

An Overview of the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program



Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has comprehensive information available on its private sponsorship of refugees program on its website:

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/index.asp>

This reference document will focus on the differences in the various sponsorship options available, the obligations of sponsors, and application processing procedures, with additional comments on the leadership Canada has provided in this area internationally, and comparisons of outcomes by type of program.

What are BVOR sponsorships (Blended Visa Office Referred), and how do they differ from other private sponsorship arrangements?

The Blended Visa Office Referred (“BVOR”) sponsorship program was launched by the Canadian government in 2013. The name “Blended” arises from the core principle of the program where the government and private sponsors share the support costs for the re-settled refugees.¹ Sponsoring groups assume full costs associated with the sponsorship of Privately Sponsored Refugees.

BVOR candidates are referred by the UNHCR to Canadian visa offices abroad. The Canadian visa office conducts security and background checks to identify whether the candidate is eligible to participate in the BVOR program. If they are deemed eligible then a profile is created and posted to a designated BVOR website, called the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program. Potential sponsors such as Sponsorship Agreement Holders, Community Groups, and Groups of Five can access the website and select a refugee to support. Profiles include information such as priority level, country of origin, family size, medical requirements, reason for sponsorship, and

¹ <http://www.rstp.ca/en/special-initiatives/blended-vor-program/>

recommended destination.² Profiles remain on the website for 14 days. If a refugee is not selected within that timeframe then they will be referred back to the visa office and processed as a Government Assisted Refugee. Many of the refugees sponsored under this program will be travel-ready and can arrive in Canada within 1-4 months.³ Populations sponsored in the BVOR program included Syrians, Iraqi, Iranian, Ethiopian, Congolese, Burundian, Somali, Burmese, Colombian, and Chinese.⁴

The BVOR program is attractive to sponsoring groups because of the expedited processing, lower volume of paperwork, and the reduced cost. The BVOR program initially attracted the interest of private sponsorship groups during the Syrian re-settlement initiative. However, the numbers available on the BVOR list were quite small.⁵ A discrepancy between the criteria used by the UNHCR to refer cases to Canada and the BVOR program led to a small number of candidates. UNHCR considered whether refugees have family links in Canada, while Canadian officers only identified Government Assisted Refugee cases with no family links in Canada for the BVOR program. This reduced the number of eligible candidates for the BVOR program.⁶

Interest in the BVOR program decreased in recent years. Sponsoring groups are concerned that the BVOR program is subsidizing government contributions as opposed to adding to the overall number of refugees that are re-settled to Canada. This fear is reflected in the government's announcement in 2012 of an increase of 1,000 in the number of Privately Sponsored Refugees which replaced an equivalent number of Government Sponsored Refugees. The government in setting the goal of 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2016 included BVORs. Critics argue that the Private Sponsorship Program rests on the principle of additionality, where Privately Sponsored Refugees are considered an addition to government efforts to re-settle refugees.⁷ The government is using the BVOR program to decrease its responsibility in re-settling refugees. Private groups may also be reluctant to use the program because private sponsorship allows groups to help re-unite families in Canada by sponsoring family members of individuals in Canada as opposed to sponsoring strangers.

On October 23rd, 2017, there were 23 BVOR refugee cases ready for sponsorship.

² http://www.cic.gc.ca/jas-pac/Example_eng.aspx

³ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/ref-sponsor/index.asp>

⁴ <http://www.rstp.ca/en/special-initiatives/blended-vor-program/>; IRCC, Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP), Dated July 2016

⁵ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/syria-refugee-sponsors-list-bvor-1.3220258->

⁶ IRCC, Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP), Dated July 2016

⁷ CCR, "Statement on Blended Visa Office Referred Refugees", Dated 21 July 2016, <http://ccrweb.ca/en/BVOR-statement>; <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/dpr/2012/dpr.asp#strategic2-5>

The following are the numbers for Privately Sponsored Refugees and BVORs from the recently release Immigration Level Plan:

2018-2020 Immigration Levels Plan is released:									
Immigration category	2018 - Low	2018 - High	2018 - Target	2019 - Low	2019 - High	2019 - Target	2020 - Low	2020 - High	2020 - Target
Government Assisted	6,000	8,000	7,500	7,000	9,000	8,500	8,500	10,500	10,000
Blended Visa Office Referred	1,000	3,000	1,500	1,000	3,000	1,650	1,000	3,000	1,700
Privately Sponsored	16,000	20,000	18,000	17,000	21,000	19,000	18,000	23,000	20,000

Note: The levels do not refer to submissions, but they indicate the number of arrivals.
Source: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/notices/2017-11-01.asp>

What are the financial obligations for sponsors?

