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CHAPTER 6:

The Sponsorship Process

The sponsorship process involves many steps, some in Canada and others at an overseas visa post. As described in previous chapters, sponsorship of refugees consists in part of the sponsoring group and the accepted Undertaking by CIC in Canada. The other part entails the refugee and his or her dependants who apply from overseas to be accepted as refugees in need of resettlement to Canada. Every party requires a clear understanding of how the sponsorship process unfolds.

This chapter outlines this process starting with the initial step of the undertaking after you have formed your sponsoring group, up to the point of the refugee's arrival.

Assembling the Application Forms

To officially initiate the sponsorship application process, sponsoring groups need to complete and submit the forms contained in the [Application for Refugee Sponsorship](#) package. There is a separate application package for Sponsorship Agreement Holders and their Constituent Groups who are submitting an Undertaking under the [Joint Assistance Sponsorship \(IMM 5493\)](#) program.

Read Chapter 4 of this guide carefully when completing the sponsorship application forms.

If your group is sponsoring a **Visa Office-Referred** case, the Centralized Processing Office in Winnipeg (CPO-W) will provide the group with detailed information about the refugee in order for the group to complete the application. In such cases, it will not be necessary to submit any forms other than the sponsorship application forms. However, when sponsoring a **sponsor-referred** case, the refugee applicants will be required to complete all of the forms contained in the [IMM 6000 application package](#). *For detailed information on filling out the refugee forms, please refer to Chapter 5.*

For sponsor-referred cases, the forms which are contained in the Application for Refugee Sponsorship, including all the forms of the IMM6000 application package, need to be submitted together to the CPO-W.

In-Canada Processing

After the sponsoring group has completed their part of the application forms and has obtained completed and signed forms and supporting documents from the refugee applicant, the group will need to send them together in one envelope to the CPO-W. The mailing address of the CPO-W is:

Centralized Processing Office – Winnipeg
Box #1B
400 – 25 Forks Market Road
Winnipeg, MB R3C 4S9

The CPO-W will review the received application package to determine whether:

- ▶ The undertaking is accurate and complete
- ▶ The individuals meet the requirements to participate in a sponsoring group
- ▶ The group has a reasonable budget and the necessary funds available to meet the sponsorship obligations (SAH and CGs may be exempt)
- ▶ There is a back-up plan in case of change of circumstances
- ▶ There is a clear plan of orientation and support for the newcomers throughout the year
- ▶ There is consideration as to how to use available settlement services
- ▶ The applicant intends to live in the same community as the sponsoring group
- ▶ There are enough individuals who are willing to provide support
- ▶ The time they plan on providing to the settlement of the refugees seems reasonable
- ▶ The settlement plan includes arrangements for: housing, interpreters, settlement services, transportation, health care, education, schooling, dealing with crisis or trauma, etc.
- ▶ The in-kind donations seem reasonable and have been explained in detail
- ▶ The responsibilities are shared among all parties to the sponsorship

New Information

If the sponsoring group has submitted its application but becomes aware of new information important to the application or relevant to the applicant's safety, this information must be provided by the sponsoring group to the local CIC.

Such information might include:

- Change in family configuration
- Change in contact information
- Change in level of security of the applicant
- New information about the refugee case regarding eligibility and/or admissibility

CIC will forward the information to the appropriate contact at the visa office abroad to ensure timely processing.

CPO-W also:

- ▶ Returns an application package to the sponsoring group if major documents or information is missing
- ▶ Contacts the sponsoring group for minor omissions or corrections
- ▶ Approves the undertaking if it is completed properly, group members meet the sponsorship eligibility criteria and all supporting documents have been provided
- ▶ Enters information into the CIC data system (the GCMS) and sends a letter of acknowledgement to the sponsoring group
- ▶ Provides a **file number** indicating that the application is now in process to the sponsoring group's main contact or representative
- ▶ Sends the entire package to the appropriate visa post for further assessment and processing

Overseas Processing



The second part of the process takes place at a Canadian visa office overseas. This process begins with receiving the approved sponsorship undertaking and application for permanent residence forms and continues to the arrival of the refugee(s) in Canada.

Overseas preparation of the refugee's file

When CPO-W forwards an application to an overseas visa post, it is opened in order of receipt. The overseas process begins with the following activities:

Overseas Processing Benchmarks

CIC will provide the refugee and the sponsoring group contact with a report on the application process at two stages in the overseas processing:

Receipt of the completed refugee application and estimated time until an interview.

To inform of the outcome of the selection interview, and, in positive cases, pending the final results of the medical, security and admissibility checks, the estimated time to visa issuance.

