

BEYOND MASS DEPORTATION

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ABSTRACT

Donald Trump's threats to carry out the mass deportation of unauthorized immigrants helped propel him to a second term as President of the United States. For the estimated 11 million people in the U.S. without lawful status, those threats have increased fears of forced returns to their countries of origin. While American immigration law is heavily focused on the legal processes leading to deportation, little attention has been paid to the post-deportation experiences of individuals who must reintegrate into their home countries. This gap in understanding is especially alarming given the high stakes of reintegration. A successful transition can empower deported individuals to lead economically and socially stable lives, while a failed reintegration may result in homelessness, vulnerability to violence, mental health struggles, and attempts at illegal reentry.

Our project fills this gap. Over four years, our interdisciplinary team interviewed more than 300 Mexican citizens

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who had been deported (or returned on their own), asking about their economic, social, and cultural reintegration and what advice they would offer to others returning to Mexico. Based on these interviews and interviews with governmental and non-governmental organizations on both sides of the border, we offer specific policy interventions in the areas of deportation, documentation, services, and immigration reform, to facilitate the successful reintegration of returning Mexican citizens. For example, the Mexican Government should use its mobile consulate services to work with their citizens much earlier in the return process—e.g., in federal prisons and at American community centers and schools—to procure the Mexican identification card that is needed to work, rent housing, and obtain services. Our recommendations are bi-national and focus on the role that lawyers, law schools, and law clinics can play in stimulating conversations and action in legal circles on these important reintegration issues.

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I. INTRODUCTION

"We will seal the border, stop the invasion and launch the largest deportation effort in American history."

Donald Trump, at a campaign stop at the Arizona-Mexico border

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Exit polls showed that tougher immigration policies were among the top priorities for voters who supported Donald Trump's candidacy, propelling him to a second presidential term.² With his electoral success, President Trump moved quickly to implement his plans for mass deportation. He declared that immigration across the southern border was "an invasion under Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution of the United States," allowing him to send military troops to the border.³ He also pledged to use the 1798 Alien Enemies Act, a wartime authority that allows a President to detain and deport the citizens of a wartime enemy,⁴ to carry out the mass deportations, pressuring state and local police to join in these enforcement efforts.⁵ The Department of Homeland Security also expanded the use of expedited removal beyond the traditional border areas and authorized the deportation of people who legally entered the U.S. through Biden-era parole programs.⁶ Facing the largest deportation

1. Paul Ingram, *In a Familiar Refrain, Donald Trump Uses Az-Mx Border as Campaign Stump*, TUCSON SENTINEL (Aug. 23, 2024), https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/local/report/082324_trump_cochise/in-familiar-refrain-donald-trump-uses-az-mx-border-as-campaign-stump/ [https://perma.cc/BV6V-MZTV].

2. Gary Langer, *Exit Polls 2024: Deep Economic Discontent with Biden Drove Voters to Trump*, ABC NEWS (Nov. 5, 2024), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/2024-exit-polls-fears-american-democracy-economic-discontent/story?id=115529546> [https://perma.cc/U25L-7EF3].

3. Brian Bennett, *Trump Launches New Immigration Measures, Prompting Abrupt Shift in U.S. Border Policy*, TIME (Jan. 20, 2025), <https://time.com/7208516/trump-executive-orders-immigration-deportation-border/> [https://perma.cc/DS4V-6FMR].

4. Katherine Yon Ebright, *The Alien Enemies Act, Explained*, BRENNAN CTR. FOR JUST. (May 1, 2025), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/alien-enemies-act-explained> [https://perma.cc/68CU-RNX69TAJ-Y4XB].

5. Bennett, *supra* note 3.

6. Hamed Aleaziz, *Trump Officials Move to Quickly Expel Migrants Biden Allowed in Temporarily*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 26, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/>

program in recent history, the American public has engaged in fierce debates about who should be deported⁷ and what procedures should be used.⁸

Largely absent from these debates is any discussion of what happens to individuals after they are deported, and of their experiences as they try to reintegrate in their countries of origin. Nowhere is that void more apparent than in our systems of laws and of legal education. For American immigration lawyers and for America's immigration system, the story largely ends when the noncitizen is deported from the United States. The Immigration and Nationality Act contains the provisions of U.S. immigration law that lay out extensive criteria for deciding which country a noncitizen should be deported to⁹ but is silent on what should happen after the

2025/01/23/us/politics/trump-immigrants-deportation.html [https://perma.cc/ZL2L-3AYR].

7. See generally Jens Manuel Krogstad & Sahana Mukherjee, *Most Americans Say Undocumented Immigrants Should Be Able to Stay Legally Under Certain Conditions*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Nov. 22, 2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/11/22/most-americans-say-undocumented-immigrants-should-be-able-to-stay-legally-under-certain-conditions/> [https://perma.cc/XJK2-GLT5] (reporting polls showing that majority of Americans support mass deportation but also support a path to legal status if certain conditions are met); Allison McCann et al., *Who are the Millions of Immigrants Trump Wants to Deport*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 24, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/01/17/us/immigrants-trump-deportations.html> (analyzing the different groups of immigrants, including those with temporary status, who would be vulnerable to a mass deportation program).

8. See generally Nicci Matthey, *Mass Deportation in the U.S.: Explainer*, NAT'L IMMIGR. F. (Sept. 30, 2024), <https://immigrationforum.org/article/mass-deportation-in-the-u-s-explainer/> [https://perma.cc/J5BN-TYK4] (stating that executing a large-scale removal operation would require an enormous amount of resources and would cause community disruption and human rights violations); Maria Ramirez Uribe, *Can Donald Trump Use a 1798 Law to Carry Out Mass Deportations?*, POLITIFACT (Oct. 18, 2024), <https://www.politifact.com/article/2024/oct/18/can-donald-trump-use-a-1798-law-to-carry-out-mass/> [https://perma.cc/JW3V-ARTT] (describing the Trump Administration's plan to use the Aliens Enemy Act of 1798 to deport "migrant criminal networks"); Elizabeth Goitein, *How Trump Could Deploy the Military for Mass Deportation*, BRENNAN CTR. FOR JUST. (Dec. 3, 2024), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/how-trump-could-deploy-military-mass-deportation> [https://perma.cc/NA45-52SH] (discussing other statutes that Trump could use to deploy the military for mass deportation and limitations of those statutes).

9. Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101–1537. Deportation is called "removal" in the INA. Section 241(b)(2) of the INA outlines a four-step procedure for deciding a noncitizen's removal country, beginning with the noncitizen's preferred country of removal or country of origin. If neither of these options is possible, the immigration judge has six alternative countries to consider

return. In law school, students are taught the chargeable grounds for deportation, possible defenses, and the intricate procedures required in immigration court. Students also learn basic information about the execution of the deportation itself, but course coverage usually ends there. Similarly, practicing attorneys can access training about post-deportation legal relief for their clients¹⁰ but have limited access to training on what their clients will experience after deportation, and how to help their clients prepare for their post-deportation life.

By contrast, for those who are deported and their families and loved ones, the actual deportation is just the start of a long, difficult and often dangerous reintegration process in their country of origin. Whether reintegration is successful matters. A successful reintegration means the individual can provide for their economic needs and lead a healthy, meaningful life.¹¹ An unsuccessful reintegration can lead to homelessness and other economic struggles, physical decline, substance abuse, mental health problems, and social stigma and discrimination.¹² Depending on their country of return, a

and can ultimately select any other accepting nation for removal. [8 U.S.C. § 1231(b)(2)(E).

10. See, e.g., Daniel Kanstroom et al., *Post-Deportation: Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Visas, Motions to Reopen, and Returning your Client to the U.S.*, CERIFI LEGAL EDGE. *Online Course* (Mar. 10, 2014), https://westlegaledcenter.com/program_guide/course_detail.jsf?videoCourseId=100015841&ADMIN_PREVIEW=true&sc_cid=bba_ws [<https://perma.cc/8K4F-M34U>].

11. See generally Steffen Reinhold & Kevin Thom, *Migration Experience and Earnings in the Mexican Labor Market*, 48 J. HUM. RES. 768, 796–99 (2013) (finding that migration experience is associated with an increase in earnings among return migrants in the Mexican labor market); JACKLINE WAHBA, *The Economics of Return Migration*, in HANDBOOK OF RETURN MIGRATION 24, 24–37 (Russell King & Katie Kuschminder eds., 2022) (noting how returns can have both individual and regional positive effects); see also Elisabeth Malkin, *Mexican Deportees, Once Ignored Back Home, Now Find ‘Open Arms’*, N.Y. TIMES (April 15, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/15/world/americas/mexico-deportees-welcome.html> [<https://perma.cc/X6MC-WSUK>] (explaining that Trump’s deportation plan has sparked a nationalist surge in Mexico, leading to politicians urging companies to hire return migrants, businesses being more willing to hire return migrants, and states welcoming return migrants through social programming and services).

