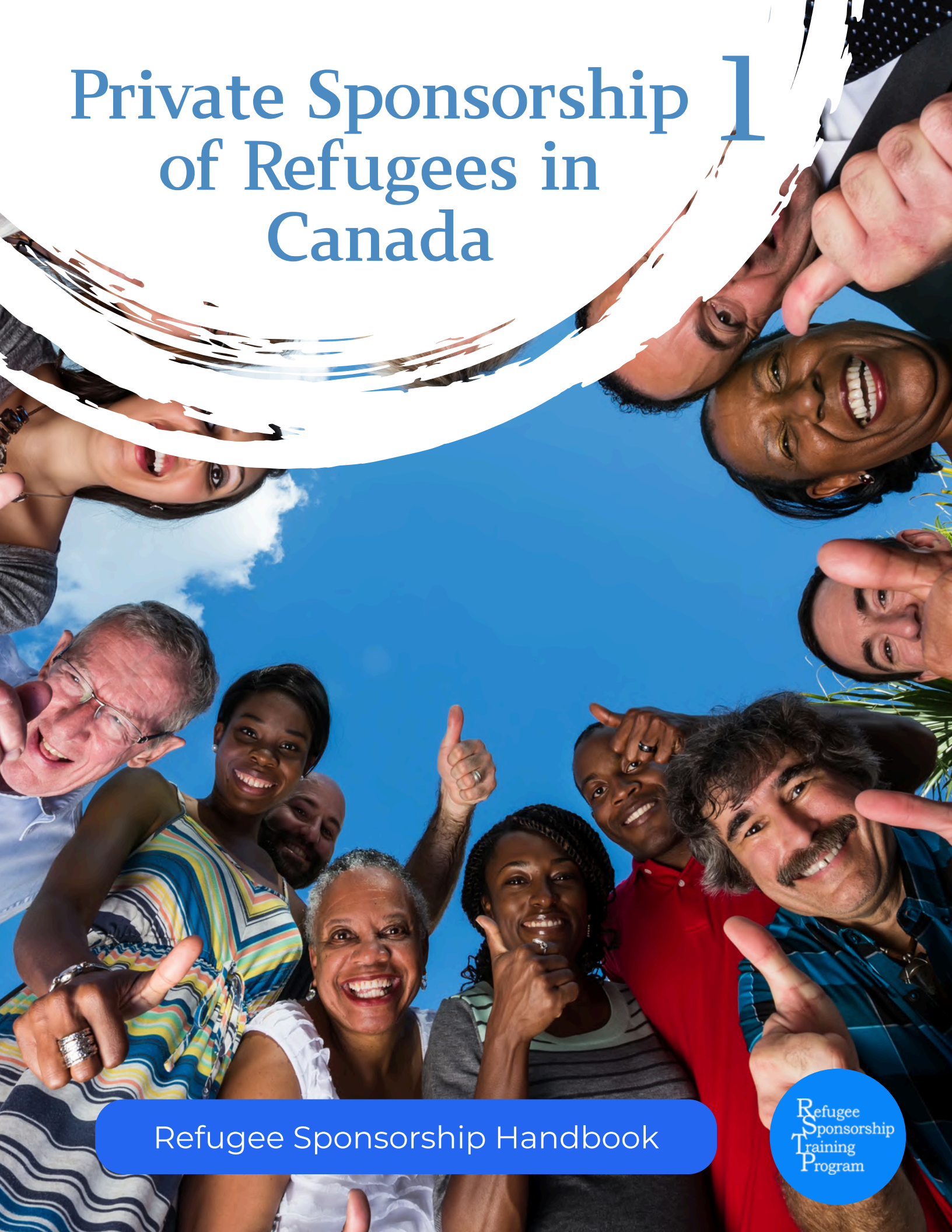


# Private Sponsorship of Refugees in Canada

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Refugee Sponsorship Handbook



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## ABBREVIATIONS

**AWR** - Women at Risk (Program)  
**BVOR** - Blended Visa Office-Referred  
**IRB** - Immigration and Refugee Board (of Canada)  
**IRCC** - Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada  
**IRPA** - Immigration and Refugee Protection Act  
**IRPR** - Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations  
**JAS** - Joint Assistance Sponsorship  
**PSR** - Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program  
**UNHCR** - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
**UPP** - Urgent Protection Program

## TERMS

**Country of Asylum** - a country that grants protection to people fleeing persecution or serious danger in their own country

**Country of Habitual Residence** - the place where a person resides on an ongoing and stable basis. Habitual residence is to be understood as stable, factual residence

**Country of Origin** or **Home Country** - the country where a person resides and holds citizenship

**Durable Solution** - a permanent solution to the problems of refugees, allowing them long-term resolution to the situation of displacement (voluntary repatriation, local integration, resettlement)

**Local Integration** - (durable solution) when refugees permanently settle or assimilate in the country in which they sought asylum

**Permanent Resident** - someone who has been given Permanent Resident status in Canada, but has not yet become a Canadian Citizen with voting rights.

