

Quick Reference Guide on Family Reunification Avenues to Canada

With Spotlights on Complementary Pathways
and their Intersection with Family Reunification

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**REFUGE
POINT**



**REFUGEE SOLIDARITY
NETWORK**

This Quick Reference Guide provides information on family reunification to Canada for:

- NGOs and case workers within host countries assisting individuals with family reunification to Canada,
- Individuals abroad wishing to reunify with family in Canada, and
- Individuals in Canada seeking to reunify with family members.

Please note that policies and programs are subject to change and may have been updated since publication. Users are advised to verify the information through the links provided in the document.

Note:

While this guide discusses a number of different avenues that have been used for family reunification to Canada, it also covers broader immigration pathways that are not strictly family reunification mechanisms. Readers are encouraged to review each section carefully, as eligibility criteria, program availability, and application processes are dependent on individual circumstances and evolving government policies, and may change over time.

Acknowledgements

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– Leila Shifteh & Bahati Ernestine Maganjo

Report designed by Becky Still.

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Glossary of Terms

- [Accompanying Family Member](#)
- [Blended Visa Office Referred \(BVOR\) Program](#)
- [Community Sponsorship Group](#)
- [Community Sponsor](#)
- [Common Law Partner](#)
- [Conjugal Partner](#)
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- [Co-Sponsor](#)
- [Country of Asylum Refugee](#)
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- [De facto Dependent](#)
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- [Dependent Child](#)
- [Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot \(EMPP\)](#)
- [Family Class](#)
- [Family Member](#)
- [Foreign National](#)
- [Foreign Student](#)
- [Foreign Worker](#)
- [Government Assisted Refugee \(GAR\)](#)
- [Group of Five \(G5\)](#)
- [Humanitarian & Compassionate Application \(H&C\)](#)
- [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada \(IRCC\)](#)
- [Immigration Status](#)
- [Inadmissibility](#)
- [Joint Assistance Sponsorship \(JAS\)](#)
- [Live-in Caregiver](#)
- [Member of the Convention Refugees Abroad Class](#)
- [Non-Accompanying Family Members](#)
- [One Year Window Provision](#)
- [Permanent Resident](#)
- [Principal Applicant](#)
- [Privately Sponsored Refugee](#)
- [Protected Persons](#)
- [Protected Person Status Document](#)
- [Protected Temporary Resident](#)
- [Public Policy](#)
- [Refugee Claimant](#)
- [Refugee Dependant](#)
- [Refugee Landed in Canada](#)
- [Refugee Protection Status](#)
- [Sponsorship Agreement Holder \(SAH\)](#)
- [Spouse](#)
- [Student Refugee Program](#)
- [Study Permit](#)
- [Temporary Foreign Worker Program](#)
- [Temporary Resident Permit](#)
- [Visa](#)
- [Work Permit](#)

Terminology Note:

The term “individual in Canada” in this guide refers to people in Canada holding various legal statuses who are seeking family reunification with family members currently abroad or in Canada. The Government of Canada may use terms like “sponsor” or “anchor” depending on the specific family reunification pathway mentioned.



Introduction

Family reunification in Canada is primarily facilitated through the **Family Class**, which allows citizens and permanent residents to sponsor close relatives, and represents the core stream within the immigration system. These relatives include immediate family members (such as spouses, common-law partners, conjugal partners, and dependent children) with limited restrictions, as well as other relatives, such as parents and grandparents, who face additional restrictions (see further below).

Sponsors (the Canadian citizen or permanent resident family member) must meet specific requirements, including providing financial support for the sponsored person, ensuring they do not rely on social assistance, and compliance with eligibility rules. For the full list of requirements and eligibility criteria, visit the **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)** Sponsorship Eligibility Page and the IRCC guidance on sponsorship undertakings.

An important factor in the family reunification process is the type of family relationship existing between family members wishing to reunify. See page 8 for a decision tree outlining how different relationships shape the pathways available to reunify with family members.

Note:

This document provides an overview of IRCC's classical family reunification options, such as the Family Class, and takes a closer look at pathways commonly used by refugees, including the One Year Window, Complementary Pathways, and the Private Sponsorship Program.

Disclaimer: This reference guide is for informational purposes only and does not provide legal advice. For personalized guidance, please consult a qualified professional.

Navigating Family Reunification Pathways

As a quick reference, this table snapshots the relevant Canadian family reunification programs, incidental pathways that result in family reunification, as well as related humanitarian pathways. Whether you are an individual seeking to reunite with loved ones or an organization supporting clients through this process, it guides you on what to consider and links each individual and family context to the corresponding program, with concise notes on how commonly the pathway is used and key operational challenges. Use this as a handy tool to pinpoint the pathway that best fits any circumstance.

Canada’s immigration programs operate within an annually updated Immigration Levels Plan and evolving program policies. Intake limits, eligibility criteria, and program availability may change over time. Readers should verify the current status of each pathway through official Government of Canada sources.