1. The visa post receives the undertaking information, the IMM6000 forms and supporting documents. If needed, the visa post may send an update request to the refugee regarding the information provided in the forms of the IMM 6000 application package.
2. Upon receipt, the visa officer opens a file and assigns the refugee applicant a **B-number** (if the CPO-W has not already done so). This number is important for identification of the refugee's file and will be needed for any requests for updates and communication with the visa post regarding the sponsorship.
3. The visa officer notifies the sponsoring group contact or representative that the application is complete and sends the **1st benchmark letter** indicating an estimate of the number of months until the interview date. The refugee is put on a wait-list for an interview. The wait for an interview can range from a few months up to a few years.

Processing times

Processing times refer to the period of time it takes from the point at which the application to sponsor and completed refugee forms are received by a visa office abroad until the time the refugee arrives in Canada. Processing times vary according to the referral method of the case (sponsor, JAS or visa-office referred) and the workload of the visa office. You can find the average application processing times [online](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/times/perm/ref-private.asp) at: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/times/perm/ref-private.asp>.

Paper screening

An application for private refugee sponsorship may be subject to paper screening at the visa office to assess basic eligibility criteria and admissibility elements. The application may be refused if it is apparent that the applicant does not meet any of Canada's criteria for admission. Applicants do not automatically have a right to an interview; if the applicant passes the paper-screening, an interview is scheduled. In cases where the sponsoring group assessed the case prior to submitting to CPO-W, and where the refugee applicant has presented a complete application including substantive information on his/her protection needs, there is a good chance that the refugee will be screened for an interview.

A visa officer conducts the interview, although in some posts other staff may hold a preliminary interview.

During the interview process the visa officer:

1. first confirms the refugee's information in the IMM 0008 and then assesses the refugee's story to determine *eligibility*;
2. reviews security and criminality information (the officer may forward the refugee's details to the Canada Border Services Agency);
3. interviews the principal applicant and family members/de facto dependants to assess *eligibility, credibility, admissibility, adaptability* as well as *special needs*, and to ensure the family composition is complete and accurate; and
4. expects that the applicant answers all questions truthfully and, if possible, produces documents to substantiate the application. Credibility is very important, and if the undertaking or accompanying materials contain any misleading or contradictory information, the applicant may be in a very difficult position. **Note:** Chances of appeal against refusals are **small**, as are the chances of reviews after a refusal. A thorough preparation of the case before an interview is therefore strongly recommended.

Interpreters

During the interview, refugees who are not fluent in English or French will receive assistance from interpreters. CIC has no blanket policy on the use of interpreters in refugee interviews. A common practice is to use visa office employees who speak the language in question and whose knowledge of the interview process and reliability are known. Where visa office employees are not available the UNHCR may, on occasion, be able to lend the officer an interpreter who is experienced with refugee interviews and has been selected based on language ability. Although it is the least preferred option, the officer may, due to necessity, use relatives, friends of the applicant or hired interpreters. Visa office practices vary for many reasons.

The interview convocation letter will advise the applicant whether he/she needs to make any arrangements for an interpreter.

After the interview, the applicant may be provisionally accepted or refused. If she/he is refused, both the applicant and the sponsoring group contact or representative should receive notification from the visa post of the outcome of the selection interview.

For information on **negative** decision, please refer to the [RSTP information sheet on Responding to a Negative Decision](#).

Expedited and Urgent Processing

In exceptional cases, interviews and decisions can be prioritized. In 'urgent' cases there is an immediate risk to the life of an applicant. 'Vulnerable' cases involve persons with greater protection needs than other refugees in a country of asylum. Vulnerability can be related to medical needs, trauma, women-at-risk or other individual circumstances. A sponsor can flag such circumstances and request the visa office to process the case expeditiously. **Note:** such requests should only be made in **exceptional** cases, and the need of prioritizing should be substantiated.

After a Positive Interview Decision

A positive interview decision (provisional acceptance) does not necessarily mean that the applicant(s) will be resettled to Canada. Each applicant will still have to pass an admissibility screening. If one applicant is found to be inadmissible, all family members are inadmissible.

After a positive interview outcome, the visa officer:

1. refers the applicant for medical testing;
2. conducts a criminality and security screening;
3. decides whether another interview is needed for a final decision;
4. makes the final decision as to whether a person is admissible to come to Canada;
5. facilitates the acquisition of travel documents in cases where the applicant has no passport;
6. issues instructions to the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM) regarding travel booking, and [Canadian Orientation Abroad](#); and
7. issues admissibility and travel loans if needed.

Medical exams

The visa officer refers the applicants to designated medical staff for medical tests. The medical exam is mandatory for refugees and all of their dependants and serves to determine whether applicants have medical conditions that present a danger to Canadian public health or safety. The applicants will receive instructions regarding the time and place of the medical exam. In most cases, the IOM or Red Cross will pre-pay the medical exam to be repaid by the refugees at a later date. If the refugee cannot afford to pay for the exam, he or she can be issued a loan by the government of Canada to pay for these expenses.

