share responsibility for the formal settlement system, municipalities including Toronto also have a key role to play in ensuring newcomers settle successfully. The City of Toronto does not fund or manage the settlement system. However the City does work with settlement services and is funded by IRCC to coordinate local settlement activity (i.e. the Toronto Newcomer Office).

This report recommends that City staff continue to work with non-governmental agency partners to organize and facilitate information and referral services for refugee/asylum claimants (other than housing/shelter and income security). In light of the current context, staff will continue to refine the refugee capacity plan and report in the second quarter of 2019.

### **Situation in Montreal:**

Responding to refugee/asylum claimants has inter-provincial and regional impacts and requires a coordinated, intergovernmental approach. For example, the refugee situation in Montreal has implications and lessons for Toronto. In 2017, half of all refugee/asylum claimants to Canada made their claim in Quebec (24,785 out of 50,445). This was a significant increase from 5,525 refugee claims in 2016, and was largely made up of arrivals of refugee/asylum claimants originally from Haiti.

It is important to note that in Montreal, the management of refugee/asylum claimants are a *provincial*, not municipal, responsibility. Quebec, as the lead government managing the response, is much better positioned to help distribute the flow of refugee/asylum claimants to various areas in greater Montreal and beyond.

The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has indicated that there is "A triage system...already in place between the Government of Canada, Province of Quebec, and the City of Montreal...This has ensured that Quebec and Montreal have always been able to accommodate asylum seekers to date and continue to do so, despite misconceptions to the contrary."

While there has been some indication of planning for a Canada/Ontario triage initiative, to date there has been no equivalent response model implemented in Ontario.

### **Intergovernmental Relations:**

Toronto has been sharing information with Ontario and Canada at both political and staff levels with respect to the increasing pressure on the shelter system and the broader issues within Toronto's settlement system.



Provincially, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration has led this file. The province was key in facilitating the opening of two college locations for a short period to house refugee/asylum claimants, and is sharing with the City the Red Cross costs for the college programs up to \$3 Million (of a total program cost of \$6.3 Million). City and Ontario staff discussions are ongoing and have resulted in an increase in information sharing, however sustainable, longer term strategies remain unclear.

At the federal level the City is engaged with staff within Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and has communicated City Council's urgent requests for assistance in handling the surge in refugee claimant arrivals. The federal government has been working primarily through the Provinces on this issue. However, the Minister has recently indicated to the Mayor that Toronto will be invited to join the ongoing meetings of the Intergovernmental Task Force on Irregular Migration, including Ontario and Quebec, to give Toronto a voice at the table. This is a welcome invitation and will assist Toronto in better understanding the situation in a national and provincial context.

The federal government has also indicated that initial funding of \$11 Million will be made available to Ontario to offset temporary housing costs for refugee/asylum claimants, but again, no details with respect to this funding announcement have been forthcoming.

#### **Current Status:**

City efforts to meet existing shelter demands and the refugee related demands are at a maximum. City staff in Shelter Support and Housing Administration have been working flat out for the past eight months to address immediate service demands and secure sites for additional shelter capacity. However the system is backing up because arrival numbers far exceed the outflow to permanent housing, which is constrained by the tight Toronto housing market and a lack of resources to pay rent.

Although there has been an exhaustive search and review of shelter sites involving all relevant City divisions and provincial and federal colleagues, no order of government has yet identified appropriate sites for providing additional shelter capacity for refugee/asylum claimants.

City staff are particularly concerned because the approximately 800 refugee/asylum claimants to be accommodated at Centennial College and Humber College must vacate those locations before August 9th, to accommodate the return of students. The City does not have the facilities, personnel, or financial resources to relocate these refugee/asylum claimants.

These issues are all the more concerning as the flow of refugee/asylum claimants historically has increased significantly towards the end of June. The shelter system in Toronto cannot manage the current numbers.

This report recommends Council formally advise both the provincial and federal governments that the City of Toronto has not been able to resolve the issue unilaterally and that their immediate and direct action is required.

## **Conclusion:**

The City of Toronto has responded to the increased flow of refugee/asylum claimants in a responsible and timely manner. Toronto City Council has authorized increased resources in the last two operating budgets exceeding \$64.5 Million. The City has communicated to both the federal and provincial governments, again in a timely manner and in some detail. However, a concrete provincial/federal plan to manage the flow of refugee/asylum claimants and address the extraordinary pressures on municipal and non-governmental programs remains elusive.

The City of Toronto remains committed, as it has been for decades, to welcoming and supporting newcomers. However, Ontario and Canada must engage and lead this effort if it is going to be successful.

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## **SIGNATURE**

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