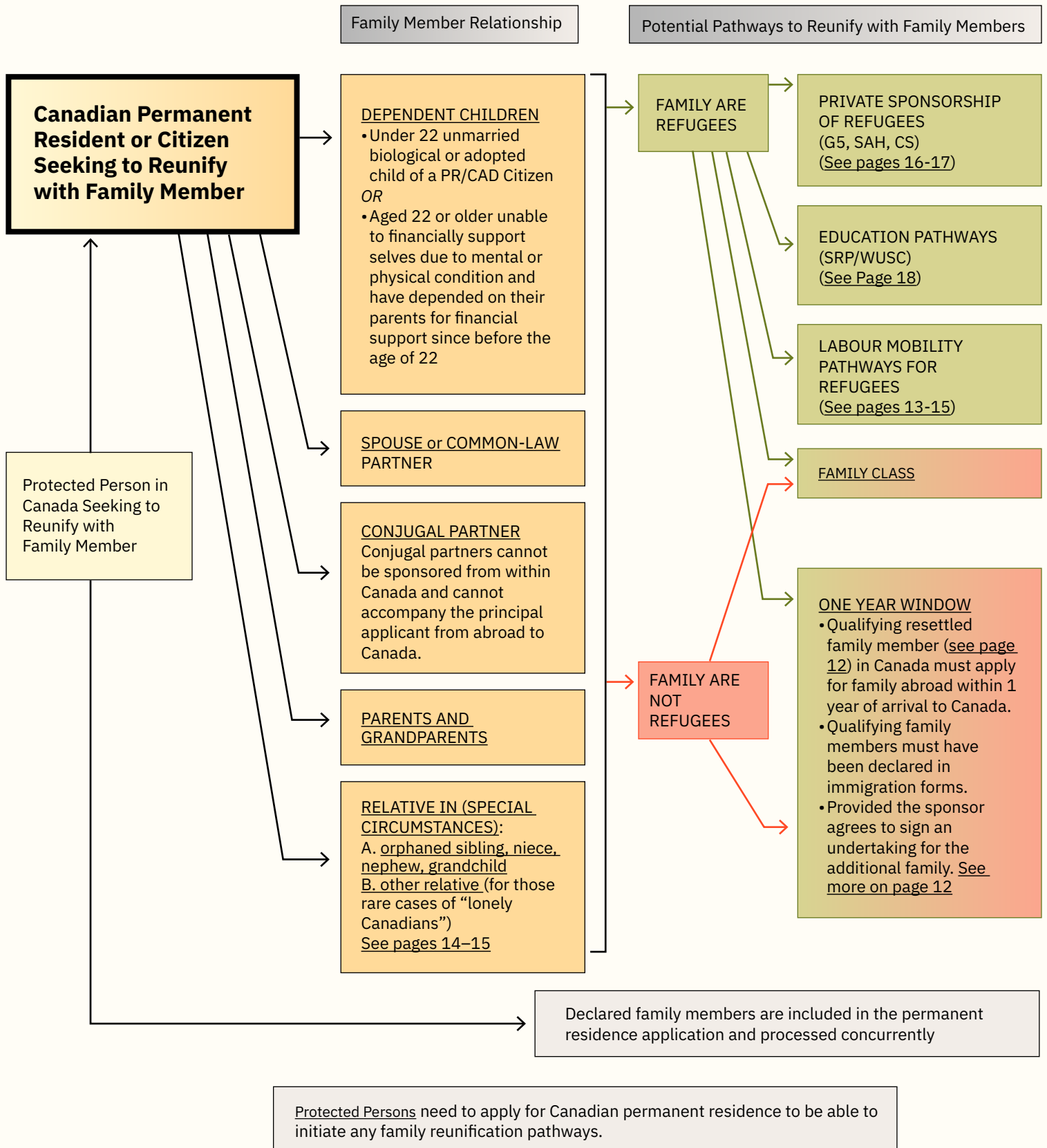
Eligibility Questions	Sub-Eligibility Questions	Pathway	Notes (Prevalence & Challenges)
Are you a (refugee or non-refugee) spouse, dependent child, parent/grandparent, or “relative (in special circumstances)” (see pages 14–15) of a Canadian citizen, Permanent Resident (PR), or Protected Person?	Yes. If your family member was/is a PR → were you included/declared in their PR application?	Family Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a primary family reunification pathway. • Family Class Sponsorship is accessible to Permanent Residents and Citizens of Canada. • It can be accessed by refugees but would need certain flexibilities to overcome barriers (for example, related to travel document use). • For parents/grandparents and other relatives, financial proof is a barrier. At the time of writing, Parents and Grandparents Sponsorship has not opened a new interest-to-sponsor form since 2020. In 2025 IRCC invited more sponsors from the 2020 pool (up to 10,000 applications) rather than opening a new intake. • This pathway excludes extended family members except in special circumstances (see page 8). • Family members left off a sponsor’s original application can be barred from later sponsorship. A temporary public policy waives this in limited cases (e.g. the spouse, partner, or child of a refugee or protected-person sponsor). Set to expire September 10, 2026. Verify with IRCC.
	Yes. Did your family member resettle to Canada as a former refugee, were you included/declared in their PR application, and is it within 1 year of their arrival?	One Year Window (OYW)	Though IRCC prefers families travel together, sometimes separation is unavoidable. This pathway is designed for family reunification. It is more common for Government Assisted Refugees/Blended Visa Office Referred refugees, and less so for Privately Sponsored refugees. See page 12 for more on the One Year Window (OYW).
	Yes. Is your family member in Canada a protected person (recognized refugee) in Canada?	Concurrent Processing	This is a pathway that is designed for family reunification. For dependents outside Canada, in most cases, the Protected Person in Canada must first obtain permanent residence before their non-accompanying dependents’ applications can be processed. Where concurrent processing is possible, both applications may be considered together. In case concurrent processing is not possible for various individuals’ reasons, OYW may still be an option after PR. Check here for information on a one-time special initiative for protected persons to access permanent residency in Canada.
Are you a refugee outside Canada?	Yes. Are you seeking resettlement in Canada through government assistance?	Government-Assisted Refugee Program (referred)	This pathway focuses on resettlement; family ties and reunification are incidental. Individuals cannot apply directly; instead, they must first register for refugee status with UNHCR or their state authorities, which can then refer them for Canadian resettlement. Learn more here.
	Yes. Do you have a family member elsewhere with an active resettlement case to Canada?	Concurrent Processing	This is a pathway that is designed for family reunification and to reduce reliance on the OYW, but it is not very commonly used. Some cases may involve logistical and communication challenges.

