

AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

ELCA AMMPARO Quarterly Report

February 2025

AMMPARO Global

By Mary Campbell, Director, ELCA AMMPARO

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO) in Serbia, now a part of AMMPARO Global will provide funding over a three year period to support the accompaniment of refugee women and children in 2 state-run reception centers (RC) with activities aimed at developing individual capacities that help the women and unaccompanied children develop their own individual potentials during the time that they are in the reception centers. This really important work in Serbia which began through the Europe desk with World Hunger funds is now a part of AMMPARO. They recently completed two inspirational pieces that highlight their work. The virtual photo exhibition, finalized in the early December 2024 and the video production, finalized in the end of December 2024 and posted on YouTube in January 2025 are found in the following links:

- Virtual photo exhibition ([Link](#))
- Video ([Link](#))

Please take the time to check them out.



A Message of Appreciation

I just want to express my appreciation for your work!

You know what a critical place we are in as we accompany vulnerable migrants and many others who find themselves either here in the US or on the way!

Without your commitment and ministry, the levels of fear and panic in our communities would be even higher! Without your support of AMMPARO, the important international and domestic work, that AMMPARO supports, would not happen!

Mary Campbell,
Director, ELCA AMMPARO

AMMPARO in the Americas:

By Stephen Deal, AMMPARO Regional Representative

Since Nov. 5, the overriding concern of our AMMPARO companions has been the clearly anti-immigrant narrative of president-elect Trump, which was central to his 2024 election campaign and intensified even more during the transition period (between Election Day and the Jan. 20 inauguration) and, more recently, during the first two weeks of Pres. Trump's second term.

December Webinars on US Elections for AMMPARO Companions

Once the official results of the U.S. presidential and congressional elections were known, key leaders of our AMMPARO companions in Latin America began inquiring about what to expect in terms of U.S. migration policy, not only with Pres. Trump back in the White House, but also from a new Congress with both chambers controlled by the same party. In response to such a high level of interest and concern, AMMPARO offered two webinar opportunities (in Spanish) for our companions in the Americas – on Dec. 5 and Dec. 9 – to share the most reliable information available at that moment about the dramatic changes taking place in the U.S. political landscape. All our AMMPARO companions, from Mexico to Chile, participated in the webinars. During each 90-minute session, they received advance warning on many of the migration policy changes that would be formally announced on/after Jan. 20. Equally important, they also began exchanging ideas on possible responses to the humanitarian crisis that existed in Latin America prior to Jan. 20 and that will be worsened by the policy changes of the Executive Orders signed by Pres. Trump thus far.

J-Term Seminary Delegation to GUA-MEX Border in January

During the second week of January (just before the Jan. 20 inauguration), I accompanied a J-term group from Luther Seminary (a total of 12 people) for 3 days on both sides of the border between Guatemala and Mexico. This segment of their trip itinerary was organized to help them understand the socio-political and economic causes of migration and the ways in which churches, migrant rights groups and governmental organizations are responding to what has become a permanent social reality in Central America and Mexico. Program arrangements were made thanks to ELCA's close relationships with our AMMPARO companions in Mexico, including the local staff of civil society organizations who I had the privilege of meeting during a visit to the same area in 2023.

Before reaching the border, the J-term group visited two indigenous villages in northern Guatemala where the Augustinian Lutheran Church (ILAG) has established

congregations. There, group members heard the first-hand accounts of church members about their daily life and the reasons why so many villagers – including church members – have made the difficult decision to emigrate. Before leaving Guatemala, we visited a shelter for in-transit migrants on the Guatemalan side of the border. Once in Mexico, we met with the legal director of a non-profit organization that accompanies migrants who have fled life-threatening situations in their home country and are applying for asylum in Mexico, and then with the director of a local office of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR). After their 3 days in southern Mexico, the J-term group continued to Mexico City where they visited a second migrant shelter which works closely with the migration ministry team of the Mexican Lutheran Church (ILM).



Praying with a group of migrant guests at the close of the J-term group's visit to the migrant shelter at the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Beyond all that Luther seminarians learned about regional migration from our ELCA companions in Guatemala and Mexico, the opportunity to accompany them presented a golden opportunity to reconnect with my network of key AMMPARO contacts – contacts that will facilitate future immersion experiences for synodical and congregational leaders interested in learning more about the vital work of ELCA's AMMPARO companions in places like Guatemala and Mexico.

Impact of Executive Orders (EOs) on Migrants Served by Our AMMPARO Companions

Since Jan. 20, the electoral rhetoric around mass detentions and deportations is becoming reality at an accelerated pace, not only in the U.S. but also in countries south of the border where our AMMPARO companions are preparing as best they can for a major increase in the number of deported migrants needing return and reintegration assistance. According to figures published in early February by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), the top four countries of origin for unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. are Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – the same four countries where ELCA's AMMPARO network began in 2016.

	2010		2023	
	Number	Share of Overall Unauthorized Immigrant Population	Number	Share of Overall Unauthorized Immigrant Population
Total	10,521,000	100%	13,738,000	100%
Mexico	6,564,000	62%	5,530,000	40%
Guatemala	506,000	5%	1,402,000	10%
Honduras	338,000	3%	1,098,000	8%
El Salvador	592,000	6%	1,078,000	8%
Venezuela	37,000	0%	486,000	4%
Colombia	116,000	1%	351,000	3%
Philippines	189,000	2%	294,000	2%
Brazil	137,000	1%	286,000	2%
Ecuador	179,000	2%	225,000	2%
India	228,000	2%	199,000	1%

Some of the fiercest anti-immigrant hardliners in the Trump Administration have conceded that U.S. immigration enforcement agencies lack the necessary resources to quickly locate and deport the estimated 9.1 million immigrants from these 4 countries. In Nov. 2024, ICE estimated that only about 10% of that total would be “susceptible” to rapid deportation – referring to undocumented immigrants with final orders of removal and virtually no remaining appeal options in immigration court. Even if the number of immediate deportations was closer to the lower number, that would far exceed the existing capacity of each country to receive and repatriate tens of thousands of men, women and children. To date, only Mexican president Claudia Sheinbaum has announced a special initiative – “*Mexico Te Abraza*” (Mexico Embraces You) – under which her government will establish emergency reception centers at key border crossings for Mexican nationals who are sent back and need immediate assistance upon their arrival in Mexico. One of the key reasons that immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador are considered “easier to deport” is because each country has diplomatic relations with the U.S. and a repatriation agreement which obligates them to accept deportation flights from the U.S. For decades, the highest number of deportees have been from Mexico and Central America. During the 4 years of the Biden Administration, 63% of internal deportees were from Mexico and 24 % from Central America.

In contrast, ICE maintains a list of “recalcitrant countries” in Latin America (Cuba and Venezuela), and beyond, who are not on good diplomatic terms with the U.S. and only willing to accept a limited number of returnees via deportations flights; in some cases, none at all. To get

around these obstacles, the Trump Administration is pressuring friendlier nations to accept migrants of other nationalities on deportation flights that otherwise would include only deportees from a single country. Apparently, Sec. of State Marco Rubio has made significant progress on this point with Panama and El Salvador, the first two countries visited during his current diplomatic swing through the region which will also include Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic.

Alongside the rightful attention that is being given to the content and implementation of immigration-related EOs in the U.S., it is equally important to pay close attention to the responses of other Latin American nations who are being subjected to diplomatic pressures during the first month of the Trump Administration. Clearly, the central aim of this U.S. policy push is massive deportation, regardless of whether deportees can be transported back to their country of origin on deportation flights that originate in the U.S. If not, the U.S. will continue to lean on other countries in the Americas to receive migrants from these “recalcitrant countries” and leave it to them to deal with the problem as best they can.

Amid such an adverse political environment and with limited resources, ELCA’s companion churches and ecumenical partners who have joined together in the AMMPARO network are entering a new phase of the response to this humanitarian crisis and doing so as they always have – with deep compassion and utmost respect for the human dignity of vulnerable families and individuals in situations of human mobility.

Migration Advocacy

By Giovana Oaxaca, Program Director of Migration Policy

Understanding Policy Changes

Well over 10 of the current administration's executive orders (EOs) are directly related to revoking the previous administration's immigration imperatives or setting new policies and directives. As these executive orders take effect, some are immediately effective, while others are already sparking significant legal battles.

Immigration Enforcement: The EO "Protecting the American People Against Invasion" expands expedited removal nationwide, effective as of Jan. 21. Expedited removal is an expedited deportation process without, generally, a chance to go before a judge. It mainly applies to more recent newcomers suspected of being undocumented. The order also instructs DHS to establish new enforcement priorities specifying that the agency should make enforcement of civil immigration violations a main priority (Sec.4) along with prosecuting criminal immigration offenses. The order calls for a voluntary registry of undocumented immigrants, under civil and criminal penalties, and for fines and penalties for to be levied against people who are undocumented or others who facilitate the presence of someone who is undocumented. It also directs the collaboration with local law enforcement beyond their current public safety mission for investigation, apprehension, or detention of immigrants (Sec.11). In recent days, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has also revoked the protected areas memo, which restricted ICE activity in places like churches, hospitals, and schools.

Impact: Together, these directives have instilled great fear of raids in communities. This has prompted organizations and places of worship to disseminate Know Your Rights information. But a growing issue is [misinformation](#) fueling panic about potential raids that haven't occurred creating confusion about real ICE activities. Currently, ICE activity has ramped up and detention facilities are at [109%](#) capacity. Due to physical constraints and capacity, ICE has exercised the same discretion that every previous administration has used to [initiate releases](#).

