

# Who Can Sponsor 2



Refugee Sponsorship Handbook

Refugee  
Sponsorship  
Training  
Program

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## ACRONYMS

- BVOR** - Blended Visa Office-Referred
- GAR** - Government Assisted Refugee
- IRCC** - Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- JAS** - Joint Assistance Sponsorship Program
- PSR** - Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

## TERMS

**Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR Program)** - the Visa Office has determined a refugee to be eligible and has referred them for sponsorship to Canada. Sponsorship costs are shared between the Canadian government and the sponsors. Sponsors pay the start-up costs and provide settlement assistance.

**Community Sponsor (CS)** - Any organization (for-profit/not-for-profit, incorporated/non-incorporated) located in the community where the refugees are expected to settle that has made an organizational commitment to sponsor.

**Constituent Group (CG)** - A group authorized in writing by a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) to act on its behalf in sponsoring refugees. Refer to section 138 "group" of IRPR.

**Co-Sponsor** - A sponsoring group may choose to formally partner with an individual (e.g., a family member of the sponsored refugee living in Canada) and/or another organization in carrying out settlement duties. This partner is termed a "co-sponsor".

**Group of Five (G5)** - A Group of Five is a sponsoring group under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. G-5 sponsorship groups are often one-time groups and are formed in response to special situations that arise.

**Private Sponsor of Refugees (PSR) Program** - one of Canada's immigration streams through which refugee applicants are resettled to Canada as permanent residents sponsored by a Group of Five, Sponsorship Agreement Holder or Community Sponsor. The PSR program involves civic participation and is based on a strong volunteer base in various communities.

**Service Provider Organization (SPO)** - organizations funded by IRCC to provide programs and supports to newcomers resettling in Canada.

**Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH)** - Incorporated organizations that have signed a formal sponsorship agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). SAHs assume overall responsibility for the management of sponsorships under their agreement, and generally submit several refugee sponsorships a year.

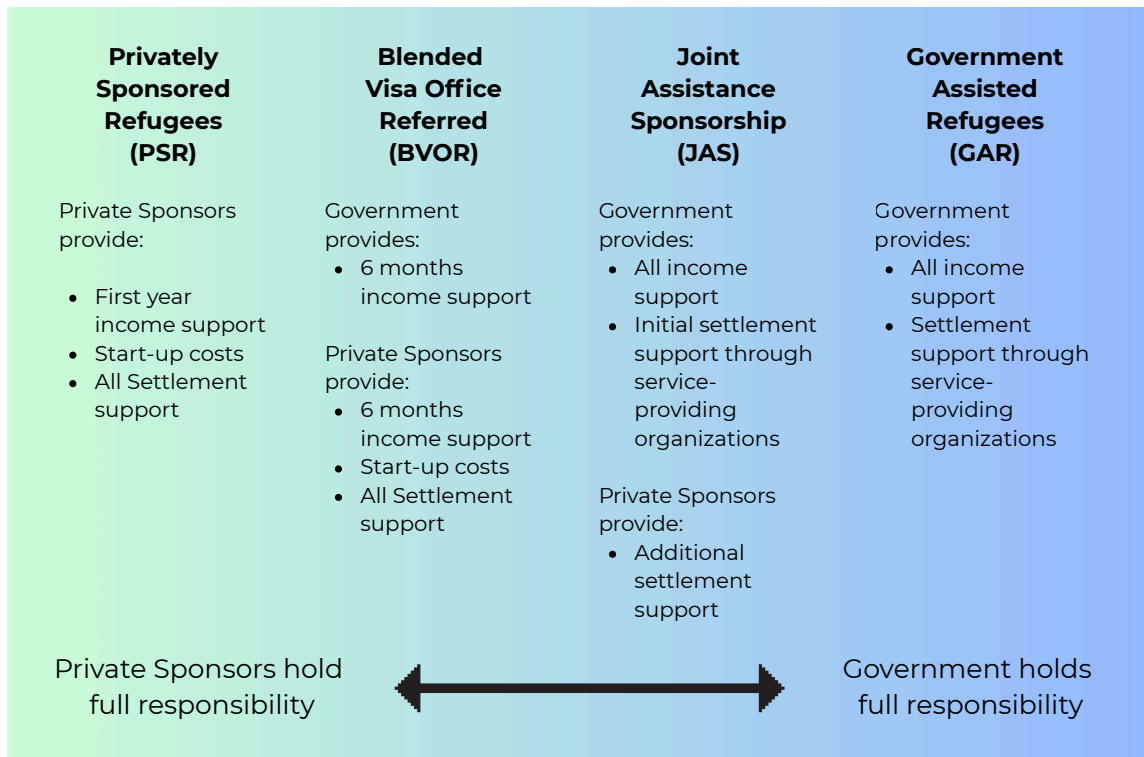
## What is Sponsorship?

The Canadian **Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program** allows citizens to sponsor refugees from outside of Canada. What does sponsorship of refugees mean? Who can sponsor a refugee? What are the obligations of a sponsor?

