

June 26, 2018

Refugee/Asylum Claimant Arrivals to Toronto

Toronto's Interim City Manager has submitted a report, [Refugee/Asylum Claimant Arrivals to Toronto](#), to Council for consideration at its meeting of June 26, 27 and 28, 2018. The report sets out a series of recommendations with respect to the urgent need for a concrete provincial/federal plan to manage the flow of refugee/asylum claimants and to address the extraordinary pressures on municipal and non-governmental programs.

This backgrounder provides key highlights of this report.

Context

- Toronto is one of the most multicultural urban areas in the world. Each year tens of thousands of people from around the globe choose Toronto as their new home. Their diverse cultures and communities have helped create Toronto's identity as a vibrant global city.
- Toronto is a welcoming and inclusive city for all and supports the successful settlement and integration of newcomer communities and has a long history of supporting and welcoming refugees including Vietnamese peoples in the 1970s, Somali peoples in the 1980s, and more recently, Syrian refugees in 2016.
- The current increase in refugee claimant arrivals to Toronto that started in late 2015 and intensified in 2017, has continued and further sharpened in 2018.
- This prolonged and ongoing demand has created significant pressures on the City's shelter system. The shelter system has been operating at capacity for a number of years, creating an unsustainable situation.
- A significant number of the refugee claimants continue to arrive in Toronto through Quebec, with a smaller number arriving from other locations.
- As of June 24, 2018, 3,305 or 46.1 per cent of all shelter users in the City's system are refugee claimants (both pre-claim and those who have already made their claim). This represents a significant increase over a short period of time: from 11 per cent in early 2016, and 25 per cent in late 2017. As of June 24, 2018, there are approximately 7,128 shelter users on a nightly basis in Toronto.

Current situation

- The City of Toronto has exhausted all facilities, personnel and financial resources available to meet the current needs of refugee claimants/asylum seekers in the municipal shelter system.
- There are currently more than 3,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the Toronto shelter and hotel programs.
- On May 23 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 residences.
- These residences must be vacated by early August; the City of Toronto does not have the resources or space to relocate the refugees claimants at these locations to other locations within the city.
- Moving just this population would require the emergency closures of multiple community centres in neighbourhoods across the City and the cancellation of public programming – a step the City is not prepared to take.
- 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 claimants have been identified.
- The City has been advised through correspondence to the Mayor from the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) that ministry officials have been working closely with their Ontario counterparts to prepare for further irregular migration movement.
- Toronto City Council authorized increases in the last two operating budgets exceeding \$64.5 million to meet the immediate needs of refugee claimants. To date, neither Ontario nor Canada has provided any direct funding to assist the City with these new costs.
- On June 1, the Government of Canada announced that it will make an initial \$50 million available to the provinces of Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba, with \$11 million allocated for Ontario, to help alleviate the immediate financial pressures associated with temporary housing for refugee claimants.
- On April 26, the City requested that the provincial and federal governments urgently establish a coordinated, regional response to the increase in refugee claimant arrivals looking to settle in Toronto.

- 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.
- An effective and well-resourced long-term solution is required including support from all three levels of government.

Call for action from other levels of government

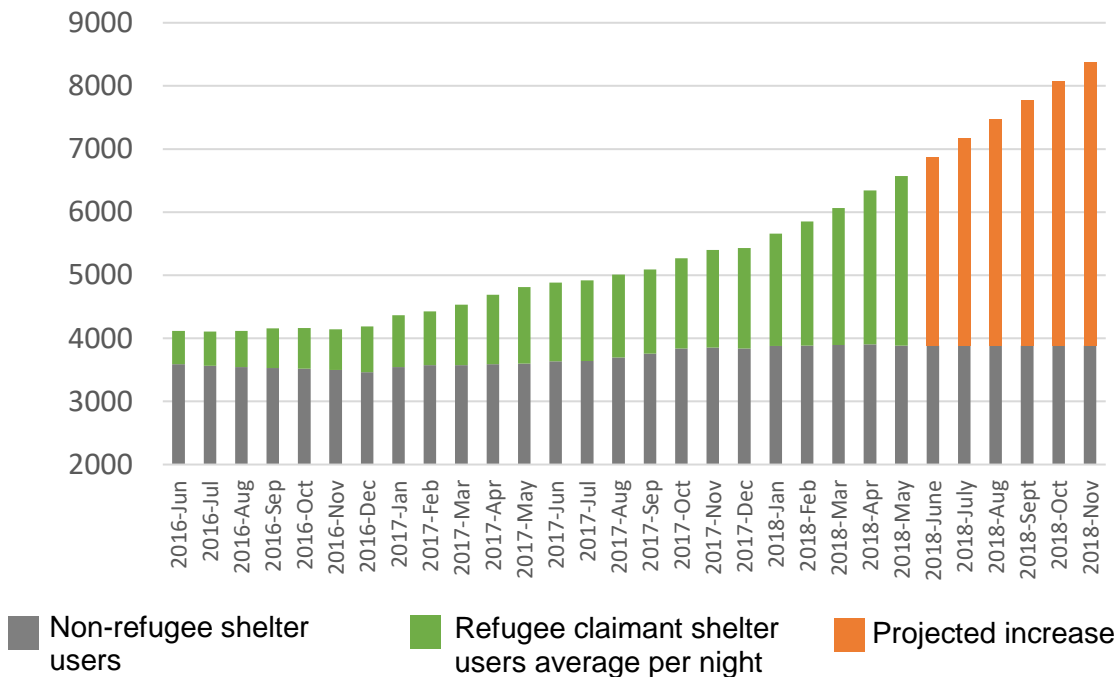
- To ensure that Toronto remains a safe, welcoming and accessible place for all, the Interim City Manager's report recommends that Council request that urgent action be taken by the provincial and federal governments to facilitate a coordinated and regional response to this increasing and acute challenge:
 - **Reimbursement for all costs** – including those incurred in 2017 and projected for 2018 – in responding to the needs of refugee claimants in Toronto, including \$64.5 million for direct operations.
 - **Provision of shelter space for refugee claimants** – 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 claimants have been identified. All the more concerning is the fact that, historically, the flow of refugees has increased significantly towards the end of June.
 - **Regional response and strategy** – City Council has repeatedly requested that the provincial and federal governments facilitate a coordinated and regional response to manage the increase of refugee claimant arrivals to Toronto and relieve associated pressures.

Data collection

- All clients arriving at City shelters are asked a series of questions as part of their intake. This includes asking clients the reason for needing shelter services.
- Most clients who are refugee claimants self-disclose their status at this time. (Important to note that people are not refused service if they do not want to answer these questions on intake.)
- As case planning develops, individuals who did not initially identify as refugee claimants may do so as services are identified as being necessary to their success in getting permanent housing and settling into the community.
- Toronto is a Sanctuary City and citizenship status is not a prerequisite to receive shelter services. As such, it is likely that representation of refugee claimants in our shelter system is if, anything, under-reported.

- Of interest, COSTI recently shared the results of a broad survey conducted March 2016 to May 2017 within the City refugee motel program that it manages for the City. The results showed that, of the 1600 people surveyed, 96% were current refugee claimants (asylum seekers), with the balance saying they had completed the refugee claim process.

Increased demand by refugee claimants



Average nightly number of refugee claimants in Toronto's shelter system has increased from an average of 459 per night in 2016 to 3,305 in June 2018.

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