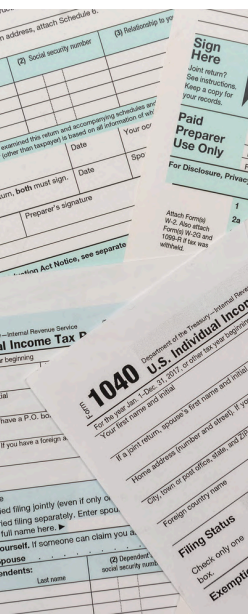


Application Processing and Travel

5



Refugee Sponsorship Handbook

Refugee
Sponsorship
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Program

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ACRONYMS

BVOR - Blended Visa Office-Referred

ROC-O - Resettlement Operations Centre - Ottawa

IOM - International Organization for Migration

IRCC - Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada

COA - Canadian Orientation Abroad Program

TERMS

Admissibility - a set of criteria on whether a person may be admitted to Canada. Admissibility is evaluated through 3 checks: criminal, security and medical.

Eligibility - Sponsors and refugees must show that they qualify to sponsor or be sponsored. There are specific criteria whether or not the refugee or sponsors qualify to participate in refugee resettlement to Canada. Eligibility criteria can be found in the [Guide to Private Sponsorship of Refugees](#).

G number or G# - A G number is the file number given to a refugee sponsorship application when it is entered into the Resettlement Operations Centre - Ottawa (ROC-O) database. Applications are given a G number after a ROC-O staff person has scanned the documents in the application and decided there is nothing missing.

Notice of Arrival Transmission (NAT) - a communication from IRCC, usually sent by email, notifying the sponsoring group that the sponsored person(s) have travel arrangements and a travel date. More information on the NAT and preparing for Arrival in the [Post-arrival requirements for private sponsorships guide](#).

Port of Entry (POE) - A Port of Entry (POE) is a place which is selected as an entry point into Canada by the Government of Canada. Usually the Port of Entry that you come through will be the first airport or land crossing that you stop at in Canada.

Travel document - a Canadian visa officer may issue a Single Journey Travel Document (SJTD) which is to be used solely for the purpose of the refugee's one time travel to Canada if they are unable to obtain a travel document in the country in which they reside.

Travel loan - Funds provided temporarily by the Canadian government for refugees resettling to Canada. The loans are used to cover a number of expenses, including travel to Canada and other costs associated with resettlement. More information on travel loans [here](#).

The [refugee sponsorship application processing](#) involves many steps, some in-Canada and others at Canadian Visa Offices overseas. First government officers in Canada at Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada (IRCC) review the sponsorship plan and **eligibility** of sponsors. If the sponsorship plan and group are accepted, then IRCC sends the application package to a Visa Office overseas. There, a Visa Officer will review the refugee's **eligibility** and **admissibility**. The Visa Officer will assess whether the refugee and their dependents meet the requirements for refugee sponsorship and resettlement to Canada.



About the Application Package

You will find more detail about the application forms in Chapter 4. We are including a short note here on the application package and sponsoring through the BVOR program.

To officially start the sponsorship application process, sponsoring groups need to complete and submit the relevant [application forms](#). The refugee sponsorship application package is made up of two sets of forms: the sponsorship forms and the refugee's forms.

There are 3 types of groups that can sponsor: Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH), Groups of Five (G5), and Community Sponsors (CS). Each group needs to fill its own specific forms. So, be sure to know what type of group you are in so you can fill the correct forms. The refugee's forms are the same no matter which type of group is sponsoring.

If your group is sponsoring a **Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR)** case, you must be matched with a refugee profile. To be matched with the profile, please email bvor@rstp.ca. Once you have been matched with a refugee profile, staff at the Resettlement Operations Centre-Ottawa (ROC-O) will provide the group with detailed information about the refugee in order for the group to complete the application forms. In such cases, the sponsoring group only needs to complete and submit the forms for their sponsoring group, as the forms for the refugee have already been completed. You can learn more about the BVOR program in Chapter 9.

