TU LUCHA ES MI LUCHA!

Immigrant communities must stand UNITED!

#NoMuslimBan
#AbolishICE
What I appreciate the most about NIPNLG staff members is their willingness to take leadership to do necessary work to keep things moving and their commitment to support directly impacted community members and community organizing as a whole.

- Carlos Rojas Rodrigues
  New Way Forward Coordinator

For more than 50 years, the National Immigration Project has fought for justice for those who are most harmed by the immigration system. A national membership organization of committed lawyers and advocates, we have held steadfast in our values and worked to protect the rights of all people, and to imagine and work towards a future where all people can live freely and thrive.

We support and partner with those who face the greatest challenges with the fewest resources, pursue all forms of legal advocacy on behalf of immigrants, and provide technical assistance and support to legal practitioners, community-based immigrant organizations, and people working to advance the rights of noncitizens.

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“Even amidst omnipresent violence we have to remember that the future is a process we generate through our collective commitment to organizing together today and every day.”

- Harsha Walia
National Immigration Project’s
2021 Impact in the Arts & Media Award Recipient

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A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Sirine Shebaya

Looking back at 2023, I feel deeply inspired and grateful for the opportunities we have had to focus on our membership community. Over the past few years, we have worked hard to refresh and restructure our membership program to make it more accessible, more diverse, more engaged, and truly reflective of the full scope of our beautiful movement for immigrant justice. Our membership has expanded to include lawyers, advocates, organizers, law firms, clinics, and legal and community organizations. Our member programming has similarly expanded to begin to integrate more robust offerings for attorneys and more focused and targeted support for community groups and non-lawyers across the country. And as we finally emerge from the COVID pandemic, we have turned our attention more fully to base-building, organizing, and connecting with our members and close partners so we can work more effectively together for a better future.

As a membership organization, a core part of our mission is to resource the movement and to strengthen the progressive infrastructure in tough places.

This fall, we hosted five in-person regional convenings—in Louisiana, Minnesota, Texas, California, and Maryland—bringing together lawyers, organizers, movement leaders, and impacted people from each region to share ideas, form deeper relationships, and begin to build joint strategies and commitments for our work. Over the summer, we also hosted a convening for our partners working within Black, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Sikh, and South Asian communities, to align on advocacy priorities for the final months of the Biden administration. These gatherings have been energizing and transformative, and we plan to continue to ensure there are regular touchpoints for our communities to come together over the coming year.

In addition to our usual array of training offerings, this year we also hosted two Know Your Rights sessions for border advocates in Texas facing harassment by law enforcement. We also embarked on a new training journey with Movement Law Lab, offering our members and close partners an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the principles and frameworks of movement lawyering, and to take a moment to think about the “how” and “why” of the work we do, so that we can truly live up to our taglines: we are lawyers for the movement, and we offer a political and legal home for our members. In 2024, we look forward to deepening that vision and reality.
for all our members, who are deeply situated in their own communities and able to be a powerful force for change. Programmatically, this year has also been a year of renewing our focus on transforming systems and keeping communities together. We welcomed new projects focused on building opportunities for legal pathways and tackling the impact of climate change on our communities. We continued our work on enforcement and detention. We built up our expertise and engagement on system-changing expansions of legal protections. We supported local groups all over the country seeking to implement favorable state and local policies, participatory defense structures, and movements to empower immigrants in their communities. And we continued to strengthen and build capacity for narrative strategy and organizing in the toughest places.

As we look ahead to 2024, we look forward to continuing our partnership with each of you. We know this work is only possible because of your support. Hand in hand, we are building a brighter pathway towards a future where all people can live freely and thrive.

With gratitude,

Sirine Shebaya
Executive Director

Sirine Shebaya speaking on Muslims for Just Futures panel
This year, I was honored to assume the position of the National Immigration Project’s Board Chair, taking the torch from my dear friend Carlos Moctezuma García who helped the organization evolve and grow tremendously throughout the past four years. As a removal defense attorney who has worked closely with the National Immigration Project for many years and has served on the board for three years, this position means a great deal to me, and I am beyond thrilled to have the opportunity to help lead and support the organization as it continues to play its critical role in the movement for immigrant and human rights.

2023 was an exciting year for the National Immigration Project!

Under Sirine’s visionary leadership, the National Immigration Project has reached new heights, and its capacity to support and engage with its members has expanded significantly.

This year, for the first time ever, the Project held in-person convenings in five key regions across the country. After years of only seeing each other in little boxes on our screens, it was a breath of fresh air to share space and really be in community with each other again.

