



The Blended VOR Initiative

We Respond Together - to Refugees in need of Resettlement

The federal government launched a new Blended Visa Office-Referred Initiative in 2013.

(This) is a program 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 (or SAHs - The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a SAH) both contribute to financially supporting the refugees. 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. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada - CIC)

Refugees coming under the Blended VOR program normally arrive within 1 – 4 months from when a sponsorship is filed - it is quite fast. The program only includes refugees referred by UNHCR; other refugees whom we wish to sponsor must come through the traditional sponsorship program, with its slower timelines. (Please check with the refugee coordinator – see below - for information.)

The government provides income support at provincial welfare rates for the first 6 months after arrival. Costs of language classes are also covered by the government. The refugees qualify for provincial health care and for full Interim Federal Health Program benefits, including vision and hearing care, prescribed medications, and ambulatory devices. (Cuts made in 2012 to the Interim Federal Health Program benefits for privately sponsored refugees and refugee claimants do not apply for B-VORs.)

Sponsors are responsible for: meeting the refugee(s) upon arrival, securing lodging, and paying start-up costs (furnishings, housewares, and initial clothing). They help them to register for school (if there are children), language classes, provincial health care and the Interim Federal Health Program, as well as for income support programs (e.g. family benefits), where applicable. The sponsors provide an introduction to public transit and to shopping wisely in Canada, and extend friendship and emotional support. They assume financial support – equivalent to the government’s support - for the first month and for the last 5 months of the sponsorship, aiming for financial independence by the end of the 12-month period.

2015 cases are drawn from many different refugee populations, including:

- Bhutanese, Burmese, Burundian, Cameroonian, Central African Republic, Chinese, Congolese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Gambian, Iraqi, Malian, Somali, Sudanese, South Sudanese, Syrian and Ugandan

(On September 25, 2015, procedures for Syrian BVOR cases changed. See Can we sponsor Syrian refugees? for details.)

All are deserving of help. Where there are family connections or friends in Canada, sponsors will be sought nearby.

Presbyterian congregations interested in sponsoring refugees under the Blended VOR Program should contact **Rob Shropshire** at rshropshire@presbyterian.ca, (416) 441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301, x249. Rob will provide profiles of available cases and information about how to apply under The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s sponsorship agreement with the federal government.