

AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

February 2023

NETWORK NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the AMMPARO network newsletter, a compilation of updates covering strategy developments, in-country reporting, education, and advocacy on migration topics.

AMMPARO Team Highlights from Border Trip

From December 9–18, the ELCA AMMPARO team and Executive Committee traveled approximately 1000 miles along the southern border of the U.S. from El Paso, Texas to San Diego, California, together with more than 50 other pilgrims as part of the Journey for Justice, organized by a group called Witness at the Border.

Highlights of the journey included the opportunity to visit ELCA-affiliated migrant ministries in two border synods of the ELCA: **Cristo Rey Lutheran Church in El Paso, TX** where practically all of the church's physical space is used during weekdays to feed and house migrant families just released from immigration detention; the **Border Servant Corps in Las Cruces, NM** who operate a hospitality center for 200 migrants who have been released from immigration detention and need a brief waystation before traveling to their final destination in the US; and **La Casa de Misericordia in Nogales, Mexico**. This amazing shelter provides housing and holistic programming for 120 migrants on their way to the U.S. With only three paid staff and one volunteer, migrants are involved in day-to-day operations and have a voice in decision-making about the shelter.

Quitobaquito Springs



Near Ajo, AZ, a respected elder of the Hia-Ced O'odham tribal nation recounted the story of how Quitobaquito Springs, a sacred Hia-Ced O'odham oasis in Organ Pipe Cactus National Park, was almost destroyed by border wall construction. Today, tribal members and allies are working to undo the cultural and environmental damage that was done.

In Yuma, AZ, where an increasing number of migrants are coming to the border, we provided humanitarian assistance of water, food and blankets to new arrivals awaiting processing by Customs and Border Protection.

Participating in the March of Silence in San Isidro, CA, on International Migrants Day



In Tijuana, we were able to visit shelters that are supported by the **Haitian Bridge Alliance**. We saw evidence of how Haitians are doubly stigmatized as Black migrants in Mexico.

In San Diego, CA at Friendship Park, our group was joined by members of the Pacifica Synod. We split in two groups and participated in the March of Silence and Border Church, the latter which takes place on both sides of the border on a weekly basis. It was moving to see colleagues separated by a fence – 'We see you', we shouted, but couldn't touch each other. This journey was an important opportunity to learn more about conditions along our southern border and inspires us to work harder to safeguard protections for asylum-seekers.

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Updates from the Program Director

Thank you for your support of AMMPARO in 2022. We were able to achieve several of our goals of expanding the network and strengthening our work with the companions and congregations we partner with. Join us in celebrating these achievements!

Accompaniment

- The Guardian Angel Program in Atlanta, Georgia was restarted.
- Spiritual accompaniment of unaccompanied children in Chicago through a detention visitation program.
- Afghan family sponsorship under Operation Allies Welcome. One group was able to support 8 families!
- Meeting and assisting migrants who were bused from the border to New York City, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.
- Accompaniment of the community of Iglesia Luterana Santa Maria Peregrina in Lodi, CA.
- AMMPARO participation in a visit to the Darien Gap in November, to explore new ways to render humanitarian assistance to migrants passing through this dangerous region on the border of Colombia and Panama.
- Responses of Latin American/Caribbean companions to specific humanitarian challenges: EPES and AMPRO helped Venezuelan migrants in northern Chile, CASM responded to the needs of Cuban migrants at the Nicaragua-Honduras border, and the ILM supported migrant shelters in Mexico City and Ciudad Juarez.

Awareness-Raising

- Finalization and publication of the AMMPARO Advocacy Principles in English and Spanish.
- Publication of the Sanctuary Discernment Guide, which was then promoted with 1000 congregations in 32 synods.
- Teaching opportunities at “*Abriendo Caminos*,” a workshop held in Holden Village, Washington.
- Participation in several conferences and webinars hosted by Church World Service and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS).
- Significant growth in our social media presence, especially on Facebook.
- Work in progress on a new open-source map for volunteer opportunities in migrant justice.
- Participation in the Journey for Justice, a pilgrimage along the southern border organized by Witness at the Border.

Network Expansion

- Connection with Project Amal to explore improved awareness-raising and trauma care of refugee children.
- Enhanced partnership with **Seafarer’s International** in New York.
- The first in-person AMMPARO network gathering, which took place on August 25-27 at the ELCA Service & Justice Becoming Conference.
- Continued expansion of the U.S. network – AMMPARO is now made up of 218 congregations, with activity in 58 synods and 36 synod task forces.
- In 2023, we hope to make connections within the remaining 7 synods!