I attended the West Coast convening in Los Angeles, CA, where members and partners came together for a rich conversation about the work happening at the regional level and to pinpoint opportunities to collaborate and push for wins in this final year of the current Biden administration. I’ve heard from colleagues on the board and partners across the country that these convenings were a much-needed space to take a step back from our day-to-day and devote time to strategize and build together.
Beyond being a critical space to strategize and build, from my perspective, these convenings also exemplified one of the greatest strengths of the National Immigration Project: its diverse and deeply committed membership. The varied backgrounds, skills, experiences, and perspectives that filled the room in Los Angeles were proof of what makes the National Immigration Project a truly remarkable organization.

It is an organization that prioritizes inclusivity and collaboration in a way that yields boundless creativity, passion, and impact.

Now, with the year coming to a close and as we look to the challenges and opportunities of the coming election year, it is clearer than ever to me that connection, collaboration, and unity across our movement is key. And as the landscape of immigrant rights continues to evolve, I know the National Immigration Project will continue to adapt and grow, refining its strategies, expanding its outreach, and continuing to collaborate with organizations and advocates across the country to lead the charge in the fight for immigrant rights.

In solidarity,

Veronica Barba, Esq.
Board Chair
2023 AT A GLANCE

From litigating in the courts and advocating in DC to creating one-of-a-kind resources and teaching the courses our movement needs, this year, the National Immigration Project used every tool at its disposal to help create the world our communities deserve.

**19** attorney resources

**15** reports & community resources

**64** litigation & legal representation

**49** trainings, webinars, & courses

**7** digital media toolkits & campaigns

**8** amicus briefs filed

**24** legal & policy advocacy tools

**22** networks & collaboratives

**7** convenings & community conversations

\[ \text{= 215} \]

litigation and advocacy resources and tools to create a better world

2023 REGIONAL CONVENINGS

For the first time, the National Immigration Project held regional convenings in **five key regions** across the country.

With organizational and individual members across all 50 states, the National Immigration Project prioritizes supporting and uplifting state and local work. Our regional convenings served as a critical opportunity to come together with members and partners from across the country to understand the work happening at the regional level and pinpoint opportunities to collaborate.
CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

VANESSA VAQUIZ MENDOZA

Reuniting a family and fighting to fix our country’s broken return process.

Vanessa Vaquiz Mendoza came to the United States when she was only nine years old. She spent the next 25 years building a life in North Carolina where she began her own business and had three children.

But in 2020, after being arrested for shoplifting clothing and serving a short criminal sentence, ICE detained Vanessa, holding her at Irwin County Detention Facility. While in detention, Vanessa was medically abused by Dr. Mahendra Amin who performed nonconsensual, painful, and unnecessary gynecological procedures on people detained at the facility. The conditions were unbearable.

Ultimately, Vanessa felt she had no choice but to agree to deportation in order to escape the abusive conditions.

Deportation meant that Vanessa was separated from her three children, including her oldest son Jason who experiences significant physical disability as a result of Pompe Disease, a rare disorder that causes weakening of organs and tissues. Until this point, Vanessa had served as the main source of support for Jason his entire life. Once deported and no longer able to be with and care for her children, her ex-partner – who had subjected Vanessa to domestic abuse – became their primary caretaker.

In El Salvador, Vanessa was robbed twice and lived in a constant state of fear. And for nearly three years, she was unable to see, hug, or care for her three children.

In June 2021, National Immigration Project attorneys filed a motion to reopen for Vanessa. The following month, the Immigration Judge granted the motion to reopen, beginning the two-year-long legal fight to bring Vanessa back to the United States and reunite her with her family. With the help of our partners, the National Immigration Project advocated internally and publicly on behalf of Vanessa.

Vanessa was finally reunited with her three children and community in Raleigh, NC in September 2023.
CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

JANE DOE*

Representing the brave women who came forward about the neglect, abuse, and retaliation they experienced at Irwin County Detention Center.

Jane Doe* was 21 years old when she was detained at the Irwin County Detention Center (ICDC) in Georgia. She remembers ICDC as “the worst place I’ve ever been in my life.”

Jane Doe had given birth to her daughter a few months before she was detained. Like many other women at ICDC, Jane Doe was taken to see Mahendra Amin, a doctor authorized by ICE to provide gynecological services to women at ICDC. ICE brought her to the appointment handcuffed at the wrists, ankles, and waist. When Amin came into the exam room, he told Jane Doe to “open up [her] legs.” He did not explain what he was doing or why, ask for consent, or even acknowledge her in any way. Amin then put a tool into her vagina and shoved it around inside of her. For Jane Doe, who has a past history of sexual abuse, this experience made her feel she had no control over her body and triggered traumatic memories. Amin also directed a nurse to give Jane Doe a hormonal birth control shot without explaining what it was or the side effects or asking if she consented to the shot.

