



# Alejandra Bravo

CITY COUNCILLOR • WARD 9 • DAVENPORT

October 30, 2023

Dear Chair and Members of the Executive Committee,

Re: Need for Long-Term Investments to Address Refugee and Humanitarian Crisis

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2022 at least 108.4 million people around the world had been forced to flee their homes. The impacts of this unprecedented global situation are felt in Canada and here in Toronto, where a growing number of people are arriving daily in search of safety and a new home. To provide more information on this matter, UNHCR Representative Rema Jamous Imseis is available to present to Executive Committee. I am requesting that Executive Committee receive her presentation as the first item on the meeting agenda.

This year, more refugee claims have been made in Ontario than in any other province. By July 2023, the number of claims already surpassed the total made in all of 2022. This increase has placed enormous pressures on City of Toronto programs and services, as well as community agencies. In Toronto's emergency shelter system, refugee claimants now account for 40% of all shelter occupants. With shelters over capacity, an average of 320 people, including 133 refugee claimants, are turned away from Toronto's shelter intake each night due to lack of space.

The Federal Government has failed to implement a systemic, coordinated approach to respond to increase in arrivals of refugee claimants. Instead, and with no alternative, a system designed to respond to local homelessness is being called upon to respond to a national immigration and humanitarian issue. Local governments are doing everything we can to respond to this surge in need. But the situation is unsustainable, and the recent Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) transfers of refugee claimants to other locations outside of Toronto have not substantially alleviated the ongoing pressures on local systems, as new arrivals immediately fill any available spaces.

This situation stands in stark contrast to the Federal Government's approach to welcoming resettled refugees and Ukrainian arrivals to Canada, where there are organized reception services at entry, followed by comprehensive federally and provincially-funded settlement services. This is also different from the Federal Government's approach in Quebec, where until recently those arriving through Roxham Road were immediately able to access reception and other services at entry.

---

Community Office  
1240 Bloor Street West  
Toronto, ON, M6H 1N5

Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
2nd Floor, Suite C42  
Toronto, ON, M5H 2N2

 416-392-7012  
 [councillor\\_bravo@toronto.ca](mailto:councillor_bravo@toronto.ca)  
 [alejandrabravo.ca](http://alejandrabravo.ca)



Reception centres for asylum seekers are a common, best-practice approach around the world. In a recent staff-level meeting with UNHCR Canada, the Agency expressed their strong support for the establishment of a regional reception centre for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. Toronto City Council, supported by our community and regional partners, has called on the Federal Government to establish and fund a regional reception centre for refugee claimants arriving at Pearson Airport. We have also advocated for a system-level approach to be created and implemented to ensure a more coordinated, compassionate, and efficient response to future large-scale refugee claimant arrivals.

Based on global trends, this is not a short-term situation. We should expect that the arrivals of asylum seekers in large numbers will continue. Proactive investments from the Federal Government for refugee-specific shelter infrastructure will ensure a more comprehensive support system for refugee claimants, as well as consistent funding for local governments on a fair allocation basis, through the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP).

This will also allow municipalities to focus their efforts on addressing local homelessness and the need for shelter, rather than assuming responsibility for an area that is fundamentally under federal jurisdiction. It is also critical that the Federal Government expand eligibility for federally-funded settlement services to include refugee claimants.

Systemic intervention, including the creation of a reception centre and consistent federal funding for shelter and housing, will not only facilitate a coordinated and effective response, but will ensure that people arriving to Canada looking for safety receive the dignity and support that they deserve.

**Recommendation:**

**That Executive Committee:**

- 1. Receive the presentation from the Representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees for information.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bravo'.

Alejandra Bravo  
City Councillor  
Ward 9, Davenport