

PGP Sponsorship Lottery Eliminated, Quota Increased

In the latter part of August 2018, the IRCC Minister Ahmed Hussen announced the elimination of the lottery system for parent/grandparent (PGP) sponsorships by 2019, to be replaced by a first-come, first served system. The annual quota will also be increased to 20,000 effective next year.

Thus, in January 2019, the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) will relaunch the online form whereby prospective sponsors can express their interest to sponsor their parents or grandparents and enter some required preliminary information. Instead of randomly choosing sponsors who will be invited to apply via a lottery system, IRCC will issue invitations in the order by which the 'interest to sponsor' forms are received. The sponsors will then be given 60 days within which to submit the complete sponsorship and permanent residence application packages to IRCC. Invitations will be issued on a periodic basis until the annual quota of 20,000 completed applications had been reached.

This change is a departure from the current lottery system where prospective sponsors face the risk of waiting year after year to be invited to apply, if they are not fortunate enough to be picked in the lottery.

Meanwhile, the increased quota of 20,000 for 2019 is a four-fold increase from the time that the PGP sponsorship program was reopened in 2014 with a annual intake limit of only 5,000. The annual quota was increased to 10,000 and again to 17,000 this year.

According to IRCC, the increased quota is due to the continuing high demand for PGP sponsorships as well as the significantly reduced inventory in this class of applications which has "dropped from a peak of 167,000 people in 2011, to just under 26,000 people in June 2018."

The new PGP sponsorship system is expected to begin in early January 2019 hence interested sponsors are encouraged to be ready to complete the online interest-to-sponsor form as soon as it is launched in the IRCC website.

As in the past years, the IRCC will reopen the parent-grandparent sponsorship program by allowing prospective sponsors to fill up an online form for this purpose. Completion of this form is not equivalent to an application but is only an expression of interest to sponsor and will form part of the pool of prospective applicants.

Unlike in the previous years however, where one's fate is left to chance, this year the timing of the invitation will depend on when the sponsor completed the online form and how many applications IRCC is able to process at a time until it reaches the annual cap of 20,000.

It must be noted that while those who will complete the form will be invited on a first come, first served basis, the sponsors or applicants who fail to qualify can still be refused or their applications returned.

Therefore, when completing the online form, the sponsor must provide complete and accurate information to avoid problems such as the possibility of being charged with misrepresentation. In early 2018, the online interest-to-sponsor form asked for detailed information, including the names, dates of birth, family size and incomes of prospective sponsors for the past three taxation years. This was meant to weed out prospective sponsors who are not qualified to sponsor due to lack of the minimum necessary income. In the past years, the fact that many sponsors who completed the form did not meet the income requirement led to the IRCC's inability to meet the target of 10,000 applications in 2017 even after two rounds of lottery invitations.

Those invited to apply will need submit the complete applications within 60 days or will be refused. If they would like to reapply, they will have to resubmit a new online interest form when the parent-grandparent sponsorship program reopens and then wait to be invited again.

In the past, IRCC also clarified that one can only sponsor his/her own parents and grandparents. An invitation to apply received from IRCC cannot be used to sponsor the spouse' parents or grandparents. If one is a co-signer in his/her in-law's PR application, it is the spouse or partner who must have received an invitation to apply as a sponsor.

Overall, the new system appears more fair than the lottery system for PGP sponsorships imposed in the past years. However, it remains to be seen whether this will improve the current processing times and allow more sponsors to be reunited with their parents and grandparents at the soonest possible time.

The increased income requirement for sponsors and the higher likelihood that elderly relatives are deemed medically inadmissible due to a potential to cause an excessive demand on Canadian health and social services, still prove to be the biggest stumbling blocks for family reunification under the PGP sponsorship program.

If the Canadian government is truly serious about family reunification without any form of discrimination, the income and medical screening requirements must be reconsidered, if not totally eliminated. After all, empirical studies have shown that the positive impact of family support and unity go far beyond arbitrary economic indicators. The presence of parents and grandparents benefit families and societies in valuable but often intangible ways, such as wisdom gained from life experiences, among others.

Hence, the Canadian government has to do a lot more to become truly inclusive and welcoming, especially for the elderly members of immigrant families.

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