

MARCH KICK-OFF EVENTS A TIME FOR EVALUATION AND PLANNING

As summer ends in the southern hemisphere and we head into a new school year, EPES and the coalitions and health teams we work with all have planning meetings for the new year. Here are some of the highlights:

CULTIVATING THE FUTURE: ADVANCING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE NUTRITION

In March 2025, the Intersectoral Nutrition Coordinating Coalition of El Bosque held its 2024 Annual Evaluation and 2025 Planning Meeting, a space for reflection and collective learning. During the meeting, participants reviewed the achievements and challenges of the previous year, moving forward in the creation of a model for a comprehensive and transformative local policy for healthy and sustainable nutrition. This process included the promotion of collective care, strengthening bonds among participants, and reaffirming their commitment to a more just and sovereign future.



At the Amajudisa and Auco community gardens supported by EPES, the summer crop cycle was completed, and preparations began for new plantings. In addition the garden was expanded and flowers were planted to attract pollinators, promoting biodiversity and strengthening of local ecosystems.



STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY ACTION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

EPES continues to support health teams working to end violence against women. Three planning meetings were held with the groups Newen Domo and Organized Women for Lives Free from Violence. There was a special emphasis on significant dates related to gender-based violence and defining activities to further the defense of women's rights.

We also made progress in assessing the sexual health needs of older women, through six group interviews that gathered key information about the quality of sexual health care programs and older women's perceptions of these services.

THE ENDURING LEGACY OF EPES CONCEPCIÓN



During the celebration, the EPES Santiago staff holds up a banner reading: Celebrating 41 years of EPES Concepción: a footprint that can't be erased (1983-2024)

After 41 years, EPES Concepción closed its doors on January 1, 2025—but its legacy lives on. Founded in 1983, a year after EPES began in Santiago, the Concepción office was established due to the area's poverty, dense population, and rich history of social organization before the 1973 coup. Lutheran congregations in working-class neighborhoods also influenced the decision.

At the time, the north shore of the Biobío River was filled with illegal dumps and overgrowth near precarious neighborhoods. Rodents, floods, and unsanitary conditions were common, yet fear silenced complaints under the dictatorship.

EPES Concepción helped communities find their voice. Eleven health promoter groups were formed to address urgent needs, with over 100 women participating in Hualpencillo neighborhood alone.

Dr. Lautaro López, director for 30 years, is widely respected for his leadership and commitment. "EPES made an important contribution to rebuilding democracy and recognizing human rights," he said.

Virginia "Vicky" Norambuena, who passed away in October 2025, led for 26 years with creativity and vision, producing educational materials and spearheading environmental efforts, such as the protection of a wetland, leading to the creation of Guñuhue Park.

EPES Concepción was a national pioneer in environmental health. It tackled other pressing issues like HIV/AIDS, post-earthquake response in 2010, long waitlists in public health centers, and systemic violations of the right to health. It did so by organizing neighborhood groups and broad networks.

Through this work, women and communities were transformed, empowered to lead and claim their rights with dignity. EPES Concepción's legacy is one of courage, creativity, and lasting change.

During the evening of November 8, 2024, over a hundred people gathered under a spacious tent to bid farewell to the Concepción offices of EPES and to recognize its milestones. Built in 2006 in a collaborative effort that included several churches in the United States, the *Centro de Educación Popular Gastón Toledo* was a venue for seminars, courses, celebrations, and book launches, in addition to serving as a hub for recovery aid after the February 2010 earthquake. The mural that spans the back wall was designed by health promoters and EPES staff together with Chilean artists Luis Almendra and Rodrigo Quevedo and American artists Steve Delaitsch and Scott Duffus. Melanie Nelson, member of the Action for Health in the Americas board of directors, was a major source of support as well.

Kimi Monsalve, leader of a health promotion group founded after the earthquake of 2010, attests to the enduring legacy of EPES Concepción: "Maybe we will experience another storm, but we know that its impact will not last forever. We learned key words to help us go on, like resilience, empowerment and participation. We will never forget our beginnings with EPES. Now we have to continue on our own."



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▲ STRENGTHENING COMMITMENTS TO SAFE AND DIGNIFIED MIGRATION

Between March 18 and 20, 2025, the Second Regional Review of the Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean took place in Chile. The event was organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the International Organization for Migration.

The gathering brought together more than 350 people, including representatives from governments, UN agencies, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, migrant organizations and families, as well as church-based organizations. Sonia Covarrubias, Executive Director of EPES, participated as part of the ACT* Alliance delegation that contributed its local experience and strong commitment to human rights.

During the meeting, various organizations raised concerns about setbacks in human rights and the spread of anti-migrant rhetoric. In this context, EPES joined a collective declaration calling for migration that is safe, dignified, and grounded in human rights. The declaration condemned mass detentions and deportations and highlighted the contributions of migrants to local economies.

By endorsing the declaration, EPES reaffirms its commitment to regional advocacy and the defense of the rights of migrants, promoting sustainable, equitable solutions with a focus on social justice.



Sonia Covarrubias, Executive Director of EPES (third from right) with the ACT Delegation.

**ACT ALLIANCE is a global faith-based coalition organized in national and regional forums operating in more than 120 countries. Through their more than 140 members, they work on humanitarian aid, gender and climate justice, migration and displacement, and peace and security to support local communities. EPES has been a member since the 2010 earthquake in Chile.*



EPES staff member Macarena Villarroel presented at the International Congress on Migration.

◀ EPES AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON MIGRATION AND HUMAN MOBILITY

From April 8 to 11, 2025, the International Congress on Migration and Human Mobility took place in Santiago. The event gathered over 600 participants, with 40 thematic panels, 200 presentations, 120 research papers, and 80 presentations of practical experiences. Over three days, representatives from academia, civil society, and the public sector engaged in dialogue about migration in Latin America from multiple perspectives: security, gender, health, and education, among others.

During this event, EPES staff member Macarena Villarroel presented the experience, *Education for Autonomy: Spanish Course for Haitian Women, 2024*. This initiative seeks to strengthen the social inclusion and community participation of migrant women through Spanish language learning and the creation of a safe space to share everyday experiences.



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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▲ First session of Second Level Spanish course for Haitian women.



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14TH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF POPULAR EDUCATION IN HEALTH

In January 2025, the 14th International School of Popular Education and Community and Participatory Strategies in Health was held in Santiago, Chile, organized by EPES. This edition brought together 19 participants from Haiti, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile, selected from over 50 applications.

Since its creation in 2010, the School has hosted more than 265 participants from 30 countries across three continents, establishing itself as a space for training, exchange, and action around the right to health, grounded in the principles and methodologies of Popular Education.

Over eight intensive days, the group engaged in both theoretical and practical sessions, including field visits and collaborative activities with community organizations. The School concluded with three community actions carried out in the neighborhoods of San Ramón and El Bosque. As part of the training process, each participant developed an action plan to be implemented in their own community, integrating tools acquired during the week.

With over 42 years of experience promoting the right to health from a perspective of social justice, gender, and interculturality, EPES reaffirms its commitment to training community leaders and agents of change both locally and internationally.

