

Blended Visa Office-Referred Program Refugee Resettlement in Canada

Important Information

You want to come to Canada and your application has received an initial review by Canadian officials. Now you are wondering what will happen next. Your selection as an eligible refugee is an important step in the resettlement process. But it is not the last step.

This is information about the next steps in the process, and about Canada.



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Ci44-20/2019E-PDF
978-0-660-32877-5
2627-11-2019

Blended Visa Office-Referred Program

You may be resettled to Canada under the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program. This means that the Canadian government and a private sponsorship group will work together to support you during your first year in Canada.

The Canadian government will provide you with up to 6 months of financial support once you arrive in Canada. The government will also cover the cost of most medical services that you may need after your arrival.

Your sponsor will then provide you with financial assistance for an additional 6 months. In total, you will have 1 year of financial support.

Your sponsor will also support you emotionally and socially during your first year in Canada.

When you are matched with a private sponsor, you are being matched with a group of people eager to help you adjust to life in Canada.

These people are not paid by the government to help you. They are volunteers who have committed to sponsoring you because they want to help. Sponsorship groups raise funds and donations to provide you with assistance on their own.

If you come to Canada under this program, you will receive as much support as those who are resettled under the Government-Assisted Refugees Program. But in addition, you will receive the support of a private sponsor to help you adjust to life in Canada.

You are encouraged to get in contact with your sponsors while you are waiting for approval to come to Canada. This can be done through emails, phone calls or online messages.

Application process – next steps:

- You and your family members must undergo a medical exam before coming to Canada.
- The cost of the medical exam, along with some other medical services before you leave, is paid for by the Canadian government.
- It could take several months after your interview before you are asked to go for a medical examination. The International Organization for Migration or an Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Migration Office will contact you with more details if you have not already had your examination.
- You must also undergo criminality and security checks. These make sure that you have not committed serious crimes in the past, and that you are not a security risk to Canada.
- Canadian officials will review your application to decide if you pass the medical, security and criminality examinations. Unless asked, there is no need for you to submit any additional information.
- If you do not pass your medical, security and criminality examinations, you may not be chosen for resettlement to Canada.
- If you pass your medical, security and criminality examinations, Canada will ask the International Organization for Migration, or another organization, to help you prepare to travel to Canada.



- In some countries, you will be invited to attend a free orientation session before you leave. These free sessions, called Canadian Orientation Abroad, are paid for by the Canadian government and are delivered by the International Organization for Migration. In this session, you will learn about Canada and the services that are available to help you adjust after your arrival.
- If you are not invited to attend a Canadian Orientation Abroad session in your country, let your sponsor know and they will make sure you receive that information when you arrive in Canada.

Leaving for Canada:

- Once you have passed all of the examinations and your documents are ready, your travel to Canada will be arranged.
- In some countries you may need to pay an exit fee to the government of your country of residence before leaving. While you are required to pay this fee yourself, the International Organization for Migration can help you with this process.
- If you do not have a passport or another valid travel document, the Canadian government will give you a document so that you can travel to Canada.
- The Canadian government will issue a loan to cover the cost of your travel to Canada.
- This money is a **loan**, which means that you will have to pay back the total amount to the government within 3 to 8 years, depending on the amount of the loan.
- You must start repaying the loan within 1 year of your arrival in Canada. **Your sponsor will not repay your loan.**
- You will be given help to get to the airport and to deal with immigration officials when you leave.
- Traveling to your final destination in Canada could be a long trip. You may want to bring snacks with you since you may have to pay for food on the airplane or at the airport.



Arriving in Canada:

- When you first arrive in Canada, staff from a service provider organization, including an interpreter if needed, will greet you when you exit the plane and help you through immigration procedures.
- If you have a connecting flight, they will guide you to your final destination. They will also provide you with food and a place to sleep if you have to wait many hours before your connecting flight.
- If you are already at your final destination, they will bring you to meet your sponsor who will be waiting for you at the airport.
- Your sponsor will provide you with a place to stay, such as an apartment, house or hotel.
- In some cases you may be provided temporary accommodations for a few days or weeks until you are moved into your permanent accommodations.
- Your sponsor may provide some supplies when you first arrive and will help you shop for your own food and clothing with the financial support provided by the government and your private sponsor.
- You may also be provided with winter clothing.
- Your sponsor will also answer all of your questions about life in Canada and help you to:
 - o locate interpreters;
 - o find a family doctor and dentist;
 - o apply for provincial health care coverage;
 - o arrange for your children to go to school;
 - o meet people with personal interests like yours;
 - o use banking services, transportation, etc.; and
 - o connect you with government-funded settlement services, such as language training, employment services, and others.



