**The Blended Sponsorship Project**

The Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program is Canada’s response to the growing refugee crisis designed to resettle refugees identified by the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR) and submitted to Canadian visa offices abroad. It is referred to as a “blended” program because it is a cost-sharing arrangement whereby *Citizenship and Immigration Canada* (CIC) and *Sponsorship Agreement Holders* (SAHs) both contribute to financially supporting the refugees.

Through the BVOR program Canada is opening its doors wider for refugees fleeing a Middle East civil war and the Islamic State’s reign of terror, and expects to accept another 10,000 Syrians over three years and 3,000 more Iraqis in 2015. The Government is expecting private organizations, such as church groups, to shoulder the majority of the burden for resettling these newcomers – a decision expected to strain the capacity of these sponsors.

Refugees under this program have already met eligibility and admissibility criteria, making them travel-ready. However, they must be matched with a sponsor before they can travel to Canada.

**Background**:

The UN high commissioner for refugees (UNHCR) reported in 2014 that the total number of refugees worldwide exceeded 50 million for the first time since World War II. The recent increases were largely due to the Syrian civil war. Since the onset of civil war four years ago and the rise of Islamic State over the past year, roughly half of Syria’s 22 million people have either fled the country or have been forcibly displaced from their homes. The refugee crisis caused by the conflict in Syria is the worst the world has witnessed in a generation with more than 2.9 million refugees in the region. More than 9 million people need assistance including 6.5 million displaced inside Syria.

The ideal solution for most refugees is repatriation--the resettling of refugees back to their country of origin.

For those who cannot return home, a second solution is for the refugee to create a new life in their country of asylum. However, if neither of these solutions is possible, refugees may be resettled to a third country, like Canada, the U.S, or many others.

Refugee resettlement is the third and final possible solution available to refugees. This often comes as a surprise to many North Americans. A mere 1% will be welcomed into a new country. Limited numbers of countries willing to resettle refugees and limited number of resettlement spaces per country are the main reasons so few refugees are resettled. Those that are, face difficulty in adjusting to a new culture and often find their education and work experience less valued in their new land.

Canada is unique among nations that welcome refugees. That’s because it is the only country that allows sponsorship of refugees by private organizations. MCC is one of the Canadian agencies that has been granted a sponsorship agreement by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). This sponsorship agreement allows Mennonite and other congregations or private groups in Canada to sponsor refugees. With 10.5 million refugees in the world today, the need for sponsorship is great.

**How does the “blended” model work?**

Refugees resettled under the Blended VOR Program will receive income support through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) during the first 6 months after their arrival. They are also fully covered under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) for the duration of the sponsorship, in addition to provincial health coverage.

For the duration of the sponsorship period, sponsors are required to provide:

 *Reception*

 *Housing & basic necessities*

 *Settlement assistance* (including language classes, enrollment in school, finding health care provider, job search, etc.)

 *Emotional & moral support*

**How soon will the refugees arrive?**

Visa office-referred cases are normally ready to travel to Canada within 3 to 5 months of being matched with a sponsor. However, delays may occur in some “travel-ready” cases because of problems in arranging exit permits, travel documents, etc. Once the sponsorship is signed, CIC will provide the sponsor with more accurate information regarding departure and arrival dates, as well as any particular settlement needs that might exist in transit and in the first few weeks after the refugees have arrived in Canada.

**What happens after the refugees arrive?**

Refugees sponsored under this program are considered permanent residents once they arrive in Canada. This means that they are legally entitled to work, go to school, receive health care and access free services for newcomers to Canada such as language classes, employment counseling and other support services. Sponsored refugees are eligible for provincial health care coverage right away.

**What are the expected costs of sponsorship under this program?**

The sponsorship application kit provides details of how much financial support will likely be needed to meet the sponsorship obligations. Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) income support provided by CIC is intended to cover the cost of shelter, food and incidentals for the refugee over their first 6 months, so expected costs can be reduced accordingly. RAP rates are roughly equivalent to prevailing social assistance rates in the expected community of settlement (see attached cost table).

**What is expected of refugees under this program?**

Sponsored refugees are expected to work with their sponsors to develop a detailed plan with the goal of becoming independent and self-sufficient after the end of the sponsorship period. In order to continue receiving support from their sponsors, refugees are expected to remain in their sponsorship community for the duration of the sponsorship period. It is also expected that sponsored refugees would not need to access social services during the sponsorship period since they should be receiving sufficient support from their sponsors.