Private sponsorship groups must demonstrate that each individual member and the group as a whole have sufficient financial resources to support the sponsored refugee(s) for 12 months from the time of arrival in Canada. The amount depends on family size. The Sponsorship Cost Table provides an equivalent of local social assistance numbers across provinces. The Sponsorship Cost Table should be used as a guideline of the amount necessary for financial support for 12 months and start-up costs such as clothing, winter clothing, food staples, basic household needs, and school start-up costs. Groups can take into account in-kind donations such as furniture and clothing they have received. Appendix A of the Instruction Guide shows the dollar amounts that can be deducted.⁸ The Sponsorship Cost Table determines the minimum amount of funds required. The actual cost of sponsorship can be higher than the amount listed.

The financial obligations of sponsors for the BVOR program is less than the amount required for private sponsorship. The government will provide six months of income support through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) and private sponsors will provide six months of financial support.⁹ The RAP payments are from the 2nd to 7th month after arrival and the sponsoring group is responsible for the rest. Sponsoring groups halve the amount found in the Sponsorship Cost Table.

⁸ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/applications/guides/5413ETOC.asp#appa>;
<http://www.rstp.ca/en/refugee-sponsorship/groups-of-five/3-financial-requirements/>

⁹ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/ref-sponsor/index.asp>

What is the application process like, and how long does it take?

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees program allows Canadian citizens and permanent residents to re-settle refugee(s) from abroad. There are two classes of refugees that are eligible for sponsorship, the Convention Refugee Abroad Class and the Country of Asylum Class. The Convention Refugee Abroad Class applies to individuals who:

- Are outside their home country;
- Are outside of Canada;
- Cannot return or unwilling to return to their home country because of a well-founded fear of persecution. The fear of persecution is based on one of the five enumerated grounds;
- Are unable to integrate in their current location;
- Do not have any other durable solution available;
- Have the ability to successfully settle in Canada.

The Country of Asylum Class applies to individuals who:

- Are outside their home country;
- Are outside of Canada;
- Have been and continue to be seriously affected by armed conflict or have suffered a massive violation of human rights;
- Are unable to integrate in their current location;
- Have the ability to successfully settle in Canada.

Groups of Five, Community Sponsorship, and Sponsorship Agreement Holders can submit a private sponsorship. The sponsoring group must reside in the community of settlement. The sponsoring group can suggest the name of a refugee or family they are interested in sponsoring. However, to be sponsored by a Group of Five or Community Sponsor, the principal applicant must already have refugee status by an authorized body such as the UNHCR or the government of the country where the asylum seeker is currently living.

The sponsoring group must request the Refugee Sponsorship application package and complete the Document Checklist, Settlement Plan (outlining the settlement and financial arrangements), and Undertaking. Additionally, a Group of Five and Community Sponsorship group must complete the Financial Assessment form. Refugee applicants are required to complete all the forms in the Application for Permanent Residence in Canada including the Convention Refugee Abroad and Humanitarian Protected Persons Abroad (IMM 6000 kit) and gather supporting documents. The IMM 6000 kit includes the Application for Permanent Residence, Additional Dependents, Schedule A (Background), Schedule 2 (refugees outside Canada), Use of Representative, and Document Checklist. The sponsoring group can submit the sponsoring

undertaking and IMM 6000 on behalf of the applicant or the applicant can submit the sponsoring undertaking and IMM 6000.

The application must be submitted to the Resettlement Operations Centre in Ottawa (ROC-O). The ROC-O will review the sponsorship undertaking to ensure it is complete and meets the eligibility requirement. The office will also review the Application for Permanent Residence for completeness. ROC-O will forward the information to the visa office where the refugee resides for further processing. The Canadian Visa office is responsible for reviewing the application, conducting an interview to determine if the applicant is a member of the Convention Refugee Abroad Class or Country of Asylum class. The office also conducts medical, criminal and security checks. If a positive decision is made, the office issues a permanent residence visa and organizes travel plans.¹⁰ Average processing times vary across visa offices and are available on the IRCC website.

