

Sexual Violence Against Immigrants & Refugees

mecasa
MAINE COALITION AGAINST
SEXUAL ASSAULT

Traditionally, Maine has not been an ethnically diverse state, but ethnic and cultural minorities have arrived in Maine in unprecedented numbers since 2001, as part of the US State Department's refugee resettlement program. Communities such as Lewiston and Portland are now home to approximately 10% immigrant refugee populations,¹ many of whom are primary and secondary refugees and immigrants. These changes are resulting in more vibrant and richer communities across the state, as well as many new and exciting challenges to sexual assault support centers across the state.

Prevalence & challenges

The magnitude of sexual violence against immigrants and refugees in Maine is difficult to determine. Sexual violence often goes unreported. The factors contributing to underreporting—fear of retribution, shame, powerlessness, lack of support, breakdown or unreliability of public services, and the dispersion of families and communities—are all exacerbated for immigrants and refugees. Immigrants, both legal and illegal, may fear deportation as well. We know sexual violence happens to immigrants and refugees, as it does within the broader community. Sexual violence is often used as a tool of conflict and war in some of the regions from which New Mainers are coming.

These challenges, along with the knowledge that some diverse communities experience higher-than-average rates of sexual violence, constitute a pressing need to strengthen our effective education and relationships with our new community members. In 2011, MECASA opened membership to non-traditional sexual assault support programs such as the Immigrant Resource Center of Maine, resulting in a more culturally and linguistically specific response to immigrants and refugees in Maine.

Factors that contribute to underreporting of sexual violence are exacerbated for immigrants and refugees.

Learn more

[Immigrant Resource Center of Maine](#)

The mission of Immigrant Resource Center Of Maine (formerly known as United Somali Women of Maine) is to support refugee and immigrant communities by offering culturally and linguistically sensitive services to promote a healthy and equitable Maine.

[Catholic Charities of Maine—Refugee and Immigrant Services](#)

Since 1975, Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigration Services has been the primary provider of resettlement services to refugees in Maine. Catholic Charities Maine resettles refugees of all races, religions and ethnicities.

[Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project \(ILAP\) Maine](#)

The Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP) provides free and low-cost immigration information and legal assistance to low-income Maine residents.

Learn more, continued

[Women's Refugee Commission](#)

The Women's Refugee Commission advocates vigorously for laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and young people, including those seeking asylum—bringing about lasting, measurable change.

[National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women](#)

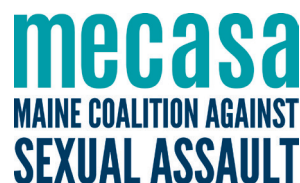
The National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women is a coalition of survivors, immigrant women, advocates, activists, attorneys, educators, and other professionals committed to ending violence against immigrant women.

[American Civil Liberties Union—Immigrant Rights](#)

Founded in 1987, the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project is dedicated to expanding and enforcing the civil liberties and civil rights of non-citizens and to combating public and private discrimination against immigrants. For more than twenty years, the IRP has been at the forefront of almost every major legal struggle on behalf of immigrants' rights through class action lawsuits, law reform litigation, judicial rulings and legal advocacy.

Sources

1 City of Lewiston General Assistance Estimates & City of Portland General Assistance Estimates, 2013.



Paul R. LePage, Governor Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner