

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is a refugee?

Under the [United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951](#), a refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” Simply put, a refugee is an ordinary person who has been caught up in extraordinary circumstances where war, injustice or lack of protection in his or her native country has forced him or her to flee to another country to survive.

Jesus was a refugee when he fled with Mary and Joseph into Egypt to escape from Herod. (Matt. 2, 13-16)

What do the acronyms mean?

- DRWG (RWG)– the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa’s Refugee Working Group
- CIC – Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- PSR – Privately Sponsored Refugee
- GAR – Government Assisted Refugee
- JAS – Joint Assistance Sponsorship
- RSTP – Refugee Sponsorship Training Program
- VOR – Visa Office Referred
- SAH – Sponsorship Agreement Holder

How do refugees fit into Canada’s immigration system?

Canada welcomes about a quarter of a million new immigrants each year in various classes. Most come under the skilled workers and professional class, the Canadian experience class, the investors, entrepreneurs and self-employed class, the provincial nominees class or the family class. Only about 20,000 to 30,000 new immigrants come to Canada each year as refugees.

Refugees can apply for permanent residence status either from their country of asylum outside Canada or from within Canada as inland refugee claimants. Applicants making their claim outside Canada are interviewed by the nearest Canadian visa office to determine if they are eligible to come to Canada as refugees under either [Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s \(CIC\) Privately Sponsored Refugee \(PSR\) program](#) or the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) program. Each application is judged on its own merits. If the interview is successful, the refugee must then undergo criminality, security and medical checks to determine if they are admissible. Generally, failure to pass the medical check will not disqualify the refugee from sponsorship. However, in some visa offices there is a backlog of thousands of applications and the approval process can take between 1 and 6 years.

Refugees making a claim inside Canada are assessed by the [Immigration and Refugee Board \(IRB\)](#). If the IRB determines that the claimant is a refugee in the sense of the UN Convention, or is in need of protection because his or her life would

be in danger if they were to be returned to their home country, the claimant can apply for permanent residence. However, if the IRB rejects their claim, the applicant must leave Canada or apply to stay in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds or appeal to the Federal Court. Very few humanitarian and compassionate cases or Federal Court appeals result in the applicant being granted permanent residence.

Who can sponsor a refugee?

Subject to the necessary DRWG approval, a parish, on its own or in combination with other churches, not necessarily Anglican, or a group of at least five parishioners may sponsor a refugee.

What obligations are involved in sponsoring a refugee?

There are several types of sponsorship requiring various degrees of financial, material and social support.

A parish can on its own or as part of a group of parishes undertake the private sponsorship of a refugee or refugee family under Citizenship and Immigration [Canada's \(CIC\) Private Sponsorship of Refugees \(PSR\) program](#). The sponsoring group is responsible for the financial support of the refugee or refugee family for the first 12 months or until the refugee or refugee family becomes self sufficient. The level of financial support must be equivalent to that which would be provided by [Ontario Works](#). The sponsoring group is also responsible for providing furnishings, clothing and household supplies upon arrival, either in cash or in kind. The group must also help the refugee or refugee family settle into the community by finding doctors and dentists, enrolling the children in school and the adults in language training, applying for health insurance, child benefits etc. And of course, the sponsoring group must provide the emotional support and understanding to help the family through the transition from refugee to resident.

A sponsoring group can also partner with CIC in a [Joint Assistance Sponsorship \(JAS\)](#). In a Joint Assistance Sponsorship the visa office overseas identifies a refugee or refugee family who has special needs resulting from trauma, medical conditions, discrimination or gender persecution, and who will likely need more than a year to integrate into Canadian society because of those needs. In the partnership between CIC and the sponsoring group, CIC provides the financial support for up to two years and the sponsoring group provides the social support as in the case of a PSR although, because of the special needs of the JAS family, the requirement for emotional and most likely medical support will be greater than for a normal PSR family.