Navigating Family Reunification Pathways

Eligibility Questions	Sub-Eligibility Questions	Pathway	Notes (Prevalence & Challenges)
Are you a refugee outside Canada?	Yes. With family/friends/affinity groups in Canada willing to sponsor you?	Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) (see pages 16 & 17)	This pathway is not strictly designed for family reunification; however, it is frequently used for that purpose. This program has resettled many refugees annually (not specific to FR) though numbers are subject to Immigration Levels Plan changes. Family/friends must show financial ability. Application slots are limited (note: new Group of Five and Community Sponsor intake is paused. See page 17).
	Yes. Are you a refugee qualifying to pursue higher education in Canada?	Student Refugee Program (SRP) (WUSC) (see page 18)	This pathway focuses on education. This is not a family reunification program; family ties and reunification are incidental. Benefits about 150 students/year. Applicants must be 18–25, single, and have no children. In most cases there will be family left behind, causing later pressure to sponsor.
	Yes. Are you a refugee with in-demand skills for employment in Canada?	Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) (see page 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government of Canada has announced changes to the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP). As of early 2026, the program is closed to new applications. Program availability, intake, and eligibility criteria are determined by the Government of Canada and may change over time. Future intakes or successor programs may be introduced at the government’s discretion. As such, EMPP should be considered a potential pathway rather than a predictable or ongoing option. This pathway is not a family reunification program; family ties and reunification are incidental. EMPP was introduced as a pilot to facilitate access to permanent residence for refugees and displaced persons who meet Canada’s economic immigration requirements, often linked to employment offers and English/French language proficiency.
Are you someone who does not meet the legal requirements for other family reunification options?	Yes. Are you from a country affected by conflict and eligible under a specific temporary public policy for family reunification?	Humanitarian Pathway: Public Policies (see page 19)	These are temporary humanitarian programs, not designed for family reunification, though family ties may help. They offer pathways to Permanent Residency for individuals from conflict-affected countries and can close once full or expired.
	Yes. Are you outside your country of nationality or residence, seriously affected by civil war, conflict, or human rights violations, with no durable solution in a reasonable period of time; and are considered a non-convention refugee?	Humanitarian Pathway: Country of Asylum Class (see page 19)	This is not a family reunification pathway, as family ties are only incidental. Refugees may be selected for consideration under this class following a resettlement referral to States made by UNHCR, another authorized body, or through private sponsorship. Individuals cannot apply directly to UNHCR for this pathway.
	Yes. Are you a human rights defender and a refugee seeking resettlement to Canada?	Humanitarian Pathways: Human Rights Defenders under GAR (see page 19)	This pathway focuses on resettling up to 500 Human Rights Defenders and their families annually under the Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) program. Family ties and reunification are incidental. Individuals cannot apply directly; they must first be recognized as refugees and referred for resettlement to Canada by UNHCR or one of two other referral partners— Front Line Defenders or ProtectDefenders.eu .
Yes. Are you a foreign national in Canada who isn’t eligible for other PR programs, but whose situation—such as facing serious hardship if removed, having strong ties to Canada, and not being barred from applying (due to a refugee or removal decision)—might fall under one type of H&C consideration?	Humanitarian Pathways: Humanitarian & Compassionate Grounds (see page 19)	This is not a family reunification program; family ties and reunification are incidental. This pathway is typically used for individuals already in Canada who have exhausted other legal avenues to remain. In rare and exceptional cases, it may also be applied to individuals outside Canada as a last resort to overcome barriers preventing other forms of admission. It often involves complex assessments of hardship and can take considerable time to process.	

→ If so, humanitarian pathways may still be available to you. These include public policies, humanitarian and compassionate considerations (H&C), and the Country of Asylum Class, depending on your circumstances.

Understanding Reunification Options by Family Relationship



Understanding an Individual's Immigration Status in Canada and Its Role in Family Reunification Avenues

For family reunification categories that are initiated by the family member in Canada, this individual must be a **citizen** or a **permanent resident** who is at least **18 years old**. This person must either be a family member of the person they wish to reunify with or a member of a “private sponsorship” group.

To be able to apply for a family member to come to Canada, the person's legal status in Canada – and in some cases, the pathway they used to migrate – will determine which avenues are available for family reunification. For example:

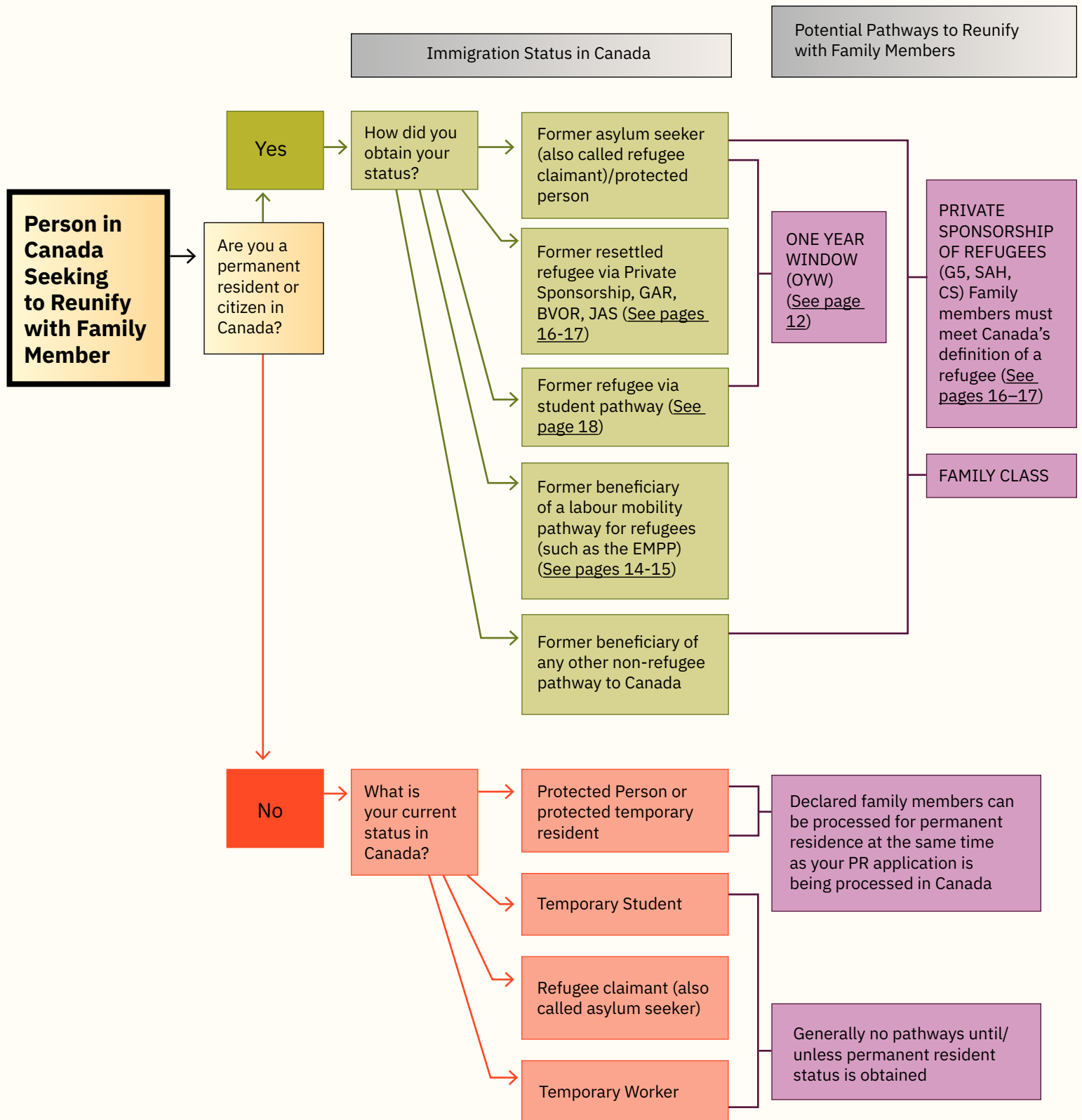
- **Permanent residents and citizens**, whether they obtained their permanent residence on arrival or after residing in Canada, may access pathways like **Family Class Sponsorship** and **Private Sponsorship** (see pages [8](#), [16](#) & [17](#) for details).
- **Resettled refugees** and ***Protected Persons in Canada** may reunify with declared family members through a program called the One Year Window (OYW), provided those family members were listed on the initial application, even if they were not accompanying the applicant to Canada.

