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The Regional Municipality of Durham
Information Report

From: Commissioner of Social Services
Report: #2023-INFO-81
Date: September 28, 2023

Subject:

Durham Region Humanitarian Response - Asylum Seekers and Refugee Status Update

Recommendation:

Receive for Information

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 To provide an update on the Regional Municipality of Durham's (Region) local humanitarian response to manage the influx of newcomers, refugees, and asylum seekers since July 2023.

2. Background

2.1 On July 10, 2023, the Region expanded a regional humanitarian response to manage the sudden influx of newcomers requiring basic needs assistance arriving in Durham Region. The Region is currently providing assistance to approximately 235 newcomers.

2.2 The composition of newcomers in Durham Region are primarily East African and a small portion from Ukraine and South America.

2.3 The majority of the refugees are young single males. Families with children and single females make up a very small percentage of the newcomers receiving assistance.

3. Current State

3.1 The Region's emergency shelter system is at capacity and is not able to support an influx of people experiencing homelessness. In response, an additional 235

temporary shelter beds were acquired through the use of hotels and motels across Durham. It is anticipated that this demand will continue into the winter months, which will only put additional pressure on a system that is unable to respond. During September, the Region is receiving 15-20 newcomers per week which is up from the 5-8 received weekly in July and August.

- 3.2 In addition to the 235 Asylum Seekers being supported directly through temporary shelter beds, an additional 50-70 remain homeless and are accessing local community agency supports such as meals, clothing and donations, and referrals to settlement services. As such, increased funding has been allocated to these agencies under the Region's Homelessness Program for the influx of costs incremental to the demand.
- 3.3 Staff are operating this response in partnership with a local settlement agency (i.e., Community Development Council Durham (CDCD)) and had established service centres in hotels across Pickering, Ajax, and Whitby. During the summer period, the Region occupied Durham College in Oshawa until the end of July and transitioned all Durham College clients to alternative locations for the rest of the response period, as students were scheduled to return to residences for the start of the school year.

4. Federal and Provincial Supports

- 4.1 On July 18, 2023, the Federal Government through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced a one-time injection of approximately \$212 million in funding into the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP), which will be extended until March 31, 2024. Within this announcement, was a commitment of \$97 million to the City of Toronto to provide shelter for refugee claimants. At the time, there was no indication of a specific allocation for other municipalities also being impacted by the influx.
- 4.2 By providing IHAP allocations, the federal government anticipates "that this support will enable provinces and municipal governments to continue delivering effective interim housing solutions for asylum claimants, strengthen their interim housing capacities, and limit the need for the federal government to directly provide interim housing services."¹
- 4.3 Regional staff have been in contact with IRCC staff directly and have submitted an application for reimbursement of costs associated with the response through IHAP, covering costs from July 2023 to the end of December 2023. Staff are also seeking confirmation of an indication of an allocation amount for 2024 for Durham. Eligible expenditures under IHAP consist of interim housing and associated costs and may include, for example: temporary accommodations; triage and transportation operations; other indirect costs related to the provision of interim housing for asylum claimants. Regional staff will be connecting directly with any lower tier

¹ [Interim Housing Assistance Program - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/interim-housing-assistance-program.html)

municipalities that have been impacted by the influx of Asylum Seekers in Durham, to coordinate an application for reimbursement of eligible costs under the IHAP program.

- 4.4 To date, the total cost for providing programs and services for refugee claimants related to Asylum Seekers is projected to be \$5 million in 2023, which represents a period of 6 months (this does not include the costs of supporting Ukraine Asylum Seekers since 2022, which was in the range of \$2.3 million). These figures represent the current approach and needs of the clients being supported through various wraparound services, referrals to community supports, shelter and food costs, transportation, and other indirect costs. If numbers of asylum seekers and refugees continue to increase in the region, the expenditures will continue to grow exponentially and may require a different approach.
- 4.5 During the months of July and August, IRCC staff were on-site and met with each individual to go over their immigration claim and ensure processing and paperwork were being completed in a timely manner. On two separate occasions, IRCC staff provided transportation for the clients to Etobicoke to continue with the immigration claim processing. As of recently, staff have reached out to IRCC to arrange for more on-site visits, as additional Asylum Seekers have arrived and would require similar supports.
- 4.6 In August, Regional Chair Henry sent a letter to Minister Marc Miller on behalf of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) Mayors and Chairs to highlight the increased demand for supports for asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the GTHA. The letter requests a sustainable funding model and a coordinated response for refugee claimants.
- 4.7 On September 18, 2023, the Ontario government announced that they are investing an additional \$42 million through the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) program to support the City of Toronto and other impacted municipalities across the province in providing urgent assistance to a rapidly growing number of asylum claimants and other at-risk populations.
- 4.8 The COHB program provides a direct, monthly benefit payment to eligible households to help pay their rent. The benefit is portable, which means a household may continue to receive the benefits even when moving to another rental address in Ontario. The COHB program provides an alternative to waiting for a rent-geared-to-income unit to become available.
- 4.9 The Region's allocation was noted as \$826,000 and has been provided to address the increases in asylum claimants by prioritizing this group with this funding.
- 4.10 An additional \$13.25 million was also recently announced by the Ontario government for settlement services, language training and labour market integration supports to help asylum claimants settle, achieve stability and find employment. This would be available to local Ministry-funded providers of newcomer settlement and language training services in Durham.

4.11 Staff from the Income, Employment and Homelessness Supports Division (IEHSD) have been on-site providing wraparound supports, in partnership with the department's Emergency Social Services (ESS) program, since the beginning of the response. During this time, prioritization was given to ensure the claimants were assessed for social assistance eligibility, in addition to other community support referrals and job seeking assistance. As such, the majority of individuals being supported are now in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) financial assistance.

5. Next Steps and Continued Support

5.1 Regional staff continue to work across departments and programs, along with our community partners, to provide a safe and welcoming environment for newcomers to our communities.

5.2 Staff meet regularly with counterparts across the GTHA to coordinate resources, share best practices and approaches to service delivery, and collaborate advocacy efforts for additional funding and policy changes.

5.3 Staff are working closely with Community Development Council Durham to advocate for the establishment of a federally funded Resettlement Assistance Program in Durham Region to ensure supports are available for future refugees and asylum seekers.

5.4 Funding announcements from both the Federal and Provincial government is appreciated, but a municipally led and partially funded response is not sustainable, given pressures within our current shelter capacity and availability of affordable housing.

6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

- Goal 2: Community Vitality – To foster an exceptional quality of life with services that contribute to strong neighbourhoods, vibrant and diverse communities, and influence our safety and well-being.
- Goal 4: Social Investment – To ensure a range of programs, services and supports are available and accessible to those in need, so that no individual is left behind.
- Goal 5: Service Excellence – To provide exceptional value to Durham taxpayers through responsive, effective, and fiscally sustainable service delivery.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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Commissioner of Social Services