

CRISIS AT THE BORDER

The arid Atacama Desert, which stretches for miles along northern Chile and southern Peru, where temperatures dip low at night and soar by day, has become the scene of a humanitarian crisis. Since mid April, 300 mostly Venezuelan, but also Haitian, Colombian and Ecuadoran, migrants and refugees, with backpacks, infants in strollers, and light bags, have been stranded along the sandy wayside of the highway that cuts through the desert. Chilean military are lined up behind them, Peruvian police ahead of them. They are not allowed to remain in Chile or to enter Peru.

Over the past four years, an estimated half a million immigrants, 30% of whom are Venezuelans, have found their way to Chile. Since the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010, thousands of Haitians have also made their way south, mainly to Chile and Brazil. In 2012, fewer than 2000 Haitians resided in Chile; by 2020, they numbered 182,000. The Haitian population has faced additional obstacles due to language barriers and prejudice. Earlier this year—in a climate of rising discrimination, xenophobia and political hostility—the government

deployed soldiers along Chile's northern border, prompting some immigrants residing in Chile to consider returning to their home countries rather than remain in limbo.

*Neighbor
is not a geographic
term. It is a moral
concept.*

– Rabbi Joachim Prinz

EPES EMERGENCY PROJECT: STRENGTHENING LOCAL ACTION AND SOLIDARITY FOR THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN NORTHERN CHILE

Since early 2022, with the support of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), EPES has undertaken efforts to support immigrant community advocates in the Asamblea de Migrantes y Pro-migrantes (AMPRO), an organization that aids immigrants in the northern cities of Iquique and Arica. EPES has provided AMPRO with emergency resources to strengthen their capacity to assist immigrants in general and immigrant women with children in particular. AMPRO addresses immigrants' basic needs, such as housing, food and clothing, but also access to public health services for sexual and reproductive health.

AMPRO is distributing items such as winter clothes, blankets, diapers, baby food, water and thermoses to the hundreds stranded along the desert corridor.

In addition, EPES has helped design and print educational materials on the rights of the migrant population to health services and how to access health care. We have also provided psychosocial support and self-care workshops for AMPRO members.

IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN CHILE: STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES FOR HEALTH

In 2019, EPES began to design programs to address barriers to health care for immigrant women, especially Haitians. The underlying goal is to promote the rights of immigrants to health care and to help build welcoming communities. EPES' human rights perspective aims to address language and cultural barriers, as well as gender inequities.

Since 2022, EPES has planned and delivered several workshops jointly with local municipal agencies. Women from Peru, Venezuela, Colombia and Haiti have come together in this space where they feel valued and protected, and where they receive training and information to empower them to exercise their rights in Chile.

The workshop, Women's Rights and Our Bodies, coordinated by EPES educator Sonia Covarrubias, used popular education methodologies to generate reflection on how women's bodies are represented. A special focus was on the ways the media represent racialized women, and how stereotypical images make us feel. El Bosque's Mayor Manuel Zúñiga Aguilar opened the workshop by thanking EPES for its work.

In a Self-care and Emotional Well-being workshop, women shared their migration experiences. They spoke about what it meant to leave their country of origin, what they left behind, how they came to Chile and how they feel today. In one ice-breaking exercise, the group created a collective human sculpture that represented the experience of leaving their countries and coming to Chile.

Another workshop, Our Bodies, Our Territories, addressed cultural beliefs related to menstruation and the possibilities women have to approach the menstrual cycle in a dignified way. The session debunked myths concerning menstruation, and its supportive environment enabled women to express their feelings about it. Alternative sanitary accessories, such as reusable period products, menstrual cups, compressed cloth and absorbent underwear were introduced.

These are just some of the examples of EPES' work with immigrant women. This work will persist, as long as immigration policy continues to spread negative perceptions that infringe on their rights and dignity.



MORE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS ACTIVITIES

- On November 28, a mural on the right to immigrate, carrying the slogan, "My skin color does not justify your racism," was painted across the street from the



EPES Santiago community center by immigrant Haitian women and the visual artist, Valeria Merino. The mural, along with workshops and public actions, was part of an EPES campaign to raise awareness and prompt reflection concerning the racism that exists in our society.

- Sonia Covarrubias, EPES Executive Director, traveled to Bogota, Colombia to participate in the regional conference, Towards Joint Action: Immigration and Displacement in Latin America and the Caribbean, held February 20–23, 2023. The forum was organized by ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together), an international interfaith organization that brings together more than 100 church-based emergency aid and development organizations (including EPES). Sonia presented EPES' work on immigrant health rights and our support for immigrant communities in Iquique, described above.



WOMEN SOW NEW PLOT TO GROW THEIR OWN VEGETABLES

▲ EPES promotes the right to healthy nutrition and food sovereignty, a concept that refers to the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. During the pandemic, the Gardeners’ Group was created to help women grow food in their own homes, and then expanded to plant community gardens. In January 2023 (at the height of the southern hemisphere summer), the group broke ground for a new vegetable plot outside the Los Almendros community center, the second community garden created in this district. The gardens are the work of EPES-trained health promoters who have worked in these communities for decades.



◀ More than 60 people gathered on Saturday, May 13 for the first district-wide gathering of community gardeners, in which participants shared how the gardens have changed their lives and their communities. The activity was organized by EPES and the food sovereignty network in El Bosque that EPES generated and has led for the past six years.

WORKING TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



▲ EPES Santiago and Concepción once again commemorated International Women’s Day with staff joining marches convened by the Chilean Network against Violence against Women.



▲ To commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, EPES staff and the Newen Domo action group installed a memorial to the 45 Chilean women whose deaths in 2022 were attributed to intimate partner violence (known as femicide).



◀ The EPES team in Santiago delivered a workshop to build capacity for the first response to victims of violence including tools for victim advocacy and community support for women, children and others who experience violence.



Participants from Argentina, Nicaragua, Colombia, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia and Chile converged in Santiago and Concepción January 15–25 for EPES’ twelfth *International Training Course on Popular Education for Health*. Since its inaugural session in 2010, the course, known as *La Escuela*, has trained 225 people from 29 countries of Latin America and Africa. For more information and photos on EPES’ international training see www.epes.cl.



On May 10, EPES held Self-care and Grief workshops simultaneously at our centers in Santiago and Concepción. The objective of the workshops was to recognize the stages of grief, share tools that help us understand the process, and assess individual and collective ways of dealing with loss. Participants were able to share their personal experiences in coping with loss in a supportive and respectful environment.



An international delegation of health advocates visited EPES in November to learn about our 40 years of working for justice, dignity and health. Members were from Kenya, Ghana, the United States, the United Kingdom, India, Peru, Colombia and Chile.



EPES was created in 1982 to promote health with dignity for the poor through empowerment, mobilization and collective action. It began as a program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) and maintains close ties nationally and internationally with the Lutheran church and is an ELCA Global Mission supported ministry. EPES became an independent, non-profit Chilean foundation in 2002.

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