

A Settlement Counsellor's Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program

What is the Private Sponsorship of Refugees?

- A Canadian government program that allows Canadian citizens and permanent residents to help refugees living abroad find protection and build a new life in Canada.
- Groups sponsoring refugees under this program must provide them with financial support and settlement assistance for 12 months or until they become self-sufficient, whichever comes first.
- Refugee applicants under this program are identified by the sponsors, often through a family member living in Canada.

Who can sponsor under the PSR Program?

1. Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs)

These are incorporated organizations that have signed an agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to sponsor refugees. SAHs can sponsor directly or through groups they have authorized to sponsor, called Constituent Groups (CG). They can also sponsor with individuals (called "co-sponsors"). There are currently over 100 SAHs across Canada (excluding Quebec).

2. Community Sponsor

A Community Sponsor can be a Canadian organization, association or corporation that is registered, and is based in the community where the refugees are expected to live. They can also sponsor with co-sponsors.

3. Group of Five

A Group of Five is a group of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents over 18 years of age whose members all reside in the community where the refugees are expected to live.

PLEASE NOTE: Groups of Five and Community Sponsors can only sponsor persons who have been officially recognized as refugees and have proof of refugee status from either the UNHCR or the host government of the country where the refugees have fled after leaving their country of origin.

Who can be sponsored under the PSR Program?

1. To be **eligible**, refugee applicants:

- Must have a sponsoring group in Canada
- Must be outside of their home country
- Cannot be in Canada
- Are unable or unwilling to return to their country
- Cannot locally integrate where they are currently living
- Meet the definition of:
 - Convention Refugee Abroad Class: well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

OR

- Country of Asylum Class: seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or suffered massive violations of human rights.

2. Refugee applicants must also be **admissible**. They must pass:

- Medical screening
- Security screening; and
- Criminality screening.

What do you need to know about the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) and Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) Programs?

The BVOR and JAS programs are two other refugee sponsorship programs that may involve settlement counsellors.

The **BVOR** program is “blended” because it is a cost-sharing model. The federal government and the private sponsoring group share financial responsibility for refugees sponsored through this program. The federal government provides income support for 6 months of the year through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), and private sponsors provide 6 months of income support plus all of the “start-up costs”. Private sponsors are also responsible for providing settlement support for the duration of the sponsorship period (12 months), as they do under the PSR program.

The **JAS** program is designed for refugees with special needs who may need additional support to settle in Canada. Under the JAS program, refugees usually receive 24 months of financial support from the government. After initial settlement services provided through RAP service providing organizations, settlement support for the refugees is provided by private sponsors (usually for 24 months). In a few cases, the private sponsor may be asked to provide settlement support for up to 36 months.

Refugees sponsored under the BVOR and JAS program have been identified by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and matched with private sponsors in Canada. Since the refugees sponsored under the BVOR and JAS programs are identified by the UNHCR, if someone in Canada would like to apply to sponsor a family member or friend that is a refugee, they cannot apply under the BVOR or JAS categories, but would rather apply through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees stream in which the sponsors would provide a full 12 months of financial and settlement support.

What is a sponsored refugee’s immigration status?

A sponsored refugee becomes a **permanent resident** at the Port of Entry into Canada, with all the rights and responsibilities of that status.

What are the sponsors’ responsibilities?

It is important to be aware that private sponsors have a contractual obligation with IRCC to provide financial and settlement support to the refugees they have sponsored for 12 months or until they become self-sufficient, whichever comes first. Since **private sponsors are obliged to provide sufficient financial support to cover the basic necessities of life for the refugees they have sponsored**, privately sponsored refugees are not expected to access social assistance during the 12 month sponsorship period. The sponsoring group is required, through financial and in-kind support, to provide:

- Lodging: suitable accommodation, basic furniture, and other household essentials.
- Care: food, clothing, local transportation costs and other basic necessities of life.
- Settlement assistance and support, and;
- Ongoing friendship and emotional support.

The level of financial support that private sponsors are expected to provide, **at minimum**, is the prevailing rate of social assistance in the community of settlement. The total cost of sponsorship can be reduced through in-kind goods. For an estimate of what it costs to support a refugee family for twelve months, and the financial deductions that can be made for in-kind goods, refer to the Sponsorship Cost Table on the RSTP website. It can be found under Fact Sheets in the Resources section.

Privately sponsored refugees **cannot** be made to prepay or repay the costs of their sponsorship.

If within the 12 month sponsorship period, privately sponsored refugees become self-sufficient, the sponsors are not required to continue providing financial support but are still required to provide settlement assistance and ongoing friendship and emotional support if needed. If at any time during the 12 months, the privately sponsored refugees cease to be self-supporting, the sponsors must resume financial support.

The following sets out some of the private sponsors' obligations in more detail:

1. Start-Up Costs:

- Temporary accommodation if needed
- Permanent accommodation and hook up costs (including rental and utility deposits, telephones, etc.)
- Furniture
- Household start-up effects such as kitchen supplies, cleaning products, bedding, linens, etc.
- Food staples
- School start-up costs, if applicable, such as books, stationery, utensils, school uniforms, etc.

2. Ongoing Expenditures:

- Accommodation: includes monthly rent and cost of electricity, heat, water, telephone and insurance
- Transportation: bus or metro passes, tickets, etc.
- Living allowance: food, pocket money, unanticipated expenses, recreation, day care (if applicable) etc.

