

## 15TH EPES INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF POPULAR EDUCATION IN HEALTH STRENGTHENS REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

From January 18–26, 2026, Fundación EPES successfully implemented the 15th International School of Popular Education and Participatory and Community Strategies in Health (known as the Escuela) in Santiago, Chile. This flagship program continues to serve as a strategic platform for building capacity, fostering regional collaboration, and advancing the right to health across Latin America and the Caribbean.



Since its inception in 2010, the Escuela has trained 285 participants from 30 countries across three continents, contributing to a growing global network of community leaders, practitioners, and advocates committed to social justice and health equity. In 2026, 20 participants from 8 countries—Puerto Rico, Haiti, Costa Rica, Honduras, Argentina, Guatemala, Chile, and the United States—completed an intensive, practice-based training process.

The curriculum combined theoretical frameworks with hands-on methodologies, including participatory assessments, field immersion, and direct engagement with grassroots organizations. A key component of this year's program was a regional forum on water justice, highlighting the impact of extractive industries on community health, and strengthening participants' capacity for advocacy and collective action.

Participants also carried out three days of action in the district of El Bosque, collaborating with local organizations to co-develop and implement community-based initiatives. These experiences reinforced practical skills in facilitation, community organizing, and participatory planning.

The program culminated in the design and presentation of action projects to be implemented in participants' home countries. These initiatives address critical issues such as gender equity, migration, child well-being, and food sovereignty, ensuring that the School's impact extends beyond the training period and into sustained, community-level change.

### KEY RESULTS OF EPES' 15TH ESCUELA:

- **20 participants** trained from **8 countries** of Latin America and the Caribbean
- Part of a cumulative network of **285 alumni from 30 countries** (since 2010)
- **9 days** of intensive training combining theory, participatory methods, and fieldwork
- **3 days** of applied community action in El Bosque
- **1 regional forum** on water justice
- **100% of participants** developed action plans for implementation in their home countries

**Impact:** The Escuela translates training into action by equipping leaders with practical tools and launching community-based initiatives that contribute to more equitable and resilient health systems.

## TWO LUTHERANS FROM THE COSTA RICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH PARTICIPATE IN THE EPES ESCUELA THANKS TO SCHOLARSHIPS FROM THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA (ELCA)

Esmeralda Perez is a pastoral agent who works on behalf of Indigenous peoples and their children. Currently enrolled in a theology degree program, she says that EPES' holistic approach resonated deeply with the way we work with our own communities, interrelating the rights of women, immigrants, and the concept of popular education. Learning that is never imposed but rather built collectively was the major lesson she brought home. Beyond the curriculum, what stood out for Esmeralda was the loving way the EPES staff integrated each participant into the intense week they all shared.

Keller Araya Molina, an anthropologist and theologian, coordinates a Lutheran shelter for immigrants and is an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. The Escuela led him to “rediscover the concept of community,” which he hopes to share with coworkers in Costa Rica and the populations they serve. “It is important to strengthen the power of community in our daily lives,” says Keller. The Escuela, he



adds, was a unique space for “connecting with other people who share similar values” and who strive to put into practice a slogan he saw in the EPES office: “Let’s build a more just world.”

## EPES PARTICIPATES IN THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE ELCA AMMPARO NETWORK

EPES executive director Sonia Covarrubias and EPES educator Angelina Jara participated in a regional gathering in El Salvador marking the 10th anniversary of AMMPARO.

The AMMPARO Network is a holistic, church-wide initiative dedicated to protecting and supporting migrants—particularly children—who are fleeing violence and poverty. The anniversary event brought together churches and organizations from nine countries, all committed to advancing justice and dignity for people in the context of human mobility.

During the gathering, Sonia and Angelina shared EPES' work with Haitian immigrants. As part of a methodology commission, they were also invited to help lead a participatory evaluation process and facilitate a session focused on identifying ongoing challenge and future priorities.

A moving moment came when they discovered that five of the participants were graduates of EPES' Escuela, highlighting the lasting impact and reach of EPES' training model and the ways it continues to strengthen leadership across borders.