12. See generally Daniel E. Martínez et al., *Repeat Migration in the Age of the “Unauthorized Permanent Resident”: A Quantitative Assessment of Migration Intentions Postdeportation* 52 INT’L MIGRATION REV. 1186, 1191 (2018) (finding that strong social ties in the United States drive repeat migration post-deportation, which can result in consequences like family separation and criminalization); Eunice D. Vargas Valle et al., *Family Separation and Remigration Intentions to the USA among Mexican Deportees*, 60 INT’L MIGRATION 139, 149 (2022) (finding that deportees who left minor children in the United

deported person can also be threatened with serious violence from gangs and other criminal groups.¹³ Those who don't successfully integrate have a high likelihood of returning to the U.S., with all the attendant risks of illegal reentry.¹⁴

Outside of the deportation context, significant numbers of people choose to return to their countries of origin after extended

States are more likely to return without authorization); Alexis M. Silver & Melissa A. Manzanares, *Transnational Ambivalence: Incorporation after Forced and Compelled Return to Mexico*, 46 ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUD. 2612, 2616 (2023) (finding that individuals who grew up in the United States and returned to Mexico as young adults struggle to find belonging and are unaware of existing public and private support structures); Alexis M. Silver, *Displaced at "Home": 1.5-Generation Immigrants Navigating Membership After Returning to Mexico*, 18 ETHNICITIES 208, 211–12 (2018) (finding that individuals who grew up in the United States and returned to Mexico as young adults continue to experience the stigma of criminality, "legal violence" against immigrants, and institutional barriers to reintegration); Nayelhi Saavedra Solano et al., *"I Don't Want to Be Here." Returning from the U.S. to Mexico and Emotional Distress: A Qualitative Study*, 7 J. MIGRATION AND HEALTH, 100, 181 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2023.100181> [<https://perma.cc/29K6-QHEP>] (finding that people who were deported or forcibly returned to Mexico from the United States faced both emotional and bureaucratic obstacles to reincorporation).

13. See Ana Villareal, *Domesticating Danger: Coping Codes and Symbolic Security amid Violent Organized Crime in Mexico*, 39 SOCIO. THEORY 225, 229 (2021) (describing the prevalence of organized crime in Monterrey); Bertha Alicia Bermúdez Tapia, *"I Want to Get on the Next Bus and Leave This City Now": A Study of Violence and Deportation on the Texas-Tamaulipas Border*, 45 QUALITATIVE SOCIO. 483, 484 (2022) (describing the threat of gang violence and the impact of the Mexican Government's war on cartels in U.S.-Mexico border communities); JEREMY SLACK, DEPORTED TO DEATH 69 (2019) ("[D]eportees are seen as both threat and resource, a source of anxiety and a potential boon for any criminal organization.").

14. See DEBORAH A. BOEHM, RETURNED: GOING AND COMING IN AN AGE OF DEPORTATION 15 (2016) ("Even those deported may be willing to risk the potential consequences of return passage to the United States, "reentry" after deportation that many understand as their only alternative."); Eunice D. Vargas Valle et al., *supra* note 12, at 140; see Liza Schuster & Nassim Majidi, *Deportation Stigma and Re-Migration*, 41 J. ETHNIC MIGRATION STUD. 635, 636 (2015) (finding that a phenomenon exists where deportation creates conditions that encourages re-migration as the likely outcome, such as incurred debts, family obligations and stigma); BETH C. CALDWELL, DEPORTED AMERICANS: LIFE AFTER DEPORTATION TO MEXICO 67–99 (2019) (traces the stories and challenges of Dreamers who were deported to Mexico in recent years, despite many of them holding green cards or serving in the U.S. military, with no hope of lawful re-entry); W. Dumon, *Problems Faced by Migrations and Their Family Members, Particularly Second Generation Migrants, in Returning to and Reintegrating into Their Countries of Origin*, 24 INT'L MIGRATION 113, 116 (1986) (explores how voluntary return migration creates issues for returnees in terms of reintegration into society).

stays in the United States. Though they may not be forced to leave through a deportation process, they face many of the same reintegration challenges as deported individuals.¹⁵

Given the significance of these issues, we want to stimulate conversations about reintegration. The salience—and urgency—of these discussions is underscored by the Trump administration’s determination to implement mass deportations of potentially millions of people. In response, Mexico¹⁶ and Guatemala¹⁷ devised programs to receive thousands of their citizens who are expected to be deported from the United States. But critics of these programs have faulted them for focusing on the immediate needs of returning individuals, without planning for their long-term reintegration needs.¹⁸ All receiving countries must think strategically and comprehensively about their reintegration strategies. Our goal is for immigration lawyers, nonprofit advocates, and policymakers in the U.S. and in receiving countries to understand what the reintegration process is like and importantly, how to improve it.

Our project is focused on Mexico because Mexican citizens are numerically the largest group of immigrants in the United States,¹⁹ through both authorized and unauthorized channels.²⁰ Increasingly, Mexican nationals are returning to Mexico in large numbers. Indeed, from 2005-2014, the U.S. experienced an outmigration of Mexican nationals, as more Mexicans left than entered, reversing a trend from

15. Dumon, *supra* note 14, at 116.

16. Emiliano Rodríguez Mega & Annie Correal, *Inside the Plan to Receive Thousands of Mexicans Deported from the U.S.*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 23, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/23/world/americas/mexico-deportation-trump.html> [https://perma.cc/LCC2-JH73].

17. Annie Correal, *How One Country Plans to Resettle Planeloads of Deportees from the U.S.*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 21, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/21/us/politics/guatemala-trump-deported.html> [https://perma.cc/K5Y2-TCCW] (describing Guatemala’s reintegration plans for its citizens who are returned under Trump’s mass deportation program); Merlin Delcid, *Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo Announces Plan to Assist Deported Guatemalan Migrants*, CNN LAT. AM. (Jan. 14, 2025), <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2025/01/14/latinoamerica/presidente-guatemala-plan-migrantes-deportados-orix> [https://perma.cc/M2GL-TCWP].

18. Rodríguez Mega & Correal, *supra* note 16.

19. Joanne Haner & Mark Hugo Lopez, *8 Facts about Recent Latino Immigrants to the U.S.*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Sept. 28, 2023), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/28/8-facts-about-recent-latino-immigrants-to-the-us/> [https://perma.cc/RUJ2-C7YD].

20. *Id.*

the previous decade.²¹ Many of these people were deported, as the United States significantly increased its interior removals. For this time period, the U.S. deported 2,368,098 Mexican nationals back to Mexico, including a record 306,870 people in 2012.²² Additionally, significant numbers of Mexican nationals returned to Mexico on their own, to join deported family members or to find better economic and educational opportunities than were available in the United States.²³ In more recent years, the period of net outmigration has ended. But the numbers of Mexican deported and returned persons continue to be significant, with 214,849 Mexicans returning to Mexico in 2023.²⁴

To study this phenomenon, over four years, our interdisciplinary team interviewed 301 individuals,²⁵ who returned to Mexico either because they were deported or because they chose to return. As discussed further in Section II, there are three types of returns: deportation, constrained return, and autonomous return. This paper focuses on the former two and refers to people who were deported as “deported” and people who underwent constrained return as “returned.”

In the tradition of community engaged research,²⁶ we endeavored to give the respondents a central voice in our research.

21. Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, *Before COVID-19, More Mexicans Came to the U.S. Than Left for Mexico for the First Time in Years*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (July 9, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/07/09/before-covid-19-more-mexicans-came-to-the-u-s-than-left-for-mexico-for-the-first-time-in-years/> [https://perma.cc/4JPN-ZNV6].

22. MARY DOUGHERTY ET AL., IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS: 2005, at 5 tbl. 3 (2005); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS: 2006, at 4 tbl. 3 (2006); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS: 2007, at 4 tbl. 3 (2007); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS: 2008, at 4 tbl. 3, (2008); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS: 2009, at 4 tbl. 3 (2009); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS: 2010, at 4 tbl. 3 (2010); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS: 2011, at 6 tbl. 6 (2011); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS: 2012, at 6, tbl. 7 (2012); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., FY 2013 ICE IMMIGRATION REMOVALS 4 (2013); DEPT. HOMELAND SEC., ICE ENFORCEMENT AND REMOVAL OPERATIONS REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2014, at 4 (2014).

23. Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, *Mexicans Report Fewer Connections in the U.S., in MORE MEXICANS LEAVING THAN COMING TO THE U.S.* 16, 16, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Nov. 19, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2015/11/19/chapter-3-mexicans-report-fewer-connections-in-the-u-s/> [https://perma.cc/WZ29-LY5K].

24. See *infra* Figure 1 in Appendix A.

25. Data on file with the authors.

26. Community-engaged research is “the process of working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or

We analyzed their responses, by drawing on Jean-Pierre Cassarino's typology of successful reintegration.²⁷ From Cassarino's typology, we identify three areas of reintegration to determine the success of our respondents' reintegration: politico-institutional reintegration, economic reintegration, and socio-cultural reintegration. *Economic reintegration* refers to labor market participation, including the ability to use skills obtained in the U.S. upon return, experiences of gender and age discrimination, and self-employment. The mobilization of financial, human, and social capital are key to setting oneself up in the labor market.²⁸ *Politico-institutional reintegration* refers to being able to fully participate in the country's social and political institutions, such as social services, educational systems, and political traditions.²⁹ *Socio-cultural reintegration* includes the person's ability to incorporate into community and family life, participate in social organizations, and maintain physical and mental wellbeing. In this regard, locals' stigmatization and public perception of deported and returned individuals deeply affect their sense of belonging to the country of their return.³⁰

With respect to reintegration, some of our findings include:

Challenges to Politico-Institutional Reintegration

- Deported and returned persons reported one of their most important needs was to obtain Mexican national identification in a timelier manner to more easily and less expensively validate the U.S. documents needed for school enrollment, and to receive mental health services.
- From our sample, 87% of deported individuals did not receive the reintegration services required by law at the eleven repatriation³¹

similar situations with respect to issues affecting their well-being.” Joyce E. Balls-Berry & Edna Acosta-Pérez, *The Use of Community Engaged Research Principles to Improve Health: Community Academic Partnerships for Research*, 36 P.R. HEALTH SCIS. J. 84–85 (2017). See also Rebecca London et al., *Community-Engaged Scholarship and Its Implication for Public Sociology and The Discipline*, 72 SOC. PROBS, 1, 6–7 (2024) (identifying reciprocity and mutual benefit as one of the five main principles of community-engaged work).

27. Jean-Pierre Cassarino, *Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited*, 6 INT'L J. MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES 253, 270 (2004).

28. *Id.*

29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

31. Repatriation is the term that both the United States and Mexico call the physical process of returning deported persons to Mexico from the United States. This process is different from reintegration as it applies only to deported

sites where they were processed. These sites are supposed to provide provisional ID, medical care, phone calls to relatives, information on government services, information on shelters, and discounted bus tickets.³² A subgroup, 12%, reported being deported at night when these centers were closed, in violation of the U.S. and Mexico's *Memorandum of Understanding on the Orderly, Dignified and Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals*.³³ Nighttime deportations significantly increase the physical dangers to those who are deported because the repatriation centers are usually located in border towns with high rates of crime; deported Mexicans, in particular, are often targeted by narco-traffickers and gangs as victims or potential recruits.

- NGOs provide an important role in reintegration, with 43% of respondents reporting they relied on NGOs for services. NGOs in Mexico are of two types: (1) NGO "first responders" concentrated in border towns that provide immediate services like food, shelter, and telephone services and (2) NGOs advocating for "*retorno*

individuals, and it only refers to the immediate, physical return. *See generally* Memorandum of Understanding Between the Department of Homeland Security of the United States of America and the Secretariat of Governance and the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs of the United Mexican States on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified & Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals, U.S.–Mex. (Feb. 20, 2004), <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/repatriation-agreements/memo-of-understanding-safe-orderly-dignified-humane-repatriation-of-mexican-nationals.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/2QW2-2XTW>] (naming the process that the United States uses to return Mexican nationals to Mexico "repatriation") [hereinafter MOU on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified & Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals].

32. *Dirección de Repatriación Digna [Dignified Repatriation Directive]*, INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE MIGRACIÓN [NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF IMMIGRATION] (Oct. 5, 2022), <https://www.gob.mx/inm/acciones-y-programas/programa-de-repatriacion-12469> [<https://perma.cc/H8RP-XCCG>].

33. MOU on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified & Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals, *supra* note 31. For example, Article 3(c) of the MOU requires that "points of repatriation are to be established in a manner consistent with scheduled hours of operation and staffing availability." *Id.* Local agreements specify the hours of repatriation, usually between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. *See, e.g.,* Del Rio Repatriation Agreement, U.S.–Mex., Att. 2 (Feb. 23, 2016), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/LRA-Del-Rio-FEB-23-2016.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/84UB-5UAL>]. Further, Article 3(f) of the MOU specifies that "[i]ncapacitated persons, unaccompanied minors, and other vulnerable persons" should only be repatriated during daylight hours. MOU on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified & Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals, *supra* note 31.

digno”³⁴ (“dignified return”) that provide longer-term services. Those longer-term services include group therapy and “accompaniment” to help returned and deported persons navigate Mexican administrative bureaucracies to obtain national identification cards and other government services.

- Though there are fifty-five Mexican consular offices in the United States, few returning Mexicans use their services. Only 13% of those who returned on their own used consular services, mostly to obtain passports, consular IDs (that are of limited use in Mexico), and information on validating U.S. school documents. Deported individuals who obtained services while in detention mostly obtained consular IDs.

Challenges to Economic Reintegration

- Both deported and returned individuals reported problems in finding work. Deported individuals initially found work in the hardest and worst paid sectors (like agriculture and janitorial services), but once they obtained identification and developed their social networks, they were able to transition to better-paying jobs.
- Thirty percent reported that they had learned skills while living in the United States—including experience working with machines, construction skills, and English fluency—that helped them to find better jobs in Mexico.
- The most repeated advice that our respondents offered to others returning to Mexico was to save as much money as possible before returning and to get as much education as possible while in the United States. They pointed to the much lower wages in Mexico, making it harder to survive economically and to save. They also said that more education enhances employment opportunities in Mexico and that education is hard to obtain in Mexico because of documentation issues.

34. *Otros Dreams en Acción [Other Dreams in Action], Toward a Retorno Digno: Recommendations for a Holistic Public Policy of Return to Mexico City*, DUKE HART LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (2021), <https://hart.sanford.duke.edu/projects/toward-a-retorno-digno-recommendations-for-a-holistic-public-policy-of-return-to-mexico-city/> [https://perma.cc/H3X5-68TU].

Challenges to Socio-Cultural Reintegration

- Though respondents reported serious barriers to reintegration in Mexico, a sizable number (39%) only wanted to return to the United States for short visits with family. Many people did not want to return permanently to the United States because they did not want to experience (or repeat) the difficult experience of living in the United States as an unauthorized person, suffering racism and discrimination, as well as the traumatic experience of detention and deportation. Others talked positively about the lives that they had established in Mexico. At the same time, respondents talked about the mental health struggles that they experienced being separated from U.S. family members.
- The challenges to reintegration that our findings identify suggest several policy interventions in deportation policies and procedures; documentation; information and education; services; and immigration reform. Accomplishing these interventions will require bi-national collaboration to promote collaboration among governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the actors making up the legal and social networks within each country. Moreover, because we studied a wide variety of deported and returned persons' experiences, differentiating their unique resources and challenges, problem-specific recommendations may be more successful than one-size-fits-all responses.

Building upon the return migration literature,³⁵ our original survey and analysis add unique data to understand the reintegration trajectories of deported and returned individuals.

This Article proceeds in four parts. In Part II, we give the context of deportations and returns, building upon the scholarship of others. Part III describes the study and its research subjects. Part IV analyzes the respondents' experiences, and Part V provides recommendations for government actors, social and legal services providers.

35 . See, e.g., TANYA MARIA GOLASH-BOZA, DEPORTED IMMIGRANT POLICING, DISPOSABLE LABOR AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM (2015) (exploring the gendered and racialized aspects of mass deportation); CALDWELL *supra* note 14, at 67–99 (detailing the long term consequences of deportation, including drug use, depression, and homelessness, based on interviews of 100+ deported and their families); Jacqueline Maria Hagan & Joshua Wassink, *New Skills, New Jobs: Return Migration Skill Transfers, and Business Formation in Mexico*, 71 SOC. JUST. 513, 515–17 (2016) (using a multidimensional skills variable, the authors find that returning Mexican migrants who have acquired new skills abroad often use those new skills to start businesses in Mexico).

