



FACT SHEET

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ETHNIC COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

What Is an ECBO?

An Ethnic Community-Based Organization (ECBO), formerly known as a Mutual Assistance Association (MAA), is a non-profit community-based organization whose governing board is comprised of a majority (at least 51 percent) who are current or former refugees. The purpose of an ECBO is to promote successful refugee resettlement by addressing the social services needs of refugees, particularly those who are newly resettled in the United States (U.S.).

Some ECBOs are small grassroots organizations based in communities where large numbers of refugees reside. Others are affiliates of larger well-established national networks that provide services to refugees in multiple communities.

Originally, many ECBOs were established to serve refugees from specific ethnic groups or regions, e.g., Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, or Africa. However, refugee groups who have resettled in the U.S. have become increasingly diverse, and many ECBOs have hired multi-lingual, multi-cultural staff in order to serve refugees from many different ethnic groups and regions.

Services to Refugees

The ECBOs operate on the principle of mutual aid: refugees helping refugees. Those who were resettled earlier and who have become more established in the mainstream community assist recently arrived refugees to acculturate and start new lives in the U.S. These organizations facilitate the social adjustment and cultural transition of refugees by providing a broad range of services including:

- Case management
- Translation and interpretation services
- Information and referral
- Employment assistance
- English language training
- Health promotion education
- Emergency assistance
- Naturalization and citizenship services
- Youth services, such as tutoring, mentoring, or career counseling.

Services delivered in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner are often most effective in transitioning refugees to self-sufficiency; therefore, federal, state, and county governments often contract with ECBOs and refer refugee clients to services provided by these organizations.

In addition to providing services, ECBOs serve as an important source of emotional support to refugees by providing a place for them to meet and socialize with others from their home country. They also provide opportunities for refugees to connect with and preserve their language and culture through holiday celebrations and religious observances.

Community Building

The ECBOs contribute to the building of stronger, more diverse communities. They frequently fill gaps in existing community services by providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services. They advocate for the needs of refugees and immigrants and foster an awareness of the presence and contributions of newcomers in the community at large. In addition, ECBOs provide refugees and immigrants with citizenship services and educate them about their civic responsibilities, encouraging refugees to become active and involved members of their communities.

For a listing of ECBOs in California, please visit the Refugee Programs Bureau web page at www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/refugees/stakeholders/ecbos.