Cancelling Temporary Status: Executive orders have also threatened various temporary protection programs. Several parole programs have been paused pending review following the [Securing the Border](#) executive order. Affected parole programs include those for [Ukrainians](#), [Cubans](#), [Haitians](#), [Nicaraguans](#), [and Venezuelans](#), and [Central American minors](#). A recent extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for [Venezuelans](#)* (*TPS designation for Venezuela, announced on Oct. 3, 2023) was also cancelled.

Impact: The decision to cancel the TPS extension for Venezuelans puts [600,000](#) at greater risk of deportation. The cancellation also affects work authorization. Welcome.US reported that over [2 million](#) Americans have volunteered to serve as sponsors under these humanitarian parole programs, showing its wide appeal. It is low-cost to taxpayers and has significant community support.

Southern Border: The executive order, Securing Our Borders, seeks to establish complete operation control by effectively eliminating access to asylum, making Remain in Mexico the only alternative, suspending the CBP One App, and ending the CHNV humanitarian parole program. The executive order, Declaring a National Emergency orders the deployment of the military—including personnel and budgetary resources—at the border and to execute mass deportations. The executive order Guaranteeing the States Protection Against Invasion makes an assertion that an "invasion is ongoing at the southern border" which require specific actions to take. One of these ways is effectively banning asylum at the southern border. It goes further than past public health predicated bans (i.e. Title 42), limiting humanitarian protection from those engaged in "invasion"—making no exceptions even for unaccompanied children.

Impact: Border crossings have been at their [lowest levels](#) since the mid-2020s. This order compounds the risk of use of force against migrants. Many vulnerable people will be put further at risk in Remain in Mexico without access to asylum.

Redefining U.S. Citizenship: The executive order, Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship, attempts to deny U.S. citizenship to children born to parents who are undocumented or who hold temporary status—including temporary visa status. This rule would go into effect on Feb. 19 (30-days from the date of the order) however it has been blocked.

Impact: This order has faced a litany of legal challenges. This order opens the door for children to become vulnerable and possibly stateless. On Jan. 23, Judge John Coughenour of the Western District of Washington [issued a temporary restraining order](#) against the executive order in [State of Washington et al v. Donald J. Trump et al](#). On Feb 5., a second judge, Judge Deborah Boardman [ordered](#) a nationwide preliminary injunction blocking the birthright citizenship executive order in [Casa v. Donald Trump](#). "Citizenship is a most precious right, expressly granted by the 14th Amendment to the Constitution," Judge Boardman said.

Congress meanwhile has passed legislation of significant concern. In January, Congress passed the Laken Riley Act, which was signed into law by President Trump on Jan. 29. In the coming weeks, Congress is slated to consider the No Bailout for Sanctuary Cities Act ([H.R.32](#)), which would strip “sanctuary jurisdictions” of all federal funding, including for roads, public safety, and more. In the coming weeks, lawmakers also aim to introduce a budget resolution. This process sets up budget reconciliation, a budget process that allows lawmakers to make tax, spending, and debt limit changes. Immigration, Energy, and Defense, are rumored to be high priorities.

What is the Laken Riley Act?

The Laken Riley Act expands “mandatory detention”—detention without a bond hearing—to apply to certain offenses, *even if the person accused was never charged or convicted*. Specifically,

- **Section 2:** Expands “mandatory detention” to apply to undocumented people who are charged with, arrested for, or convicted of burglary, theft, larceny or shoplifting related offenses. There is no statute of limitations.
- **Section 3:** Allows state attorneys general to sue the Secretary of Homeland Security for alleged violations of this act, including specific detention and parole decisions, and for not stopping visas for nationals from countries that refuse to accept deported individuals from the United States.

Impact: This bill is counterproductive as it diverts federal resources, and it fails to ensure that due process is guaranteed by removing access to an individualized bond and bail hearing, even for people who were never convicted of certain offenses. It will likely lead to tens of thousands in prolonged detention at great moral cost and taxpayer expense. According to ICE, [\\$26 billion](#) would be required to meet the provisions of the Laken Riley Act, federal funds that would be absent to address the needs of everyday Americans.

Witness in Society Welcomes MDCC Colleagues!

On Jan. 30, the Witness in Society team welcomed ELCA Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities for a day of action and group strategic planning. The visit began with DC staff training guests on legislative advocacy, followed with visits to the Hill. The event brought together ministry staff to give voice to issues of concern to ELCA communities. Topics included immigration, housing, Israel-Palestine, the Truth and Healing Commission, and more.