In-Canada Processing

After the relevant application forms have been completed, and all of the supporting documentation gathered, your sponsorship group will submit the application package through the Permanent Residence Portal or [PR Portal](#).

PR Portal

The Portal is a website where your group will create your application, upload the forms and submit the application. You can find more information about the PR Portal in Chapter 5.

When your group has submitted the application package through the PR Portal

- Your group will get an automated email showing that you have submitted an application.

Next, the application is checked for completeness.

If the application is complete, it has all the required forms and supporting documents, then an official application file is created in the IRCC data system.

- Your group is emailed an official file number for the application called a **G number (G#)**

If the application is not complete, then it is “returned” and no file number is created.

- Your group will get an email saying that the application was incomplete and returned.
- The application will show as “returned” in the PR Portal.

Your group may choose to revise the application and submit it again.

For complete applications, government officers at ROC-O review the sponsorship portion of the application. They also do an initial check for **refugee eligibility**.



A ROC-O Officer will review the received application package to determine whether:

- Sponsors and refugees meet the eligibility requirements
- The sponsored refugee intends to live in the same community as the sponsoring group
- The group has financial and settlement capacity to carry out sponsorship responsibilities
- There is a clear settlement plan that meets the program requirements
- There is a back-up plan in case circumstances change

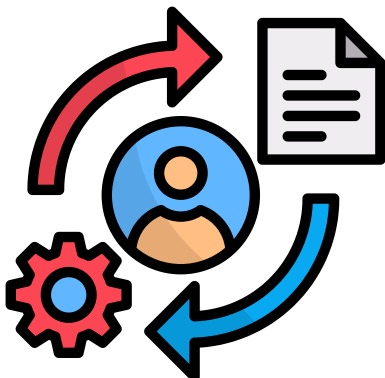
If the application package satisfies all the program requirements, the ROC-O Officer will:

- Approve the sponsorship portion of the application
- Send an automated email to the sponsoring group that they have been approved as sponsors and the file has been transferred overseas for processing
- Send the entire package electronically to the appropriate Visa Office overseas to continue with processing

Change in Circumstance After the Application is Submitted

After submitting the application through the Portal:

If there is new information important to the application or relevant to the applicant's safety, communicate with ROC-O and the Visa Office abroad.



Such information might include:

- Change in family configuration, e.g., marriage, birth of a new child or death;
- Change in contact information of the sponsoring group or the refugee;
- Change in level of security of the applicant, i.e., refugees have become vulnerable or are being subjected to persecution; and,
- New information about the refugee case regarding eligibility and/or admissibility

Overseas Processing

Once the sponsorship part of the application package is accepted, ROC-O Officers will forward the package overseas to a Visa Office. There, a Visa Officer will review the refugee's forms.

Overseas preparation of the refugee's file

When ROC-O forwards applications to an overseas Visa Office, applications are opened in order of receipt. The overseas processing begins with the following activities:

1. The Visa Office receives an entire application package (sponsorship and refugee forms together). If needed, the Visa Office may send an update request to the refugee regarding the information provided in their forms (listed in the IMM 6000 application package).
2. The refugee is put on a wait-list for an interview. The wait for an interview can range from a few months up to a few years.

Overseas processing benchmarks

IRCC will provide the refugee and the sponsoring group contact with a report on the application process at two stages in the overseas processing:

- To inform of the outcome of the selection interview
- The estimated time to visa issuance in positive cases, pending the final results of the medical, security and admissibility checks

Paper screening

A refugee sponsorship application is assessed for basic eligibility criteria and admissibility elements. The application may be refused without an interview in certain situations (to understand more about refusals, please see the [RSTP All About Refusals Factsheet](#) and the [IRCC Operational Guidelines](#). Applicants do not automatically have a right to an interview; if the applicant passes the paper-screening, an interview is scheduled.



