



# REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

RENEWED HEARTS, RENEWED SPIRITS, RENEWED PEOPLE

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The news that Canada has begun receiving large numbers of Ukrainian refugees has many of us wondering how best to help. The Refugee Sponsorship Program of the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia has kept abreast of the situation and has some information to share.

## **Background**

At the moment, the Canadian government is offering two ways for families seeking refuge from the war in Ukraine to come to Canada. Some will be sponsored to Canada by relatives. Many will arrive on visas that give them the right to work and study in Canada for up to three years. So far, neither provincial nor federal governments have announced any additional benefits such as health care.

The diocese's Refugee Sponsorship Program that many of you are familiar with and may have participated in over the years is a separate immigration stream from both options above. So, we are limited in what we can do directly.

The good news is that the extensive and well-organized Ukrainian community in Canada has mobilized. They are well positioned to coordinate both local and national responses to this refugee crisis, and we encourage individuals and parish groups to lend support to their initiatives.

Here are some ways you can do that:

## **Stay Informed**

This is an evolving situation. We know that thousands of Ukrainian refugees have applied for visas to Canada, many of them women and children. But we do not know how many families

will be coming to our area or when they will arrive. The application process is taking many weeks, but this might suddenly speed up as procedures are refined. Locally, the main sources of information on recent developments, government policies, events, fundraisers, and reliable resources are the Victoria branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC-Victoria) and the Ukrainian Canadian Cultural Society of Vancouver Island.

Mainstream media sometimes tends to give us a biased image of global events, especially wars and conflict. Try to reach out for alternative media, such as the [Canadian Council for Refugees, Refugees 613](#), and the [Canadian SAH \(Sponsorship Agreement Holder\) Association](#).

### **Volunteer**

[Help Ukraine Vancouver Island](#) is a website that allows people who are offering to help match up with those needing it. You can register to participate a little or a lot—from offering to drive newcomers to appointments once a week to registering to host a Ukrainian family in your home. This website also has an island-wide events page and a link to government information on options for Ukrainians seeking refuge in Canada.\*

\*If you are assisting someone to get a visa, [How to Apply for the Canada Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel](#) provides tips for working through the online visa application.

### **Donate**

Donate individually or consider organizing a fundraiser in support of a Ukraine-focused charity. A fundraiser not only collects cash for the cause but helps raise people’s awareness of the issues.

UCC-Victoria is collecting funds to support Ukrainians who arrive in the Victoria area. Funds will be distributed on an as-needed basis for food, clothing, housing, health care, immigration services, and so on. Donations can be made at the Ukrainian Cultural Centre at 3277 Douglas St. Credit card donations can be accepted over the phone (250-475-2585). They do not have charitable status, so cannot provide tax receipts.

*Help Ukraine Vancouver Island* has a list of other recommended organizations accepting donations of various kinds, many focused on providing help on the ground in Ukraine. <https://ukrainehelpvi.ca/how-to-donate/>

### **Spread the Word**

UCC-Victoria asks people to show their solidarity with Ukraine by attending events such as public rallies and raising the issues on social media—hashtag #StandWithUkraine. They also

suggest that you write to your local MP to encourage Canada's support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees.

And, of course, there is prayer. Please pray for the people of Ukraine and for those in Russia who are being silenced and worse for speaking out against their government's actions.

### **Advocate**

A novel approach to addressing refugee flow during times of global crisis is needed. Read and share [the position of the Canadian Council for Refugees](#) on the need for a new, more objective framework for responding to other similar crises with fairness and equity.

### **Our Current Work**

The private Refugee Sponsorship Program of the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia continues to actively support the sponsorship of refugee families from other war-torn countries around the world, such as Syria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, and most recently Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, we are currently unable to accept new sponsorship applications. We have reached our capacity. We have 70 families currently in the process of preparing for their trip to Vancouver Island. 11 of these families will be arriving soon in Victoria. Three of them are from Syria, one is from Afghanistan, four are from Eritrea and three are from Ethiopia, for a total of 40 people, 30 of them children. Some of these families have been waiting for their visas to be approved, under difficult conditions in a third country, for almost two years.

Historically, most people forced to flee war prefer not to leave their region, and especially not right away. They want to stay close to home, hoping that the war will end soon, and they can return once things are safe again.

Most people who are resettled to Canada through the traditional pathways have been displaced from home for several years, and come via the Government-Assisted Refugee Program, or private sponsorship programs, both of which provide the newcomer with one year of financial support.

At the national level, there is currently a backlog of more than 70,000 people in the Private Sponsorship Program pipeline. Unfortunately, the need is always great, and we help as much as we can.

**Please contact us if you would like to help any of the refugee families we are currently supporting.** Our email address is [refugeecommittee@bc.anglican.ca](mailto:refugeecommittee@bc.anglican.ca).