Under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), refugees **will not be found inadmissible** on the basis that their health condition is expected to cause an excessive demand on Canada's health or social services. Your sponsoring group should be informed of any significant medical issues that will impact the settlement of the refugee family. Applicants with a condition considered a danger to public health or safety are inadmissible to Canada. If the condition is treatable the applicant may be scheduled for a follow-up medical exam after the treatment.

The pre-departure medical exam is limited, therefore check-ups should be scheduled for all newcomers soon after their arrival in Canada.

If any one member of the family is found to be inadmissible, the entire family will be deemed inadmissible.

Security and criminality checks

Refugees and all their dependants who are 18 years and over, including non-accompanying family members are subject to security and criminality checks to verify information in the application and to ensure that the applicants are admissible under these criteria. There may be long delays involved in the security check process, especially if there are concerns about membership in an organization that is suspected of being involved in terrorist acts or war crimes.

Travel and Arrival

Once the refugee applicant has been accepted the visa office will provide an estimated processing time for visa issuance.

In most cases, travel arrangements are made by the [IOM](#). The IOM can arrange for accompaniment within airports when the applicants must change airlines during their journey. Without the support from the IOM, this may be a difficult procedure as refugees are unable to obtain transit visas to be within the country where they change airlines. IOM is also able to make special arrangements for children traveling unaccompanied. IOM will

provide travel services where a transportation loan is not required or has not been approved.

Once the visa officer is satisfied that all preparations have been made, the officer will give instructions for the visa to be issued. The visa officer will send a Notice of Arrival Transmission (NAT) to the [Matching Centre](#) which will send a copy to the local CIC responsible for the area where the applicant is expected to settle. The local CIC will then get in touch with the contact person or representative listed on the Undertaking.

Additionally, the [Canadian Orientation Abroad Program](#), a project of the IOM, offers orientation covering a range of topics related to life in Canada to refugees before they travel to Canada. The orientation ranges from a three day orientation up to one week and aims to prepare refugees for life in a new country and environment.

A few of the large Canadian international airports have a CIC funded reception service for Government-Assisted Refugees which may also assist Privately Sponsored Refugees who have an onward flight from the port of entry. Costs for overnight stays in hotels and meal expenses are usually added to the refugee's transportation loan.

Examination at port of entry

Upon arrival at the Canadian port of entry, the refugee applicant must be examined by an immigration officer. The purpose of this examination is to establish that, at the time of the examination, the applicant and his or her accompanying family members and/or de facto dependants meet the requirements of the IRPA and regulations. Where the officer is satisfied that it would not be contrary to the Act or the Regulations to grant permanent residence, the officer will grant permanent residence. The port of entry officer then signs the document and the applicant is no longer a refugee but a permanent resident of Canada.

Sponsors should ensure that the newcomer goes through this process before they leave the port of entry.

Reception by sponsors

Sponsoring groups are responsible for receiving the refugees at the airport when they arrive. This is the beginning of the sponsorship period and the time for sponsoring groups to get acquainted with the newcomers and implement the settlement plans.

Status Update Requests

The sponsoring group may request updates on the overseas processing from the CPO-W, but only within the guidelines established by CIC. The guidelines are intended to reduce the number of status update requests that divert visa officers away from the actual task of processing refugee cases for resettlement. At the same time, CIC agrees to update the sponsor within reasonable timeframes when there appear to be unexplained delays in processing.

The ***PSR Case Status Update/Information Change Request*** outlines when a SAH or another sponsor may request a status update from the CPO-W and expect to receive a response from the visa post. This can occur when:

e-Client application status

Private sponsors can use CIC's online status update service to check the status of an application. Sponsors can check the file status by entering a principal applicant's name, date and country of birth and client ID or file number. This service is available at:

<https://services3.cic.gc.ca/ecas/?app=ecas&lang=en>.

- ✓ Processing time has exceeded the mission's completion time for **75%** of PSR applications, based on the calculated processing start date from the date the IMM 0008 and accompanying forms and documents were received at the mission abroad or three months from approval of undertaking.
- ✓ The completed application kit was submitted to the visa office. Three months have passed, and the first benchmark letter has not been received.
- ✓ First benchmark letter was received. **Two months** have elapsed since estimated date given for the selection interview, with no subsequent contact from the mission.
- ✓ Second benchmark letter was received. **Three months** have elapsed since the estimated date given for visa issuance, with no subsequent contact from the mission.
- ✓ **Six months** have passed since second benchmark letter was received, which did not contain an estimated time frame for visa issuance.
- ✓ **Three months** have passed since selection interview and no second benchmark letter was received.

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