**Refugee Populations identified under the Blended Program**

*(updated 8 Sept 2015)*

- 51 Eritrean cases

- 5 Iraqi cases

- 2 Somali cases

- 11 Ethiopian cases

- 19 Congolese cases (including 1 high urgency case)

- 1 Ugandan (LGBTI) case

- 2 Central African Republic cases

- 9 Bhutanese cases

- 21 Burmese cases

- 9 Sudanese cases

- 1 Chinese case

- 2 Burundian cases

- 3 Gambian (LGBTI) cases

- 1 Malian (LGBTI) case

- 1 Cameroonian case

- 1 South Sudanese case

- 4 Syrian cases (including 2 high urgency cases)

**Why become involved?**

The number of people forcibly displaced at the end of 2014 reached a staggering 59.5 million compared to 51.2 million a year earlier and 37.5 million a decade ago. The increase represents the biggest leap ever seen in a single year. Moreover, the situation has worsened still further.

Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. If this were the population of a country, it would be the world's 24th biggest.

Sponsorship allows churches to demonstrate Christ’s love as we are commanded in Matthew 25: 35. If your church, group or individuals would like to consider sponsoring a family or individual suggested under the Blended Program please call us! With over 10.5 million refugees in 2015, there are countless refugee families in need of help in many places around the world.

We will provide you with resources, administrative help, and encouragement if you decide to make this a ministry for this year. MCC has a number of resources which contain a wealth of information about refugee sponsorship and details about how your church can become involved.

**I’M INTERESTED. NOW WHAT?**

1. Call your local MCC Refugee Coordinator to discuss how to proceed. They can advise you how best to present this initiative to the wider church body.
2. Talk to your church leadership about your desire to sponsor a refugee and form a small action committee.
3. Learn about becoming a sponsor:

[*http://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/10factsheet2.1.pdf*](http://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/10factsheet2.1.pdf)

1. Your MCC Refugee Coordinator can refer several cases and help you review refugee profiles. They can help identify cases that might be a good fit with your congregation. Take time with your committee to discern whom God is calling your congregation to sponsor.
2. The MCC Coordinator will assist you in preparing the necessary paperwork for submission to CIC.
3. Begin fundraising and make a “settlement plan”, designating tasks among committee members.
4. WAIT. There is usually ample time to prepare for the refugees’ arrival because the overseas immigration processing can take a few months (or years depending on the type of sponsorship). Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR/VOR) cases and Joint Assistance Sponsorships (JAS) arrive more quickly because they have already been interviewed and found admissible to Canada.
5. When an application is accepted and the refugee(s) are set to arrive in Canada, the MCC Coordinator can help to organize / advise particular training for the sponsorship group to best prepare those getting ready to welcome the newcomers.

If you would like us to connect with you regarding your interest please contact us: Jennifer Mpungu@mccbc.ca

**Jennifer Mpungu**

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**Cost of Sponsorship Table**

Although the cost of living varies from one region to another, the following table can assist the sponsoring group in estimating the cost involved in sponsoring a refugee family for 12 months. The required financial resources indicated in the Sponsorship Cost Table are roughly equivalent to local social assistance rate figures.

| Family Size | 12 Months of Income Support | Start-up Costs | Estimated Total Annual Settlement Cost ($) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | 9,800 | 2,800 | 12,600 |
| **2** | 16,800 | 4,400 | 21,200 |
| **3** | 17,700 | 5,300 | 23,000 |
| **4** | 20,000 | 7,000 | 27,000 |
| **5** | 22,500 | 7,200 | 29,700 |
| **6** | 24,500 | 8,000 | 32,500 |
| Additional member | 1,550 | 1,000 | 2,500 |

Income Support can vary depending on ages of various dependants which play a role in determining monthly income support for shelter, food, transportation and incidentals.

Start-up costs include: one time payment for household items, furniture, linens, food staples, clothing & winter clothing, deposit for utilities, phone installation and first month’s rent. These are approximate rates only and should be used as a guideline. Contact your local Citizenship and Immigration Centre (CIC) should you be interested in your local Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) income support rates which are in line with local social assistance rates.

Several factors may reduce the amount of financial support that the sponsoring group must provide. Examples of these factors may include: in-kind donations and financial resources the sponsored refugee brings to Canada. The chart below provides an estimated value for certain in-kind donations.

| **In-Kind Deduction Table ($)** | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Family Size | Shelter | Clothing | Furniture | Start-up Costs (Household Needs) | School Start-up Costs | Food Staples |
| **1** | 6,000 | 500 | 1,500 | 325 |  | 175 |
| **2** | 7,100 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 350 |  | 250 |
| **3** | 7,800 | 1,375 | 2,500 | 375 |  | 325 |
| **4** | 8,400 | 1,750 | 3,000 | 400 |  | 400 |
| **5** | 9,600 | 2,125 | 3,500 | 425 |  | 475 |
| **6** | 9,600 | 2,500 | 4,000 | 450 |  | 550 |
| For additional member, add | 900 | 375 | 500 | 25 | 150/per child between ages 4-21 | 75 |