Sponsorship is a legal commitment to ensure that sponsored refugees to ensure that refugees have the necessary support to integrate into life in Canada. Sponsors must provide basic financial support (e.g., for housing and food) and care for the sponsored refugee for up to 12 months or until the sponsored refugee becomes self-sufficient, whichever comes first. In exceptional circumstances, the length of the sponsorship may be up to 36 months.

Sponsorship is a three-way partnership between sponsors, the Government of Canada, and the refugees themselves. The sponsors demonstrate their legal commitment by signing an Undertaking/Application to Sponsor (called a Sponsorship Undertaking).

Sponsorship can range from full responsibility by private groups to full responsibility by the Canadian government.



## Who are Private Sponsors?

Sponsoring refugees is a group commitment. A private sponsor can be a group, a corporation, an unincorporated organization, an association or any combination of these entities.

Sponsoring groups should have a sufficient number of individuals to provide the refugee with support upon arrival. There are 3 types of private sponsorship groups in Canada:

- Sponsorship Agreement Holders (and their Constituent Groups)
- Community Sponsors
- Groups of Five

Sponsors may work with co-sponsors to help them support the sponsored refugee.



## *Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) and Constituent Groups (CGs)*

A **Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH)** is an organization that has signed a Sponsorship Agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). A SAH can sponsor refugees itself or can work with **Constituent Groups (CGs)** that may sponsor refugees under the SAH's agreement. SAHs assume overall responsibility and liability for the management of sponsorships under their agreement, and generally submit several applications per year.

## *Community Sponsors (CS)*

A **Community Sponsor (CS)** is an organization, association or corporation that meets the criteria for community sponsorship has no limits on the number of sponsorship undertakings they can submit per year. However, they must undergo financial and settlement plan assessments by IRCC each time they wish to sponsor.



## *Groups of Five (G5)*

A **Group of Five (G5)** is any group of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents who meet the criteria can also sponsor refugees. A Group of Five is

“five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents, each of whom is at least 18 years of age, who are acting together for the purpose of sponsoring a Convention refugee or a person in similar circumstances”. (from the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR))

In G5 sponsorships, the individuals act as guarantors that make sure the necessary support will be provided for the whole sponsorship.

## Forming a Sponsoring Group

The sponsoring process begins with the formation of a sponsoring group. While each sponsoring group has the same basic obligations towards the sponsored refugees, the composition of sponsoring groups can vary widely. You may already be part of an organized group or you may have come together solely for the purpose of sponsoring one particular refugee family. Regardless of which type of sponsoring group you are, the sponsorship process will be the same.

Given the length of both the application process and the sponsorship period, most sponsorship group members will work together intensively for an extended period of time. Many people will eventually play a role in the settlement of the refugees, but one of the first steps is deciding who will be part of the sponsorship group and who will take on the official responsibility of signing the Sponsorship Undertaking. Sponsoring groups may decide to partner with a co-sponsor and share the sponsorship responsibilities.



## Partners to a Sponsorship

Sponsorship is a partnership between the sponsors, the Government of Canada and the refugees. It is also possible for SAHs and/or Community Sponsors to formally partner with an individual (for example, a relative of sponsored refugees living in Canada) or another organization to raise funds and carry out settlement duties. This type of partner is called a **co-sponsor**.

## *Co-sponsor individuals*

If you are sponsoring a refugee who has relatives or friends in your community, it is important to decide how those individuals will be involved in the sponsorship. Has the relative or friend made a commitment to provide sponsorship support? If this is the case, consider making the individual a member of your sponsoring group, or asking him or her to formally partner with your group by signing the sponsorship undertaking as a co-sponsor (if eligible). Whether or not they are formally recognized as partners, the relatives or family members who are contributing financial support or settlement assistance should be included in the settlement planning process.

Co-sponsors must provide details of all previous sponsorship commitments, including family class sponsorship obligations, to IRCC. Reviewing these obligations with a prospective co-sponsor can help your group assess the level of support the individual can realistically be expected to provide. There is no obligation to formally recognize individuals contributing to the sponsorship as co-sponsors. When an individual co-sponsor signs the sponsorship undertaking, they officially commit themselves to sharing responsibility for the sponsorship.

However, all parties are held jointly and severally liable for the sponsorship. The official sponsoring group - a SAH, Community Sponsor or Group of Five - must be ready to assume responsibility if the co-sponsor is unable to provide the support promised.



## *Co-sponsor organizations*

You can also include an organization as a formal partner in the sponsorship. Many sponsoring groups effectively combine the efforts of several different organizations. Formally recognizing a co-sponsoring organization is an official indication of shared responsibility. However, the ultimate liability rests with the official sponsoring group whether it is a SAH, Community Sponsor or Group of Five that submits the sponsorship.

## Sponsorship Group Responsibilities

When signing a Sponsorship Undertaking, a sponsor assumes the following responsibilities with respect to the refugee family:

Reception:

- Meet the refugee upon arrival at the airport and welcome them to the community; provide orientation to life in Canada

Lodging:

- Provide suitable accommodation, basic furniture, and other household essentials

Care:

- Provide food, clothing, local transportation costs and other basic necessities of life

Settlement assistance and support:

- Complete required forms including health insurance, social insurance and child tax benefits;
- Open a bank account;
- Learn English or French (e.g.: enroll in an ESL/LINC or FSL/CLIC class);
- Understand the rights and responsibilities of permanent residents;
- Find employment;
- Access resources (e.g.: community support groups, settlement services);
- Register children in school and guide them in dealings with the school system;
- Locate a family physician and dentist; and
- become independent.