II. CONTEXTUALIZING DEPORTATIONS AND RETURNS

To better understand the reintegration process and to think more creatively about its possible improvement, it's important to understand the contexts in which people are deported or return to their countries of origin. One helpful framework to contextualize an individual's return to their home country is to consider their level of preparedness to return. Cassarino suggests that migrants use tangible resources (like financial capital) and intangible resources (like contacts, relationships, acquaintances, skills, and education)—both brought from their home country and acquired in the host country—in their return processes.³⁶ Building on his typology of preparedness, we identify three main types of return processes: autonomous return, constrained return, and forced return.³⁷

People who engage in autonomous return freely choose to return to their home country. They often have legal status in their host country (e.g., highly skilled migrants with work visas or those on student visas) and have the financial and social capital to have positive reintegration experiences.³⁸ Because of these generally positive experiences lead to successful reintegration, we do not include any autonomous migrants in our sample. We focus on understanding those who experience greater difficulty and require guidance on how to prepare for a return – whether voluntary or not.

Those who engage in constrained return technically, choose to return in the sense that they are not being forcibly deported by the host country. For that reason, the academic literature often refers to their return as voluntary.³⁹ But in contrast to autonomous returns, those who return under constrained conditions often lack legal status in the host country and face barriers in earning a living or obtaining

36. Cassarino, *supra* note 27, at 270.

37. Cassarino describes a similar typology but does not name the processes. *See id.* at 270–75 (proposing a conceptual framework that takes into account returnees' preparedness and resource mobilization). We name the three processes and augment their descriptions based on data from our study.

38. *Id.* at 274.

39. *See* Marie Laurence Flahaux, *Reintegrating after Return: Conceptualisation and Empirical Evidence from the Life Course of Senegalese and Congolese Migrants*, 59 INT'L MIGRATION 148, 166 (2021); *see* Katie Kuschminder, *Interrogating the Relationship between Remigration and Sustainable Return*, 55 INT'L MIGRATION 107, 107–21 (2017) (arguing for broader categories of migrants in research to better analyze successful integration, including a category of migrants capable of reintegration); WAHBA, *supra* note 11, at 1–22 (analyzing the false dichotomy between voluntary and forced migration).

an education there. They may choose to return because of those barriers in the host country or to join deported family members in the origin country.⁴⁰ In any case, they have few resources to help them reintegrate in their origin country. Instead, they must ask for help to find housing, employment, or other economic opportunities to support themselves, and face considerable stigma as failed migrants.⁴¹ Because of these challenges, we describe their returns as constrained, rather than voluntary, to reflect the reality of their circumstances. Constrained returns are a major focus of our research project.

Finally, the last type of migrants are those who are forcibly returned or deported and consequently face even more dire reintegration challenges. Because many are detained until they are deported by the host country, they lack the opportunity to gather documents or resources to take with them or to choose the timing and location of their arrival back to the origin country. This group includes legal permanent residents in the U.S. whose deportation is linked to a criminal history that made them deportable.⁴² Those without lawful immigration status are primarily deported for that lack of status, though some may have a criminal conviction that deems them deportable.⁴³ Deported people face stigma upon return to their home countries, because of their status as failed immigrants and their association with criminal convictions.⁴⁴ Deported individuals are the largest group in our study, so we start our contextual analysis there.

40. Cassarino, *supra* note 27, at 273–75.

41. See Schuster & Majidi, *supra* note 14, at 643 (describing how those deported are forced to reconstruct a stigmatized identity); see also P. Romo-Martínez et al., *Prevalence of Despair and Social-Demographic Factors Related of Repatriated Mexican Migrants*, 15 ENFERMERÍA UNIVERSITARIA 55, 60 (2017) (noting high levels of despair and stigmatization among deported); David C. Brotherton & Luis Barrios, *Displacement and Stigma: The Social-Psychological Crisis of the Deportee*, 5 CRIME MEDIA CULTURE 29, 32 (2009) (analyzing social exclusion and stigmatization faced by Dominican deportees); Solano et al., *supra* note 12, at 9 (examining the psychosocial distress among Mexican deportees at the three stages: pre-immigration, stay and expulsion from the United States, and return-reintegration in Mexico).

42. See generally STEPHEN H. LEGOMSKY & DAVID B. THRONSON, IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE LAW AND POLICY 569–71 (Saul Levmore et al. eds, 7th ed. 2019) (explaining the criminal grounds for deportation).

43. *Id.*

44. Schuster & Majidi, *supra* note 14, at 635–36.

A. Forcible Return—The U.S. Deportation System

In 1996, Congress fundamentally restructured the process by which noncitizens are expelled—whether from the interior of the country or at its borders—and renamed it “removal.”⁴⁵ We continue to refer to the process as “deportation” for several reasons. First, it is the commonly used term for the process. Our interviewees referred to their process of expulsion as deportation, and scholars, writing outside of the context of legal analysis, also refer to it as deportation, rather than removal. And in the specific context of those who are admitted to the country with lawful status but are later expelled, the Immigration and Nationality Act still refers to the grounds for their expulsion (e.g., certain types of criminal convictions) as deportability grounds.⁴⁶

Simply stated, the United States deports many, many people. With the world’s strongest economy that attracts more immigrants than any other country,⁴⁷ and national immigration policies that have prioritized enforcement,⁴⁸ the country’s high numbers of deportations are not surprising.⁴⁹

What may be surprising is that the highest number of removals during this period (2009–2024) occurred not during the Trump administration but during the first Obama administration. Obama extolled the benefits of immigration in his campaign speeches, and as president he pushed to enact comprehensive immigration reform to provide undocumented immigrants a pathway to legal

45. LEGOMSKY & THRONSON, *supra* note 42, at 865.

46. See 8 U.S.C. § 1227 (demonstrating how the word “deported” is still used, even in federal legislation).

47. *The Top 10 Largest Economies in the World in 2024*, FORBES INDIA (July 17, 2024, at 17:13 IST), <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/explainers/top-10-largest-economies-in-the-world/86159/1> [https://perma.cc/JE2V-F2T8]; Mohamad Moslimani & Jeffrey S. Passel, *What the Data Says about Immigrants in the U.S.*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (July 22, 2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/27/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/> [https://perma.cc/2JHL-XS7H].

48. See generally LEGOMSKY & THRONSON, *supra* note 42, at 1111–12 (describing how the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks altered immigration policy in America and shifted its focus to preventative detention and other means of enforcement); see also TANYA MARIA GOLASH-BOZA, IMMIGRATION NATION: RAIDS, DETENTIONS, AND DEPORTATIONS IN POST 9/11 AMERICA 6 (Routledge 2011) (2015) (describing a surge in enforcement since 9/11 and how that leads to violations of people’s human rights).

49. See *infra* Figure 2 in Appendix A (showing the number of removals per year under the past five presidential administrations from 2008 to 2024).

status. Yet deportations during his first administration reached historically high levels—more than 3.1 million deportations.⁵⁰ Obama's aggressive enforcement was likely a partly calculated response to Republican congressional demands that enforcement of immigration law precede any discussion of expansion of available pathways to legal status,⁵¹ but the high numbers of removals also reflected the increased efficiency of federal immigration enforcement more generally.

By contrast, though Trump made immigration enforcement one of his core platforms, his deportation numbers during his first administration are in line with historic patterns of deportation. Rather, what changed during the Trump administration was the makeup of those deported. Under the previous Bush and Obama administrations, the people deported tended to be young and male, with low levels of education. Trump, however, aggressively targeted all unauthorized individuals, meaning that during his administration, there were more deportations of women, those with high school educations, and those who had lived in the United States for extended periods.⁵²

Biden took office, pledging to roll back Trump's harsh immigration policies, but deportations during his administration exceeded those carried out during the first Trump administration.⁵³

50. *Id.*

51. See Julián Aguilar, *Immigration Reform Groups Urge Obama to Act Without Congress*, TEX. TRIB. (Feb. 27, 2014), <https://www.texastribune.org/2014/02/27/immigration-reform-groups-urge-obama-act-alone/> [https://perma.cc/8M8X-254U] (explaining that Republicans in Congress refused to work on immigration reform because they felt the Obama administration was not enforcing the existing laws); see also Julián Aguilar, *Obama Immigration Policies Satisfy Neither Right Nor Left*, TEX. TRIB. (Sept. 22, 2011), <https://www.texastribune.org/2011/09/22/will-obamas-immigration-policy-help-gop/> [https://perma.cc/ND7V-WU84] (noting how Obama had critics on the left and right on the immigration issue.).

