
REPORT TITLE: Ukrainian Humanitarian Response in Peel Update

FROM: Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That the Regional Chair write, on behalf of Regional Council, to the federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to request financial support for Peel's Ukrainian Humanitarian Response; and**
- 2. That the Human Services Commissioner and the Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services Commissioner be authorized to negotiate and enter into agreements with the federal and provincial governments to secure reimbursement for any expenses incurred in the preparation and delivery of the humanitarian response.**

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Three to four hundred Ukrainians with Canada Ukraine Authorized Emergency Travel (CUAET) visas arrived at Pearson International Airport daily in June and July. Sixteen to twenty of these individuals had no prior arrangements or resources to settle independently and required temporary housing and basic needs support.
- The prospect of large volumes of arrivals in the fall months could generate volumes that overwhelm the existing supports that have been put in place by all levels of government.
- Housing, both temporary and longer-term, continues to be the single biggest issue hindering the settlement of Ukrainian arrivals coming to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).
- Peel activated a hotel site on Monday, June 6, 2022, to provide emergency housing and basic needs support while Ukrainian arrivals get independently established in Canada.
- Negotiations with the federal and provincial governments to provide financial support for the response have not resulted in any municipal funding support.
- The total cost incurred by the Region of Peel to date is \$2.4M for which there is no guarantee of financial support from other levels of government.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

Over the course of June and July approximately 300-400 Canada Ukraine Authorized Emergency Travel (CUAET) Visa holders arrived daily at Pearson International Airport. The volume of arrivals decreased slightly in August due to the high cost of commercial flights, but volumes are expected to return to or exceed 300-400 arrivals daily again in the fall. These individuals typically have contacts in Canada and are being supported by them. Of these arrivals, 16-20 Ukrainians came to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)

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every day without supports in place and required higher levels of coordinated federal, provincial and municipal support with housing, emergency financial assistance and other social service needs.

Fifty-three thousand CUAET visa holders have arrived in Canada in 2022 and applications to the CUAET visa program continue to grow. CUAET visa applications now total 531,000 of which 230,000 visas have been approved. There continues to be the prospect of high volumes of Ukrainians arriving in Canada as they flee the conflict. To put this in perspective, the 2015/2016 Syrian refugee movement saw 25,000 refugees arrive in Canada within 5 months, 45,000 total over 5 years. The recent Afghan refugee operation welcomed 10,500 refugees to Canada. If a high number of CUAET visa holders decided to come to Canada in a short period of time, this could very quickly overwhelm the capacity of systems that are already stretched.

Approximately 35 per cent of CUAET Visa applicants have indicated an interest in coming to the GTHA. While many of the applicants are currently in Poland, it is unclear how many will utilize the CUAET Visa to travel to Canada as this is largely dependent on the conditions inside Ukraine and neighbouring countries. The top three destinations within Canada for arrivals thus far have been Mississauga, West Toronto/Etobicoke and Ottawa. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada was not able to provide figures on the current number of CUAET visa holders residing in Peel.

Temporary Accommodation and Basic Needs Support

Municipalities across the GTHA have expanded emergency shelter systems to assist Ukrainian arrivals while they get established in Canada. There are active emergency shelter responses in Toronto, Peel, Durham, York, Halton, and Hamilton currently. Shelters set up in hotels and vacant post-secondary dormitories have limited capacity. No new funding has been allocated from the federal or provincial governments to assist municipalities to sustain this response and additional unbudgeted expenses total \$4.1M per month across the GTHA. Peel was the first municipality to operationalize an emergency shelter with dedicated hotel space at a cost of approximately \$800K per month funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve. Without this municipal support, many Ukrainian newcomers would be at risk of becoming homeless.

The Peel hotel site has assisted 383 Ukrainian arrivals since the response began. The average length of stay in the hotel is 34.5 days after which time the majority are finding rental housing or moving in with friends, family or other contacts independently. There is a demographic mix that includes both families and singles most of which are working age. Just over 50 per cent are female led single parent households however, there are more adult males arriving with their families than was originally anticipated. There have been 103 youth (16-24 years old) at the Peel site who require a different set of supports and take longer to transition out to the community.