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FROM THE DESK OF THE REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

Luther Seminarians visit AMMPARO companions in Guatemala & Mexico

A January-term group of seminarians from Luther Seminary is the first ELCA group to visit the region since the end of 2019 when international travel was totally shut down by COVID restrictions. I was able to accompany them from January 10-18.

One of the stated goals of their J-term experience was to learn more about the work of the churches and civil society organizations who are part of the AMMPARO network. At the outset of the trip, together with the staff of our companion Pop No'j, they participated in a Mayan ceremony led by a Mayan spiritual guide, an annual practice of Pop No'j staff to ground the planning of every new work year in their Mayan spiritual roots. From Guatemala City, the Luther group traveled north into the Peten to visit faith communities of the *Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala* – *ILAG* that are in indigenous villages (ILAG is ELCA's companion church in Guatemala). Crossing into southern Mexico, the group then spent two intense days of visits and meetings with churches and other organizations who are working directly with the enormous population of in-transit migrants stuck in Tapachula. The Luther visit coincided with the chaotic days just after the Biden Administration's Jan. 5 announcement on new U.S. policies for Cuban, Haitian and Nicaraguan migrants trying to reach the U.S. along its southern border.

Scheduling An Immersion Experience

The Luther Seminary visit serves as a timely reminder that similar immersion experiences can be organized for members of the U.S. AMMPARO network and other ELCA folks who would like to learn more about the migrant ministries of our AMMPARO companions "south of the border."

Post-Pandemic Realities in Honduras & El Salvador

Since my previous visits to Honduras and El Salvador in 2019, there have been significant changes. My first post-pandemic visits took place between November 20-30.

- *Comision de Accion Social Menonita (CASM):* Their work with returned Honduran migrants has expanded beyond CASM's established base of operations in San Pedro Sula to the department of Yoro further west as the geographic origins of migrants have shifted to Honduras's rural regions.

CASM staff have returned to the site of a government-run repatriation facility for deported migrant children. When the first AMMPARO delegation visited this center in 2015, it was a rundown facility with limited staff, and a woefully inadequate budget. The center was reopened and rebranded after remodeling. Abruptly, however, the administration of former-president Juan Orlando Hernandez denied access to the staff of CASM and other non-governmental organizations. Things have changed since President Xiomara Castro took office in 2022, and a more positive working relationship has been reestablished between the government agencies who run the center, and the staff of civil society organizations like CASM who provide key complementary services for migrant children.

- *LWF Honduras:* Through their RED+ project, LWF continues to accompany deported migrants in primarily rural communities in eastern Honduras with integrated case management and a continuum of return and reintegration services. Together with CASM, they are faced with a new post-pandemic challenge: how to respond to the successive flows of Venezuelans, Cubans, Nicaraguans, and migrants of other nationalities who are making their way north through Central America and Mexico. Honduras is no longer strictly a country of origin and return, but also an in-transit country.

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- *ILS Pastoral del Migrante en El Salvador*: The tough-on-crime measures of the administration of President Nayib Bukele on suspected gang members from poor communities (since March 2022) has resulted in the indiscriminate apprehension of regular citizens, including children and youth, with no legal recourse to challenge the systematic violation of their human and civil rights. This has propelled many to leave El Salvador out of fear.

Así es el Tapón del Darién

Top leadership of the *Iglesia Ev. Luterana de Colombia - IELCO* (including Bishop Atahualpa Hernandez and IELCO's migrant ministry coordinator) plus AMMPARO's regional representative participated in an ecumenical mission to the Darien Gap from Nov. 7-12. Local pastors and lay leaders of the Colombian Presbyterian Church also participated in this mission, together with a representative of the Latin America office of Jesuit Refugee Services.

Most of our time was spent with staff and volunteers of faith-based organizations in the coastal community of Necocli which is the final stop for in-transit migrants as they leave Colombia and embark on the treacherous journey to Panama via the Darien Gap. We visited Necocli after the Biden Administration's Oct. 12 announcement that it would begin expelling Venezuelan migrants from the U.S. under Title 42, while at the same time creating a new limited legal pathway for Venezuelan migrants.