The Canadian government and your sponsor will provide you with initial support to help you start your life in Canada. But it is important for you to have realistic expectations.

You must be prepared to work hard to make the most of your life in Canada.

The financial support from the government and your private sponsor is for up to 1 year from the date you arrive, or until you become self-sufficient – whichever comes first. You will need to provide for yourself and your family after 1 year.



Resettling with your family

You and your spouse, dependent children, and your dependent children of any dependent children, can apply on the same immigration form and come to Canada together.

If there is **any change** in your marital status (for example, you get married or divorced), or if you have a baby at any time before you travel to Canada, you must tell the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and Canadian officials. This is so that your new family members can be included in your immigration application.

It is **very important** to tell your sponsor and Canadian officials that you want to resettle as a family. You must list all of your family members on your application. If you do not tell a Canadian official about your spouse or child before you leave for Canada, you will not be able to sponsor them to come to Canada in the future.

If you have relatives or close friends who are already in Canada, and if you wish to live near them, you should let UNHCR and Canadian officials know now. As much as possible, Canada tries to resettle refugees in a community where they will have the support of people they know.

Because you are resettling under the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program, you will be resettled in the same town, city or surrounding area where your sponsoring group resides. If you have relatives or connections in a community where your sponsor is based or has a representative, they will try to settle you in the same community.

If your relatives or contacts move to another city in Canada, please advise your sponsor as soon as possible so that they can work with you to determine if there is adequate settlement support in the new community.

You may have identified “non-accompanied” dependent family members in your application. Once you have settled in Canada, you may be able to bring these family members to Canada under a program called the One Year Window of Opportunity. You may apply within your first year of arrival in Canada to have your spouse, common-law partner, dependent child, or dependent child of a dependent child resettled to Canada with you, as long as they were listed on your application before your departure to Canada.

Other family members, such as parents, grandparents, or brothers and sisters, will have to submit their own application to be considered for resettlement. Once you have arrived in Canada, you may be able to sponsor family members to immigrate to Canada if you meet [certain requirements](#). Either way, the process to bring these family members to Canada can take a long time, and you might not see your family members for years.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada will not support travel arrangements for pets unless it involves a service animal where legitimate reasons are found to justify its travel to Canada. Refugees must make travel arrangements for household pets on their own.



Your immigration status

When you arrive in Canada, you will be given a document called a Confirmation of Permanent Residence that says that you can live here permanently as a **permanent resident**. This means it is legal for you to stay in Canada for the rest of your life. You will be able to work or go to school.

There are specific requirements for how long you must live, **and actually be**, in Canada before you can apply for Canadian citizenship. Once you meet all the requirements, you may apply to become a Canadian citizen.

More information is available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/canadian-citizenship/become-canadian-citizen.html>, or through your sponsoring group.

Where you will live in Canada

Canada is the second largest country in the world, with many cities and towns but also lots of areas where there are few or no people living. Most major cities are in the southern part of Canada, near the border with the United States.

Many of the areas where people live are far from each other and take a long time to get to, even if you fly. For example, the distance between Canada's two largest cities, Toronto and Vancouver, is more than 4,300 kilometers, or almost 3 days by bus.



You will be resettled to the city or town where your sponsor lives.

Private sponsors are committed to supporting you on the understanding that you will live in their community and work with them to become independent. Although you have the right to move anywhere in Canada, private sponsors are only required to provide you with support for your first year **while you are in their community**.

If you decide to move to another part of Canada, your sponsor may not be able to give you support and you may not be entitled to further government assistance during the duration of the sponsorship.



Canadian society

In Canada, men and women are equal. They have the same rights and are treated with the same level of respect. Men and women of all social classes, cultures, races and religions interact with one another and are treated equally.



You are free to speak your opinion in Canada, while respecting the right of others to do the same.

There are many community groups and associations for men, women and children that you can join. You can become involved in sporting activities such as soccer or swimming, and there are many activities that you can do as a family. Some are free, while there is a cost for others.

You may be used to having your entire family around to help and support you. Once in Canada, you might feel alone, but you are not alone. If you have concerns, reach out to your sponsor or speak to someone in your community. There are people here who can help you adjust to life in Canada.

If there are meetings for newcomers in your area, try to attend. This will help you make friends in the community and help you become familiar with services in your area.

Canadian laws

Canadian laws recognize and protect the basic rights and freedoms of everyone, including liberty and equality. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is part of Canada's Constitution. It protects you from the moment you arrive in Canada.