About the interview

A Visa Officer conducts the interview, although in some Visa Offices other staff may hold a preliminary interview. An interpreter may also be present in the interview if required.



During the interview the Visa Officer:

- Confirms the personal information (e.g. name, date of birth, place of birth etc.) of the refugee and their family members.
- Ensures that all family members that meet IRCC's definition of a family are included on the application forms either as accompanying or non-accompanying dependents.
- Reviews the refugee's story and assesses the Principal Applicant's eligibility for refugee sponsorship. If the Principal Applicant is found to be ineligible, the Visa Officer must assess the eligibility of the dependents for refugee sponsorship and whether humanitarian and compassionate considerations apply.
- Asks the refugee questions relating to his or her story in order to obtain more information and to ascertain consistency and determine credibility.
- Determines whether there are any special considerations that necessitate processing priority.
- Reviews the refugee's background in order to ensure they are admissible and that there are no security, criminality or admissibility concerns (separate criminality, security and medical screenings will also be conducted as part of the application process).

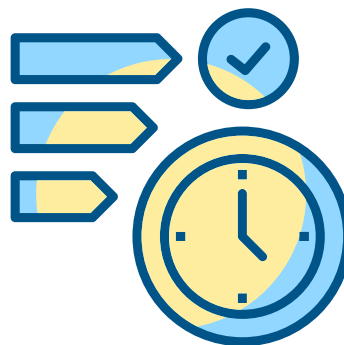
After the interview

The applicant may be provisionally accepted or refused. If she/he is refused, both the applicant and the sponsoring group contact or representative should receive notification from the Visa Office of the outcome of the selection interview.

Interpreters

During the interview, refugees who are not fluent in English or French will receive assistance from interpreters. IRCC has no blanket policy on the use of interpreters in refugee interviews. A common practice is to use Visa Office employees who speak the language in question and whose knowledge of the interview process and reliability are known. Where Visa Office employees are not available the UNHCR may, on occasion, be able to lend the officer an interpreter who is experienced with refugee interviews and has been selected based on language ability.

Although it is the least preferred option, the officer may, due to necessity, use relatives, friends of the applicant, or hired interpreters. Visa Office practices vary for many reasons. The interview convocation letter will advise the applicant whether he/she needs to make any arrangements for an interpreter.



Processing times

Processing times may vary depending on the overseas mission (the Visa office) workload. You can look up the average application [processing times by Visa Office](#).

Expedited and Urgent Processing

In exceptional cases, interviews and decisions can be prioritized. In 'urgent' cases there is an immediate risk to the life of an applicant. 'Vulnerable' cases involve persons with greater protection needs than other refugees in a country of asylum. Vulnerability can be related to medical needs, trauma, women-at-risk or other individual circumstances. A sponsor can flag such circumstances and request the Visa Office to process the case expeditiously. Note: such requests should only be made in exceptional cases, and the need for prioritizing should be substantiated.

Tips to Avoid Negative Decisions

A focus on proactive work, such as thorough case assessments, will help avoid negative decisions.

Well-prepared applications

It is important that sponsors ensure the refugee sponsorship application is well prepared before submitting it to IRCC. Ensure the applicant's narrative is clear and consistent with sufficient detail. In addition, ensure the applicant satisfies either the [Convention Refugee Abroad or Country of Asylum Class definitions](#). Applicants must review their narrative before the application is submitted to ensure it is an accurate reflection of the experiences and so they know and understand what is in their application.

Well-documented cases

Sponsors should ensure that a case is well-documented when it is submitted. That includes identity and corroborating documents such as police or medical reports, employment letters, etc., as well as objective reports on country conditions from organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the US Department of State, the UNHCR, and major media outlets.



Remember: documents can be filed up until the point a decision is made. Even after the interview if a sponsor learns that issues came up during the interview that led them to believe that there needs to be clarification, supporting documents can still be submitted to the Visa Office, so long as a final decision has not yet been made. Any information received up until that point should be taken into consideration. If this type of situation arises, it is important to notify the Visa Office immediately in writing that you will be sending further evidence and request that no decision be rendered until that new evidence has been received.