Precisely because of the abrupt shift in U.S. policy, the population of Venezuelan migrants that we encountered in Necocli had sharply declined. Migrants with whom we spoke to included families who had suspended their journey north because of the U.S. crackdown on irregular Venezuelan migration. They couldn't turn around and go back because of the life-threatening situations they fled in Venezuela. When asked about the reception they were receiving from the local population (including local churches), the response of one migrant was a verse from Matthew 24:12: "*Y por haberse multiplicado la maldad, el amor de muchos se enfriará*" (English: "Evil will spread and cause many people to stop loving others"). Those words remained with us for the remainder of the ecumenical mission.

Reflections On My Journey for Justice (J4J) Pilgrimage

This was my first trip to Mexico's northern border and my first opportunity to learn first-hand about the work of our AMMPARO companions along the U.S.-Mexico border in this role. What struck me was the model of integrated case management that is being employed, quite similar to the reintegration model used by our AMMPARO companions in Central America (with returned migrants) and the integration model used by our AMMPARO companions in South America to assist arriving migrants from Venezuela, Haiti and elsewhere in places like Colombia, Peru and Chile.

In stark contrast to Mexico and Central America, the Venezuelan diaspora in the U.S. is much smaller. Two months had passed so we were able to observe the direct impact of the U.S.' new policies for Venezuelans.

On the Colombian side of the Darien Gap, I had already encountered Venezuelan families who had decided not to continue their journey north for the same reason – the lack of a financial sponsor in the U.S. The level of desperation and frustration expressed by young Venezuelan migrants gazing across the Rio Bravo from Ciudad Juarez, less than 100 yards away from a provisional CBP processing station in El Paso, were some of the most pain-filled stories I heard during the entire J4J experience. These Venezuelan migrants were well-informed, knowing they couldn't be part of the 24,000 Venezuelans for whom a special legal pathway into the U.S. had been opened. Their other options were to remain in Mexico or begin the journey back the way they had come, neither of which was their intended destination when they began the migrant journey weeks, sometimes months earlier.

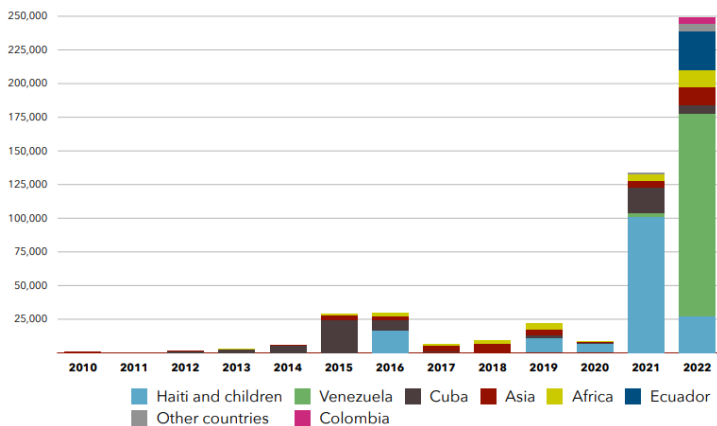
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Migration Through Panama's Darién Gap

2022: Venezuela 60%, Ecuador 12%, Haiti 11%, Asia 5.5%, Africa 4.9%, Cuba 2.4%, Other countries 2.1%, Colombia 2.0%
2021: Haiti and children 76%, Cuba 14%, Africa 4%, Asia 3%, Venezuela 2%, All others <1%



Source: Panamá Migración - <https://bit.ly/3LyECwH>

They are now part of the growing population of “migrants in limbo” whose numbers will likely grow as migrants from Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua encounter the same obstacles to legal entry into the U.S. under the new policy announced by the Biden Administration on Jan. 5.

This graph shows statistics of migrants processed through the Darién Gap, showing how the relatively small but deadly stretch has become a migrant corridor for people from across the world.

What's New from the Program Director for Migration Policy

Climate disaster, continuous social and political destabilization in the Americas and across the world, and economic outlook (because of rising [cost-of-living](#)) foreshadows deepening human insecurity and forced displacement in early 2023 and well into the year. These collective societal challenges have yet to make their way to public discourse in a nuanced way—invasion rhetoric and conspiratorial thinking around immigrants and refugees is unfortunately becoming more mainstream in the United States. Unfortunately, it appears that negative attitudes correlate with conservative media viewership. Around 90% of conservative media consumers hold negative attitudes towards immigrants according to a survey conducted by [PRRI](#). On the other hand, in the same survey, it was found that most Americans held on to beliefs about providing refuge and meeting labor demands through immigration, and solidly rejected claims that immigrants are a burden on society, increase crime, or take jobs. These perspectives highlight the importance of developing good practices to vet information, and of being weary of appeals rooted in hostility and xenophobia.

