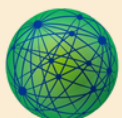

Annual Report

2023



Photo Credit: Brian Erickson



Free Migration Project

Summary

This year, Free Migration Project had some historic victories that we are proud to have achieved. We continued to follow our strategic plan and look forward to wrapping up the goals we outlined for ourselves in 2024. We want to extend a warm thank you to our clients, peers and supporters for trusting us and supporting our mission and work!

In solidarity,
Adrianna & Dave

Photo Credit: José Mazariegos



Campaign Work

Shut Down Berks Coalition

After a hard-fought eight-year campaign to permanently shut down the immigrant prison in Berks County, we got to celebrate the closure in early 2023 with a community event. This was a time to get together in person and mark the end of a shameful period in Berks County history. On November 30, 2022, it was announced that the Biden administration would be canceling the ICE contract with Berks County effective January 31, 2023.

For decades, the U.S. government has sent people seeking safety - including toddlers and infants - to Berks. The government's decision to close the prison was the result of years of organizing led by community members impacted by ICE raids and jails, including parents who were incarcerated at Berks with their children. As a core member of the Shut Down Berks Coalition, FMP celebrated this victory and continues to build strong coalitions on the lessons learned from this fight.



Photo courtesy of Adrianna Torres-García

Campaign Work

ICE Civil Fines on Sanctuary Leaders

In 2018, ICE targeted a small number of other outspoken immigrant leaders living in sanctuary churches with exorbitant civil fines of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act revealed that the fines were part of a punitive, multiyear effort, spearheaded by Trump advisor Stephen Miller, to surveil their houses of worship and prevent them from speaking out. Free Migration Project coordinated with other organizations and the targeted leaders to sue ICE for violating their constitutional rights. In April of 2021, after sustained litigation and advocacy, ICE rescinded its policy of issuing retaliatory civil fines against immigrant leaders.

In June of this year sanctuary leaders Vicky Chávez, María Chavalán Sut, Edith Espinal, and Hilda Ramírez were granted relief under a settlement! The courageous sanctuary leaders fled persecution in their home countries and sought asylum in the United States. Each became a leader of the sanctuary movement, in which houses of worship shelter people facing deportation who are in need of protection. We are so pleased that through their fight, the leaders gained deferred action status, enabling them to live freely in the United States for at least three years to pursue their immigration cases and seek additional protection.



2023

Photo courtesy of Adrianna Torres-García

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Campaign Work

End Medical Deportation Campaign

This was a landmark year for the End Medical Deportation Campaign. In March, we received news that a hospital in Allentown was attempting to deport S.C., a Dominican mother of two in a coma after she had suffered an aneurysm. We mobilized a group of community members and peer organizations to demand that the hospital administration commit in writing to not deport her. We succeeded in stopping the deportation! This case also launched the campaign onto the national (and international) media space, expanding our reach and garnering more support than ever before. This led to more awareness of the issue and the interest of elected officials in Philadelphia to support a measure legislating medical deportations.

On December 14, 2023, Philadelphia City Council Members voted to pass a bill which prioritizes the rights of immigrant patients in need of long-term healthcare to receive information in their preferred language and decision-making power over their care. This is a first-in-the-nation bill to end the practice of private medical deportation. The bill will:

1. Provide much needed oversight of the practice of medical repatriation by requiring reporting from hospitals in order to monitor how widespread the practice of medical deportation is.
2. Ensure patients and families get the in-language information they need to make the best decision for their care and fully consent to any medical repatriation.
3. Most importantly, it will make sure there are ways to hold bad actors accountable. It creates a pathway for the city to enforce legislation and levy fines on those who violate patients' rights.

Campaign Work

End Medical Deportation Campaign

Now that this bill has been passed in Philadelphia City Council, we look forward to educating our community about their rights and options when it comes to medical deportations. We also hope that other jurisdictions will take up this language and introduce it to their legislative bodies. This is not a Philadelphia-specific issue, we continue to receive calls from all over the country with medical deportation cases. Hospitals should not be deporting immigrants, and immigrants should not have to fear deportation when they are seeking medical treatment.



Photo Credit: Manuel Vásquez

Legal Services & Community-Supported Deportation Defense Campaigns

Support for Stateless Community Leaders

We value our partnership with United Stateless, a national organization led by stateless people whose mission is to build and inspire community among those affected by statelessness, and to advocate for their human rights. Stateless people are not legally considered a citizen of any country and often struggle to access education, healthcare, immigration status, and job opportunities.

