

# THE RIGHTS OF PRIVATELY SPONSORED REFUGEES

Welcome to Canada! If you are a privately sponsored refugee living in Canada (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 settlement support, as well as financial support, 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 your responsibilities are and **what to do if you have concerns about your 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 and have committed to providing you with financial and non-financial support during your sponsorship period. You may know your sponsors, as they could be your family members or friends, or your sponsors may be people you don't know that want to help you, that you will get to know in the coming months.

## HOW LONG IS YOUR SPONSORSHIP PERIOD?

In most cases, the sponsorship period is **one year**. In exceptional cases, and only if *Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)* and your sponsors agree, sponsorships may last longer than one year. If you are unsure how long your sponsorship period is, it is likely one year. Your sponsors can confirm the length of your sponsorship.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU RECEIVE FROM YOUR SPONSORS?

- 1) Financial support to cover your basic expenses for one year or until you can support yourself, 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 will include monetary support, which is usually provided monthly, and start-up support, which is a combination of monetary support and donated or purchased items that you will receive shortly after arrival to help you begin your new life in Canada. Start-up support includes things like furniture, linens, and other household essentials like cleaning supplies, plates, and pots.

Your sponsors are responsible for providing you with financial support on an ongoing basis for the duration of your sponsorship. They must either provide you with, or give you enough monetary support to pay for the following:

- a) Basic needs (food, and other necessities of life)
- b) Shelter (a room, apartment or house to live in, including the cost of utilities like electricity, heating, and water)
- c) Local transportation (for example, monthly passes for local buses or trains)
- d) Communication (phone/internet).

If you have been sponsored under the ***Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program***, the **Government of Canada will provide you with monthly cheques to cover your basic expenses for six months**, usually starting from the second month that you are in Canada. Your sponsoring group does not have to provide you with any additional funds during the months that the Government of Canada is providing you with financial support. Your sponsoring group is still financially responsible for:

- providing you with start-up support, money and items to set up your home, such as furniture, kitchen supplies, cleaning products, bedding, rent and utilities deposits, clothing, etc. Some of these items may have been donated.
- providing you with enough money to cover your basic expenses (housing, food, local transportation, communication) for the **first month** that you are in Canada, unless you can support yourself and your family.
- providing you with enough money to cover your basic expenses 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 may reduce the amount of money that they provide you with. Although some sponsors choose not to make any deductions to financial support when newcomers start working, sponsors are allowed to deduct financial support based on the following guidelines provided by IRCC:

- when your family's income (after tax deductions) is more than 50% of your monthly financial support from the sponsors (including the cost of any monthly "in-kind" support such as the cost of shelter when it is being provided "in-kind"): sponsors are allowed to deduct \$1 for each \$1 you earn.
- if your family's income (after tax deductions) is more than 150% of the monthly financial support (including the cost of any monthly "in-kind" support such as the cost of shelter when it is being provided "in-kind"), sponsors do not need to provide you with additional monthly financial support.

However, if you lose your job, or earn less money 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. Federal or provincial tax benefits or rebates, including the Canada Child Benefit are tax-free monthly payments available to all qualifying permanent residents and Canadian citizens, and sponsor support cannot be reduced once you start receiving these benefits.

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. For more information about this, including how much money sponsors can ask you to contribute to your costs of living based on the amount of money that you are bringing with you to Canada, please read the following document: <http://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/DECLARATION-OF-FUNDS-AND-ASSETS-ON-ARRIVAL.pdf>.

Although the items that you are given and the housing that has been arranged may not be luxurious, they must be adequate. Some sponsors may have arranged for you to live with someone else, such as a sponsor, family member or stranger. This is acceptable as long as you are comfortable with this arrangement. Ultimately, your home must be safe and 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. All sponsorships are different, and the amount of support sponsors provide is not always equal. **At a minimum, sponsors are expected to provide a level of financial support that is equal to the Resettlement Assistance Program rates.** To calculate the minimum amount of financial support that you should be receiving, please either:

- Use the RSTP's Minimum Financial Support Calculator: <http://www.rstp.ca/calc/?lang=en>, or
- Refer to “**Start-up Rates**” and also the **monthly rates that are divided by province** on the following website: <http://www.rstp.ca/en/sponsorship-responsibilities/resettlement-assistance-program-rap-rates/>.

For more details about the financial support that you should receive, please refer to the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document about post-arrival financial support for privately sponsored refugees: [http://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/EN-FAQs-update-Summer-2019-AUG-19-update\\_FINAL.docx-3.pdf](http://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/EN-FAQs-update-Summer-2019-AUG-19-update_FINAL.docx-3.pdf).



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## 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 local 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 use the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)
  - helping to find 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 and learn to budget
  - helping you apply for a Social Insurance Number, and if you have children, helping you apply for the Canada Child 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 settlement services in your area, visit: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/map/services.asp>.*

Settlement support must be provided throughout the entire duration of the sponsorship period, even if you are employed.

### 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 Agency 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?

As a Permanent Resident of Canada, you may move anywhere in Canada. You may **voluntarily** choose to move to another part of Canada, but before doing so you should discuss your move with your sponsors to understand possible outcomes.

Private sponsors are committed to supporting you based on the understanding that you will live in their community. Private sponsors are only required to provide you with financial and settlement support while you are in their community. If you move, sponsors must attempt to find you a sponsoring group in your new community. However, if they are unable to do so, you may not receive further financial or non-financial support from your sponsors.

## WHAT ARE SPONSORS NOT ALLOWED TO DO?

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

- Ask you for any money 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).
- Ask you for any money after you arrive to repay them for sponsoring you.
- Deduct the amount of financial support payments they provide you with when you start receiving Canada Child Benefits.
- 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 helping you to adjust to life in Canada, and cannot expect or request anything in return.

## 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 to ensure that you receive the support that you need.

You can contact IRCC by emailing: **IRCC.PSRCasereview-RevuedecasPSR.IRCC@cic.gc.ca**.

A representative from IRCC will ask you questions about the situation, and may also contact your sponsors. They will try to gather information, such as how much financial and settlement support you are being given, and they will try to connect you with the support you need. IRCC will also make a decision about who will provide you with financial and settlement support in the future. If they find 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 **IRCC.PSRCaseReview-RevuedecasPSR.IRCC@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;
- having your documents taken away from you;
- being forced to do anything you don't want to do.

**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 or your Permanent Resident status in Canada 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, 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.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT RSTP