



## 2026 World Day of Migrants & Refugees

Pope Leo has chosen “Even just one of these children” as the theme for the 112th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, to be observed on September 27, 2026.

The theme, drawn from Matthew 18:5, “Whoever welcomes one such child in My name welcomes Me”, focuses on minors on the move. It highlights the Church’s call to welcome and protect every migrant child, emphasizing that “even just one” child holds the highest value.

The day invites Catholics to pray for all those forced to leave their homes due to conflict, persecution, and hardship.

Click [here](#) to read the Vatican’s statement.

The Archdiocese of Toronto, together with the parish community of St. Isaac Jogues Catholic Church, invites you to a special Mass on this occasion on Sunday, September 27, 2026, at 11:30 AM. For more details, please see the poster below.



The Archdiocese of Toronto together with the parish community of St. Isaac Jogues Catholic Church invites you to a special Mass on the occasion of the 112<sup>th</sup>

### World Day of Migrants *and* Refugees

Sunday, September 27, 2026  
11:30 AM

at St. Isaac Jogues Parish  
1148 Finch Ave., Pickering, Ontario

*Celebrant & Homilist:*  
Most Reverend Vincent Nguyen

RECEPTION TO FOLLOW

*“You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”*  
LEVITICUS 19:34



## 2026 Public Program Cancelled

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has slashed the 2026 SAH Global Cap by 54% – the total number of refugees that all Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) combined are permitted to sponsor this year. This dramatic reduction has resulted in a severely limited 2026 allocation for ORAT. When combined with the overwhelming demand from our established Constituent Group Partner Organizations (CGPOs), we have no choice but to extend the moratorium on our Program for the General Public.

Our priority remains supporting

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## Avg. Processing Times Exceed 6 Years

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has significantly reduced targets in the 2026–2028 Immigration Levels Plan for the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program. Combined with the already massive backlog, this will drive average processing times beyond six years.

The Immigration Levels Plan sets the annual number of permanent residents Canada will admit across all immigration streams. The 2026–2028 plan sharply lowers targets for privately sponsored refugees despite extremely high demand.

Average processing time refers to the total duration

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## Changes to the IFHP

In our March newsletter, we shared an overview of upcoming changes to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). We would like to clarify one important point and walk through what these changes mean in practice.

Beginning May 1, 2026, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) will introduce copayments for certain supplemental health benefits under the IFHP. This means that newcomers (IFHP beneficiaries) will now pay a portion of the cost for some services, while the Government of Canada covers the remainder.

### Important clarification:

Following clarification sought by our office directly from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), we have been advised that copayments are the responsibility of the newcomer (the beneficiary), not the cosponsor.

### What is changing?

- \$4 per eligible prescription (including refills)
- 30% of the cost for other eligible supplemental services and products

### What counts as [supplemental health benefits](#)?

These include services and supports such as:

- Prescription medications
- Urgent dental care
- Vision care
- Mental health counselling
- Occupational and physiotherapy
- Speech-language therapy
- Assistive devices (e.g., prosthetics, mobility aids, hearing aids)
- Home care and long-term care
- Medical supplies and equipment

### What is not affected?

Copayments do not apply to:

- Basic health services (e.g., doctor visits, hospital care, ambulance services)
- Services received before May 1, 2026
- Pre-departure medical services outside Canada
- Immigration medical examinations

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## 2026 Public Program Cancelled

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our long-standing CGPO partners as we navigate the evolving immigration framework and work to fulfill our existing commitments.

We sincerely appreciate the patience and understanding of those who were hoping to access this program during this challenging time. For those still hoping to sponsor refugee relatives, we recommend reaching out to other Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) in your region. A list of SAHs is available here:

[Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program – Sponsorship Agreement Holders.](#)

Please note that other PSR streams — including Groups of Five and Community Sponsors — remain under a temporary pause on new applications until December 31, 2026. This further restricts sponsorship options in the current environment.

We will continue to closely monitor IRCC updates and will inform you of any developments that may affect future programs.

