



Ombudsman Toronto Report

An Investigation into the City's Decision to Stop Allowing Refugee Claimants into Base Shelter System Beds

What We Investigated

In November 2022, the City of Toronto decided to stop allowing refugee claimants access to its base shelter system beds. The City made this decision public in May 2023 and redirected refugee claimants to federal services. We investigated to determine:

- How, when, and why this decision was made.
- Whether the decision was fair, transparent and demonstrated accountability.
- Whether the decision was consistent with relevant City policies.
- Whether it was in line with the City's commitments to realize the human right to adequate housing.
- The impact on refugee claimants.

What We Found

Systemic Discrimination

The decision amounted to systemic discrimination on the basis of citizenship and race – specifically, anti-Black racism as most of the refugee claimants were of African descent and Black, and the City knew that.

Unhelpful referrals, harmful impacts

The City referred refugee claimants to federal services City staff knew did not provide temporary shelter. Some were turned away from City shelters even when a bed was available.

Inconsistent with City Policies

The decision went against key City policies meant to ensure universal access to services.

Lack of accountability

The decision lacked proper documentation, leaving no clear record of who approved it or why.

Our Recommendations

Ombudsman Toronto made 14 recommendations to:

- Improve and clarify City processes for major eligibility decisions affecting refugee claimants
- Train staff on anti-Black racism and the human right to adequate housing
- Meaningfully consult with experts and affected communities
- Strengthen accountability

These recommendations will strengthen fairness and transparency, and further the human right to adequate housing in the City's shelter system, ensuring all residents are treated with dignity and respect.