

Motion requesting Immediate Federal Government Support for Asylum Claimants in Municipalities

Moved by: Councillor Shahid

Seconded by: Councillor Roy

That we recommend to Regional Council:

Whereas municipalities have been at the forefront of supporting asylum claimants and refugees and providing essential settlement and housing services;

Whereas the rapid and sharp increase of asylum claims in Toronto, Montreal, Hamilton and other municipalities, particularly in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), are putting municipal governments under significant pressure;

Whereas without federal action, asylum claimants will not have permanent shelter and housing options once they leave temporary accommodations, and the current crisis will continue to grow;

Whereas refugees and asylum claimants make up over 40% of Hamilton's population in shelters, and is creating massive pressure on Hamilton's already overwhelmed shelter system that is under resourced to meet the unique and complex needs of asylum claimants;

Whereas the supports provided to municipalities to receive asylum claimants are often short-term and focused on emergency response and shelter, but do not ensure permanent settlement and housing options for asylum claimants, including a focus on homeless prevention and long-term stability;

Whereas the crisis of asylum claimants has inextricable links to the housing, homelessness and mental health crises in Canada and the immense pressure on municipal shelter, transitional and supportive housing systems;

Whereas equity-deserving communities are disproportionately represented in asylum claimant populations seeking immediate necessary support which can also lead to further stigmatization and experiences of racism, discrimination, and harassment;

Whereas action on behalf of the federal government and investing in supports to combat racism, specifically anti-Black racism, is imperative as asylum seekers commonly face racism and other forms of discrimination and hate;

Whereas municipalities across Canada are committed to fostering diverse, inclusive and welcoming communities for all individuals seeking asylum and tackling anti-Black racism and other forms of racism; and

Whereas Hamilton, Toronto and other municipalities in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) have been advocating for additional federal supports for asylum claimants over the past year;

Now therefore, be it resolved:

That the Regional Municipality of Durham strongly urge the federal government to take immediate action to support asylum claimants in Canadian municipalities by taking the following actions:

- A. Immediately provide financial support and reimbursements directly to municipalities to address the immediate short-term needs of asylum claimants and refugees through top-ups to the Canada Housing Benefit and the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP);
- B. An ongoing commitment of Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) funding to address estimated annual costs for refugees in 2024, and commit to future funding until the demand for shelter returns to sustainable levels;
- C. Collaborate with municipal governments to develop a long-term strategy to enhance capacity of local governments to effectively support asylum claimants and refugees, including through the development of tripartite agreements between municipalities, provinces and territories and the federal government to enhance cross-government coordination in providing immediate supports to asylum claimants;
- D. Recognizing that the rise in asylum seeking populations pursuing refuge in Canada is occurring in the midst of a housing crisis, provide additional funding through National Housing Strategy programs and the Canada Housing Benefit to support asylum claimants in the medium- and long-term;
- E. Broaden the eligibility for federally-funded settlement services to include asylum claimants who currently can only access provincially-funded services and also that settlement services be funded to support newcomers with housing searches as at present they are mostly limited to orientation, language instruction, and employment; and
- F. Extend and make permanent the Rapid Housing Initiative with another intake in 2024/25 to enable municipalities to invest in supportive housing on an urgent basis and relieve pressure on the shelter system, and work with the provinces and territories to ensure that supportive units have wrap-around health and social supports and long-term operating funding.