The application process for the BVOR program begins once a profile is selected by a sponsoring group. The profile is then placed on hold and additional information is then provided to the group. If the group proceeds with the sponsorship, they have 30 days to submit a sponsorship application to the ROC-O. The forms that need to be submitted are the Undertaking to Sponsor, Document Checklist and if applicable the Sponsor Assessment, Settlement Plan, and Financial Profile.¹¹ BVOR refugees can arrive within 1-4 months from the date the application is approved.

Once the refugees arrive in Canada, what are the sponsor's obligations?

The sponsoring group must:

- Provide reception at the airport;
- Provide lodging (including furniture and household essentials);
- Care (including food, clothing, and local transportation costs);
- Enroll the adults in language classes and the children in school;

¹⁰ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/ref-sponsor/section-2.asp#a2.14>

¹¹ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/vor.asp> ; http://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Blended-VOR-FAQ_2017-1-1.pdf

- Find a family physician & dentist;
- Assist in applying for provincial health care, Social Insurance Number, child tax benefit, and opening up a bank account;
- Provide moral and emotional support;
- Help locate community events;
- Provide help navigating around the city.¹²

BVOR sponsors are required to provide the same obligations, but they are only required to provide half of the costs for housing & basic necessities. RAP covers six months of income support.¹³

Canada provides international leadership in the area of refugee sponsorship

Canada's private sponsorship program was introduced in 1978. However, it took off in 1979 with the intake of refugees from Vietnam. By the end of 1980, Canada had accepted 60,000 refugees.¹⁴ In recent years other countries have begun to emulate Canada's private sponsorship program. Australia piloted a program in 2012 and made it permanent in 2015. The U.K. has also announced that it will create a permanent resettlement model based on Canada and Australia.¹⁵

In 2016, Canada helped organize the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative. This initiative will train and advise other countries on how to establish programs that allow private individuals and groups to finance, facilitate, and support refugees coming to the country.¹⁶

Outcomes for refugees

A report by IRCC released in July, 2016 called "Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP)" has revealed an interesting distinction between Government Assisted Refugees and Privately Sponsored Refugees. The evaluation assessed data between 2010 and 2015.

¹² [http://www.rstp.ca/en/sponsorship-responsibilities/responsibilities/;](http://www.rstp.ca/en/sponsorship-responsibilities/responsibilities/)

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/ref-sponsor/section-2.asp#a2.17>

¹³ <http://www.rstp.ca/en/special-initiatives/blended-vor-program/>

¹⁴ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/un-refugee-private-government-sponsor-1.3501400>

¹⁵ Jennifer Hyndman, William Payne & Shauna Jimenez, "The State of Private Refugee Sponsorship in Canada: Trends, Issues, and Impacts", Dated 20 January 2017

¹⁶ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-refugees-privately-sponsored-global-initiative-1.3895704>

The following characteristics of resettled refugees admitted from 2010 to 2014 were observed:

- **Overall admissions:** 26,466 GARs (53%), 22,737 PSRs (46%) and 313 BVOR refugees (1%).
- **Knowledge of official language¹¹:** More PSRs reported knowing at least one of the official languages than either GARs or BVOR refugees (GAR 26%, PSR 38%, BVOR refugees 14%).
- **Education level:** GARs more commonly had nine or fewer years of education compared to PSRs and BVOR refugees (GAR 61%, PSR 48%, BVOR refugees 54%).
- **Country of citizenship (top three):** The top three countries of citizenship varied by program GAR: Iraq, Bhutan, Somalia; PSRs: Iraq, Eritrea, Ethiopia and BVOR refugees: Myanmar, Eritrea, Iran.

The report also found that “since 2002, GARs tended to have lower economic performance compared to PSRs. Specifically, they had lower incidence of employment, lower employment earnings and higher social assistance reliance”.¹⁷

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¹⁷ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/evaluation/resettlement.asp>