Initial applications must declare all immediate family members, regardless of whether they plan to relocate to Canada or not. Declaring them facilitates future sponsorship, and not declaring relatives can raise misrepresentation concerns.

Other pathways to Canada that do not rely on the immigration status of the person in Canada may also, in some cases, offer possibilities for supporting family reunification (for more information, see [page 13 for EMPP](#) and [page 16 for the Student Refugee Program](#)).

* Protected Persons have been determined, while in Canada, to be refugees or in need of protection due to risks in their home country.

Understanding Family Reunification Options by Immigration Status



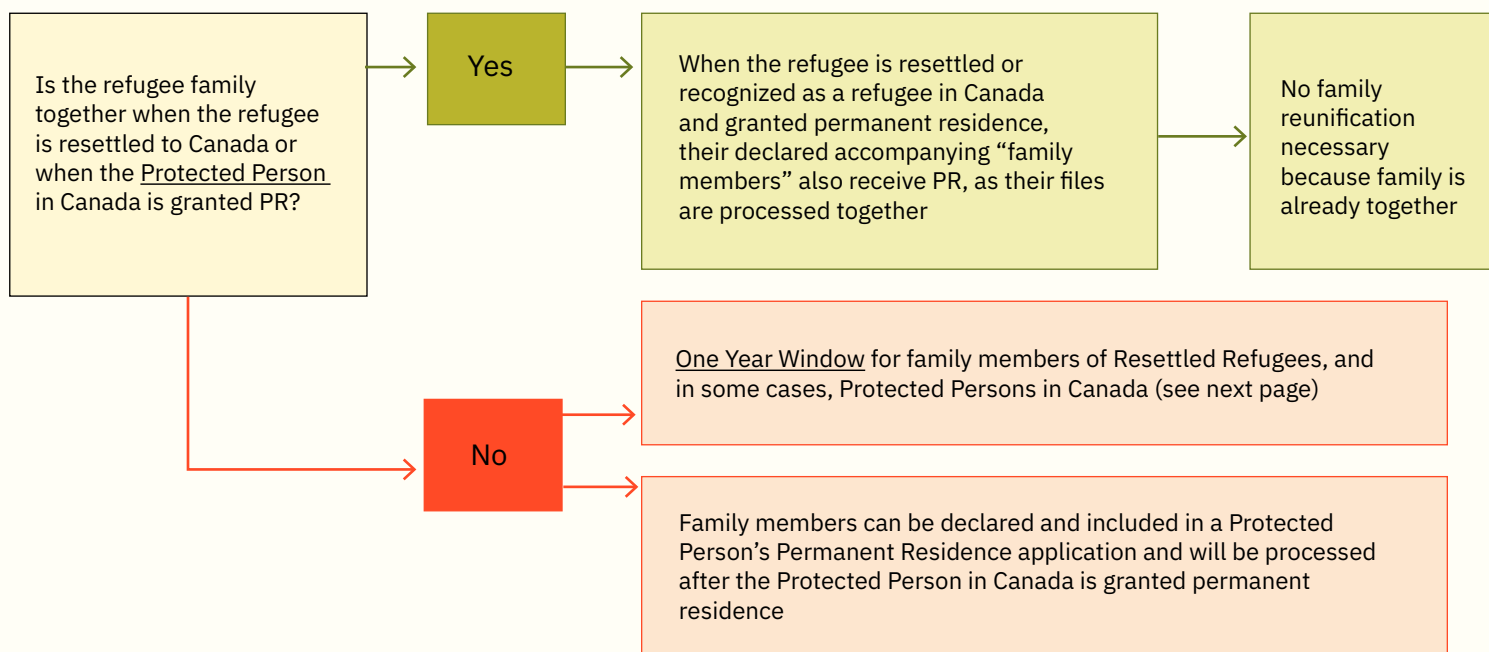


Spotlight on Refugee Families

Refugees can be resettled in Canada either as Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) supported by the government; as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) sponsored by private groups; or through the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program, with cost-sharing responsibilities between private sponsors and the government. An applicant for resettlement must not have access to other durable solutions (local integration or repatriation). Some refugees with special needs may also be resettled through the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) Program, where the government and private sponsors share support responsibilities (see [page 16](#) for more details). Some may also qualify for other complementary pathways to resettlement in Canada such as future labour mobility programs (see note on [page 13](#) regarding the current status of Canada’s EMPP program), education pathways, among others.

