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**For Information**

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REPORT TITLE: **Asylum Claimant Update**

FROM: Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide Regional Council with a full update on the Asylum Claimant response in Peel, it's projected costs and the pressures on the shelter system.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- Peel Region has seen a dramatic rise in the numbers of Asylum Claimants requiring emergency shelter and supports.
  - Peel's shelter system is currently operating at a 247 per cent occupancy rate.
  - As of August 27, 2023, 730 asylum claimants are temporarily residing in Peel's shelter overflow hotels, with 16 camped outdoors, waiting for assistance. Asylum Claimants account for approximately 57 per cent of shelter occupants.
  - Staff is preparing a claim for funding from the federal government's Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) program to assist with these costs, which are now \$2.5 million per month – staff are projecting these costs to be approximately \$15M for 2023.
  - Staff will also work with community partners to design a sustainable model for sheltering asylum claimants in 2024, continuing to advocate to the federal and provincial governments for required funding.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

The shelter system in Peel Region has long been used to temporarily house asylum claimants who find themselves homeless while trying to settle in Canada. Historically, asylum claimants account for approximately 5 per cent of Peel's shelter population.

As a result of rising levels of global unrest, Peel Region, like other municipalities across Ontario and the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), is experiencing sharp and unprecedented increases in the number asylum claimants in need of support. The number of asylum claimants seeking emergency shelter in Peel started to surpass historical norms in the spring of 2023. Throughout the summer, the number of individuals and families seeking support increased dramatically, to levels never before experienced in Peel. As of August 27, 2023, 730 asylum claimants are temporarily residing in Peel's shelter overflow hotels, with 16 camped outdoors, waiting for assistance.

## Asylum Claimant Update

This report provides Regional Council with an update on Peel's asylum claimants' response and advocacy efforts and seeks approval to explore a new sustainable model.

Another report will be tabled at Council on October 12, 2023, on the state of homelessness in Peel, which will include recommendations necessary to obtain procurement authority into 2024 for this response.

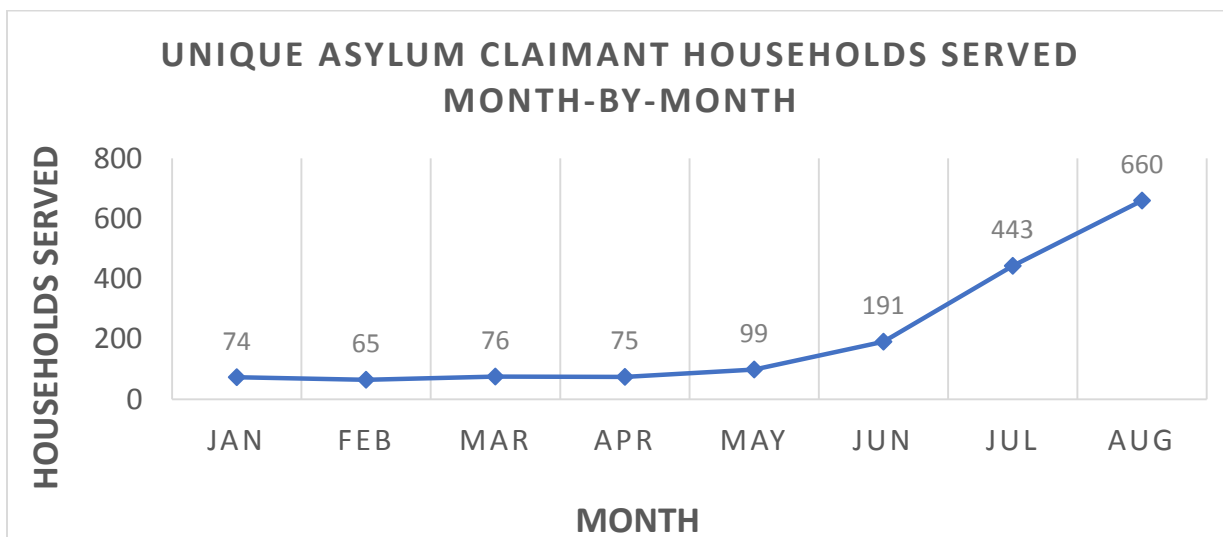
### 2. Peel Region's Current Asylum Claimant Response

There are three different cohorts of asylum claimants in Peel Region:

- I. **Government Assisted Refugees (GAR)** - Government assisted refugees are asylum claimants approved by Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) prior to their arrival in Canada. They receive one year of housing and income support fully funded by the federal government. Peel Region does not provide financial assistance to this group.
- II. **Canada-Ukraine Authorized Emergency Travel Visa Holders** - Individuals and families fleeing war in the Ukraine are treated as temporary visitors. They are provided with two weeks of federal hotel support upon arrival and a one-time federal income support payment of \$3000 per adult and \$1500 per child. Prior to the federal hotel program, and as previously reported to Council, Peel funded and operated one hotel to temporarily house and support Ukrainians. The total cost of Peel's response, which ended on June 30, 2023, was \$8.5 million. Currently, Peel Region does not provide any special assistance to this group though they are eligible to access our emergency shelter system and Ontario Works Emergency Financial Assistance.
- III. **In-land Asylum Claimants** – In-land asylum claimants enter Canada either through irregular border crossings such as Roxham Road in Quebec or through visitor visas. The federal government is currently funding three hotels in Peel for those who crossed through irregular crossings. The federal government is not providing hotels for claimants who arrived in Canada as visitors and claimed asylum upon arrival. Peel's shelter system and overflow hotels are supporting in-land refugee claimants who are not housed in federally funded hotels. Income support is being provided through Ontario Works.