The support begins on the date the sponsored refugee arrives in Canada. The sponsorship continues for a period of one year (this can be longer in special cases) or until the refugee becomes self-supporting.

**Sponsoring groups are not responsible for repaying any immigration pre- arrival fees (such as transportation fees and the cost of medical examinations). The payment of these fees is the responsibility of the refugee applicant, who may be provided with a loan by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to cover these costs. Sponsors are also not responsible for any liabilities arising from the refugee applicant's misconduct.**

## Who Cannot Sponsor?

When forming your group, be aware that some people are not eligible to participate in a sponsorship. They include:

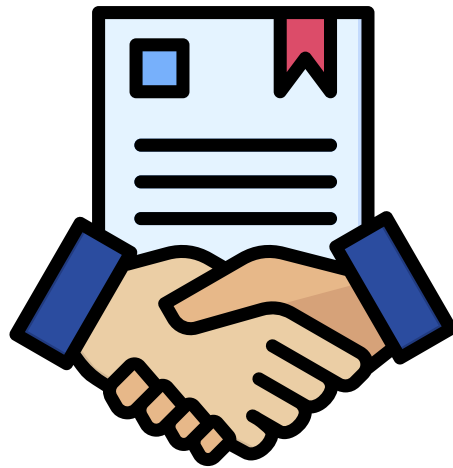
- Persons convicted of serious criminal acts, if five years have not lapsed since the end of the sentence;
- Persons in default of court-ordered support payments; and
- Removable and incarcerated persons, or persons subject to citizenship revocation proceedings.

Each person who signs the Sponsorship Undertaking must also sign a Sponsor Assessment Form, which lists the circumstances that exclude an individual from participating in a sponsorship. This includes the representative of the sponsoring group as well as any co-sponsors who have officially partnered with the sponsoring group. Each individual member of a Group of Five must sign and submit this form. SAHs are not required to submit a signed Sponsor Assessment Form with each Sponsorship Undertaking. The signing authority for the SAH will already have a signed Sponsor Assessment Form that is kept on file with IRCC.

Finally, privately sponsored refugees can be quite vulnerable and your group will have considerable power over their lives after their arrival. Your group needs to be aware of the potential for abuse of this power. The Sponsorship Undertaking form includes a Declaration by the Sponsoring Group, which all parties must sign. Part of this declaration states that

to the best of my ability, I will not knowingly or deliberately allow any individual to participate in the group's settlement activities who may be considered a threat to the safety and security of the refugee(s).

All individuals signing the sponsorship undertaking must also agree to this statement on behalf of the group.



## Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs)

A Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) is an organization that has an agreement with the Government of Canada allowing them to resettle refugees through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program. This agreement is a legal agreement between a corporation and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). When it is signed, the organization accepts the legal responsibility for all sponsorships it signs directly, as well as those it authorizes its Constituent Groups (CGs) to sign. Agreements can specify an expiration date and limit the number of individuals who can be sponsored.

There are more than 143 SAHs across Canada. While they vary in composition, type and organizational structure, the responsibilities of each SAH are generally the same. SAHs are responsible for managing sponsorships under their agreement, and they can identify refugees they would like to sponsor.

SAHs can also authorize CGs to sponsor under their agreement. The SAH is responsible for assessing the feasibility of a sponsorship, both in terms of the refugees' eligibility and a group's ability to carry out the sponsorship. Each SAH has its own procedures for assessing and approving potential sponsorships. SAHs are also responsible for training, advising, assisting, monitoring and sharing information with their CGs. A SAH may have many CGs across Canada, only a few in a specific region or area, or none at all. The SAH bears the legal responsibility and ultimate liability for all sponsorships submitted under its agreement.

## *Constituent Groups (CGs)*

A Constituent Group (CG) is a group that sponsors refugees on behalf of a SAH. If your group is sponsoring with a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH), the first step is to contact your SAH representative to find out more about the process in their organization. Each SAH has its own process for recognizing sponsoring groups as CGs.

While each SAH sets its own criteria for recognizing CGs, all CGs must be:

- Authorized, in writing, by the SAH to act on its behalf as sponsors of refugees
- Located in the community where the refugee is expected to settle
- Managed under the SAH

## *Parties to a Sponsorship*

A SAH may choose to authorize a CG and/or a co-sponsor individual or organization, A SAH may also choose to work alone on a private sponsorship case. Where settlement responsibilities are shared between a SAH, CG and/or co-sponsor, the SAH is ultimately responsible to ensure that the conditions of the sponsorship Undertaking are met. Failure to do so may result in a default being declared against the SAH and the cancellation of their agreement with IRCC. For this reason, all partners to a sponsorship should keep in touch throughout the application process and the sponsorship period to address concerns that arise and to avoid breakdown or default.



## 2: Who Can Sponsor Refugee Sponsorship Handbook March 2026

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