“Nothing was explained to me,” Jane Doe said. “I felt like I had no control over my body... I did not have a chance to ask questions or say no.”

The National Immigration Project and our partners represent Jane Doe and fourteen other women who came forward about the neglect, abuse, and retaliation they experienced at ICDC in a class action lawsuit. Shortly after filing the complaint, we filed an emergency motion to prevent retaliation against Jane Doe and others and to seek their release from detention. ICE granted Jane Doe a stay of deportation and released her soon afterwards.

I thank God that the news came out because he didn’t get to do anything else to me... I want to make sure that this type of abuse never happens again.

Jane Doe

*Pseudonym used to protect the identity of client.
SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN ICE DETENTION

Filing complaints with the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties to call for an end to the use of solitary confinement in ICE detention.

Solitary confinement is an inhumane and abusive practice that traps hundreds of immigrants each year in a small cell for 22 to 24 hours each day with almost no outside contact. In the last year, the use of solitary confinement in ICE detention has grown by 32 percent, and the average number of consecutive days in solitary that ICE and its contractors are forcing people to endure have increased from 14 to 20 days.

In response, the National Immigration Project, along with our partners, has filed administrative complaints with DHS oversight bodies urging an investigation into the use and misuse of solitary confinement at the Aurora Detention Facility in Colorado and the Moshannon Valley Processing Center in Pennsylvania. The complaints detail how ICE and the private prison company operating both detention centers, GEO Group, egregiously misuse solitary confinement to control and punish detained people.

One individual highlighted in the complaint for the Aurora facility, Felix* was placed in solitary confinement for three days for eating too slowly and forced into solitary confinement an additional 10 times during his detention in Aurora.

He stated, “If I spoke too loudly, solitary. If I climbed on top of a table to get a guard’s attention, solitary. If I had suicidal thoughts, solitary. When the guards would tease me about being deported back to my home country and make airplane sounds at me and gesture like a plane was taking me away, I would become upset and then get solitary for being upset.”

The complaint for the Moshannon facility highlighted an incident during the summer of 2023 when a group of Salvadoran men were suddenly taken out of their units, forced into solitary confinement without being given any reason for their placement, and then transferred to detention centers across the country. The two clients on behalf of whom we filed the complaint later learned through their attorneys that the facility held them in solitary confinement because it falsely accused them of being “gang members.”

Both complaints call for systemic reform to prevent further abuse and harm, including urging DHS oversight bodies to immediately end the use of solitary confinement in ICE detention.
LEGAL ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT

JOP v. US DEPT. OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Representing a group of young people who arrived in the United States as unaccompanied children.

In 2019, the Trump administration enacted a policy that limited crucial protections for asylum seekers who arrived in the United States as unaccompanied children. In response, a group of impacted asylum-seeking young people brought suit to challenge the policy, and a federal court promptly halted the new policy and restored the status quo. Following the federal court decision, in December 2020, the court certified a nationwide class and issued an expanded preliminary injunction protecting class members nationwide. The class includes individuals who filed an asylum application with USCIS that has not yet been adjudicated on the merits and who on the date of filing were 18 years old or older or had a parent or legal guardian in the United States who is available to provide care and physical custody.

The National Immigration Project, along with our partners, represents the certified class of asylum seeking young people who came to the United States as unaccompanied children. The case is currently in settlement negotiations. As we work to secure robust protections for the class through settlement, the preliminary injunction remains in place, protecting a large and growing class of young asylum seekers.

Our team has successfully intervened in the cases of numerous class members who have reached out to us for assistance, to ensure that the government abides by the preliminary injunction. In 2023 the National Immigration Project also hosted a free webinar about the litigation, and we published a fact sheet for practitioners on representing class members in their immigration court removal proceedings.
ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

CLIMATE MIGRATION AND THE BORDER

Working to protect climate migrants as the effects of climate change continue to accelerate and impact communities.

Failure to cut greenhouse gas emissions and halt global average temperature rise is already leading to more climate disasters, aggravating new and existing conflicts, and deepening poverty and insecurity, all of which drive migration. Over the next few decades, climate change is expected to catalyze higher levels of migration than the world has ever experienced before. The lack of a framework for climate migrants to seek protection in the United States, including asylum, is already presenting issues for migrants arriving at our border.

