



Blended Visa Office-Referral (BVOR) Program CCR positions, February 2018

Purposes

The CCR supports the BVOR Program addressing the following important purposes:

1. To increase the number of refugees resettled.
2. To increase the number of refugees resettled to Canada who are identified by UNHCR as being in need of resettlement.
3. To increase the number of private sponsors in Canada and cultivate the private sponsorship culture (i.e. BVORs are sponsored by people who may not know a refugee to sponsor, allowing for broader engagement in private sponsorship by civil society).
4. To increase the number of small communities across Canada to which refugees are resettled, given that in such communities there may be fewer people with a refugee background and less diversity. There may be no GARs destined there, nor community members with names to propose for a named sponsorship.

Matching referrals and sponsors

A major challenge in ensuring ongoing success of the BVOR program is the need to match referrals and sponsors, in terms both of the numbers of cases referred and of the type of cases (in relation to the sponsors' capacity).

The number of referrals depends on Canadian immigration levels, UNHCR realities, and the Canadian immigration program priorities and capacity. The number of sponsors available depends on fluctuating levels of popular interest (e.g. many more sponsors came forward during and shortly after the surge of interest around the sponsorship of Syrian refugees), promotion of the program (it is not well known) and perceptions of the responsiveness of the program (suitable cases may not be available to sponsor).

Even when there are similar numbers of BVOR cases and potential sponsors, it may not be possible to match the referred cases to sponsors. This problem may occur, for example, when cases are destined to a specific community (as is often happening currently). A mismatch may also occur when cases are particularly complex and demanding, while sponsors are sponsoring for the first time. Given that UNHCR refers the most vulnerable, the reality may often be that it is difficult to identify UNHCR-referred cases that are well-adapted to the capacities of new sponsors (purpose 3) or smaller communities (purpose 4).

When insufficient numbers of sponsors are available, refugees' resettlement is delayed, extra work may be required by IRCC to resettle them as GARs, and levels space may be lost.

When sponsors can't find a match, they lose motivation, and community interest in promoting the program wanes.

We note also the importance of good information about needs of referred cases, in order to avoid sending individuals to smaller communities where their specific needs cannot be properly met.

Additionality

As a matter of principle, and as a key motivating factor, private sponsors must be confident that by participating in the BVOR program they are enabling more refugees to be resettled (purposes 1 and 2). This is particularly important given the unfortunate origins of the current BVOR program: it was a measure explicitly introduced to convert GARs into BVORs.¹

To guarantee the principle of additionality:

- The government should substantially increase GAR targets. The CCR calls for 20,000 GARs annually.
- BVORs should count at most as ½ of a GAR when counting the overall government commitment.
- Consider introducing a mechanism that allows sponsors, if they wish, to cover the full costs (i.e. VOR, rather than BVOR), leading to an equivalent increase in number of refugees resettled through other programs (i.e. more BVORs or GARs).
- A mechanism is necessary to address unmatched cases at the end of the year. Refugees should not be left behind nor should levels spaces go unused.

VOR versus BVOR

For many sponsors, the financial contribution for BVOR cases that comes from the government through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) is important. However, this is not always the case. Where sponsors can raise the full amount of funds for the sponsorship, they should be able to sponsor the case as a VOR, without the refugee receiving RAP funding. There should be a mechanism to ensure that the money the government thus saves is used to increase the number of refugees resettled through the GAR and/or BVOR programs.

Equity issues

The CCR is committed to the principle of equity among refugees in need of resettlement. While it may be useful operationally and for promotion to have a focus on a certain population from time to time, the program should be available to all refugees referred by the UNHCR.

The use of BVOR to promote a response to certain populations is also problematic in the context in recent years of politicization of decision-making about refugees to be resettled, including the introduction of

¹ “CIC plans to increase the number of PSRs to be resettled in a year by 1,000, **which will replace an equivalent number of government-assisted refugees.**” (Departmental Performance Report, For the period ending March 31, 2012).

“Ministerial priorities”. The concern is that BVOR has in the past been used to push sponsorship into a program to resettle populations favoured by Minister.

Discrepancy in RAP rates

The fact that BVORs do not receive the same rates as GARs is confusing and seemingly unfair.

Motivational issues

The program needs to be designed and implemented in a way that takes into account what motivates sponsors (i.e. knowledge that they are responding to the most vulnerable, additionality, etc.) and what demotivates sponsors (i.e. lack of appropriate cases to sponsor). Success of promotion depends on the motivational issues being addressed.

Promotion

Active promotion of the program is required to make it more widely known, and reach potential sponsors. It is not realistic to rely on sponsor communities to promote the program. Many sponsors are already stretched to the limit.

Capacity of SAHs

The BVOR Program is currently relying heavily on SAHs, who are in most cases working with very limited resources, often with entirely volunteer leadership. Consideration must be given to SAH capacity, not only in relation to promotion, but also with respect to guiding and supervising sponsors. This is particularly the case in the context of ever-increasing demands by IRCC, especially in the area of SAH monitoring.

Quebec

We would like to see the program officially and regularly available in Quebec.