Sonia Covarrubias (EPES), Keller Araya (Costa Rica), Emily Chavez (El Salvador), Zulamita Cortes (Peru), Johana Morales (Colombia), Ana Mendivelso (Colombia), Angelina Jara (EPES).

**Your support makes this work possible**—allowing EPES to both accompany migrant communities locally and contribute to broader regional movements for justice and equity.



EPES staff and board members visit the former EPES Center in Concepción. Back row: Maritza Provoste, Hector Reyes, Rev. Dale Young, Doris Young, Rev. Marco Garrido. Front row: Dr. Lautaro Lopez, Center Director, Cristián Arriagada, Karen Anderson

## EPES STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS VISIT THE FORMER EPES CENTER IN CONCEPCIÓN

On March 13, 2026, EPES staff and partners visited their former center in Concepción, now the Kelluwün Center, run by the Talcahuano Public Health Service. “Kelluwün,” meaning community solidarity in the Mapuche language, Mapudungun, reflects its focus on supporting elderly people with dementia and their families.

The visit was both affirming and emotional. The building has been thoughtfully improved, remains widely valued,

and—now with 18 staff supporting around 180 patients—continues to serve the community. EPES still owns the space and retains weekend access, preserving a strong link to its past.

A particularly meaningful sign of continuity: the patients’ organization is led by a former EPES health promoter, showing how the center’s community roots continue to thrive.

## NUTRITION COURSE PROMOTES HEALTHIER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE WAYS OF EATING

The Healthy and Sustainable Nutrition Course (3rd edition) was held from April 21 to May 12, organized by EPES in collaboration with the Intersectoral and Community Food Coalition.

The course is designed for municipal staff from key departments, including Health, Environment, Community Development (DIDECO), and Economic Development, Innovation and Territorial Entrepreneurship (DDIET). The program brought together **25 participants** over **four sessions**.

The course aims to strengthen knowledge and practical skills around healthy, sustainable, and equitable food

systems, with a strong emphasis on reducing food waste through creative food use and food system transformation, while integrating perspectives on human rights, food sovereignty, and sustainability.

### MAIN THEMES INCLUDE:

- Social, economic, and commercial determinants of food systems
- Food environments and gender perspectives
- The food system and its impact on planetary health
- Food as a human right, food sovereignty, and agroecology
- Public policies and local food system alternatives
- Hands-on workshops on healthy cooking and food preparation

Overall, the course combines theory and practice to support municipal teams in understanding food systems more deeply and applying this knowledge in local policies and community actions that promote healthier and more sustainable ways of eating.





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.

### SUPPORT EPES

To contribute to EPES, make a tax-deductible donation online at [www.actionforhealth.org](http://www.actionforhealth.org), or mail your contribution to:

**Action for Health in the Americas**  
c/o Prince of Peace Lutheran Church  
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### JOY AND WELL-BEING THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN EPES

Leane arrived in Chile in 2016. She is 30 years old, the mother of a three-year-old girl, and lives with a friend. She first learned about the EPES Foundation through a friend who was participating in the Spanish language courses. Since then, she has actively taken part in the Spanish classes, as well as other educational and community-based workshops offered by EPES.

Leane says she deeply values the welcoming atmosphere at EPES and the kindness of the people who make up its community. She emphasizes that her participation has brought her joy and a sense of well-being, both physical and mental. The emotional well-being workshop was particularly meaningful to her, as she says it taught her how to care for herself as well as her family.



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# WEAVING CONVERSATIONS AND RIGHTS

## SPANISH COURSE FOR HAITIAN WOMEN

In 2026, EPES launched a new edition of the Spanish Course for Haitian women in the district of El Bosque, taught by educators Sonia Covarrubias, Pharayou Borgella, and Macarena Villarroel.

The course is aimed at Haitian women with a basic level of Spanish and uses popular education methodologies, with an emphasis on conversation, collective learning, and the exchange of experiences.

This training program takes place in weekly sessions from April 20 to July 20, and its purpose is to strengthen the use of the Spanish language in everyday life, providing tools



that support communication, active participation, and the exercising of rights.

To facilitate attendance, EPES provides childcare during the sessions, along with financial support for transportation.