



Refugee Sponsorship with AURA

Support Church FAQs

Key Acronyms:

IRCC: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

PSR: Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

1. What is refugee sponsorship?

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) is a Canadian government immigration program that enables regular Canadians to directly participate in resettling refugees by supporting them for their first year in Canada. The program began in the 1970s with the “Boat People” and has become an international model and a lifeline for refugees seeking safety.

There are various sponsorship programs and streams. This FAQ focuses on "Named Cases" – applications for refugees identified by their sponsors. These sponsorships often reunite families, as the highest demand for the program comes from people in Canada who are desperate to help their refugee relatives.

The PSR program requires a serious commitment from sponsors. They must raise or provide the funds necessary to support the refugees for their first year in Canada and provide post-arrival support, such as picking up refugees at the airport, ensuring they have adequate housing, providing settlement assistance, and helping them become self-sufficient. Immigration Canada (IRCC) has very clear rules around the supports sponsors must provide.

2. What does AURA do?

AURA is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) organization, meaning we have an agreement with IRCC to submit and support refugee sponsorship applications. We assist both refugee applicants and sponsors throughout the entire process and take ultimate responsibility to ensure refugees receive support from their sponsors.

AURA selects and screens sponsors, helps prepare the application, ensures all necessary paperwork is completed, and submits the application to IRCC. We provide sponsors with the tools and resources they need to understand and fulfill their obligations, follow up after arrival, and help navigate challenges.



AURA staff are available by phone, in person, or virtually to provide guidance and support at every step.

AURA is a registered charity and has been supporting refugee sponsorship for more than 30 years.

3. Why does AURA need Support Churches?

AURA and the Anglican Diocese of Toronto are joint signatories in a sponsorship agreement with IRCC. AURA is set up to support Anglican parishes that want to welcome refugees through Canada's private sponsorship program. However, many parishes have limited resources and cannot form a refugee sponsorship group or raise the funds required to participate in the program as sponsors on their own.

Meanwhile, global displacement is at an all-time high, and AURA receives thousands of requests each year from family and community groups wanting to sponsor their relatives or persecuted members of their communities. Many of these groups have the necessary funds and people to meet the PSR program's post-arrival support requirements but lack the ability to access the program.

We are seeking Anglican parishes to act as Support Churches so that together we can help more refugees find safety in Canada.

4. What is involved in being a Support Church?

A Support Church acts as the link between AURA and a sponsor group that would otherwise be unable to access the PSR program. AURA drafts a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all involved from the beginning, which is signed by the senior churchwardens and priest.

The Support Church is responsible for:

- Identifying one or two people to act as liaisons with the Co-Sponsor group and AURA, and one person to sign the sponsorship agreement with IRCC on behalf of the church.
- Receiving the funds raised or provided by the Co-Sponsor group and tracking them separately from operational funds in the church's accounting software.
- Holding the funds while IRCC processes the application.



- Disbursing the funds to the refugees post-arrival (usually one disbursement for start-up costs followed by regular monthly disbursements for one year).

Depending on the Support Church's capacity and the interest of any individual parishioners, there may be opportunities to be more involved in welcoming the refugees in different ways. There is no obligation to provide additional support, and the level of involvement can vary from one application or Support Church to the next. Some examples of ways to engage more deeply include:

- Inviting the Co-Sponsors and/or refugee newcomers to visit your parish.
- Putting out a call to the congregation when specific needs arise (e.g., finding a doctor, dentist, housing, or employment).
- Collecting donated items (such as furniture, clothing, or technology).
- Raising additional funds or collecting gift cards as a welcome gesture.
- Putting together a small "Welcome Group" of parishioners to accompany the newcomers in their settlement journey in Canada, working with the Co-Sponsors. This might include inviting them to participate in recreational activities, practicing English together, helping with application forms, or connecting them to resources.

There is no obligation to provide additional support. Given the long IRCC processing times, the Support Church can commit to a strictly administrative role and assess its capacity for further involvement once the arrival date is known. The Support Church's role, even when limited to holding and disbursing the sponsorship funds outlined above, is invaluable.

Some churches may pray for the safety and well-being of the refugees while they await processing of their application or send them messages of hope.

5. What if the application is refused by IRCC?

AURA conducts a pre-assessment of sponsors and refugees to ensure they meet program requirements. In over 30 years, we have had very few refusals. If, in the unlikely event, an application is refused or withdrawn for any reason, the Support Church would simply return any funds provided by the family Co-Sponsors, and the role of the Support Church would end. This possibility would also be addressed in the Memorandum of Understanding put in place before the application is submitted to IRCC by AURA.



6. What are our official legal responsibilities?

Every sponsorship application involves the sponsors' commitment to provide post-arrival support for refugees for one year. The Support Church must be a party to the sponsorship agreement with IRCC. The designated church liaison signs the IRCC "Sponsorship Undertaking" form alongside AURA and the Co-Sponsors.

The Sponsorship Undertaking identifies:

- AURA as the Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH)
- The Support Church as AURA's Constituent Group (CG)
- The Co-Sponsors as an organization or individuals

The Sponsorship Undertaking outlines that sponsors are obligated to provide financial and settlement support and holds all parties "jointly and severally" responsible. AURA clarifies roles through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), ensuring that Co-Sponsors are responsible for settlement support, while the Support Church manages the sponsorship funds.