**Resettlement** - (durable solution) when refugees transfer from the country where they were granted refugee status to another country that has agreed to admit them and offer them long-term resident rights and/or citizenship

**(Refugee) Sponsor** - individuals or organizations who are able to formally support refugees to resettle in Canada through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program.

**Voluntary Repatriation** - (durable solution) when refugees voluntarily return to their country of origin or habitual residence in safety and with dignity

## Who is a Refugee?

All kinds of people can become **refugees**; rich or poor; male or female; doctor or farmer. No one is a refugee by choice. Individuals are refugees because they are persecuted based on their ethnic background, faith, opinions or because they flee an armed conflict.

The [1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees](#) defines a refugee as any person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. To date, close to [three-quarters of the world's states](#) have signed the 1951 Convention and its Protocol.

Over the years, the concept of a refugee has been broadened. Many states now accept people who flee armed conflict as refugees or as persons in refugee-like circumstances. Legal definitions have been influenced by human rights treaties, such as the UN Convention against Torture (CAT) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The 1951 Convention and these treaties are the basis of our refugee laws in Canada: the [Immigration and Refugee Protection Act \(IRPA\)](#) and the [Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations \(IRPR\)](#).

A refugee is, first and foremost, a human being, a person with rights and dignity. Despite their differences, refugees throughout the world have one thing in common: they cannot live peacefully, in safety and dignity, in their home country.



## Refugees Worldwide

Some refugees are able to flee to a safe country where they are provided protection and status – a long-term solution which will permit them to live in their country of asylum and perhaps even become a citizen. When these refugees apply for asylum, they are referred to as inland claimants or asylum seekers.



For most of the world's refugees there is no immediate solution, and in some cases, individuals remain in camp situations for years, decades or even generations. Most refugees seek asylum in countries neighbouring areas of conflict. Often these are developing countries with limited resources.

These countries play an important role by temporarily providing protection to large populations. Unfortunately, they are not able to offer more permanent solutions to the refugee populations in their country. Many refugees remain in camps or live in urban settings without access to basic rights. They are often not allowed to work or go to school and start a new life.

Each year, UNHCR publishes statistics about refugees around the world. According to [UNHCR's Global Trends Report](#), at the end of 2024, 123.2 million people had been forced to leave their homes due to conflict or persecution, the largest number on record. Of these, 42.7 million were refugees – 36.8 million under UNHCR's mandate and 5.9 million Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA; 73.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 8.4 million asylum-seekers. Additionally, there are numerous refugees worldwide who are unwilling or unable to seek protection from the UNHCR but are also in need of assistance.

More information on the global refugee situation can be found in UNHCR's annual **Global Trends Report** available online [here](#)

In the past, large numbers of refugees returned home, many after decades in asylum countries, and others after only a few months. In 2024, 9.8 million displaced people returned to their home, which included 1.6 million refugees and 8.2 million internally displaced persons.

In 2024, 88,900 refugees were resettled with or without UNHCR assistance. The UNHCR encourages countries to introduce and increase resettlement programs to extend assistance to the millions of refugees worldwide.



## Durable Solutions for Refugees

States are obligated to protect refugees who are in their territory. This follows from the Refugee Convention. The Refugee Convention also stresses the importance of international solidarity with states which host large numbers of refugees. Internationally, the office of the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) is mandated to protect the rights and well-being of refugees. The UNHCR works with governments internationally to offer a durable solution to refugees.

### *VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION*

**Voluntary repatriation** may be a durable solution when conditions in the refugees' home country have improved in a lasting and meaningful way, and refugees are able to return to their home country in safety and with dignity. It is important to take the individual's circumstances into consideration when determining whether voluntary repatriation is an option. When the situation in the home country improves, some groups may be able to return home while it may not be safe for members of other groups.

## *LOCAL INTEGRATION*

When voluntary repatriation is not feasible, **local integration** is a second solution for refugees. This means that the refugees have the ability and right to stay in their current country of asylum. Refugees are considered locally integrated when they have rights similar to those of citizens in the country where they sought refuge. These include that:

- they can move around that country freely;
- they are allowed to earn a living;
- their children are allowed to attend school;
- there is no threat of forcible return to their country of origin.