3. Settlement Assistance

- Meet the refugees they have sponsored upon arrival and provide transportation to their accommodations
- Arrange transportation to and from appointments and activities
- Arrange for interpreter services, if needed and as requested, to facilitate communication with doctors, bank employees, teachers, etc.
- Provide orientation to help the refugees they have sponsored settle in the community and become independent. Examples of orientation activities include using household appliances; opening a bank account; using public transportation; shopping for food, clothes, household effects; visiting schools, getting medication from the pharmacy; etc.
- Enroll children in school, and adults in language training
- Assist with the applications for Social Insurance Numbers (SIN), Interim Federal Health (IFH), provincial health coverage, and the Child Tax Benefit.
- Assist with finding a family physician, dentist, etc.
- Provide assistance in finding employment when the refugees are sufficiently settled and have some command of an official language to begin this process
- Make child care arrangements if children are not of school age and/or require day care
- Provide information about the settlement services that are available in the community of settlement.

What is the role of a Settlement Counsellor in assisting privately sponsored refugees?

As experienced settlement counsellors, you have a key role in helping privately sponsored refugees to settle and integrate into the community. Your role likely depends on many factors, including:

- the funding that your organization receives
- organizational priorities and mandates
- the level of experience of the sponsoring group
- the Settlement Plan that was created by the sponsoring group
- the specific needs of the newcomer
- the relationship between the sponsoring group and the newcomer

Keeping in mind the above factors, your role may include:

- Providing **settlement support** and connecting with appropriate resources and services;
- Ensuring newcomers are **aware of their rights and obligations**;
- If necessary, assisting with **managing expectations** of newcomers and sponsors;
- **Encouraging dialogue** between sponsors and newcomers (especially if there is any miscommunication or conflict).

The settlement counsellor's role is **supportive** rather than primary. It is the sponsors that are ultimately responsible and they need to remain informed and engaged.

What should settlement counsellors consider when supporting privately sponsored refugees?

When providing assistance to privately sponsored refugees, settlement counsellors should take into account the experience of the sponsors. Some Constituent Groups sponsoring through **SAHs** have extensive experience in private sponsorship. They may have been sponsoring for many years and be very knowledgeable. Other Constituent Groups are new or have not sponsored in a few years. Understanding the level of experience that a sponsoring group has may help you to determine how much support you may be asked to provide.

Groups of Five and Community Sponsors tend to be involved in private sponsorship on a case-by-case basis and therefore may be less knowledgeable about their responsibilities, and the settlement services that are available and can be accessed by privately sponsored refugees.

A best practice is for you (the settlement counsellor) and the sponsoring group to meet prior to the arrival of the privately sponsored refugees to discuss which services are available to them and how your settlement organization and the sponsors will partner on the delivery of settlement services. Once the privately sponsored refugees arrive, it is advisable for the sponsoring group to accompany the newcomers to a meeting with you to make a plan together of how settlement assistance will be provided.

What should you do if you believe that refugees may not be receiving sufficient support?

When counsellors are informed about or suspect that privately sponsored refugees are not getting enough assistance from their sponsors, they should approach the situation carefully to avoid damaging the relationship between sponsored refugees and their sponsors. The following steps may assist in dealing with such situations:

- ✓ Find out what is not being provided. For example, is it financial support, settlement support, or both?
- ✓ Find out which category of sponsorship applies to the privately sponsored refugee :
 - Are they:
 - **Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR)** - 12 months of financial and settlement support from private sponsors?
 - **Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR)** - 6 months of financial support from private sponsors (plus “start-up costs”) and 6 months of financial support from the government, with all 12 months of settlement support being provided by private sponsors?
 - **Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS)** – Usually 24 months of financial support from government and 24 months of settlement support from private sponsors?
 - Are they sponsored by:
 - A Group of Five?
 - A Community Sponsor?
 - A Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) or a Constituent Group (CG) or co-sponsor of a SAH? A SAH has obligations and will need to be involved.
 - Is there a co-sponsor (often a relative) involved?
- ✓ Do not rush to conclusions before being in touch with the sponsoring group to hear their side of the story and vice-versa.
- ✓ Consider how the sponsored family and the sponsoring group can be supported to ensure that the sponsored family receives the support they need.
- ✓ If the sponsored family is unwilling to divulge who their sponsors are or are hesitant to talk about the lack of support, consider how they can be empowered to deal with their fear and to speak to the sponsoring group.
- ✓ With the permission of the sponsored refugees, raise the areas of concern with the sponsoring group.
- ✓ RSTP is available to provide advice and support.
- ✓ The privately sponsored refugee can contact IRCC by either:
 - emailing IRCC.INPSR-PPPRRI.IRCC@cic.gc.ca for the appropriate local IRCC office; or
 - calling IRCC’s general Call Centre at 1-888-242-2100.

IRCC will connect the newcomer with a local IRCC office which will contact the newcomers and the sponsoring group and gather further information about the situation. Local IRCC will eventually make a determination as to the best way to proceed, and how to address the financial and/or settlement needs of the refugee. In some circumstances, a sponsorship breakdown may be declared. For more information about the role of the Local IRCC office, sponsorship disputes, and sponsorship breakdowns, please contact RSTP.

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