For individuals who have resettled to Canada as refugees or been recognized as Protected Persons (individuals in Canada recognized as refugees or as needing protection), additional pathways for family reunification are available.

The starting question is whether the family was already together at the moment the refugee was resettled, or the Protected Person was granted PR. If eligible family members were included, they may be processed together and receive status at the same time without the need for a separate reunification process. All family members need to be declared whether accompanying or not. If they were apart or ineligible, a separate pathway is required, and the one that applies will depend on the family relationship, the person’s status in Canada, and other considerations, as the chart below sets out. The table on [pages 6 and 7](#) covers these pathways in more detail.



One Year Window

- **The One Year Window (OYW)** Program allows **Resettled Refugees** (government-assisted or privately sponsored) and Protected Persons in Canada to apply for family reunification with non-accompanying family members, within one year of arrival. This applies only if non-accompanying family members were declared in the initial application. [See link here for Quebec-specific procedures.](#)
- **The OYW program does not mean that the family members will be in Canada within one year.**

CCR Example: Semhar, a refugee from Eritrea, was sponsored to Canada. Learning her missing husband was alive in Sudan, she applied for him under the OYW within her first year in Canada.



One Year Window OYW Spotlight

Supports

Supports for OYW applicants outside Canada

Because the OYW is accessed by refugees, there are certain facilitations that are not available in other pathways.

- Waived fees (unlike Family Class)
- Cultural orientation classes through IOM
- **Note:** For private sponsorship, sponsors must financially support additional family members for the OYW. If unable, the application must proceed through the Family Class instead and the family members must meet the Family Class eligibility criteria.

Eligibility Criteria

- Non-accompanying family abroad **must have been declared before the refugee's departure** and OYW applications submitted within one year of arrival of the Principal Applicant (PA).
- **Eligible members:** spouses/common-law partners, biological/adopted children, and dependents under 22.
- The definition of a dependent child is locked in at the time of the PR's application. Children must be under 22 years of age and not married or in a common-law relationship, unless they are financially dependent due to a physical or mental condition. ([See more here on page 4](#))
- **Ineligible:** Children born or adopted after PR, (but may be included as dependents or sponsored under family class), De-facto dependents, and undeclared family members (see Additional Notes).
- Family members need not be refugees themselves for reunification.

Additional Notes

- Processing times are often lengthy, with no official timelines.
- Undeclared relatives are generally not eligible through the OYW. They may be sponsored through the Family Class under the public policy for undeclared relatives or through a discretionary Humanitarian & Compassionate (H&C) request ([see page 19](#)) (CCR note).

IRCC Example: A former Resettled Refugee in Canada, now a PR, declared marriage with no children & applies for their spouse under the OYW. Later, they declare the spouse has given birth. While the child isn't eligible under OYW independently, they can be included as the spouse's dependent on the OYW application if the spouse qualifies. IRCC requires the spouse to declare their dependent, as the spouse was declared on the PR's application. Failure to declare the child may lead to IRCC questioning the legitimacy of the relationship.

Labour Pathways & Family Reunification

Labour pathways are not family reunification programs; however, family ties may be a motivating factor for some applicants. Program availability, intake streams, eligibility criteria, and caps are determined by the Government of Canada and may change over time. At certain periods, applications may be paused or closed, and future intakes are not guaranteed. Applicants should regularly consult official Government of Canada sources for current program status and requirements.

Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP)

- EMPP combined elements of refugee resettlement and economic immigration by enabling refugees and displaced persons who met economic immigration criteria to immigrate through labour pathways. All employer and employee requirements needed to be met, [see details here](#). Also have a [look here](#) for current program statuses (Federal and Regional) and updated caps, as caps have been reached for certain Federal programs at the time of writing. **This program is closed at the time of writing.**
- **How EMPP supported family reunification (where applicable):**
 - 1. Inclusion in the initial application:** A principal applicant could include eligible accompanying family members (spouse or common-law partner and dependent children only) in their permanent residence application, if declared and meeting eligibility requirements.
 - 2. Subsequent sponsorship:** An individual who has obtained PR via EMPP and is now living in Canada, may later apply to reunify with family (see next two pages). Note: The One Year Window (OYW) provision does not currently apply to this category.
 - 3. Applying from outside Canada:** In limited circumstances, individuals in a host country who met EMPP requirements could consider this pathway as a means to relocate to Canada where they had close family ties, subject to program availability and eligibility.

Other Economic Programs

- There are other programs that can be utilised to facilitate family reunification in some cases, such as Canada’s Federal Economic, Federal Caregivers, Provincial Nominee, and Quebec Skilled Workers programs. These are pathways designed to support economic growth and meet labour needs in Canada.
- It’s important to note that each of these programs has specific requirements, some of which include capped limits, and they are not a guarantee that family reunification will be achieved. Additionally, these programs continue to evolve over time.
- Read more about these requirements and check back regularly [here](#).
- E.g. A Canadian PR or Citizen has identified a job opportunity for their family member abroad. If the employer meets the requirements, they can connect their family member with the employer in Canada and a recruitment partner in the country of asylum, to enable them to access work opportunities in Canada.
- E.g. A refugee abroad with in-demand skills may qualify for a Canadian economic immigration program if they secure a qualifying job offer and meet language and admissibility requirements.



Spotlight on EMPP Beneficiaries in Canada & Potential Options to Reunify with Family Members

This section highlights potential family reunification options that may be available to individuals who have obtained permanent residence in Canada through the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP), where applicable. EMPP is not a family reunification program, and access to the pathway itself is subject to Government of Canada policy decisions, including program availability, eligibility criteria, and intake status.

