

THREE POSSIBLE REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP PROJECTS:

1. Sponsor-referred Sponsorship Cases:

Our Diocese and faith communities regularly receive requests from individuals to sponsor refugees overseas who are often relatives of Canadians or Permanent Residents. Offering such sponsorships is important not only because lives (of refugees) are saved but also because this provides emotional relief to individuals, families and communities inside Canada.

As per the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, a Sponsor (such as your Faith community) can formally partner with individuals or organizations called “co-sponsors” to provide the support needed to integrate sponsored refugee(s). By offering this type of sponsorship, the faith community as sponsor and co-sponsors (relatives and/or friends in Canada) officially share responsibilities involved in the sponsorship.

Such refugee sponsorships are initiated in Canada and refugees will go through a process that takes 1- 4 years depending on their country of refuge. They are screened by Canadian immigration officers overseas. They have to be cleared on eligibility and admissibility grounds. Eligibility refers to the criteria of the universal refugee convention definition and admissibility refers to the security screening and medical exams. The waiting times depend on the number of cases pending at the relevant Canadian embassy and their processing capacity.

Responsibility: The faith community and/or co-sponsors are jointly responsible for providing financial and emotional assistance for one year from the date of arrival in Canada or until the sponsored refugee(s) become(s) self-supporting, whichever comes first.

2. Joint Assistance Sponsorship Cases:

Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) refers to a joint undertaking by a sponsoring group (such as your faith community) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada to sponsor refugees who need to start a new life in Canada. Refugees profiled as JAS cases are persons guaranteed Government of Canada financial assistance for 24-36 months. Citizenship and Immigration Canada will never bring them to Canada, however, before a church related sponsoring group in Canada commits to sponsor this refugee(s). Refugees eligible under this category are generally people who have special needs that will likely result in a longer or more difficult period of integration.

This category is quite different from the first because profiled refugee(s) under this category have already been interviewed by Canadian authorities overseas and found eligible and admissible for resettlement in Canada. JAS cases are generally "travel ready" as they have passed medical, security and criminal screening. If you sponsor under this category, expect your sponsored refugee(s) to be en-route to Canada within a few months or even weeks after you said “yes, you can come”. Your choice of a JAS case to sponsor might depend on the following:

- the number of parishioners who are willing to be committed to such a project,
- the particular endangered countries your group might be interested in,
- the family size that might be more reasonable for your group, etc...

We have access to the secure web site of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) that contains profiles of refugees selected under this category. The criteria above help us to identify profiles that fit your capacity.

Responsibility: Joint Assistance Sponsorships are generally 24 months undertakings. The faith community and /or co-sponsors are NOT responsible financially but are responsible for assisting with integrating the person(s) into Canada society.

3. Visa Office -referred and Blended Sponsorships (BVOR):

Visa Office-referred Sponsorship refers to a 12-month period undertaking of both financial and integration assistance. Refugees profiled under this category have been interviewed and are ready to travel to Canada once a sponsor is found. Refugees eligible under this category are generally people who have been found able to become self-supporting within 12 months. We have access to all the refugees determined eligible under this category through the secure web site of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Faith communities are encouraged to indicate their preferences regarding refugee(s) you can settle (ex. family size, family composition, country of origin etc.

Responsibility: The faith community and/or co-sponsors are responsible for providing financial and integration assistance for one year from the date of arrival in Canada or until the sponsored refugee(s) become self-supporting, whichever comes first.

From time to time, Immigration Canada also initiates **Blended sponsorship programs** for specific refugee populations. Currently, you can sponsor Iraqis and Iranians from the Middle East, Eritreans from Eastern Sudan, Burmese from Malaysia, Bhutanese from Nepal.

Responsibility: In a blended sponsorship undertaking, both Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the sponsoring faith community contribute to the financial support of the refugee(s). The period of financial support is established with the agreement of both parties. The faith community has responsibility for the reception and integration assistance for the refugees for the whole term of the sponsorship.

Summary and Recommendation:

Needless to say, there are many refugees in various endangered countries that are in need of resettlement as a humanitarian solution of last resort. Canadian authorities have become more and more concerned about the refugees Canada is planning to resettle. Screening has been completed for many but sponsoring groups have to be found in order to actually offer to these refugees the chance of starting a new life.

Also, there are many Canadians and Permanent Residents whose relatives are stranded in different places and are at risk. Some relatives in Canada are able to meet their settlement needs. Others have no relative in Canada who are able to take care of them. That is where faith communities are mostly needed.

In our refugee ministry, we prioritize as much as possible according to the greatest need of protection. The refugee in greater danger/vulnerability comes first. This also gives us assurance that those we sponsor will meet Citizenship and Immigration Canada requirements.

If a member of your faith community has a relative in danger somewhere, this might be a priority for your parish. In all cases, the financial and volunteering capacity is the most determining factor in your decision-making.