

What is Sponsorship?

The Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program allows citizens to sponsor refugees from outside of Canada. What does sponsorship of refugees mean, who can sponsor a refugee and what are the obligations of a sponsor?

Sponsorship is a legal commitment to ensure that sponsored refugees have the necessary support to integrate into life in Canada. Sponsors must provide basic financial support (e.g. for lodging 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 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. Private sponsoring groups in Canada may include:

- 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

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.

(Excerpt from RSTP's sponsorship handbook)

For more information on refugee sponsorship please visit RSTP.ca

Groups of Five (G-5)

Any group of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents who meet the criteria can also sponsor refugees. A Group of Five is defined in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations as “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”. In G-5 sponsorships the individuals act as guarantors that the necessary support will be provided for the full duration of the sponsorship.

Forming 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 type of which sponsoring group you are, the sponsorship process will be the same. Given the length of both the application process and the sponsorship period, sponsoring 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. Such a partner is called a cosponsor.

Cosponsor 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 cosponsor (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.

Cosponsors must provide details of all previous sponsorship commitments, including family class sponsorship obligations to IRCC. Reviewing these obligations with a prospective cosponsor 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 cosponsors. When an individual cosponsor signs the undertaking, they officially commit themselves to sharing responsibility for the sponsorship. However, all parties are held jointly and severally liable for the sponsorship. The **(Excerpt from RSTP’s sponsorship handbook)**

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official sponsoring group - a SAH Community Sponsor or Group of Five must be ready to assume responsibility if the cosponsor is unable to provide the support promised.

Cosponsor organization

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 cosponsoring 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.

Sponsoring 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 . Help the refugee:

- 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 prearrival 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 to cover these costs. Sponsors are also not responsible for any liabilities arising from the refugee applicant's misconduct.

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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 cosponsors 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 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. Section K of 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.

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