Interview preparation

Interview preparation is very important, when possible. Talk to the refugee before they go into the interview. It is important for the refugee to understand what is going to happen and the purpose of the interview. Review the key facts the refugee needs to convey to the Visa Officer. Emphasize the importance of focusing on what they know, admitting what they do not know and never falsifying or exaggerating information. Also emphasize that if they have ANY concerns about the interpreter or the quality of the interpretation, they should raise it with the Officer immediately during the interview. Resources on how to prepare for an interview are available [here](#).

Responding to a Negative Decision

The application may be refused without an interview in certain situations (to understand more about refusals, please see the [RSTP All About Refusals Factsheet](#) and the [IRCC Operational Guidelines](#)).

After an interview, the applicant may be provisionally accepted or refused. If she/he is refused, both the applicant and the sponsoring group contact or representative should receive notification from the Visa Office of the outcome of the selection interview.



After a Positive Interview Decision

A positive interview decision (provisional acceptance) does not necessarily mean that the refugee and their family will be resettled to Canada. Each applicant will still have to pass an **admissibility** screening (more about that on the next page). If one applicant is found to be inadmissible, all family members are inadmissible.

After a positive interview outcome, the Visa Officer:

- Refers the refugee and their family members for **medical** testing (see medical exams below);
- Conducts **criminality** and **security** screenings;
- Decides whether another interview is needed for a final decision;
- Makes the final decision as to whether a person is admissible to come to Canada;
- Enters the final decision on the application into the Government of Canada database;
- Facilitates the acquisition of **travel documents** in cases where the refugee and their family members have no valid passports or are stateless.
- Issues instructions to the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM) regarding travel booking, and the [Canadian Orientation Abroad](#); and,
- Issues admissibility and **travel loans** if needed.

Admissibility Screening

Medical exams

The Visa Officer refers the applicants to designated medical staff for medical tests. The medical exam is mandatory for refugees and all of their dependents and serves to determine whether applicants have medical conditions that present a danger to Canadian public health or safety. The applicants will receive instructions regarding the time and place of the medical exam. The cost of the medical exam is covered under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) as Pre-Departure Medical Services.

Section 38(2)(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) states that refugees will not be found inadmissible to Canada on the basis that their health condition is expected to cause an excessive demand on Canada's health care system. This means that a refugee will not be refused based on needing medical treatment.

The sponsorship group should be informed of any significant medical issues that will impact the settlement of the refugee family. Applicants with a medical condition considered to be a danger to public health or safety are inadmissible to Canada.

If any one member of the family is found to be inadmissible, the entire family will be deemed inadmissible.

However, if the condition is treatable, treatment will usually happen overseas before travelling to Canada, and the applicant may be scheduled for a follow-up medical exam after the treatment.



The pre-departure medical exam is limited, therefore check-ups should be scheduled for all newcomers soon after their arrival in Canada.

Security and criminality checks

Refugees and all their dependents who are 18 years and over, including non-accompanying family members, are subject to security and criminality checks to verify information in the application form and to ensure that the refugees are admissible under these criteria. There may be long delays involved in the security check process, especially if there are concerns about membership in an organization that is suspected of being involved in terrorist acts, subversive activity, war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

Travel and Arrival

Once the refugee applicant has been accepted, the Visa Office will provide an estimated processing time for issuing the travel visa.