52. Heeju Sohn et al., *Deportations and Departures: Undocumented Mexican Immigrants' Return Migration During Three Presidential Administrations*, 120 PROCEEDINGS NAT'L ACAD. SCIS. 1, 7 (2023); see also Luis Enrique et al., *Migrantes Mexicanos Deportados y sus Planes para Reingresar a Estados Unidos al Inicio del Gobierno de Donald Trump* [Mexican Deported Migrants and Their Plans to Reenter the U.S. at the Beginning of Donald Trump's Administration], 63 REVISTA MEXICANA DE CIENCIAS POLÍTICAS Y SOCIALES [MEXICAN MAG. POL. AND SOC. SCIS.] 43, 52 (2018) (explaining the Trump administration's intention to target all undocumented immigrants).

53. Albert Sun, *Why Deportations Were Higher Under Biden Than in Trump's First Term*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 22, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com>

In contrast to his predecessors, Biden focused on deportations at the border (versus interior enforcement), responding to the record numbers of people trying to cross during his administration.⁵⁴ To carry out his promised program of mass deportation, Trump in his second administration has carried out a blitzkrieg of enforcement tactics: raiding workplaces, arresting people who show up at immigration court hearings, and revoking legal status from previously protected groups.⁵⁵ From January 20 to June 26, 2025, the Trump Administration deported 128,030 people, according to the Freedom of Information Act documents obtained by the University of California, Los Angeles Center for Immigration Law and Policy.⁵⁶

The Immigration and Naturalization Act provides three main grounds for deportation: grounds related to immigration violations, grounds related to post-entry criminal conduct, and grounds related to national security.⁵⁷ In our sample, 64% were removed for immigration violations and 36% for post-entry criminal conduct. Deportable immigration violations include entering without the required immigration documents, overstaying a visa, or otherwise violating the terms of a visa.⁵⁸ Deportable criminal conduct includes convictions for drug offenses, crimes of moral turpitude, and

/2025/01/22/us/trump-biden-immigrants-deportations.html [https://perma.cc/4NUH-SCDX]; Muzaffar Chishti et al., *Biden's Mixed Immigration Legacy: Border Challenges Overshadowed Modernization Advances*, MIGRATION POL'Y INST. (Dec. 10, 2024), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/biden-immigration-legacy/> [https://perma.cc/J2L6-TZQ6].

54. Muzaffar Chishti & Kathleen Bush-Joseph, *Comparing the Biden and Trump Deportation Records*, MIGRATION POL'Y INST. (June 27, 2024), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/biden-deportation-record> [https://perma.cc/F5D6-3U5V]; see also Huyen Pham & Pham Hoang Van, *The Subfederal in Immigration Polarization*, 42 MINN. J. L. & INEQUALITY 33, 47–63 (2024) (describing the enforcement policies of the different presidential administrations).

55. See *Report on the Trump Administration's 2025 Changes to Immigration Law*, N.Y.C. BAR ASS'N (Oct. 10, 2025), <https://www.nycbar.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/20221419-TrumpAdminChangesImmigrationLaw.pdf> [https://perma.cc/5G3V-F5J6] (detailing the Trump administration's immigration policies since the beginning of its second term).

56. *Immigrations and Customs Enforcement*, DEPORTATION DATA PROJECT, <https://deportationdata.org/data/ice.html> [https://perma.cc/5V9A-28YW] (last visited July 20, 2025) (provides periodically updated data releases on immigration enforcement actions).

57. 8 U.S.C. § 1227(1), (3), (5) (immigration violations); 8 U.S.C. § 1227(2) (post-admission criminal conduct); 8 U.S.C. § 1227(4) (national security).

58. See 8 U.S.C. §§ 1227(1)(B)–(D) (listing deportable immigration violations).

aggravated felonies.⁵⁹ Finally, deportable national security grounds include committing terrorist acts or providing material support for those acts or for terrorist organizations.⁶⁰ The first two sets of grounds account for the vast majority of all deportations⁶¹ and our data also reflects these findings.

Noncitizens are placed in the deportation process through different pathways. They may be detained directly by federal immigration authorities—Customs & Border Protection (“CBP”) in the border areas or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) in the interior. In its interior operations, ICE identifies and apprehends individuals for deportation through various channels, including tips from third parties and its own investigations. Employer sanctions also play an important role in ICE’s interior enforcement efforts. Since 1986, when Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (“IRCA”), it has been illegal for employers to hire noncitizens who lack work authorization.⁶² Though IRCA only targets employers, employees who work without authorization get caught in IRCA’s enforcement through workplace raids that reveal their presence to ICE.⁶³ State legislatures and Congress have also criminalized conduct related to working without authorization (e.g., the federal offense of presenting false identity documents to complete IRCA’s employment verification requirements).⁶⁴

Increasingly, ICE’s ability to identify and apprehend noncitizens in the interior for deportation depends on state and local law enforcement agencies, such as police departments, sheriff’s

59. See *id.* §§ 1227(2)(A)–(B) (listing deportable general crimes and crimes dealing with controlled substances).

60. See *id.* §§ 1227(4)(A)–(B) (listing deportable offenses for security and related grounds); see also 8 U.S.C. § 1182(3)(B) (listing deportable terrorist-related offenses and defining related terms such as “terrorist activity” and “engage in terrorist activity”).

61. Mark A. Perez, *What are the Most Common Reasons People Get Deported?* (July 3, 2024), MARK A. PEREZ, ATT’Y L., <https://perezcriminallaw.com/blog/what-are-the-most-common-reasons-for-deportation-from-the-u-s/> [https://perma.cc/V2GG-GJ3M].

62. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, 8 U.S.C. § 1324(a).

63. Angela D. Morrison, *Why Protect Unauthorized Workers? Imperfect Proxies, Unaccountable Employers, and Antidiscrimination Law’s Failures*, 72 BAYLOR L. REV. 117, 125 (2020).

64. See 18 U.S.C. § 1546(b) (establishing penalty and punishment for document fraud); see also Angela D. Morrison, *Framing & Contesting Unauthorized Work*, 36 GEO. IMMIGR. L. J. 651, 672–74 (2022) (providing an overview of the criminalization of unauthorized work).

offices, or even state troopers.⁶⁵ In the exercise of their usual criminal enforcement authority, these agencies make the initial stop of the noncitizen.⁶⁶ If local law enforcement brings the noncitizen in for booking, their biometric information is automatically shared with ICE through the Secure Communities program, alerting ICE to the detention and location of the noncitizen.⁶⁷ If ICE wants to deport the noncitizen, ICE can request an immigration detainer by asking the local law enforcement agency to continue to detain the noncitizen beyond the time that the agency would ordinarily release the noncitizen. Instead of releasing the noncitizen on bail or bond, the agency can hold the noncitizen until ICE can pick up the noncitizen for deportation.⁶⁸ Some local enforcement agencies take their immigration cooperation further, signing 287(g) agreements with ICE that deputize their officers to enforce federal immigration laws.⁶⁹ With either form of cooperation, noncitizens are funneled into deportation proceedings through the efforts of local law enforcement agencies.

Noncitizens who are apprehended in the country's interior are entitled to a removal hearing before an immigration judge,⁷⁰ unless

65. See Huyen Pham, *287(g) Agreements in the Trump Era*, 75 WASH. & LEE L. REV. 1253, 1257–60 (2018) (describing changes made to the 287(g) program made by the first Trump administration); Huyen Pham & Van H. Pham, *Sheriffs, State Troopers, and the Spillover Effects of Immigration Enforcement*, 64 ARIZ. L. REV. 463, 464 (2022) (using traffic stop data from the Stanford Open Policing Project to show that 287(g) agreements cause non-signatory law enforcement agencies to engage in racial profiling).

66. Hiroshi Motomura, *The Discretion That Matters: Federal Immigration Enforcement, State and Local Arrests, and the Civil-Criminal Line*, 58 UCLA L. REV. 1819, 1858 (2011) (explaining that local law enforcement agencies that make the initial arrests are the real gatekeepers of the immigration removal system because federal immigration prosecutors have little discretion).

67. See *Secure Communities*, U.S. IMMIGR. AND CUSTOMS ENF'T (May 10, 2024), <https://www.ice.gov/secure-communities> [<https://perma.cc/YW5R-9GC6>] (establishing biometric interoperability among law enforcement agencies and ICE).