Be aware that some acts are illegal in Canada which may not be illegal in your country of residence. It is illegal and considered a criminal offense to strike a woman or child, to leave children unaccompanied by an adult, to operate a vehicle without insurance or a license, or for young children to travel in a car without a car seat. It is also illegal to urinate or defecate in public, though there are many free toilet facilities in most locations.

More information on Canada's laws and justice system is available on the Government of Canada's [webpage](#).



Language

Canada has 2 official languages: English and French. English or French language skills are very important to help you settle in Canada.

English is the most commonly spoken language in most provinces and territories. French is the main language spoken in Quebec, however there are French communities in all provinces and territories across Canada. There is also a large minority of residents who speak English in Quebec.



Strong English or French skills will help with getting a job, going to school, accessing services and making friends. If possible, try to improve your French or English before coming to Canada.

Once in Canada, you can take government-funded language classes at no cost. Your sponsor will help you with information on how to get your language levels assessed and how to register for language training programs.

Finding a job

Although you and your family will receive financial help during your first year in Canada, it is a good idea to prepare for finding a job so you will be able to take care of yourself and your family.

The better you speak either English or French, the easier it will be to find a job. Most regulated jobs and trades require you to:

- be fluent in English or French,
- have a strong knowledge of all work-related language, and
- understand phrases or expressions used, some of which may be unique to Canada.



If you can, try to find out about the language requirements needed to work in your field. Once in Canada, your sponsor can help enroll you in language classes. Your sponsor can also link you with service providers that offer free information sessions or individual services to help you find a job.

If you have a university degree, college diploma or trade certificate, it may not be accepted in Canada. It will be up to the provincial government or regulatory body where you live to determine whether or not your degree/ certificate or other credentials are recognized. Service providers can also help guide you through this process.

Volunteering is also a good way to gain Canadian work experience. Although you do not get paid for volunteering, it can help you improve your language skills and you can gain experience and the skills necessary to apply for jobs. It is also an excellent way to make friends and meet people in your community.

Settlement services

Settlement services are funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (and by the Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion in Quebec) and are available to all Canadian permanent residents, including resettled refugees. These services are free and can help you better prepare and adjust to life in Canada.

There are many online pre-arrival services on the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website to prepare you for life in Canada. You can access these services once you have confirmation that your application has been approved.

Once you are in Canada, settlement professionals offer a variety of free services to adjust to life in Canada. These include help finding a job, language training, job-specific training, services for youth and seniors, and more.

A full list of settlement services funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada can be found on [online](#).

Expenses

When you arrive in Canada, you will have financial support from the Canadian government for 6 months and from your private sponsor for the remaining 6 months, or until you become self-sufficient – whichever comes first.

When support from your private sponsor and the government end, you will be responsible for paying your own expenses, including food, rent, electricity, water, clothing and taxes. It is important to learn how to budget your money.

If you can't find a job after 12 months and need help supporting your family, there are a variety of community services such as food banks and charitable organizations that offer assistance to those in need. There are also various financial support programs provided by the government for people in need, however you must meet certain criteria to benefit from these programs. Ask your sponsor for more information on what support is available in your community.

You may also want to send money to your family back home. You are free to do so, but many people find it difficult to support themselves and still have money left to send to family. Many things may cost more money in Canada than you are used to paying. Remember that it will take time to adjust to your new life in Canada.



Schools

You will not have to pay for your children to attend elementary school or secondary school. All children between 6 and 16 must go to school. It is the law. Most students attend high school until they receive a graduation diploma (around age 18).

After they finish high school, your children may go on to university or college. College and university cost money, but the college or university may have resources to help them get a scholarship, grant or student loan.



Health and dental care

As a permanent resident of Canada, you do not have to pay for most health-care services, including visits to the hospital or doctor.

When you arrive in Canada, you will be provided with Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) coverage. IFHP coverage provides basic health-care (including visits to the doctor or a hospital) until you become eligible for provincial or territorial health coverage, which typically occurs within 3 months. During this time, you must apply for health insurance from the province or territory where you live.



It is important to present your IFHP eligibility document to your health-care provider each time you visit. You can receive health-care services anywhere in Canada from any health-care provider who is registered. The list of registered providers is available [online](#) under the “Search IFHP Providers” list.

The IFHP also provides prescription drug coverage and supplemental coverage to address a variety of urgent and primary health care needs (for example, mental health services, limited vision care and urgent dental care for the relief of pain and infection). Supplemental and prescription drug coverage is provided as long as you receive income support from the Government of Canada and your private sponsor.