## *RESETTLEMENT IN A THIRD COUNTRY*

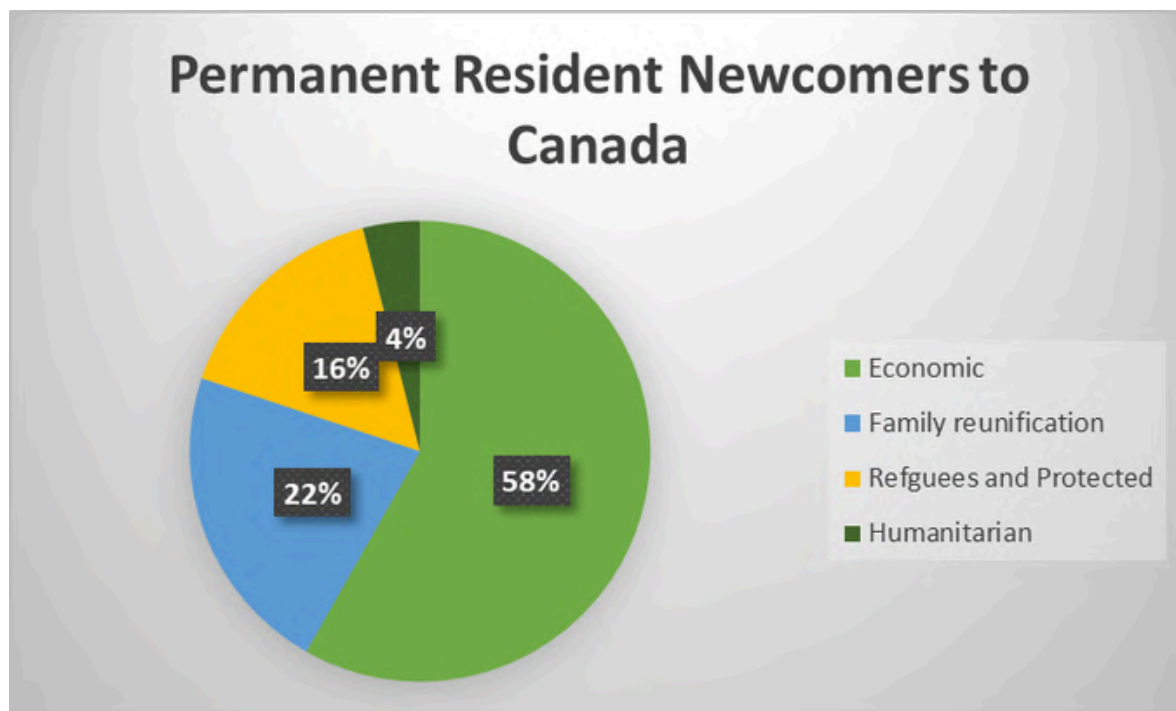
When refugees are not able to voluntarily return to their own country and have no prospects to locally integrate in their current country of asylum, **resettlement** in another country is a third possible durable solution. Resettlement provides a durable solution for refugees and offers protection to those who are particularly vulnerable and whose life, liberty, safety, health or fundamental human rights are at risk in the country where they sought refuge. Resettlement is also used as a means of sharing responsibility with a country that hosts large groups of refugees. Resettlement or sponsorship can reunite families who were separated while fleeing their homes. Most often resettlement offers refugees the right to remain in the resettlement country permanently.



## What Does Canada Do for Refugees?

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR) outline the law and regulations for immigration and refugee protection in Canada. The introduction of IRPA clarified and widened the humanitarian goals of Canada's immigration program. IRPA also modernized protection mechanisms and durable solutions available to refugees in need of resettlement.

Refugees are only a small part of all newcomers to Canada. The economic classes, which include skilled workers, live-in caregivers and business immigrants, account for about 60% of permanent residents who arrive in Canada each year. About 22% of all immigrants arrive in Canada under the family class in Canada. Sixteen percent of all immigrants coming to Canada in 2024 consisted of refugees. Of these refugees more than half came as resettled refugees, either as privately sponsored refugees (PSR) or as government assisted refugees (GAR).