As of August 27, 2023, 660 households or 730 individuals in Peel's shelter system are in-land asylum claimants, an increase from 99 households in May 2023. Asylum claimants now account for 57 per cent of those living in Peel's shelters, contributing to a shelter occupancy rate of 247 per cent.

## Asylum Claimant Update



Asylum claimants supported by Peel Region are being housed in three overflow hotels as well as throughout the emergency shelter system. The Salvation Army is under contract with Peel Region to oversee the three hotels, providing lunch and dinner daily. Settlement services are provided on-site by Dixie Bloor Neighborhood Services, Peel Multicultural Council, African Community Services and Malton Neighborhood Services. Discussions are underway with LAMP Community Health Centre, Wellfort Community Health Centre and Care Point Health to provide medical supports as required. Income support is being provided through Ontario Works.

Federal IRCC staff are also providing on-site support to process claims and work permits so asylum claimants can enter the employment market as soon as possible.

Demographic information about asylum claimants in Peel's shelter system is provided below.

Demographic Item	Count	Proportion
Age		
0-15	45	6.6%
16-24	91	12.5%
25-64	590	80.8%
65+	4	0.5%
Total (individuals)	730	-
Household Composition		
Families with children	26	4.0%
Couples without children	9	1.4%
Singles	625	94.7%
Total (households)	660	-
Country of Birth (top 5)		
Kenya	367	55.6%
Nigeria	118	17.9%
Uganda	65	9.8%
Tanzania	13	2.0%
Bahamas	11	1.7%

## Asylum Claimant Update

### 3. Funding and Advocacy

Many GTHA municipalities are facing sharp increases in asylum claimants that exceed shelter system capacity. The City of Toronto has approximately 4,000 asylum claimants in their shelter system and Durham is supporting approximately 170 claimants. York Region, the City of Hamilton, and Halton Region are also supporting additional asylum claimants.

As a result, the GTHA Mayors and Chairs and staff have been meeting regularly with the province and the IRCC to share information and promote a collaborative approach to advocacy and operations.

In July 2023, the federal government announced \$212 million of additional funding through their Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The City of Toronto was allocated \$97 million of this funding. IRCC asked all other municipalities including Peel, to submit a request for funding, with no guaranteed allocation amount.

IHAP funds direct costs associated with the provision of temporary shelter for asylum claimants. It is a cost-shared program which means municipalities are expected to fund a portion of the asylum claimant response. Peel's request for funding was submitted to IRCC on July 28, 2023 and staff is currently working through the details of our application. Once the final application is submitted, a portion of actual costs incurred in 2023 should be reimbursed to Peel, most likely in Q1 2024.

Ongoing advocacy at administrative and political levels continues.

### 4. The Need for a Long-Term Sustainable Program

Increased demand for housing, settlement, social and health supports for refugee claimants is expected for the foreseeable future. Peel's emergency shelter system was not designed to provide emergency shelter to international residents fleeing from war, violence, and other forms of persecution. A more appropriate, sustainable, and trauma-informed program is required, separate and apart from the shelter system to better meet the needs of this growing population.

Staff will work with local agencies and stakeholders to co-design a sustainable model, while continuing to advocate to the federal and provincial governments for the funding required to operate a long-term sustainable response.

## RISK CONSIDERATIONS

The sharp, unexpected, and unprecedented increase in the number of refugee claimants seeking temporary shelter and supports, is putting significant strains on Peel's already overburdened shelter system.

As of August 27, 2023, 730 individuals, or 660 unique households are being sheltered in Peel shelters and hotels at Peel Region's expense and 16 individuals remain sleeping rough outside Dundas shelter. Despite staff's efforts to secure 3 additional overflow hotels between May 2023 and August 2023, and a fourth hotel as of mid-September 2023, needs continue to go unmet. Costs have escalated to approximately \$2.5M per month – projecting them to be approximately \$15M for 2023.

## **Asylum Claimant Update**

IRCC advises that the arrival of inland asylum claimants is expected to increase throughout the next few years. Staff note that funding under IHAP will assist with growing costs however continued advocacy with our GTHA partners is required to appropriately fund this growing pressure.

### **BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The dissolution of Peel adds greater uncertainty and risk to Peel's asylum claimant response, as we seek to enter into contracts. It also puts our ability to receive longer-term federal and provincial funding at risk.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Staff are preparing a final claim for funding from the Federal Government through the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) for asylum claimants. IHAP is a cost shared program whereby they will cover a portion of direct costs. Costs are currently at \$2.5M a month – and estimated at \$15M for 2023. It is anticipated that Peel's portion can be funded within the 2023 Housing budget.

If no additional funding is confirmed, supporting Asylum claimants will likely drive a 2023 deficit in the Housing Support service.

Staff will return to Council in October 2023, with more information about the cost pressures within Peel's shelter system. Staff will also bring a report to Council once the IHAP application is complete.

### **CONCLUSION**

As a result of rising levels of global unrest, Peel Region, like other municipalities across Ontario and the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), is experiencing sharp and unprecedented increases in the number asylum claimants in need of support. The number of asylum claimants seeking emergency shelter in Peel started to surpass historical norms in the spring of 2023.

This report provides Regional Council with an update on Peel's asylum claimants' response, advocacy efforts, and seeks approval to explore a new sustainable model in 2024.

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Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

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