In June 2023, the National Immigration Project traveled to Matamoros, a city in the northeastern Mexican state of Tamaulipas, to assist Miskito asylum seekers from the eastern coast of Honduras. Hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020 devastated their communities on the Mosquito Coast through storm surges and flooding, which led to loss of homes, destruction of crops, and crippling of local economies. The effects of the hurricanes impeded the government from helping the area which intensifying the presence of narco-traffickers, who through threats and violence, dispossessed Miskito communities of their ancestral lands. Narco-traffickers then clear-cut biodiverse forests in order to make way for cattle-ranching operations that serve as cover for drug trafficking infrastructure, further accelerating the effects of climate change on this already climate-vulnerable region.

In Matamoros, we interviewed Miskito families who, trapped in a cycle of land dispossession, food insecurity, and threats to their lives, had decided to seek asylum in the United States. Families awaited a CBP One appointment from a makeshift migrant camp on the shore of the Rio Grande river, where they were frequently targeted by local cartel members. Some of the stories they told us feature in our report released in July 2023 on the situation at the U.S.-Mexico border just months after the implementation of the Asylum Ban.

Now in the United States, the Miskito families are in removal proceedings. Through some of their cases, we will test the boundaries of an asylum system that does not on its face protect climate migrants and seek to educate adjudicators on how climate-related stresses intersect with viable asylum grounds.
END SIJS BACKLOG COALITION

Organizing and advocating to end the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status backlog.

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) is a congressionally created humanitarian protection designed to quickly provide permanent legal protections to immigrant children who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by their parents. In recent years, tens of thousands of children per year have applied for SIJS, but have faced steep systemic challenges in accessing the stability and protection the program promises in a timely manner. The SIJS backlog, caused by a technical oversight in how Congress drafted the law, leaves immigrant youth at risk of deportation, without stable access to housing, work, medical care and unable to apply for federal student aid, despite having approved humanitarian protection.

On the heels of the Trump administration, advocates and youth who fought for the protection of immigrant youth in the face of the politicization of the SIJS program found themselves still struggling with a ballooning SIJS green card backlog. In February 2021, Rachel Davidson, then an attorney at The Door and the coalition’s current Director, convened hundreds of advocates across the United States on Zoom to discuss a strategy to end the SIJS backlog. As a result of this call, the End SIJS Backlog Coalition formed and began to grow rapidly.

Photo: Devin Avery // unsplash.com
Now a national group of impacted youth and over 150 allied advocacy organizations across the country, the End SIJS Backlog Coalition is continuing its work to end the SIJS green card backlog.

Through youth organizing, administrative advocacy, and legislative change, the Coalition educates policymakers and government agencies about the harmful impacts of visa caps on immigrant youth; fights for interim solutions that would give immigrant youth protection and improve their lives while they await visas; and ultimately seeks to achieve permanent legal protection in the United States for immigrant youth. This year, the Coalition found an organizational home at the National Immigration Project.

In its first two years, the Coalition made monumental strides for SIJS youth including a lawsuit against USCIS for data on the SIJS backlog, the publication of a ground-breaking report, and successful campaigns for the implementation of a deferred action program for SIJS youth and the introduction of legislation that could end the backlog. Since joining the National Immigration Project, the coalition has hired two full-time staff, a Director and a Youth Organizer. They have produced numerous resources for practitioners working with youth in the SIJS backlog, submitted 3 comments to the Federal Register on proposed rules that would impact SIJS youth, advocated directly with USCIS, ICE and EOIR and supported the reintroduction of the hallmark legislation to end the SIJS backlog in the House, with more than triple the original co-sponsors, and the introduction of the bill in the Senate for the first time.

In December the coalition will publish a new report, with never-before-seen data obtained from USCIS via FOIA litigation, describing the more than doubling of the SIJS backlog in the last two years, the government actions that have contributed to it, and the voices of impacted youth describing the impacts of this legal limbo on their lives.

Current advocacy goals and priorities of the coalition include the launch of an ambitious youth organizing strategy to build a national base of empowered impacted youth advocating for their own protection; the launch of a campaign to urge the Department of Education to expand FSA eligibility to SIJS youth; continued advocacy in Congress for legislative solution to the SIJS backlog; and ongoing administrative advocacy to push for policies that would protect and support youth impacted by the SIJS backlog.
ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

LABOR-BASED DEFERRED ACTION

Helping immigration lawyers and community members navigate the new labor-based deferred action process.

On January 13, 2023, the Department of Homeland Security announced “a streamlined and expedited deferred action request process” for non-citizen workers who experience or witness labor rights violations. This new policy is meant to ensure that workers who are potential victims or witnesses in pending labor investigations will temporarily live free from fear of deportation from the United States.