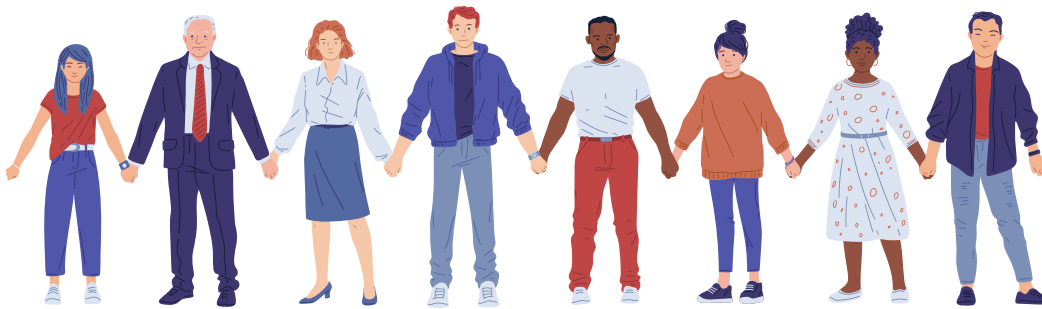
You can read more on Canada's 2024 immigration numbers in the report to Parliament [here](#).

# What Does Canada Do for Refugees?

## Canada's response to refugees is two-fold:

### *IN-LAND ASYLUM CLAIM SYSTEM*

As a signatory to the Geneva Convention, Canada is obligated to offer protection to refugees who arrive on its shores and claim asylum. Refugees seeking asylum in Canada are known as refugee claimants. In order to be permanently accepted in Canada they must first be determined eligible as refugees by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB).



### *REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT*

Canada also offers protection in the form of resettlement or sponsorship. In 2024 the refugee resettlement goal was 36,750 refugees, but numbers vary annually. Overseas refugees can be referred for resettlement to Canada by the UNHCR or another referral agency, or by private refugee sponsors. Canadian visa officers establish whether a refugee is eligible for resettlement to Canada. Selected refugees have to undergo medical, criminal and security checks before being admitted to Canada. They arrive in Canada as permanent residents with all associated rights and responsibilities.

Canada has been the second largest country of resettlement, with some 49,285 refugees resettled in Canada as Government Assisted Refugees (GAR), Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) or Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) in 2024. There are currently 37 countries that have resettlement programs. Of these, the United States had been the largest resettlement program until indefinitely halting admissions in January 2025. According to the Immigration Levels Plan (2026-2028), Canada expects to land 29,300 resettled refugees in each year of the plan.

[You can read more about Canada's expected immigration levels for 2026-28 here.](#)

## Types of Refugee Sponsorship

Refugees resettled to Canada may be sponsored by the government or a private sponsorship group. Special needs refugees may be jointly sponsored by the government and a private sponsor.

In Private Sponsorship, sponsoring groups are responsible for all material and financial support of the refugee(s) as well as for providing orientation, settlement and emotional support during the sponsorship period (usually the refugees' first year in Canada) or until the refugees become self-supporting. All government-financed settlement services are usually available to the refugees as well. However, refugees may not access social assistance because of the sponsor's commitments.



In sponsor-referred sponsorship, a group sponsors specific refugees or refugee families in need of resettlement which come to their attention through overseas contacts or through friends or relatives in Canada. The IRCC process begins with their submission of the Sponsorship Undertaking.



Under IRPA, Canadians can reunite with their immediate family members such as their spouse, dependent children, parents, grandparents, orphaned minor brothers and sisters. These are considered **Family Class Sponsorships**. When we refer to sponsorship in this publication, family class is not included, as the criteria and context are different.

## Special Programs

The Joint Assistance Sponsorship Program (JAS), enables sponsors, service-providing organizations and the government to work together to resettle refugees who are identified as having special needs. Examples of persons in this category include refugees with physical handicaps or especially large or single-parent families. The government provides financial assistance to the refugees, while sponsoring groups provide orientation, settlement and emotional support. Service-providing organizations provide appropriate settlement services. Typically sponsors commit 2 years of support to a JAS sponsorship.

The Blended Visa-Office Referred Program (BVOR) is a cost-sharing initiative designed to resettle refugees selected by the UNHCR. Under the current BVOR program, launched in 2013, IRCC provides 6 months of Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) income support to sponsored refugees while private sponsors are responsible for the remaining 6 months of settlement costs and assistance.



The Women at Risk Program, which is sometimes referred to as AWR, was set up to ensure that refugee women applicants are not unfairly disadvantaged when it comes to resettlement opportunities. The program is for women without the normal protection of a family unit who require immediate protection or are in permanently unstable circumstances with no other solution. AWR cases will often require Joint Assistance Sponsorship but they may also resettle as a government- assisted or privately sponsored refugee.

The Urgent Protection Program (UPP) allows Canada to respond to requests to provide urgent protection for refugees abroad. These include, but are not limited to, individuals who are under threat of being deported back to their country of origin and/or individuals who face a real threat to their physical safety in their current country of asylum. UPP cases are usually designated as government-assisted refugees. If the refugees in the UPP case are identified as having special needs, they are identified as Joint Assistance Sponsorship cases.



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