A summary of all IFHP benefits and services is available on the [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website](#).

Your sponsor can assist you in selecting a family doctor, finding a dentist, and connecting you to mental health and trauma counseling where necessary.

Each province and territory has its own health insurance plan. Make sure you know what your plan covers. Your sponsor will help you apply for the necessary documents upon arrival in Canada.

Refugees who are new to Canada often feel lonely and isolated, and may have ongoing stress due to the trauma of their past. There are many free services and trained people to talk to who can help heal these wounds. If you are looking for help, ask your sponsors about mental health and counselling services available to you.

Vaccinations

Getting vaccinated against a disease is one of the safest and most effective ways to prevent disease, medical complications and early death.

Vaccines work by helping to build your body's own defense system. Like all medicines in Canada, vaccines have gone through a complete verification and approval process before they are available to the public.

A panel physician may offer you vaccines to update your immunization status during your immigration medical exam, before you arrive in Canada. These services are voluntary. If you choose to get vaccinated overseas, you should bring your vaccination record to Canada.

Once you are in Canada, many vaccines are covered under your provincial or territorial health care plan. You and your family may be susceptible to diseases that vaccines can prevent, especially if you have not received vaccinations in the past. Infants and young children are particularly susceptible to certain preventable diseases, and in some parts of Canada, children need to have all of their vaccinations up-to-date before starting school or daycare.

Your sponsor, doctor or a health clinic can all provide more information on how to update your immunization status.

It is a personal decision to get yourself and/or your family members vaccinated. But remember: when you get immunized, you're protecting yourself and others from specific diseases and helping to stop the spread of disease to those who are most vulnerable.

Food and water

Water in Canada is safe to drink. Every home has its own hot and cold running water. You can get water any time of the day or night.

The variety of food available to purchase will depend on your community. Large, diverse Canadian cities will certainly have access to most of the foods you usually eat, while smaller communities may have less variety.

People from many ethnic groups live in Canada, which means there is a large assortment of foods from many cultures, and you can usually find specialty stores for specific food products. Some foods may be more expensive than you are used to due to Canada's climate and the need to import some foods.



Religion

Many religions are found in Canada. You will be allowed to practise yours freely. Canadian law requires that you respect people who practise different religions. You will not be asked or forced to change your religion. Freedom of religion is one of Canada's basic rights.

While many of the private sponsors are faith-based groups, you can continue to freely practice your religion. These people are volunteers who want to help you come to Canada and integrate successfully, without obligation.



Weather

There are 4 different seasons in Canada: spring, summer, fall (autumn) and winter. Canada is a very large country and the weather in each season can be different from one part of the country to another.

Spring (March, April and May) is a rainy season in most parts of Canada, and the weather can be cool. In the summer (June, July and August), the weather is very warm in most parts of the country. During the day, temperatures are regularly above 20°C and often rise above 30°C.

In the fall (September, October and November), the weather cools and it can also be very rainy. During the winter months (December, January and February) it is very cold in most places, with temperatures often below 0°C. Snow covers the ground from around December to March or April. In southwest British Columbia (around Victoria and Vancouver), rain is more common in winter than snow.

Depending on where you're coming from, you may be quite surprised by the cold and snow during your first winter in Canada. With the right clothing, you'll be prepared to enjoy the unique beauty of a Canadian winter. Your sponsor will assist you in getting hats, boots, gloves and winter coats for your family.



Final words of advice

Starting a new life in Canada is exciting and full of new opportunities. However there will be challenges too. Some people find it hard to adjust. It takes time, so try to be patient. Remember that many newcomers like you have adjusted and become fully integrated into Canadian society.

There are people and services available to help you. Your sponsor is available to answer any concerns or questions you may have. They are looking out for your best interests. You may also contact your [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Migration Office](#) for questions regarding your application.

Other potential resources include community groups, religious groups, counseling services and government-funded settlement organizations. These groups all have experience helping newcomers integrate in different ways. Do not be afraid to ask for help.

If at any point you believe that you are being mistreated or exploited, or that you are not receiving the amount of support promised by your sponsor, please contact Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada immediately at IRCC.INPSR-PPPRRI.IRCC@cic.gc.ca.

There is no risk of losing financial support or your residency status by contacting Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Finally, there are websites with lots more information to help you prepare. Provincial websites have lots of useful information, including frequently asked questions, community links, news and events.

The Government of Canada website includes more details on life in Canada, a list and map of settlement service organizations in communities across the country, information on free language assessment and training services, and additional resources to prepare for your travel to Canada.

www.canada.ca/immigration