The new policy guidance was a result of years of unyielding advocacy by labor organizers and immigration and civil rights organizations that were led by a firm belief that workers must be free to assert their workplace rights irrespective of their immigration status.

To help immigration lawyers navigate the new deferred action process, the National Immigration Project quickly partnered with Tulane Immigrant Rights Clinic, Unemployed Workers United, and the National Immigrant Law Center to release an in-depth practice manual to break down who is eligible for this process; what the application process entails; renewals after the initial two-year period; related relief, such as prosecutorial discretion in removal proceedings, parole, and U and T Visas; and frequently asked questions.

As a national organization that also focuses on resourcing advocates and the community, the National Immigration Project and its partners also released a resource to answer frequently asked questions for community members and advocates. The FAQ resource is available in 10 languages, including Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Kreyol, and Mixtec.

For too long, we have seen many of our clients suffer workplace abuses they were too afraid to report for fear of retribution by unscrupulous employers.

While this relief is temporary, the new guidance will help protect workers in precarious immigration situations and in so doing help ensure that labor exploitation is allowed to come to light. The National Immigration Project is committed to continuing to guide both immigration practitioners and community members through this new and critical process.

Photo: Sundry Photography // shutterstock.com

Support our immigrants and workers
OUR MEMBERS

The National Immigration Project is a political and legal home for our members—the place where you can get answers to difficult legal questions, learn skills and access resources, connect with broader advocacy efforts, and more.

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New York Immigration Coalition
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
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Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Organizing Rooted in Abolition, Liberation and Empowerment (ORALE)
Orange County Justice Fund
Orange County Rapid Response Network
Organized Communities Against Deportations
Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES)
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary LIFE Center
Safe Passage Project
Sanctuary for Families
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The Florence Project (FIRRP)
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Thrive International Programs
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### CLINICS

- Cardozo Law School, Immigration Justice Clinic
- Chacon Center for Immigrant Justice at Maryland Carey Law
- Community Immigration Law Placement Clinic
- Cornell Law School Asylum Clinic
- CUNY School of Law
- DePaul University Legal Clinic
- Duke Law Immigrant Rights Clinic
- Duke University School Of Law
- Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program
- Immigrants’ Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School
- Immigrants’ Rights Clinic, Mills Legal Clinic, Stanford Law School
- Immigration Law Clinic, James E. Rogers College Of Law
- James H. Binger Center For New Americans, University Of Minnesota Law School
- Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization, Yale Law School
- Loyola School of Law Law Clinic
- PCC Legal Resource Center/CLEAR Clinic
- Rutgers Immigrant Rights Clinic
- St. Mary’s University Center for Legal and Social Justice
- St. Mary’s University Immigration and Human Rights Clinic
- University Of Denver, Student Law Office
- The Justice Center at Albany Law School
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Thank you for advancing and defending immigrant rights. We are enormously grateful to our donors, philanthropic partners, organizational allies, and dues-paying members. You are helping to build a better world.

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Anonymous
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* Monthly Sustainer
JUSTICE
The National Immigration Project plays a vital role in our movement ecosystem through supporting frontline groups with critical legal resources, a network of immigration lawyers, and spaces for shared analysis and practice in the immigration justice field.

Darakshan Raja
Muslims For Just Futures
Our team members are located in 10 different states across the country.

- **Sirine Shebaya**
  Executive Director

- **Khaled Alrabe**
  Senior Staff Attorney

- **Caitlin Bellis**
  Policy and Community Advocacy Attorney

- **Alejandra Cruz**
  Youth Organizer, End SIJS Backlog Coalition

- **Rachel Davidson**
  Director of the End SIJS Backlog Coalition

- **Ann Garcia**
  Staff Attorney

- **Pamela Goldstein**
  Senior Donor Relations Specialist

- **Lily Hartmann**
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- **Cari Hourigan**
  Director of Finance and Operations

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  Operations and Events Manager

- **Yulie Landan**
  Justice Catalyst Fellow

- **Michelle Méndez**
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- **Victoria Neilson**
  Supervising Attorney

- **Amber Qureshi**
  Staff Attorney

- **Arianna Rosales**
  Senior Communications Manager

- **Rebecca Scholtz**
  Senior Staff Attorney

- **Matthew Vogel**
  Supervising Attorney
NIPNLG truly lives out the principle of equity in its approach to litigation and advocacy, always ensuring that historically marginalized communities such as immigrants with prior criminal legal system involvement or those who have been targeted because of their identities are centered.

Heidi Altman
National Immigrant Justice Center