Witness in Society and MDCC staff in Washington, DC office

In order to navigate the recent changes in immigration policies, ELCA AMMPARO and Episcopal Migration Ministries co-sponsored a webinar on January 17th, that offered information on the US immigration system, “Know Your Rights” information, and practical suggestions for ministry leaders. The presenters were lawyers from the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA).



Webinar
Walking With:
Migrant Accompaniment
for Ministry Leaders in 2025
and Beyond



WEBINAR

March 3rd, 2025
2:00pm Central



Walking With (Part II):
Migrant Accompaniment
for Ministry Leaders in 2025
after the Executive Orders



On March 3rd at 2:00 pm CT, ELCA AMMPARO will be hosting a follow-up webinar that will offer some basics on the US immigration system with a focus on the recent executive orders that impact the lives of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Looking forward to your participation.

Sembrando en los Márgenes: A Multi-Synod Effort to Support Migrant Ministries

By Raed Aburies, Program Manager, AMMPARO US Network,
Education and Communications

“**Sembrando en los Márgenes**” (Sowing in the Margins) is a groundbreaking multi-synod initiative designed to strengthen migrant ministries across the U.S.-Mexico border. Funded by a Holy Innovation grant and additional synod contributions, this collaborative effort brings together leaders and volunteers from six ELCA synods, AMMPARO, and local organizations in Eagle Pass, Texas, and Tijuana, Mexico. The project aims to build resilience, enhance collaboration, and secure funding to sustain and expand migrant ministries.



Fellowship at one of the shelters in Tijuana

One of the core goals of this initiative is to create a robust network connecting leaders of migrant ministries with synod staff. Through relationship-building and shared learning, ministry leaders can strengthen their efforts in accompanying migrants effectively. The project includes direct engagement with migrants, educational exchanges among synods, and fostering partnerships that ensure long-term support for border ministries. The initiative prioritizes supporting Frontera Ministries and Iglesia Luterana San Lucas in Eagle Pass, TX strengthening their capacity to accompany migrants arriving at the U.S. border.



Crossing the border into Mexico

By fostering collaboration among synods and grassroots ministries, “Sembrando en los Márgenes” aims to:

- Expand or establish new migrant ministries through seed funding.
- Strengthen leadership within existing ministries, particularly in Eagle Pass, TX.
- Develop immersion experiences to educate more people about border communities and migration realities.
- Advocate for sustained financial support from synods and congregations.

On February 5th, I participated on behalf of AMMPARO in the first educational exchange experience in San Diego and Tijuana. The event was hosted by St Mark’s Lutheran Church in Chula Vista, CA from the Pacifica Synod and had participants from the Southwestern Texas Synod, Rocky Mountain Synod, Grand Canyon Synod, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, Pacifica Synod, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod in addition to the leaders of Iglesia Luterana San Lucas and Frontera Ministries in Eagle Pass, TX. Each synod, in addition to AMMPARO, gave a presentation about their work and challenges in migrant ministry. There was a focus on building relationships by conversation, breaking bread, and worshiping together and learning about the specific context of San Diego and Tijuana.



The experience included crossing the border to Tijuana, Mexico and visiting relevant ministries and initiatives.

The group visited:

- **Shelter for migrant women and children in Tijuana:** This ministry is led by the Episcopal Church with support from a number of partners including the ELCA Pacifica Synod, the local Anglican Church, Via International and others. The initiative goes beyond offering a safe place to stay; it plans on providing job training and educational opportunities for migrant families, particularly those from indigenous communities. The shelter should be ready in 2 weeks and could accommodate at least 100 migrants and refugees.



- **Casa de Luz:** A collective house that is open to LBGTQ+ refugees. The goal of this shelter is to help create a safe place for those awaiting asylum, in addition to providing clothes, food, health services and community support. The three-story building has 20 rooms and houses more than 50 refugees at a time.
- **Friendship Park:** A historic gathering place at the westernmost edge of the United States-Mexico border where San Diego meets Tijuana. In the past, this park allowed families separated by immigration policies to meet and connect. But the recent changes to the border wall have made that impossible. As someone that has experienced the separation wall in Palestine, I could not help but feel the eerie similarity between the two walls, especially the emotional impact they leave of injustice and cruelty.



The border wall at Friendship Park



Border Immersion Opportunity

AMMPARO is planning a border immersion experience in May to visit the US-Mexican border area around El Paso, TX and Las Cruces, NM. The immersion trip aims at receiving first-hand educational experiences about border issues. Participants will be exposed to a spectrum of views about immigration and the borderlands by speaking with first-generation immigrants, visiting local organizations working with immigrant populations and meeting with government officials to learn about border protection & law enforcement.

The trip is planned for May 7th – 9th and more details will be provided soon. Because of the limited number of participants that can join the trip, reservations will be made on a first-come, first-served basis.

For signing up or for more information, please contact Raed AbuJries at:

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