68. See *Immigration Detainers*, U.S. IMMIGR. AND CUSTOMS ENF'T (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.ice.gov/immigration-detainers> [<https://perma.cc/AVD8-AHMG>] (explaining how immigration detainers work).

69. See *The 287(g) Program: An Overview*, AM. IMMIGR. COUNCIL (Jan. 20, 2025), <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/287g-program-immigration> [<https://perma.cc/RZ6U-R7UH>] (explaining how 287(g) agreements work).

70. The INA uses the term “removal” to refer to the process by which noncitizens are removed from the country. In this paragraph discussing the legal

they and ICE agree to voluntary departure.⁷¹ Under federal statute, the hearing incorporates elements that appear to protect a noncitizen's due process rights, including placing the burden of proving removability on ICE and giving the noncitizen the opportunity to both contest removability and to ask for affirmative relief (like cancellation of removal).⁷² But in practice, most removal hearings are perfunctory, with little meaningful opportunity for noncitizens to present their cases.⁷³ Approximately 70% of noncitizens in removal proceedings do not have legal representation,⁷⁴ and without that representation, their chances of successfully challenging a removal order are slim.⁷⁵ Noncitizens who are detained during removal proceedings face additional challenges in preparing their cases; even if they have legal counsel, they are often detained in remote detention centers and moved from center to center, with limited ability to communicate with family or lawyers.⁷⁶

In our study, 222 individuals (74% of total respondents) were deported. Of those who were deported, 88% were male,⁷⁷ with lower

proceedings, we use the term "removal" as well. *See generally* 8 U.S.C. § 1229 (outlining initiation of removal proceedings).

71. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1229(c) (listing circumstances where noncitizens can leave the United States voluntarily in lieu of formal removal).

72. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1229(a) (outlining procedures for removal of noncitizens).

73. *See* David Hausman & Jayashri Srikantiah, *Time, Due Process, and Representation: An Empirical and Legal Analysis of Continuances in Immigration Court*, 84 *FORDHAM L. REV.* 1823, 1826–28 (2016) (arguing that expedited scheduling in immigration courts undermines noncitizens' due process rights by limiting their ability to secure legal representation).

74. *Too Few Immigration Attorneys: Average Representation Rates Fall from 65% To 30%*, TRAC IMMIGR. (Jan. 24, 2024), [https://tracreports.org/\[https://perma.cc/C68R-KYZZ\]](https://tracreports.org/[https://perma.cc/C68R-KYZZ]) (click on "More News"; scroll down to the article; click on "See more").

75. *See id.* (discussing the disparity in successful removal order challenges between represented and unrepresented immigrants).

76. *See* Emma Winger & Eunice Hyunhye Cho, *ICE Makes It Impossible for Immigrants in Detention to Contact Lawyers*, ACLU (Oct. 29, 2021), <https://www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/ice-makes-it-impossible-for-immigrants-in-detention-to-contact-lawyers> [<https://perma.cc/2SR7-US24>] (outlining challenges people face while in immigration detention centers); *see also* *Locked Up Far Away: The Transfer of Immigrants to Remote Detention Centers in the United States*, HUM. RTS. WATCH (Dec. 9, 2009), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/12/02/locked-far-away/transfer-immigrants-remote-detention-centers-united-states> [<https://perma.cc/J9NA-DZRM>] (highlighting how ICE transfers immigrants to remote facilities and the harmful consequences that follow).

77. The gender breakdown is similar to the gender breakdown of the national population of deported persons. *See* Tanya Golash-Boza & Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Latino Immigrant Men and the Deportation Crisis: A Gendered*

educational attainment than those who returned.⁷⁸ The people in our study most commonly reported that they were deported after a traffic violation.⁷⁹ Work raids are the second most common way in which people in our study were apprehended for deportation.⁸⁰

Another significant pattern in our survey data is the prevalence of the criminal legal system in our respondents' deportation experiences. Eighty-five individuals or 38% of respondents reported an apprehension method related to criminal grounds: deportation related to drug crimes, domestic violence, gang activity, parole violation, unspecified misdemeanors, and the operation of the federal Criminal Alien Program ("CAP"), a prison-release program that checks for deportability. The total number of apprehensions in our survey related to criminal grounds may be even higher, because the other categories of apprehensions (e.g., traffic stops or deportation order) may also be based on deportable criminal convictions. The prevalence of the criminal legal system also underscores the intertwining of federal-subfederal cooperation in immigration enforcement. For example, all but one of the lawful permanent residents ("LPRs") in our survey were deported through CAP. So, when they had completed their prison sentences for non-

Racial Removal Program, 11 *LATINO STUD.* 271, 273 (2013) (explaining how immigration policies have disproportionately targeted men of color).

78. See *infra* Table 1 in Appendix A.

79. Traffic violations like speeding or even drunk driving are not deportable offenses. 8 U.S.C. § 1227(2). However, traffic stops play a crucial role in the deportation process by bringing noncitizens to the attention of local law enforcement agencies. Depending on the agency's level of cooperation with federal immigration enforcement, the local law enforcement agency can funnel the noncitizen to ICE for deportation. ICE may have various bases for deportation—e.g., unauthorized entry into the U.S., overstaying a visa, or a deportable criminal conviction—but ICE's access to the noncitizen is made possible in the first place due to the initial involvement of local law enforcement. Traffic stops are the most common method of reported apprehension in our study, underscoring the importance of local-federal immigration cooperation.

80. ICE picked up twenty-three of our respondents in the same work raid on a south Texas farm, where the workers reported that the Sinaloa Cartel had labor-trafficked them. These respondents described horrible working conditions, where the cartel forced them to work from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m., growing fruits and vegetables, but also marijuana and poppies. To work these long hours, they were drugged with cocaine. Workers who refused to cooperate were murdered, as a deterrent to others. During the work raid, the respondents reported that ICE agents and local law enforcement officers physically assaulted them. Presumably because law enforcement assumed that the workers were part of the cartel, ICE placed them in deportation proceedings.

immigration offenses (often in state-run prisons), they were moved to immigration detention instead of being released.

Half of our deported interviewees (111 individuals) reported having a hearing in immigration court. When asked if they had legal representation during the deportation process, 62% said no, 20% said yes, and 18% reported having a “government lawyer.” The “government lawyer” responses are references to the Department of Homeland Security lawyer who represents the federal government in immigration hearings and prosecutes the government’s case for deportation. The fact that so many respondents (thirty-four out of the 191 individuals who answered this question) believed that the DHS attorney was their lawyer underscores the legal confusion that many respondents had about the deportation process. There were 131 individuals who reported agreeing to deportation, meaning that they did not contest deportation through an immigration hearing.

Respondents uniformly described the deportation process as very uncertain and stressful—63% of people deported reported poor treatment while in detention, with another 28% describing their treatment as neutral. A large number reported being verbally abused. Indigenous interviewees reported being called “*indio sucio*” (“dirty Indian”) and “*chango*” (“monkey”), among other derogatory terms. Though 84% of the respondents were able to speak with their families while in detention, very few were told when they would be deported or had enough time to obtain an identification card from the Mexican Consulate.⁸¹ Most respondents reported being sent to only one detention center before being deported, but forty-two respondents were moved to several detention centers before being deported, with one respondent reporting being moved to six detention centers.

As for the deportation itself, our interviewees were either flown to Mexico City or transported to one of the eleven border crossings between Mexico and the United States. For many years, as part of the Alien Transfer and Exit Program and Mexican Interior Repatriation Program, the federal government would deport Mexican nationals from a different Border Patrol sector than the sector where

81. Mexico’s Instituto Nacional Electoral (“INE”) is an autonomous institution created to ensure and facilitate democratic elections in Mexico. One of their main tasks is issuing Mexicans their *Credencial de Elector* (known colloquially as “*INE*”), a voter identification card and the most common photo ID in Mexico. See Lauren TerMatt, *Mexico’s National Electoral Institute—Explainer*, WILSON CTR. (Oct. 24, 2023), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/mexico-national-electoral-institute-explainer> [<https://perma.cc/7GRW-DN4Y>] (explaining the importance of the INE).

they were apprehended.⁸² The government's goal in these transferred deportations is to separate migrants from their smugglers, to make it more difficult for them to reenter illegally.⁸³ But for the deported individuals in our survey, the transfers meant that they were often returned to Mexico at ports-of-entry far away from their original homes, making reintegration more difficult.