Where individuals have successfully entered Canada through EMPP, family reunification may occur either through inclusion of eligible family members in the initial permanent residence application (where permitted) or through subsequent family reunification pathways after arrival in Canada. The options outlined below may apply in some cases but are not guaranteed and depend on individual circumstances, eligibility requirements, and program availability at the time of application. Please note that the One Year Window provision does not currently apply to this category.

Family Member Abroad	Possible FR Options	Description
Declared Spouse/Common Law Partner, Conjugal Partners, Dependents	Family Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E.g. A person migrates to Canada through EMPP and in their PR application they included the names of their non-accompanying spouse and three children. Two of their children are under 22, and one is 25 but has a physical disability and is dependent on them financially. See more information on Family Class here. <i>Note: Access may be limited for refugees.</i>
Orphaned Brother, Sister, Nephew, Niece or Grandchild	Family Class , Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) (if they are refugees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E.g. Due to war, a person's sibling & their sibling's spouse passed away, leaving a 17-year-old child. Family Class: Direct sponsorship applies if related to person by blood or adoption; both mother and father passed away; under 18 years of age, and single (not married or in a common-law or conjugal relationship). In practice, it can be difficult for refugee children to prove orphan status. E.g.2 A person's niece, a refugee over 18, with parents, is married with children. While not eligible for Family Class sponsorship, she can be sponsored under Private Sponsorship. Private Sponsorship: those who do not qualify for Family Class sponsorship may qualify for PSR if they meet Canada's definition of a refugee or person in refugee-like situation.
Parents and Grandparents	Family Class* , Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Class: *At the time of writing, Parents and Grandparents Sponsorship has not opened a new interest-to-sponsor form since 2020. In 2025, IRCC invited more sponsors from the 2020 pool (up to 10,000 applications) rather than opening a new intake. These applications to sponsor are by invitation only and are capped. See more here. If capped, a Super Visa for 5 years could be an option for temporary stay. Two key considerations under Family Class: 1) The financial commitment or "undertaking" period to sponsor parents and grandparents once they are in Canada is 20 years. In Quebec, it's 10 years. 2) A person is not eligible to sponsor their parents if they have an unpaid pending immigration loan. See here for additional eligibility requirements. Private Sponsorship: If either the sponsor (former EMPP beneficiary), or the parent or grandparent do not qualify for Family Class sponsorship, they might still be eligible for Private Sponsorship of Refugees if they fit Canada's definition of a refugee or are in a similar situation.



Spotlight on EMPP Beneficiaries in Canada & Potential Options to Reunify with Family Members

Family Member Abroad	Possible FR Options	Description
Biological or Adopted Brothers and Sisters; Cousins, Aunts, Uncles and Other Distant Relatives	<u>Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If family members do not qualify under the Family Class, Private Sponsorship might be an option for them provided they meet Canada's definition of a refugee.• Check eligibility requirements, including <u>individuals who may not be sponsored</u>, such as people who are already in Canada, and people who fled persecution or civil war some time ago but can now integrate into the country where they are residing or can return home safely.
Other Relative in Special Circumstances	<u>Family Class</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This program is reserved for those rare cases of "lonely Canadians."• A person may sponsor one relative of any age if they have no living relatives they can sponsor instead (such as a spouse, child, parent, grandparent, or orphaned sibling/niece/nephew/grandchild) and have no relatives in Canada who are citizens, permanent residents, or registered Indians under the Indian Act.



Spotlight on Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program

Refugee Private Sponsorship allows individuals to sponsor **refugee family members**, for example, if they don't qualify under Family Class pathways. Though this pathway is not strictly designed for family reunification, it is frequently used for that purpose. This program has resettled many refugees annually in recent years; however, numbers vary by Canada's Immigration Levels Plans. This pathway differs from the Family Class in that the private sponsors provide financial and settlement support to the refugee for the sponsorship period, usually up to 1 year. Privately sponsored refugees arrive in Canada as permanent residents.

Program Types

Sponsorship Type & Actors Involved	Description	Can you sponsor a refugee you know?
<u>Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR)</u> (Both Government & Private Sponsorship Group)	Offers some key benefits: it reduces sponsors' financial burden through cost sharing with the government, and matches sponsors with UNHCR-identified refugees who have already undergone initial screening and may therefore be able to travel more quickly.	No
<u>Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS)</u> (Both Government & Private Sponsorship Group)	Allows Sponsorship Agreement Holders and their <u>Constituent Groups</u> to sponsor government-referred refugees with special needs. Sponsors provide support for up to 24 months, while the government offers financial assistance.	No
<u>Sponsor-Referred Refugees</u> (Private Sponsors)	Sponsoring a <u>known refugee</u> may take longer than a government-referred one, and no financial assistance is provided by the Government of Canada.	Yes

Individuals cannot sponsor a refugee on their own, it must be through either a Sponsorship Agreement Holder, Group of 5 or Community Sponsorship group (more on next page).

Under the Sponsor-referred refugee program, individuals in Canada are able to nominate their family members abroad for sponsorship. Below are more details on who can sponsor and what requirements there are on the individuals being sponsored.

- Note that **all sponsors must be above 18 years** and either **Canadian permanent residents or citizens**.
- Among other requirements, **the person being sponsored must: be outside Canada**, and meet the definition of one of the **refugee classes** of Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. *Applicants of any age may be considered.



Spotlight on Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program

The success of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program relies on dedicated sponsors. Below are the key groups eligible to sponsor refugees and their respective requirements.

