

THE RIGHTS OF PRIVATELY SPONSORED REFUGEES

Welcome to Canada! If you are a privately sponsored refugee living in Canada (but not including Quebec), this resource is for you. If you are living in Quebec, please contact *Immigration, Diversité et Inclusion* for information.

Private sponsorship means that a group of people in Canada submitted an application to bring you here, and committed to providing you with support as well as money to cover your basic expenses for the duration of your sponsorship period.

This resource explains your **rights**, and **what you should expect from your sponsors**. It also explains **what to do if you have concerns about the sponsorship, or believe that you are not receiving the support that you are entitled to**.



WHO ARE PRIVATE SPONSORS?

Private sponsors are volunteers who have come together to sponsor you to come to Canada. They have committed to providing you with financial and settlement support. You may know your sponsors, as they could be your family members or friends, or your sponsors could be strangers that want to help you and that you are going to get to know in the coming months.

HOW LONG IS YOUR SPONSORSHIP PERIOD?

In most cases, the sponsorship period is **one year**. In very rare cases, the sponsorship period can be longer than one year if the Canadian government department *Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)* requested that sponsors provide more than one year of support before you arrived in Canada. If your sponsorship period is more than one year, you would have already been informed of this by IRCC.

WHAT SHOULD YOU RECEIVE FROM YOUR SPONSORS?

- 1) **Financial support to cover your basic expenses for one year or until you become self-supporting, whichever comes first.**

Your sponsor is responsible for financially supporting you during your first year in Canada or until you can support yourself, whichever comes first. Support may include direct financial support, but the sponsor may also give you items, such as furniture, household goods, and clothing.

You must be given enough money **or** donated items to provide you with:

- a) Housing (a room, apartment or house to live in)
- b) Food
- c) Clothing
- d) Local transportation (for example, public buses or trains)

If you have been sponsored under the *Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program*, the Government of Canada provides you with monthly cheques to cover your basic expenses for six months, starting from the second month that you are in Canada. Your sponsoring group is responsible for:

- providing you with money or items to set up your home, such as furniture, kitchen supplies, cleaning products, bedding, some food, rent and utilities deposits, some clothing, etc. Some of these items may have been donated.
- providing you with enough money or items to cover your basic expenses (listed above) for the **first month** that you are in Canada.
- providing you with enough money or items to cover your basic expenses (listed above) for the **last five months** of your sponsorship period, or until you can support yourself and your family, whichever comes first.

If during the first year in Canada you find a job, it is possible that your sponsors will reduce the amount of money that they provide you with. If you are able to *fully* support yourself and your family, your sponsoring group is not required to continue to provide you with financial support; the decision of whether or not they will continue providing financial support is up to them. However, if you were to lose the job during the sponsorship period, your sponsors must start providing you with financial support again. Basically, **the sponsoring group must ensure that you are able to afford all of the basics listed above for the entire sponsorship period.** It is a good idea to have discussions with the sponsoring group about how much support they plan to provide if you start working.

Private sponsors are not required to provide you with financial support if you already have enough money to fully support yourself and your family. If you brought money to Canada with you, it is possible that your sponsoring group may ask you to contribute to your costs of living in Canada. Sponsors are ultimately responsible for ensuring that you have sufficient money to cover all of your basic necessities.

The quality of the home and items that you receive may depend on how much money the group has been able to raise for you. Although the items that you are given and the housing that has been arranged may not be luxurious, they must be adequate. Your home must be able to accommodate your whole family, and you must have enough money to buy sufficient food to keep you and your family well-fed and healthy.

It is possible that other refugees are given more or less money and items than you. This is likely because some sponsoring groups have been able to raise a large amount of money for the sponsorship, while others have only been able to raise the minimum amount of money required. It may also be because some sponsoring groups have arranged for the newcomers

they have sponsored to get free rent or donated household items and therefore may give them less money every month, while other sponsoring groups may provide more money and fewer donated items. All groups are different. **At a minimum, sponsors are expected to provide a level of support that is equal to the rate for social assistance in your province and must provide you with enough support to cover all of your basic expenses.** It is also important to remember that refugees that came through different categories (such as Government Assisted Refugees) have different entitlements.

2) Settlement support for the duration of the sponsorship period.

Your sponsors must assist you to get set-up and adjusted to life in Canada. This entails many tasks, including (but not limited to):

- **Housing**
 - finding housing for you, or helping you to find housing.
- **Orientation**
 - teaching you how to use public transportation, like buses and trains
 - showing you around your community, and helping you to find the nearest grocery store
 - explaining the laws in Canada.
- **Health Care**
 - helping you apply for your provincial health card and for the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)
 - finding you a doctor, dentist, and other health services
 - explaining health services.
- **Education**
 - helping you enroll in English or French classes
 - helping you enroll your children in school.
- **Important documents and services**
 - helping you open a bank account, apply for a Social Insurance Number, and if you have children, helping you apply for the Child Tax Benefit.
- **Interpretation**
 - providing an interpreter when needed.
- **Employment**
 - connecting you with job search services.
- **Resources and Services**
 - connecting you with appropriate resources and services, such as a Settlement Worker.
(to find immigrant services in your area, visit: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/map/services.asp>)

Sponsors should also provide you with **emotional and moral support** as you adjust to your new life in Canada.