A parish can also co-sponsor a refugee or refugee family with an individual Canadian. Normally the individual is a friend of, or related to, the refugee or refugee family. The parish and the individual must agree on the division of financial, material and social responsibilities for the sponsorship.

For all three types of sponsorship the specifics of who is responsible for what must be spelt out in the Settlement Plan provided by the sponsoring group to the diocesan RWG.

Finally parishes are encouraged to provide pastoral care and emotional support for Government Assisted Refugees and refugee claimants. Refugee claimants frequently need a great deal of emotional support because of the uncertainty associated with the IRB hearing and because in many cases they have been forced to flee their homeland, leaving spouses or children behind.

More information on the mechanics of sponsorship can be found on the websites of the [Refugee Sponsorship Training Program](#) and [Settlement.Org](#)

To what social benefits are sponsored refugees entitled?

As soon as a sponsored refugee lands in Canada he or she is a permanent resident of Canada and is entitled to apply for Ontario Health Insurance and, depending on the family situation, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the National Child Benefit Supplement, the Ontario Child Benefit, the Universal Child Care Benefit, the Child Disability Benefit and the HST credit. As well, during the sponsorship period, the refugee is entitled to Interim Federal Health insurance that provides limited medical, dental and vision coverage not provided by OHIP.

As a permanent resident the refugee is entitled to a Social Insurance Number and has the right to work.

A sponsored refugee is not eligible for Ontario Works benefits or subsidized housing during the period of sponsorship.

After three years as a permanent resident, the refugee can apply for Canadian citizenship.

Is there a quota on the number of refugees admitted to Canada?

CIC has set a target of 5500 individual PSR resettlements in 2012 and 6500 in 2013. However there is a backlog of 25,000 individual PSR applications in the system so CIC has capped the number of new “named” PSR applications in 2012 at 1350 individuals (a “named” sponsorship is one where the sponsor specifically identifies the refugee or refugee family overseas). Moreover, for those visa posts that are most heavily backlogged, i.e. Cairo, Nairobi, Pretoria and Islamabad, CIC is further restricting the number of new “named” applications to 85 for Nairobi and 50 each for Cairo, Pretoria and Islamabad. Finally CIC has assigned a specific limit of “named” sponsorship applications to each Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) for each visa point. The end result is that the Diocese of Ottawa can make no new “named” sponsorship applications in 2012.

However, these limits do not apply to Joint Assistance Sponsorships nor to refugees whose eligibility and admissibility has already been approved by an overseas visa post (these latter cases are known as Visa Office Referred or VOR cases). Consequently parishes are still able, and are encouraged, to sponsor JAS and VOR refugees. The DRWG has access to the list of VOR and JAS cases available for immediate sponsorship.

What qualifications do I need to work with refugees?

All volunteers working with refugees must go through the Diocese's [Screening in Faith](#) process, which includes a police records check . After that, all you need is a loving heart, an open mind and a desire to share in the life of some very remarkable souls.

Where do you begin?

If you would like to sponsor a refugee, please contact the diocesan [RWG](#). Speakers are available to advise your group, parish council, or the parish as a whole about the options in sponsorship, give you background information, help you with the administrative process and even provide names of refugee families who need sponsors.

The process of finalizing the application to sponsor a refugee involves the completion of a number of forms required by CIC, including statements from and photographs of the refugee. Details can be obtained by visiting the CIC website and following the prompts to [Refugee Sponsorship](#).

How much time will it take before the refugee arrives?

Once the necessary documents have been approved by the DRWG, they are submitted to the local CIC office. The length of time the process takes will depend on where the refugee is in the interview process. For Joint Assistance Sponsorship and Visa Office Referred cases, the refugee or refugee family could arrive in a matter of months. However, for a "named" sponsorship where the refugee has not yet been interviewed by the visa office it could take years. The process is visa-office driven and DRWG has little influence over the lengthy process, which is a result of high levels of applications and low levels of staffing in our visa offices overseas.