This year, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued important new guidance about how it will treat stateless people in the U.S. applying for benefits or protection with the agency. Free Migration Project provided legal and technical support to United Stateless in its ongoing advocacy efforts with DHS. We also provided legal representation to two of United Stateless's founding members in their immigration cases, Karina and Miliyon.

Karina Ambartsoumian-Clough came to the U.S. as a child with her family seeking asylum. She became stateless after her country of birth, the Soviet Union, dissolved. Through collaborative work between FMP and United Stateless, Karina's long struggle for permanent legal status in the U.S. came to an end this year when she received her green card. We are honored to have been a part of her journey.

Legal Services & Community-Supported Deportation Defense Campaigns

Support for Stateless Community Leaders

Miliyon was forced to leave his country of origin decades ago after the government there stripped him of his citizenship and tortured him. He came to the U.S. and applied for asylum, but his case was wrongly denied. Along with the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild and United Stateless, FMP worked with Miliyon to reopen his case and lift his deportation order earlier this year. We continue to fight alongside Miliyon to achieve durable legal status in the U.S.



Photo courtesy of Karina Ambartsoumian-Clough

Legal Services & Community-Supported Deportation Defense Campaigns

Justice for Denis & Julio

Denis Calderon and Julio Maldonado are cousins born in Peru who were raised in the U.S. In 1996, a mob of young white men attacked them as they walked to Denis' neighborhood bar around the corner from his home in Northeast Philadelphia. When the police arrived at the scene, they zeroed in on Denis and Julio, the two non-White men. Denis and Julio were unjustly charged and eventually wrongfully convicted of aggravated assault. When they were wrongfully convicted. After they had already served their prison sentence, Denis and Julio were deported.

In 2023 Denis's case was heard by the Board of Pardons, but unfortunately he was denied. A pardon would get Denis one step closer to reuniting with his children in the U.S. We continue to advocate for a fair and efficient clemency process for families facing separation by borders or prison walls.



Photo Credit: Nigel Charles

Legal Services & Community-Supported Deportation Defense Campaigns

Pardons Project: Second Chances

We continued our partnership with VietLead, a grassroots community organization serving the Southeast Asian community in Philadelphia. This partnership aims to help Cambodian and Vietnamese people who were deported due to harsh immigration penalties for criminal convictions return to their communities in the U.S. We also support community members who are at risk of deportation due to a past criminal conviction. This collaboration had an amazing victory this year when one of the participants received a pardon!

Through collaboration with peer organizations like VietLead, we have been able to tackle these complex cases creatively. We filed pardon applications for community members and are exploring options to prevent deportation for some at-risk people still in the U.S. Through this work, we are advocating for reforms to the system that punishes immigrants convicted of crimes twice: first through prison, and then again through deportations and exile.

Education & Outreach

Border Abolition Study Group

Last year we launched the Border Abolition Study Group, co-hosted with Tsuru for Solidarity and Detention Watch Network. We concluded the six-session program earlier this year. The Study Group provided a free, bilingual, space where we covered topics like Border Abolition 101, Carceral Economies, and Decolonization.

We believe in creating spaces to deepen our understanding of abolition and draw the connections between immigrant rights and prison abolition. This project reflected our organizational commitment to abolitionist values. We hope to receive support for future sessions and to help us create facilitation guides and materials for other groups looking to self-organize study groups of their own.



Photo Credit: Brian Erickson

Infrastructure

New Board Members

We are so excited to announce that Sundrop Carter and Vicky Chávez have joined the FMP Board this year! We have collaborated with both Sundrop and Vicky for many years now and achieved big wins together. We look forward to having them as part of the FMP team and learning from their expertise!



Photo courtesy of Sundrop Carter

Sundrop Carter



Photo Credit: Leah Hogsten, The Salt Lake Tribune

Vicky Chávez

Infrastructure

Internship Program

We continued our internship program this year with a new cohort of awesome students! FMP interns have the opportunity to join us in rallies, protests and campaign work, giving them a unique hands-on experience.

During the summer, as a team we went through a multi-week, abolitionist curriculum where we discussed and learned about abolitionist ideas. While we mostly followed the [Abolitionist Futures](#) curriculum, we added a session on abolition in the immigration context. Each week a team member facilitated a discussion topic and guided the group through readings.

"Free Migration Project has really opened my eyes up to so many issues within the immigration system that we have the power to fix. I've been able to learn so much from being part of the organization and am so proud of all that FMP has accomplished in the last year."

-Arianna Monarch, Communications & Social Media Intern, Temple U.



Photo courtesy of Arianna Monarch