



East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (EBSC)

Creating Safety and Justice for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

The majority of EBSC's female clients have suffered from sexual violence.

Every year, EBSC provides direct legal aid to 325+ women fleeing gender-based violence and serves hundreds more through our community programs.

Immigrant women and girls are vulnerable to exploitation in their home countries, while entering the U.S., while working, and even within their homes. Gender-based violence is one of the major reasons that women and girls seek political asylum. This may be due to gender-discriminatory laws in their home country or from culturally accepted forms of violence against women such as domestic abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), or honor killings. Being approved for asylum means a woman can stay in the U.S. without fear of deportation, thereby providing an escape from her persecutors. For immigrant women in the U.S., women may be financially dependent and vulnerable to threat of deportation. Women may not report abuse to the police for fear they will be deported and separated from their families. If deported, they are more likely to be killed by their abuser.

What types of trauma have EBSC clients experienced?

Women and unaccompanied minor girls who seek legal aid and social support at EBSC have survived rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced marriage, attempted honor killings, female genital mutilation, violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity, forced pregnancy, forced abortion or sterilization, and/or other forms of sexual violence as underlying acts of both crimes against humanity and war crimes. Gendered persecution and genocide has happened in a number of armed conflicts, including Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur, Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, and others.

How does EBSC help?

EBSC helps women attain legal status and then partners with community groups to provide culturally appropriate counseling for survivors. EBSC staff and volunteers are multilingual and have many years of experience working with asylum and trauma. With compassionate support, women are able to start rebuilding their lives. Our CDE program provides English and citizenship classes and leadership training for nearly 100 women annually.

Highlight on Forced Marriage

Forced and early marriage is most common in impoverished states in Africa, South Asia, and the former Soviet republics, yet there are still cases in more affluent North American and European countries.

"I am a 30-year old woman from Burkina Faso. Members of my extended family kidnapped me and gave me to a man more than twice my age. My husband raped and beat me often; his three other wives also abused me. There were guards on duty at all times. After a very bad beating, I was hospitalized and managed to escape. Because I dishonored my family, they will kill me if I go back. Women in forced marriages in my country are essentially in prison. After receiving asylum with EBSC's help, I began community college and found work as a bilingual receptionist."

— "Assita," EBSC Client

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Donate: <https://ebsc.nationbuilder.com/donate>

Highlight on Indigenous Guatemalan Women

Each year, EBSC serves 100 indigenous Guatemalan women survivors of sexual violence. Due to cultural, financial, and language barriers, most would not be able to receive legal or psychological support without the help of EBSC and its community partners.

“I want indigenous women to understand that they should not be ashamed, that they deserve to move forward in their lives and receive legal help and mental services.” – “Flor,” Mam Maya Client

Guatemala has one of the highest rates of femicide (gender-motivated killing) in the world. It is estimated that more than 6,500 women were victims of violent killings between 2000 and 2013 and thousands more raped and battered.¹ Over twenty years after the end of the civil war, indigenous women in Guatemala are still disproportionately targeted for violence, and racial and cultural inequities significantly limit their access to justice. Fleeing atrocious persecution, indigenous Guatemalans have sought safety in the Bay Area since the 1980s. Today, approximately 5,000 Mam Maya (the largest of 21 recognized indigenous Maya ethnic groups in Guatemala) live in the Bay Area, with more arriving every month. Many are illiterate, and speak little or no Spanish or English.

Flor’s Story: “I was born in a small Mam Maya village in Guatemala. During the war in 1982, my parents fled to the mountains. I started to help my parents farm at age 4. There was a lot of discrimination from Ladinos – people who speak Spanish - against indigenous people. Also, women do not have the same rights as men. The government tried to take our land away. When I was a teen, I joined an organization of internally displaced people. We helped people fight for their land rights and make official reports about abuse. I was 19 years old and the Secretary for this grassroots group when soldiers raped and beat me because of my activism. I was in the hospital for ten days. I returned to my house and the soldiers threatened to kill my family and me. After a month, I fled to the U.S. to seek safety.

Some people from the church told me about Santuario. EBSC helped me get asylum and I felt much safer. I still had psychological trauma, but I felt more freedom. When staff at EBSC told me I could go to school here in the U.S., I was so happy. I started to learn Spanish and then EBSC helped me get a scholarship to study English and start citizenship classes. My dream is to get my GED, go to college, and have a career as a nurse assistant.

It is hard for indigenous women to share what happened to us. If people are traumatized, Santuario can help them find counseling. I would like to help others who are seeking asylum, especially Mam women.”

¹ <https://cgrs.uchastings.edu/our-work/femicide-and-gender-based-violence>