Who Can Sponsor?	Description	Requirements for the Refugee	Resources/Examples
Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs)	Typically a religious, ethnic, community, or humanitarian organization with a presence in the community where the refugee will resettle. It can authorize Constituent Groups to sponsor refugees under its agreement.	Among other linked requirements below , the person sponsored must be outside Canada, and must meet the definition of one of the refugee classes of Canada's Immigration & Refugee Protection Act.	A list of SAHs E.g. United Church)
Group of Five (G5)	*Note at the time of writing (Oct 2025), IRCC is not accepting new applications from Groups of Five. Future intake remains subject to government policy decisions. Groups of five or more Canadians can sponsor refugees abroad to come live in Canada permanently. This means you will support them emotionally and financially, usually for 1 year.	Depending on the type of sponsorship group chosen, the Principal Applicant being sponsored will in most cases need to show documentary proof of refugee status.	Resources: You can start your own Group of 5
Community Sponsors	*Note at the time of writing (Oct 2025), IRCC is not accepting new applications from Community Sponsors. Future intake remains subject to government policy decisions. A community sponsorship group can be an organization, association, or corporation, and does not need to be incorporated under federal or provincial law. It must commit to supporting refugees for the sponsorship period, typically one year, and can partner with individuals or other organizations as co-sponsors	Who may be sponsored Who may not be sponsored	Example of a CS group: Pictou County Safe Harbour
Quebec Program– The Program for Refugees Abroad (Collective Sponsorship)	*Note at the time of writing the Government is not accepting new applications under Collective Sponsorship (Oct 2025). Future intake remains subject to government policy decisions. The Program for Refugees Abroad (Collective Sponsorship) enables a group of 2 to 5 individuals or a legal entity to sponsor a refugee and their accompanying family members.	Who may be sponsored	



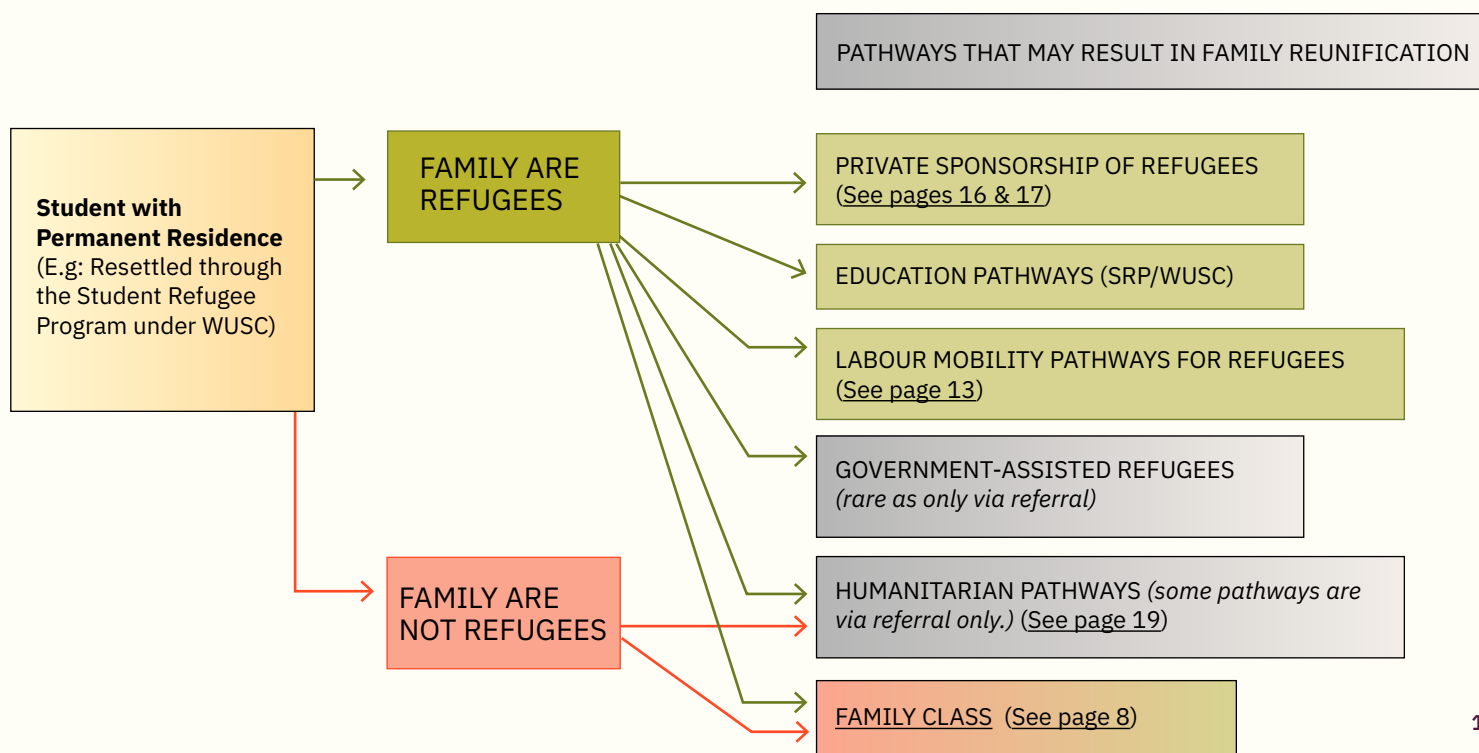
Spotlight on Education Pathways: Student Refugee program

Student pathways, also known as Education Pathways, such as the Student Refugee Program under the **World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Program**, utilize private sponsorship to give qualifying refugee students the opportunity to study in Canada.

NOTE: This is not a family reunification pathway. Family ties and reunification are incidental.

WUSC Student Refugee Program

- The WUSC **Student Refugee Program (SRP)** is the only one of its kind to combine resettlement with opportunities for higher education. This scholarship opportunity is a complementary pathway to refugee resettlement and **student beneficiaries arrive in Canada as permanent residents.**
 - WUSC is a Canadian non-profit organisation dedicated to improving education, employment and empowerment opportunities for youth, women and refugees.
- Disclaimer: These are highly competitive programs and do not guarantee admission.
- **There are several ways in which the SRP may support family reunification:**
 - **E.g.1:** A refugee abroad could apply for a refugee scholarship to Canada through the Student Refugee Program and be admitted to an institution in the location where they have a sibling.
 - **E.g.2:** A beneficiary of the Student Refugee Program approaches the community sponsorship group in their town to help sponsor their parents and siblings who are still refugees abroad.
- **Note:** Regarding the One Year Window for private sponsorship, note that sponsors must undertake to support additional family members. If they are unable, the application can proceed through the Family Class instead and the family members must meet the Family class eligibility criteria.