## Avg. Processing Times Exceed 6 Years

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IRCC takes to process a sponsorship application from the moment it is submitted to them by a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) until a final decision is made.

At ORAT, we continue to actively advocate for a substantial increase in PSR targets under the Levels Plan. Raising the target by just 10,000 spaces could reduce average processing times to approximately 3.8 years — a meaningful improvement for refugees and their families waiting in desperate situations.

We need your help. Please join us in this effort by contacting your Member of Parliament (MP) to urge an increase in PSR admissions. Your voice can make a real difference. We have created a brief that can assist you with your advocacy. Please contact our office at [oratrefugeeoffice@archtoronto.org](mailto:oratrefugeeoffice@archtoronto.org) for a copy of this brief.

## Changes to the IFHP

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### Eligibility:

Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) are eligible to receive health benefits under the IFHP including:

- **Basic Coverage:** Basic coverage (e.g. doctor visits, hospital care, ambulance services) will last until the newcomer qualifies for health insurance from their province or territory.
- **Supplementary Health Benefits:** Supplemental benefits and prescription drugs are covered until the newcomer is no longer receiving income support from the Resettlement Assistance Program (or its equivalent in Quebec), and/or financial assistance through private sponsorship

### Advice:

- **Ask ahead:** Before seeking any health-care service or product, newcomers should confirm whether it is covered under IFHP (see the [Coverage Summary](#)). They may also wish to contact the healthcare provider in advance to verify both that the service or product is covered and that the provider accepts IFHP. If the service or product is not covered, or if the provider does not accept IFHP, the newcomer will likely be required to pay the full cost.
- **Keep receipts:** Copayment receipts can be helpful for newcomers when claiming medical expenses during tax season.

More information on these changes is available at [www.canada.ca/ifhp-copayments](http://www.canada.ca/ifhp-copayments).

More information on copayments and supplemental health benefits available at [Interim Federal Health Program: Co-payments for supplemental health benefits - Canada.ca](#)



## EDUCATION CORNER

### Saudi Arabia Country Report

Saudi Arabia is located in the Arabian Peninsula in Southwest Asia. It shares land borders with Jordan and Iraq to the north, Kuwait to the northeast, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates to the east, Oman to the southeast, and Yemen to the sou-



th. The country also has extensive coastlines along the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, providing access to major international maritime routes.

Saudi Arabia occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula and is characterized primarily by desert landscapes, including the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter), one of the largest continuous sand deserts in the world. Key urban centers include Riyadh, the administrative capital; Jeddah, a major commercial hub on the Red Sea; and the cities of Mecca and Medina, which hold central religious significance in Islam. The country's geographic position and natural resources have contributed to its significant regional and global influence.

**Saudi Arabia's Geo-history:** The region that is now Saudi Arabia has long been a crossroads of trade, pilgrimage, and tribal societies. Historically, it was composed of nomadic and settled communities connected through caravan trade routes linking Arabia with the Levant, Mesopotamia, and beyond.

The modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932 under the leadership of Abdulaziz Al Saud following the unification of various regional territories. The discovery of oil in the 20th century transformed the country's economy and development trajectory, shifting it from a largely subsistence

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## Saudi Arabia Country Report

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and trade-based society to one of the world's leading energy producers.

Since its establishment, Saudi Arabia has played an influential role in regional politics, global energy markets, and the Islamic world, particularly due to its stewardship of Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina.

Religious Affiliation: Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state, where Islam is the official religion and a central component of the legal and social framework. The majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims, and Islamic law (Sharia) forms the basis of the judicial system.

Religious expression is closely regulated. Public practice of religions other than Islam is not permitted, and non-Muslim worship is generally limited to private settings. Conversion from Islam is not permitted and carries serious legal punishment, including long prison sentences (10–15+ years), flogging, solitary confinement. The death penalty as prescribed under Sharia Law for conversion is still on the books though Saudi courts have not carried out a confirmed judicial execution solely for apostasy in many years (last known cases date back to the 1980s–1990s, with isolated death sentences in the 2010s that were not always carried out).