B. Constrained Return

Historically, Mexican workers engaged in circular migration to the United States, going north for work and returning home after the work was completed.⁸⁴ That circular migration largely ended in the 1990s, as the United States increased its border enforcement and made inter-country travel more dangerous and expensive.⁸⁵ As a result, more undocumented Mexican immigrants chose to remain in the United States for longer periods of time.⁸⁶ And as noted earlier, Mexican migration to the United States decreased in the early 2000s at the same time that Mexicans were returning in record numbers (through deportation and voluntary returns), resulting in periods of net Mexican outmigration.⁸⁷

82. Jason De León, *The Efficacy and Impact of the Alien Transfer Exit Programme: Migrant Perspectives from Nogales, Sonora, Mexico*, 51 INT'L MIGRATION 10, 11 (2013); Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes & Susan Pozo, *On the Intended and Unintended Consequences of Enhanced U.S. Border and Interior Immigration Enforcement: Evidence from Mexican Deportees*, 51 DEMOGRAPHY 2255, 2258 (2014).

83. De León, *supra* note 82, at 11.

84. See generally Jorge Durand & Douglas S. Massey, *Evolution of the Mexico-U.S. Migration System: Insights from the Mexican Migration Project*, 684 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. SOC. SCI. 21, 21–42 (2019) (describing the evolution of Mexican migration to the U.S. as circular until border militarization led to an increasingly settled and undocumented population); see also DOUGLAS S. MASSEY ET AL., BEYOND SMOKE AND MIRRORS: MEXICAN IMMIGRATION IN AN ERA OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION 31 (2002) (“Fleeing economic and political uncertainty during the Mexican Revolution, the first migrants did not seek to relocate permanently in the United States, but sought seasonal work in a growing agrarian U.S. market.”); Sohn et al., *supra* note 52, at 3 (describing economically-motivated circular migration).

85. Douglas S. Massey et al., *Border Enforcement and Return Migration by Documented and Undocumented Mexicans*, 41 J. ETHNIC MIGRATION STUD. 1015, 1016 (2015).

86. *Id.*

87. See *infra* Figure 1 in Appendix A (showing an increasing number of Mexicans returning to Mexico from the United States between 2005 and 2009); *supra* notes 21, 22 and accompanying text (noting how net migration to Mexico was negative during the Great Recession).

Studying the voluntary return of immigrants—whether under constrained or autonomous circumstances—is challenging because there are fewer centralized mechanisms for recording their return, as compared to the more centralized system for deportations. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, the Center for Migration Studies (“CMS”) estimates that from 2010–2018, an average of 665,000 undocumented immigrants left the U.S. annually.⁸⁸ Of that number, CMS estimates that 305,000 emigrated voluntarily, with deportations, deaths, and adjustments to lawful immigration status accounting for the remaining 360,000.⁸⁹ CMS estimates do not break down the voluntary returns by nationality, but the Center notes that during this eight-year period, the number of undocumented Mexican immigrants arriving to the U.S. remained steady and the number who left the U.S. increased.⁹⁰ CMS attributes the rising number of Mexican departures, in part, to improving social and economic conditions in Mexico.⁹¹

The demographics of the returning population of Mexican nationals closely resembles the demographics of deported Mexicans: largely male with less than a high school education.⁹² But looking at these demographics across time (2001–2019), there are also increasing numbers of women, older returned (in the forty-six to fifty-nine age group), and returned with a high school degree or more.⁹³ As noted earlier, the uptick in these changed demographics started in the first Obama administration and continued through the first Trump administration.⁹⁴ Interestingly, there is “little evidence that the [first] Trump administration’s rhetoric and heightened enforcement efforts succeeded in motivating a more diverse group of undocumented immigrants to leave voluntarily for Mexico.”⁹⁵

Generally speaking, immigrants choose to return to their countries of origin for multiple, interrelated reasons, including job opportunities, family reunification, and individual lifestyle

88. Robert Warren, *Reverse Migration to Mexico Led to U.S. Undocumented Population Decline: 2010 to 2018*, 8 J. MIGRATION & HUM. SEC. 32, 33 (2020).

89. *Id.*

90. *Id.* at 34–35 fig. 2.

91. *Id.* at 34–35.

92. Sohn et al., *supra* note 52, at 4 tbl. 1; Edith Y. Gutiérrez Vázquez, *The 2000–2010 Changes in Labor Market Incorporation of Return Mexican Migrants*, 24 REVISTA LATINOAMERICANA DE POBLACIÓN [LATIN AM. POPULATION J.] 135, 145 (2019).

93. Sohn et al., *supra* note 52, at 4 tbl. 1.

94. *Id.*

95. *Id.* at 1.

preferences.⁹⁶ Immigrants who experience xenophobia or racism in the host country may also be incentivized to return home, where they have a greater sense of belonging.⁹⁷

But for many returned, the decision to return is often a choice between lesser evils. Take Cindy, for example. Her parents brought her to the U.S. at age 3 without lawful immigration status. She took high school courses in Los Angeles and speaks fluent English but poor Spanish. When we asked why she left the U.S. at age 29, she responded: “Because you get tired looking over your shoulder to think ‘when are they going to catch me?’ You can’t live in peace.”⁹⁸ Now that she is back in Mexico, she plans to stay.

Besides the burden of possible deportation for themselves, some respondents returned to Mexico to join deported family members. Victoria arrived in the U.S. at age twenty-six with her husband and children.⁹⁹ They settled in Washington, D.C., where they had relatives. Although she spoke no English and did not have lawful immigration status, she obtained work right away. Eight years later, her husband was deported. She did not leave right away. She stayed with the kids and worked two jobs, but, in the end, decided to return:

Because when I worked, I had to work in the morning. In the afternoon, I worked in another job. I didn’t rest well. I felt exhausted. Nervous. I thought, “What if the police are gonna stop me?” I don’t have a permit. I don’t have this. I don’t have that. It was a lot of pressure. And yes, that, that makes one question, “well, why did I come over here?” And I would hang on to stay[ing] there and work[ing] but, in the end, I knew. I knew that it was harder and harder that I was closing myself off and I would go to work, and I would leave my kids alone in the little room that we rented, and I mean, I had their passports in case of anything. Every day, every day, I would think “what’s

96. *Id.* at 2.

97. Filiz Kunuroglu et al., *Return Migration*, 8 MIGRATION AND ACCULTURATION 1, 9 (2016) (explaining motives for return migration in general); see also Lorena Guzmán Elizalde, *Return to Mexico: Exploring Reintegration Experiences*, 24 J. INT. MIGRATION & INTEGRATION 465, 474 (2023) (explaining motives for Mexican return migrants).

98. Interview with Cindy (Mar. 11, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

99. Interview with Victoria (Apr. 9, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

going to happen if they stop us?” and I would think about my situation.¹⁰⁰

Faced with exploitative jobs that paid little, Victoria returned to Mexico.¹⁰¹

In sum, many people who returned did so in response to a binary choice. More restrictive immigration laws and hardening borders mean that people must choose whether to remain in the U.S. without authorization or return to Mexico. Whether they make that choice depends on a number of factors, including the economy in Mexico and the availability of jobs in the United States, the social conditions in Mexico and in the United States, and individuals' own assessment of their risk of apprehension.

III. OUR STUDY AND THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS

To better understand the findings and recommendations, this section discusses the research methodology and the demographics and background of our participants.

A. Research Methodology

Our research proceeded in several stages. Initially, the research team visited state migration agencies and non-profit organizations in four locations in Mexico in summer 2019: San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, and Mexico City. Next, we conducted interviews. Due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions, we were unable to travel to Mexico in 2020, so we conducted our interviews via Zoom or telephone.¹⁰² We completed a total of 301 interviews.¹⁰³ Virtual

100. *Id.*

101. *Id.*

102. Based on our previous year's contacts, we asked two nonprofit organizations, *Otro Dreams en Acción* [*Other Dreams in Action*] and *Deportados Unidos en la Lucha* [*Deportees United in the Fight*], to facilitate online recruitment by posting an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) approved flyer on their social media. Through informal networks, our flyer was also shared among people who were deported or returned and did not have connections to the original nonprofit organizations. We even received calls from people who had obtained the flyer at the airport upon reentering Mexico after being deported.

103. In 2020 and 2021, using these recruitment methods, we completed 275 Zoom or phone interviews with people who were deported or returned. In 2022, we conducted 26 in-person interviews with deported and returned people who had received support from the Guanajuato Ministry of Migrant Outreach, for a total of

recruiting had the advantage of a larger sample that provided a greater variety of experiences. Our interviewees returned to twenty-two (out of thirty-two) states in Mexico, in addition to Mexico City, and reported having lived in forty-one of the fifty states in the United States.¹⁰⁴

One drawback of our recruiting and interviewing methods was that some of the interviewees were very recently deported or returned. Because their reintegration experiences were more limited, we focused these interviews on their deportation or return experiences.¹⁰⁵ This helped better understand the current conditions for deportation and immediate return experiences, providing important context for the reintegration experiences that are the focus of our project.