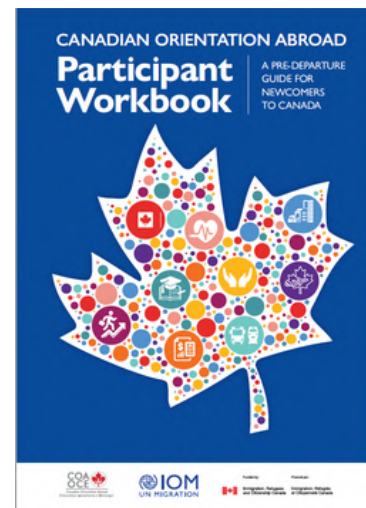
In most cases, travel arrangements are made by the [IOM](#). The IOM can arrange for accompaniment within airports when the applicants must change airlines during their journey. Without support from the IOM, this may be a difficult procedure as refugees are unable to obtain transit visas to be within the country where they change airlines. IOM is also able to make special arrangements for unaccompanied children. IOM will provide travel services where a transportation loan is not required or has not been approved.

Once the Visa Officer is satisfied that all travel preparations have been made, the Officer will give instructions for the visa to be issued. The Visa Officer will send a **Notice of Arrival Transmission (NAT)** to ROC-O and the local IRCC office. ROC-O will then send a copy of the NAT via email to the contact person or representative from the sponsorship group. The NAT should be sent at least 10 days prior to arrival and will specify the date of arrival, the port of entry and the flight details of the refugee and any accompanying family members.

Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA)

Additionally, the [Canadian Orientation Abroad Program](#), a project of the IOM, offers orientation covering a range of topics related to life in Canada to refugees before they travel to Canada. The orientation ranges from three days to one week and aims to prepare refugees for life in Canada.

There is a workbook participants receive from IOM. There is also a free app called O-Canada.



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- ቡርካሽ

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Examination at Port of Entry (POE)

Upon arrival at the Canadian **port of entry (POE)**, the refugee/s must be examined by an Immigration Officer. The purpose of this examination is to establish that, at the time of the examination, the Principal Applicant and his or her accompanying family members and/or de facto dependents meet the requirements of the IRPA and the IRPR. Where the Officer is satisfied that it would not be contrary to the IRPA and the IRPR to grant permanent residence, the Officer will grant permanent residence. The port of entry officer then signs the document and the refugee/s is no longer a refugee but a permanent resident of Canada. Sponsors should ensure that the newcomer goes through this process before they leave the port of entry.

Reception or Assistance at Port of Entry

A few of the large Canadian international airports have an IRCC funded reception service for Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs). This may also assist refugees sponsored under the PSR program who have an onward flight from the port of entry. Costs for overnight stays in hotels and meal expenses are usually added to the refugee's transportation loan.

Reception by Sponsors

Sponsoring groups are responsible for receiving the refugee and their family at the airport when they arrive in Canada. This is the beginning of the sponsorship period and the time for the sponsoring group to get acquainted with the newcomers they have sponsored and begin implementation of the settlement plan.

Find out more about reception and orientation in this Handbook chapter 7.



Status Update Requests

The sponsoring group may request updates on the processing of an application from ROC-O, but only within the guidelines established by IRCC.

The guidelines are intended to reduce the number of status update requests that divert Officers away from the actual task of processing refugee cases for resettlement. At the same time, IRCC agrees to update the sponsor within reasonable timeframes when there appear to be unexplained delays in processing. The PSR Case Status Update/Information Change Request outlines when a SAH or another sponsor may request a status update from ROC-O and expect to receive a response from the Visa Office. This can occur when:

- Processing time has exceeded the mission's completion time for 75% of PSR applications, based on the calculated processing start date from the date the IMM 0008 and accompanying forms and documents were received at the mission abroad or three months from approval of undertaking.
- The completed application kit was submitted to the Visa Office. Three months have passed, and the first benchmark letter has not been received.
- First benchmark letter was received. Two months have elapsed since estimated date given for the selection interview, with no subsequent contact from the mission.
- Second benchmark letter was received. Three months have elapsed since the estimated date given for visa issuance, with no subsequent contact from the mission.
- Six months have passed since second benchmark letter was received, which did not contain an estimated time frame for visa issuance.
- Three months have passed since selection interview and no second benchmark letter was received.





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