The country hosts a large expatriate population that includes Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and others, who are generally able to practice their faith privately within regulatory limits. While religious minorities are present, public religious expression outside the Islamic framework is prohibited, and religious life is expected to align with established cultural and legal norms.

Displacement & Humanitarian Conditions: Saudi Arabia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not operate a formal asylum system under international refugee law. As a result, individuals fleeing conflict or persecution are not operate a formal asylum system under international refugee law. As a result, individuals

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## A Refugee Story – Assour

My name is Assour. I came to Canada through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), after suffering displacement to Lebanon, fleeing indiscriminate bombing, the conflict between armed groups and the former regime, and the lack of safety and peace in my beloved country, Syria. I entered Lebanon in 2012 and registered with the UN. I have no desire to return to Syria.

The sight of the dead in the streets, the sounds of shells and bullets—these will never be erased from my memory. That's why my relative in Canada, arranged through the Office for Refugees for a sponsorship to help me be resettled to Canada, through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees' Program.

When I arrived in Canada about few months ago, the weight of the relief of feeling that now I live in safety, peace, and a normal life in a country that deserves gratitude and appreciation has been tre-



mendous. Now, after the regime change in my homeland, Syria, again the plight of my brothers and sisters is concerning because the country has descended into chaos, where injustice and tyranny prevail, especially against religious minorities like Christians. This includes the bombing of churches, the destruction of statues and holy sites, and the killing of unarmed Christian civilians, as happened in the towns of Rabla and Wadi al-Nasara. There are also regular incidents of kidnappings and the burning of homes with their inhabitants inside, as happened in al-Qusayr, including the recent attack on the city of al-Suqaylabiyah, that involved the destruction of shops, cars, beatings, and arrests without cause.

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## Saudi Arabia Country Report

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fleeing conflict or persecution are not formally recognized as refugees under domestic legal frameworks.

Instead, the country has historically relied on administrative and humanitarian entry measures to host displaced populations, including individuals from Sudan and Syria, as well as other conflict-affected contexts. Many reside under temporary residency arrangements, work sponsorship systems (iqama), or other discretionary permits.

Legal status is typically temporary and closely tied to employment or state authorization, which can create uncertainty regarding long-term residence. Access to permanent protection or formal integration pathways is limited, and conditions may vary depending on policy changes and individual circumstances.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia has contributed significantly to international humanitarian efforts through financial assistance, regional development support, and cooperation with global relief initiatives. However, within its own borders, protection for displaced populations remains primarily administrative rather than based on a formal asylum framework.

**ORAT's Support:** Since 2006, ORAT has had the privilege of assisting with 59 sponsorship applications for 142 individuals residing in Saudi Arabia and seeking resettlement opportunities. These applicants originate from a range of countries affected by conflict and instability, including Syria, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Through ORAT's continued dedication, each individual has been provided with meaningful support in pursuing protection and rebuilding their lives in safer environments. To date, 33 of these applications have resulted in successful resettlement, allowing 90 individuals to establish themselves in new communities with access to legal protections and essential services.

A further 25 applications, representing 47 individuals, are currently under review with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. ORAT remains

actively engaged throughout the process, providing ongoing guidance and support to ensure individuals are assisted with care and consistency at every stage of their resettlement journey.

## A Refugee Story – Assour

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I hope Canada will continue to protect Syrian Christians by providing opportunities for resettlement to them, where they can experience peace, security, and dignity, while exercising the freedom to worship.

I thank the private sponsorship group, ORAT, for opening its doors to persecuted refugees and treating us as human beings. In a particular way, I want to thank St. Barsaumo Syriac Church and the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT) for helping to sponsor me to this beautiful country, Canada. Thank you for blessing lives like mine in practical ways and for giving us not just a lifeline to safety, but a path to a new future. You are the reason people like me now have a future to look forward to. God bless you.





## Supporting ORAT

Our work is supported by the generosity of the Archdiocese of Toronto, ShareLife, various collaborating organizations and the faithful. If you would like to donate to support the work of this office, please click the donate button.

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