While it's difficult to imagine what the new year will bring in legislative advocacy, I look forward to the reintroduction of bills like the Dream and Promise Act, the Afghan Adjustment Act, and meaningful engagement from lawmakers to overcome the congressional impasse on immigration reform. When the benchmark of success regarding immigration is determined by how many people are kept out, as opposed to how many are given the opportunity to migrate safely, you know some things need to change. Our work will continue to prioritize protecting the rights and dignity of migrants. I have optimistic expectations for the year after journeying to the border as part of the Journey for Justice and witnessing communities overcoming immense humanitarian and public challenges together.

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The end of the year **federal appropriations process** was suspensefully capped off with Congress passing a \$1.7 trillion spending bill. The massive spending bill contains \$85 billion in supplemental funding for Ukraine and disaster recovery, in addition to several unrelated policy riders. Sadly, months-long efforts led by the advocate community to include immigration bills were thwarted. Therefore, the **Afghan Adjustment Act** and **permanent protection for Dreamers** were not included, which means advocates will have to push ahead in a divided Congress. At the last hour, an anti-immigrant amendment to extend Title 42 offered by Senator Lee (R-UT) was defeated (47-50) when Senators were given a chance to vote on a side-by-side amendment that also failed (10-87). Here's a simple recap of FY23 federal approps:

Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS);
Executive Office for Immigration Review FY23

- \$29 million for Legal Orientation Program

Homeland Security FY23

- \$800 million for a new Shelter & Services Grant Program (for state and local governments and NGOs providing humanitarian assistance to migrants encountered by DHS, previously a subset of FEMA's Food and Shelter Program)
- \$20 million for Alternatives to Detention Case Management
- \$10 million to the Civil Liberties Division of the Office of Diversity and Civil Rights for improving legal access in detention
- \$133 million investment for refugee processing at USCIS
- Continues Family Separation & Reunification Taskforce directives
- FY22 levels of detention funding (34,000 detention beds); seemingly no family detention funding
- 1.95% overall increase to ICE
- 12.44% overall increase to CBP

The FY23 omnibus can be found [here](#).

Congress has encouragingly appropriated funding for many resources and community initiatives that will hopefully improve how migrants are treated. Yet it has maintained a reliance on custodial detention, all the while foregoing this opportunity to make systemic changes to the immigration system, choosing instead to kick the can down the road on Dreamers, Afghan newcomers, massive backlogs, and wait-times.

"I have hope, and I do know that a lot of people are praying—they've assured me of their prayers—that the Holy Spirit would inspire the heart of our leaders, especially President Biden, but others as well, to take into account the humanity of those people who are seeking refuge in our country,"

-- Bishop Mark Seitz

(Source: [Inside President Biden's car ride along the border with Bishop Seitz](#))

On January 8, **President Biden visited the border** at El Paso, Texas. The president was joined by several other national and state officials for a brief tour which included a visit to the border wall, a local humanitarian aid organization, and a conversation with Bishop Mark Seitz, a fellow Catholic. El Paso was chosen because of the high incidence of crossings. According to CBP statistics, El Paso is one of the busiest sectors along the southern border, and in Dec 2022, there were [51,477](#) encounters of migrants, or approximately a quarter of all border encounters. In El Paso, most encounters are of Nicaraguans, after Venezuelan encounters steeply fell off after the announcement of the [Venezuela parole process](#) in October. It's not clear that the President visited with migrants. In fact, it's [believed](#) CBP began forcibly clearing up tents in the vicinity of Sacred Heart Catholic Church where many have taken up shelter, intimidating migrants.

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On January 5, President Biden delivered rare public remarks, personally announcing **new border and enforcement measures** that have been widely dubbed a “carrots and sticks” approach. It’s a lengthy speech doubling down on Title 42, meagerly offering 30,000 spots for people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela on a narrow path to the U.S. through the parole process while simultaneously touting an agreement with Mexico to accept 30,000 returns of these nationalities apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border.

As a sovereign nation, Mexico has a strict rubric of who it accepts to be returned to Mexico, routinely accepting Title 42 returns of migrants hailing from Central America and Haiti (and as of October, Venezuela), but with the new agreement, now migrants from Cuba and Nicaragua will also be returned to Mexico.

...

The Biden Administration was busy in the final weeks of 2022 preparing for 2023, announcing a **new USCIS fee schedule** in the form of a proposed rule ([public comments are due March 6](#)), [streamlining](#) consideration of **Deferred Action for exploited immigrant workers** who expose labor violations, and discussing regional migration with Mexico and Canada at the **10th North American Leader’s Summit** ([NALS](#)).