WHAT ARE YOUR SETTLEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES?

Once you have arrived in Canada, you are expected to make every effort to become self-sufficient as soon as possible. This may include attending English or French classes, connecting with a Settlement Worker that can help you to settle into life in Canada, and starting to look for a job if you are able to. Although you are not required to work and support yourself and your family in your first year in Canada, it is advisable to create a plan for how you intend to support yourself and your family after the sponsorship period is over.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU CHOOSE TO MOVE TO A DIFFERENT CITY IN CANADA?

You are allowed to move to anywhere in Canada. However, if you **voluntarily** choose to move to another part of Canada, your sponsors may not be able to provide you with financial and settlement support. For newcomers that receive government assistance, you may not be entitled to receive further financial assistance from IRCC for the remainder of the sponsorship period.

Private sponsors are committed to supporting you based on the understanding that you will live in their community. Although you have the right to move anywhere in Canada, private sponsors are only required to provide you with support for your first year while you are in their community. If you move, sponsors should attempt to find you a sponsoring group in your new community. However, if they are unable to do so, you may not receive further sponsor support.

WHAT ARE SPONSORS NOT ALLOWED TO DO?

Your sponsors are here to provide you with support. They are not allowed to:

- Take any money from you **before you arrive** to pay for your sponsorship, including any fees, or money to pay for your living expenses in Canada (even if they say they will give it back to you)
- Take any money from you after you arrive to repay them for sponsoring you (keeping in mind that they may ask you to use the money you brought with you to help pay for your own expenses)
- Force you to work
- Ask you to work for them for free
- Force you to do anything you are not comfortable doing.

Sponsors have committed to volunteering to help you to adjust to life in Canada, and cannot expect or request anything in return.



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WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE NOT RECEIVING ENOUGH SUPPORT FROM YOUR SPONSORS?

If you believe that your private sponsors are not providing you with the support that they are supposed to provide, talk to your sponsor about your concerns if you are comfortable enough to do so. If they sponsored you through an organization (for example, a Sponsorship Agreement Holder), share your concerns with the organization. If you are still not receiving support, or if you are afraid to approach your sponsors, you should **contact *Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)***. There are no consequences to contacting IRCC, and your Permanent Resident status will not be impacted. IRCC will try to find a solution to the problem.

You can contact IRCC by:

- emailing PSR-PPPR@cic.gc.ca to be connected to the appropriate Local IRCC office, or
- calling IRCC's general Call Centre at 1-888-242-2100.

Eventually, you will be connected with a Local IRCC office (which is often the IRCC office located in your area).

The Local IRCC office will ask you questions about the situation, and may also speak to your sponsoring group. They will try to gather information, such as how much financial and settlement support you are being given, and reasons why you may not be receiving enough support. While they are doing this research, if the Local IRCC office finds that you require financial support urgently, it is possible that they may provide you with some emergency funds. The Local IRCC office will also make a final decision about who will provide you with financial and settlement support. If they find that it is true that you are not receiving enough support, and your sponsoring group is unable or unwilling to provide you with more support, they may declare a "sponsorship breakdown." This means that your sponsoring group would no longer be responsible for providing you with financial and settlement support for the rest of the sponsorship period. In this case, you may:

- be given another sponsoring group, or
- be given government funding, or
- be told that you can apply for provincial social assistance.

Depending on the circumstances of the case, there may be some consequences to the sponsoring group. For example, they may have to pay the government back for the government funding or provincial social assistance that you receive.

It is important to remember that solutions and consequences are determined on a case by case basis by IRCC.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE BEING MISTREATED, EXPLOITED OR ABUSED?

If you believe that you are being mistreated or exploited by your sponsors, please contact IRCC immediately at PSR-PPPR@cic.gc.ca. There are many examples of mistreatment and exploitation, including:

- being threatened;
- being forced to give sponsors money;
- not being allowed to leave the house;
- being forced to work;
- being forced to do things that you are not comfortable doing.

For any serious or urgent matters, contact the police. If it is an emergency, dial 911 for immediate assistance. Urgent matters include (but are not limited to):

- if someone is being violent towards you or your family;
- if you fear that someone will be violent towards you or your family;
- if you are experiencing any abuse, including physical or sexual abuse.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO YOU IF YOU REPORT YOUR CONCERNS TO IRCC?

There are **no consequences** to you if you ask IRCC for help if you are not receiving adequate financial or settlement support from your sponsors, or if you have concerns about the sponsorship, including if you believe that you are being mistreated, exploited or abused.

If you report your concerns to IRCC, there is **no risk** of you losing your Permanent Resident status in Canada. Your status will remain the same, and IRCC will try to find a solution to the problem that you are facing.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS?

You have the right to express any concerns that you have with your sponsoring group. For example, if you have concerns about sponsors publishing information or pictures of you without your consent, or making decisions on your behalf, you have the right to raise your concerns with your sponsors.

Also, you are entitled to receive the financial and settlement support explained above from your private sponsors.

It is your right to contact IRCC to raise any concerns you may have, and to contact the police if needed.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND MORE INFORMATION?

For more information, please contact the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP):

Tel: 1-877-290-1701

Email: info@rstp.ca

If you are in Toronto, you can call 416-290-1700, ext. 404 or email torontorss@rstp.ca.

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Refugee
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