The Support Church is **not** responsible for any shortfall in Co-Sponsor support. Any such issues would be addressed directly between the Co-Sponsors and AURA, not the Support Church. The Support Church may be involved, only if they choose to do so.

The Support Church **is** responsible for holding and disbursing the sponsorship funds which were raised and/or provided to it by the Co-Sponsors. The amount of money representing the IRCC financial support requirements must be in place before the application is submitted, so there is no financial risk for the Support Church.

7. What if there are serious post-arrival issues and the refugees or Co-Sponsors need more help than anticipated? Are we responsible?

No.

This is unlikely because AURA ensures that sponsor groups have the capacity and commitment required to fulfill their obligations. Even though the Support Church is a party to the sponsorship agreement, they would not be required to provide additional support beyond what they initially committed to through the Memorandum of Understanding.



If the Support Church feels they can provide additional help, they may choose to do so. However, AURA is ultimately responsible for finding resources and making alternative arrangements for the refugees if the Co-Sponsors fail to provide them.

8. Is there an obligation to provide financial support?

No.

The Support Church's responsibilities are limited to managing the funds provided by the Co-Sponsors, with AURA's guidance and in accordance with the PSR program's rules. The Support Church is not obligated to raise or provide funds unless they choose to do so.

In some cases, the Support Church may issue charitable tax receipts to eligible donors who make financial gifts to the sponsorship. However, in most cases, funds are collected by family members of the sponsored refugees who are not eligible to receive charitable tax receipts.

The Support Church faces no financial risk, because the required funds will be in place before the application is submitted.

9. Our church has limited resources – how much work would this involve?

There is some work involved in acting as a Support Church, but AURA strives to minimize the workload for parishes with limited resources. Tasks would include:

- The leadership team would need to discuss the opportunity and may choose to meet with the Co-Sponsors and/or AURA.
- The liaison identified by the church will need to sign the Sponsorship Undertaking form and provide ID to AURA for submission.
- Those responsible for finances will need to receive and deposit funds, ensure they are tracked separately from operational funds, and provide proof of funds to AURA before AURA submits the application to IRCC. Some parishes earn interest on the funds they hold, which can offset administrative work or increase the funds available for the refugees post-arrival.
- Some churches pray for the well-being of the refugees during the process.
- Post-arrival, the Support Church will disburse funds to the refugee newcomers, typically following a disbursement schedule developed with AURA and the Co-Sponsors. Depending on the family composition, this may require multiple



disbursements each month. AURA will put in place a schedule so these payments can be planned out with minimal changes during the year.

The workload is minimal compared to the life-changing impact the sponsorship will have for refugees and their families.

10. Can we act as a Support Church for multiple sponsor groups?

Yes! Once you have the structure and process in place to support one sponsorship, it's relatively simple to extend your impact by supporting multiple sponsor groups.

Some parishes in the Diocese have been Support Churches for multiple family/community groups and have made a significant positive impact in this way.

11. Why should we do this?

Refugees are forced to flee their home countries and cannot return safely. Many face extraordinary challenges, including unsafe living conditions, lack of access to education for children, inability to work and economic hardship, no access to medical care, and fear of detention or deportation. At the same time, many relatives of refugees in Canada have the resources to sponsor them but lack access to the program without a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) like AURA.

Your parish can open the door to the program and AURA's support by becoming a Support Church.

Being a Support Church is a tangible way to make a life-changing difference for a refugee or refugee family and people already in Canada. It's also an opportunity to serve your community and welcome the stranger.

From a liaison at a Support Church: "I would like to emphasize that the most important benefit of being a Support Church is meeting the refugees and getting to know them. We have a great opportunity to do that as we have with the refugee newcomer our Church recently helped sponsor, by seeing him for coffee or lunch to give him the cheques and to find out how he is doing. This has been a very worthwhile contribution not only to our Priest and me, but also to our parish who has met and interacted with him. The chance that a Support Church has to see this firsthand is a huge benefit."



12. What kind of screening do the refugees go through before coming to Canada?

All refugee applicants undergo screening by IRCC to ensure they meet the definition of a refugee in need of protection. They answer extensive questions about their situation, have an interview with a Migration Officer, and undergo medical exams, security checks, and background screenings. All assessments must be completed before a refugee's application is approved and travel arrangements are made for their arrival in Canada. Upon arrival, refugees become Permanent Residents.

13. How long does it take for sponsorship applications to be processed?

Processing times vary based on factors like case complexity, and which IRCC migration office processes the application. On average, from submission to arrival, the process takes 2 to 3 years, followed by a one-year sponsorship period.

We get a clearer sense of timing once key processing milestones (such as medical exams, eligibility interviews, and security screenings) are reached.

14. We've been approached by someone asking about sponsorship and we're interested in helping - what is the next step?

Please contact AURA by email at marin@auraforrefugees.org or by phone at 416-588-1612 ext. 0 to discuss next steps. Whether someone has asked for your help in sponsoring relatives, or you are interested in becoming a Support Church, the next step is to have a conversation with AURA.