Agencies providing onsite support report that arrivals are motivated and have been active in seeking out employment opportunities and housing so they can live independently. Most have utilized the federal government's Canada-Ukraine Transitional Assistance initiative for financial support (one-time provision of \$3000 per adult, \$1500 per child) however, due to the high cost of living in the GTHA, rent deposits and other startup expenses exhaust these funds quickly. Five hundred and forty applicants have turned to Ontario Works Emergency Income Assistance in Peel to sustain themselves financially while they get established. Recent trends of smaller numbers of CUAET visa holders accessing programs like child

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care fee subsidy and Peel's Affordable Transit Program are indicative of Ukrainians moving along their settlement journey in Canada.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is in the process of scaling up a 2-week hotel program for Ukrainian arrivals, however the high cost of hotels and limited availability in the GTHA has caused program delays. At present they are operating 75 rooms in hotels across the GTHA with a goal of having 200 rooms online by October. COSTI Immigrant Services is also conducting a host home program that has successfully placed 37 Ukrainian newcomer families in host homes across the GTA. Private sponsors and corporate partners like Airbnb have also helped by providing short-term accommodations for Ukrainians fleeing the conflict.

Peel's Refugee Settlement Planning Table has been meeting to focus on coordination of supports related to government assisted refugees, including Afghans, as well as displaced persons arriving on temporary permits, such as Ukrainians. The working group is co-chaired by the Region of Peel and Peel Newcomer Strategy Group. This community table includes Peel settlement services providers, IRCC, community agencies, the Canadian Ukrainian Congress and others that respond to Ukrainian newcomers. This group is meeting regularly to plan additional supports and has been instrumental in informing a culturally sensitive response. The Region in collaboration with GTHA municipal partners have launched a webpage (www.torontoareahelps.ca) listing available resources and is working with our community partners on additional communications to help connect CUAET visa holders to the range of services and supports that exist in the GTHA. Currently employment support and English Second Language training are the top requests.

2. Limited Support from Other Levels of Government

In a letter to the GTHA Mayors and Chairs received in July, IRCC Minister Sean Fraser stated that the federal government will continue to provide funding support to CUAET visa holders through the Canada-Ukraine Transitional Assistance Initiative as well as the two-week hotel assistance program being led by IRCC. There was no indication from the federal government that they wanted to partner or provide financial support to municipalities at this time.

The provincial government has also shown interest in the file and has amended several social service support programs to permit service provision to CUAET visa holders. At this time, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is aware of the housing and shelter challenges facing municipalities but has not announced any dedicated funding support.

In Peel there are no existing sources of funding to support the extraordinary emergency shelter costs the Region is taking on to support Ukrainian arrivals. As a result, the Region continues to fund this response from the Regional Reserve Fund though this approach is not sustainable indefinitely. Peel and other GTHA municipalities have exhibited a great deal of goodwill to this point however, dedicated resources are now needed to sustain our response.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

By proactively standing up our hotel site to provide temporary accommodation and other supports to Ukrainian arrivals, the Region is taking on a growing financial liability in the absence of a funding agreement with the federal or provincial government. As the response continues, it

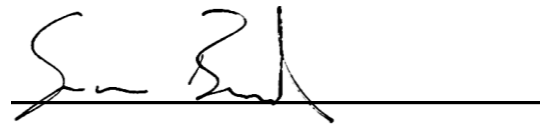
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seems increasingly unlikely that either level of government will provide sufficient financial support.

Not proceeding with an active response could result in Ukrainian arrivals accessing Peel's emergency shelter system and other emergency supports. The capacity of our shelter system is already stretched as a result of intake from the domestic population. A situation where Ukrainians must access support from this system is undesirable from both a system capacity perspective as well as generating subpar outcomes for Ukrainians trying to get settled in Canada.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Through 3 full months of operating the response, the actual costs have averaged \$800,000 per month. This is lower than the \$1,089,000 that was projected. Staff have continued to make financially prudent decisions like moving the operation to a less expensive hotel site to try to contain costs. Occupancy levels have also fluctuated over the summer months and savings have been realized by the partner agencies (Elizabeth Fry Society and Our Place Peel) retained to support the site. In total the Region has spent \$2.4M in the preparation and delivery of this response to date.



Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

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