Spotlight on Humanitarian Pathways

Humanitarian Pathways may be available to individuals who do not meet the legal requirements for other categories or channels to reunify with family in Canada:

Public Policies

The Canadian government periodically institutes temporary public policies for individuals from countries in conflict. There are various evolving categories, some offering permanent residency. These are temporary programs and may close once full or after the set timeline ends. Check the public policies link above for full requirements.

E.g. A person's child is born after their departure from their country of asylum, or they married their spouse after PR is issued; meaning that their family members abroad were not declared on their PR application as they were unmarried and without children at the time of submission. This policy could be used to waive the declaration requirement in order to sponsor them through the Family Class. (Disclaimer: public policies are temporary)

Human Rights Defenders Stream under GAR Program

Canada resettles a limited number of people (human rights defenders and their family members) each year. Front Line Defenders, ProtectDefenders.eu and UNHCR identify the people who are most in need of protection through this stream. The quotas are split among them and they all independently identify and refer cases to IRCC. A person cannot independently apply to resettle to Canada under this stream and they must not have access to other durable solutions.

De Facto Family Members

De facto family members may be considered under H&C Considerations. These are individuals who do not qualify as Family Class members but are in a dependent situation, making them part of a family that is either in Canada or applying to immigrate. Examples: a dependent son or daughter (over the dependent-age limit); a sibling left alone in their country of origin; an elderly relative; or a long-term unrelated resident. De facto family members do not qualify for OYW.

Country of Asylum Class (Humanitarian-Protected Persons Abroad)

The Country of Asylum Class applies to people in refugee-like situations who do not qualify as Convention Refugees; who are outside their country of nationality or habitual residence, are seriously affected by civil war, armed conflict, or human rights violations, and do not have access to a durable solution within a reasonable period of time. Eligibility is assessed by an overseas IRCC officer based on medical, security, and admissibility checks, and the applicant's potential to establish in Canada (sponsor support, language skills, and employment prospects). Note: A person may be ineligible if they have legal status in another country (e.g. E.U.); access to a durable solution (repatriation, local integration or resettlement); or remain in their country of citizenship or habitual residence. Program access and decision-making are determined by the Government of Canada and may change over time. Individuals cannot apply directly to IRCC under the Country of Asylum Class without a referral by organizations such as UNHCR or private sponsorship.

Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C) Considerations

Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C) Considerations: At times, a Protected Person, permanent resident, or Canadian citizen may have a family member **who does not meet the requirements for any of the traditional family reunification processes** (e.g. a child over the dependent age limit under the Family Class). In those cases, it may be possible to request an exemption on Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds.

H&C may also be raised where an undeclared family member cannot be sponsored through the Family Class public policy for undeclared relatives (page 6) or the OYW (see CCR, Excluded Family Members). Note that having not declared some relatives may raise misrepresentation concerns about the original application.

Applications based on Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C) grounds are discretionary and considered only in exceptional circumstances. H&C is not a standard immigration pathway and may impact the processing of other concurrent applications. **See here for more.**

*Please check links above for latest updated program information.

The Impact of Canada's 2026-2028 Levels Plan on Family Reunification

Canada's Immigration Levels Plan for 2026–2028 sets the country's immigration priorities and outlines a **reduction in the overall number of permanent residence spots** compared to previous projections.

Canada's Immigration Levels Plan is updated annually and may revise admission targets, program allocations, and priorities.

It is anticipated that these changes will **also impact processing times and the availability of certain family reunification pathways**, and should be considered as you work through this guide.

Please note that despite this adjustment, the plan continues to highlight family reunification as a key priority, leaving open the possibility for families to find pathways to come together or reunite in Canada.

Explore more about this plan on the official website via this [**Backgrounder**](#) and [**Supplement**](#).

NB: Canada operates under a multi-year Immigration Levels Plan, which is reviewed and tabled annually.

In non-election years, the new plan is typically tabled in November.

Information about Family Reunification Timelines

Pathway

What you should know about [timelines](#).
(Below examples may not be current, please see links for updated timelines)

Family Class by PR/Citizen Sponsor

- See [here](#) to verify timelines for specific family members

Refugee Private Sponsorship by Permanent Resident/Citizen/Private Sponsorship Group

- Varies by country. Note, it is important to consider that in addition to sponsorship application times, refugee application times must be added. **Example:** Kenya - 27 months (sponsorship application) + 22 months (refugee application); Türkiye - 28 months (sponsorship application) + 31 months (refugee application)
- See [how processing times are calculated](#)

One Year Window

- There is no official processing time for OYW applications
- The OYW program **does not mean** that the family members will be in Canada within one year

Protected Persons

- **Permanent Residence application for Protected Persons:** [processing times](#) will differ inside & outside of Quebec
- **Dependents of Protected Persons:** the [processing time](#) differs for this category.

Humanitarian & Compassionate (H&C)

- Verify [latest dates here](#); note this is a **2 stage process**

Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP)

The program is closed so no processing times listed

- Note there will be PR applicant processing time, in addition to time needed for securing employment, language testing, and other prerequisites for PR applicants as EMPP candidates.
- (N.B: There is no processing time category for EMPP on IRCC webpage options.)

Government Assisted Resettlement (GAR)

- Varies by country. **Examples:** [Kenya- 11 months](#), [Türkiye- 16 months](#)



Resource List

- [Refugee Legal Support Organizations in Canada](#), Canadian Council for Refugees
- [Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers \(CARL\) website](#)
- [Practical Information: webinar and resources on various categories \(e.g. Protected Persons and OYW\)](#), Refugee Family Reunification Project
- Use the [Come to Canada Tool](#) to learn about eligibility to apply, IRCC
- [Family Reunification Refugee Advocacy efforts in Canada](#), Canadian Council for Refugees
- [Family Reunification Help Page](#), UNHCR Canada

**Please also see specific hyperlinks throughout the document.*