Title 42 was expected to end by December 21, 2022 after Judge Sullivan of the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C. ruled so, but after a commotion in the courts, the U.S. Supreme Court will now consider whether states can intervene to extend Title 42, meaning that in the meantime, Title 42 will continue. In short, 19 states filed an emergency motion to suspend Judge Sullivan’s termination of Title 42 with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, a motion that was denied. This ruling was then appealed to the Supreme Court, which on December 27, [agreed](#) to debate the merits of permitting states to *intervene*. This doesn’t mean SCOTUS will rule directly on Title 42.

This is a lot to follow! Recent legal developments have been compiled into a [litigation tracker](#) by the Justice Action Center.

What Do the New Border & Enforcement Measures Do?

- Establishes a new parole process for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans – effective Jan 6 and found [here](#)
- Steers migrants to request appointments at ports of entry thru CBP One, an app – effective Jan 12 with fact sheets for CBP One™ available in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Haitian Creole](#), [Portuguese](#), and [Russian](#).
- Provides notice of intent to issue a proposed rule that may cause migrants who cross without authorization or who do not seek protection in a country they transited through to be presumptively ineligible for asylum. This part is sometimes referred to as an asylum transit ban.

Defending Asylum Protections

The **ELCA** joined 160+ other faith-based organizations in a [letter](#) urging the administration to withdraw the asylum transit ban Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, said: “Draconian restrictions to limit the legal right to seek asylum are a short-term deterrent, but robust legal pathways will ultimately ease strain on the asylum system well into the future.”

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U.S. Policy Spotlight: Berks Detention Center Closes for Good



Seven miles outside of Leesport, Pennsylvania, lies the Berks County Residential Center. It is owned and operated by the county, but until very recently was leased to ICE. For 20 years, it was used as a detention center for immigrant families. The inhumane conditions, systemic abuse, and other atrocities perpetuated at Berks were brought into the national spotlight in 2015, when a staff member was convicted of sexually assaulting “Maria,” a young mother from Honduras. That same year, local activists, faith communities, and former detainees formed the Shut Down Berks Coalition.

Now, thanks to the tireless advocacy of the Shut Down Berks Coalition and the efforts of many formerly detained individuals, the federal government has finally announced that it will be terminating its contract with Berks County at the end of January 2023. As of January 10, all immigrants previously held at Berks have been released and it is anticipated that the facility will remain empty until its permanent closure on January 31. “...this really shows that when we keep pressure on our targets, and when we organize, we can have big victories,” said Adrianna Torres-García, deputy director of the Free Migration Project and a member of the coalition. The Shut Down Berks Coalition now looks to the future. The coalition advocates for the closure of the two other ICE facilities in Pennsylvania and the end of immigration detention in the United States.

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Resources

New Tool: Mapping volunteer opportunities

Please fill out this [Google form](#) with information about any opportunities for engaging in the work of migrant and refugee justice in your community. Early in January 2023, we began collecting submissions for an [open-source map](#) of organizations that provide volunteer opportunities for engagement with migrants in the U.S. We need your help to expand the map and make it better! Please reach out to corinne.hughes@elca.org with any questions or comments!

International Migrant Day Toolkit

For December 18, UN International Migrants Day, the AMMPARO network of companions and partners in Mexico, Central America, and the U.S. promoted a new joint-statement and toolkit, including recordings of performances, videos, book studies, and more. The resource, which is in Spanish, is found [here](#).

Explore Asylum seeker sponsorship

Your congregation may be interested in asylum-seeker sponsorship. This is a crucial effort that involves the whole community coming together to support, encourage, and walk alongside their newest neighbors. A toolkit to help your congregation prepare is available from Episcopal Migration Ministries [here](#). As always, please reach out if you have questions!

How To Be a Legislative Advocate with Farmworkers

Are you interested in learning more about how to be in solidarity with migrant farmworkers by advocating for legislation that improves working and living conditions? You can sign up [here](#) to receive the latest webinar training from the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM). The ELCA is a proud member of the NFWM board.

Migration Policy Action Alerts

Don't Finish Donald Trump's Border Wall

The United States Border Patrol is preparing to construct two 30-foot border walls across the face of Friendship Park, the historic binational meeting place at the western-most end of the US-Mexico border just south of San Diego. Tell President Biden not to continue down this path by signing this petition from Friends of Friendship Park. ([Link to a third-party site](#))

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