We analyzed the interview data using the online mixed methods platform, Dedoose.¹⁰⁶ The software facilitates data analysis by allowing strings of text to be linked to codes thematically and theoretically conceived by the researchers. In this way, we organized the interview data by themes to discern patterns in how deported and returned persons respond to social and economic dislocation, engage with government institutions, and reconnect with families, for example. The mixed-method platform also allowed us to create categorical variables, permitting comparison of themes by gender, age, geographical region, and labor market experiences, to name a few.

301 interviews. We recorded, transcribed, and translated all interviews. We used audio or audiovisual applications like Tape-A-Call or Zoom for recording. The research participant chose between a phone and Zoom interview, and if by Zoom, whether to turn on their camera or not. We wired research participants the equivalent of \$25 after completion of the interview and gave them a resource sheet of services in Mexico. Most interviews lasted around 45 minutes, with some going over an hour. Participants chose the language of the interview, Spanish or English. More than two-thirds chose to interview in English, reflecting their high levels of integration into the United States. The Spanish language interviews were then translated by one of the native-Spanish speaking team members, and all interviews were transcribed using the Otter.AI program.

104. See *infra* Figure 3 in Appendix A.

105. For example, we interviewed 77 individuals, recently deported men who were living at shelters in Mexico City, Tamaulipas, Tabasco, and Chiapas. Through their shared deportation experiences, these men had formed distinct groups at the shelters; some of the individual members had seen our flier and contacted us to request interviews.

106. DEDOOSE, www.dedoose.com (last visited Oct. 28, 2025) (we used Dedoose Version 10.0.59 in our analysis of interview data).

Finally, with our preliminary findings, we organized a convening in May 2023 in Mexico City, with people who have returned to Mexico, governmental actors, civil society organizations, lawyers, and academics. The goals of the convening were to share our preliminary findings and to start a larger conversation about the factors that lead to successful reintegration, the challenges to reintegration, and recommended policy reforms, including concrete actions to address the barriers to reintegration. We reviewed the input from that conference, evaluated it, and where appropriate, included it in our recommendations in Part IV below.

B. Demographics and Background

For purposes of our discussion, we provide here an overall description of the returned and deported we interviewed. We provide the demographics and background information including family structure and migration trajectories.

1. Demographics

Our sample was 77% male and 23% female, with the experience of males largely associated with deportation, while the women tended to identify more with constrained returns. In our survey, men represented 88% of the deported, and women represented 53% of the returned.¹⁰⁷ The gender breakdown in our sample is consistent with other studies' findings that men are overrepresented in deportation proceedings.¹⁰⁸

Because most of the reintegration literature looks at deportation to urban areas,¹⁰⁹ we recruited rural residents for our survey. As a result, 28% of our respondents returned to rural areas in Mexico.¹¹⁰

Regarding other demographic characteristics: we interviewed adults from the ages of eighteen to over sixty-five years, with the

107. Since we are interested in learning about women's reintegration experiences after deportation, we also made a concerted effort to interview deported women.

108. Golash-Boza & Hondagneu-Sotelo, *supra* note 77, at 271 (finding that 88% of deported are male and 98% are Latin American).

109. BOEHM, *supra* note 14, at 9; SLACK, *supra* note 13, at 45; GOLASH-BOZA, *supra* note 35, at 6.

110. Moreover, in Mexico and other countries of origin, government and NGO resources that are crucial to reintegration are less available in rural areas.

majority (71%) between the ages of twenty and forty-nine. Almost half of those who were deported reported high school education attainment, while 47% of those who returned reported at least some college education. With respect to Spanish language fluency, 89% of deported and 91% of returned were fluent.¹¹¹ Seventy one percent of deported and 76% of returned were fluent in English.¹¹²

111 . Language proficiency was a common theme of the interviews. Individuals who did not have a great deal of Spanish language proficiency or spoke it but not at native speaker levels often reported greater difficulty in integrating into Mexican society. Children who spoke Spanish but did not know how to write it struggled in school. Perhaps most surprisingly, children whose parents returned under constrained conditions struggled the most with Spanish, suffering greater educational setbacks as a result.

112 . English fluency provided respondents with more and better employment opportunities.

Table 2: Demographic Information of Respondents^{1,2}

	Deported	Returned	All
Sample size			
Number of participants	222	79	301
Proportion from total	74%	26%	100%
Age			
Mean	34	32	34
Sex			
Male	88%	47%	77%
Female	12%	53%	23%
Educational attainment			
Elementary school or less	12%	4%	10%
Middle school or junior high	28%	18%	25%
High school or equivalent	45%	32%	41%
Some college or technical school	12%	19%	14%
College	3%	28%	9%
English proficiency³			
Fluent in English	71%	76%	72%
Spanish proficiency when arrived in Mexico^{3,4}			
None	0.5%	3%	1%
A little	9%	19%	12%
I got by	22%	26%	23%
Spoke but could not write	5%	4%	5%
Good	63%	49%	59%
Current Spanish proficiency³			
Fluent in Spanish	89%	91%	90%

¹ Missing values for education category: 3; English proficiency: 4; Spanish proficiency when returned: 35;

Spanish proficiency now: 13.

² All values have been rounded to the closest integer

³ Considering self-reported speaking skills

⁴ Self-reported proficiency at the time of deportation/return.

2. Family Structure

We asked the interviewees several questions about their family structure. When asked about their marital status, some explained that they were not legally married. Instead of spending time investigating the legal and practical implications of their intimate relationships, we grouped together those who indicated they were married or in serious partner relationships. Of those who are married, the majority reported that their spouses live in Mexico. 63% of deported persons' spouses and 85% of returned individuals' spouses live in Mexico. However, the deported individuals were more likely to have remarried in Mexico, while the returned came back to Mexico with their spouses and children. This difference is one of the reasons

that deported individuals have a higher percentage of children in both the United States (older children from their earlier marriage) and Mexico (younger children from their current marriage).

When we discussed children, 67% of the deported and 48% of the returned reported having children. Only nineteen of the 125 deported with children, or approximately 15%, stated that their children had dual citizenship. The rate of dual citizenship for children of returned individuals with children was higher (21%).

In terms of support structure, both deported and returned individuals reported significant close family in the United States, though a larger number of deported individuals (71%) reported these close U.S. connections than did returned individuals (57%). When asked about close family ties in Mexico, the answers of the deported and returned flipped: over 84% of returned individuals reported having close family ties in Mexico, while only two-thirds of the deported had those ties.

Table 3: Family Structure of Respondents^{1,2}

	Deported (n= 216)	Returned (n=79)
Marital Status		
Single ³	46%	47%
Married	36%	42%
Divorced	15%	11%
Family⁴		
Spouse in Mexico	63%	85%
Spouse in the United States	36%	12%
Children's Living Place⁵		
Children live in the United States	37%	8%
Children live in Mexico	40%	86%
Close relatives in the United States and Mexico		
Has close relatives in the United States when returned	73%	54%
Has close relatives in the United States now	71%	57%
Has close relatives in Mexico when returned	48%	62%
Has close relatives in Mexico now	64%	84%

¹ Missing values for marital status: 6; Family: 184; Has children: 29; Children's living place:131

² All values have been rounded to the closest integer

³ Includes widowed

⁴ Among those who report having a spouse

⁵ Among those who report having children

3. Migration Trajectories

The individuals we interviewed represented a variety of return experiences and processes. Both deported and returned lived in the United States for a significant period of time, with over 70% having lived in the United States for over ten years. Given our changed recruiting strategy required by the pandemic, we accepted research subjects who described themselves as deported or returned, without requiring a minimum reintegration time in Mexico (reflected in the 16% who lived two or fewer years in Mexico after return or deportation). In our sample, the deported population is slightly more settled than those returned, with 55% of the former reporting having lived in Mexico for eight to over ten years (compared with only 51% of returned respondents).

Table 4: Respondents' Years in the United States Before Return or Deportation^{1,2}

	Deported (n=221)	Returned (n=78)	All (n=299)
Years in the United States at the time of return/deportation			
0-2 years	13%	8%	11%
3-4 years	4%	6%	5%
5-7 years	4%	13%	6%
8-10+ years	80%	73%	78%
Years in Mexico at the time of return/deportation			
0-2 years	17%	15%	16%
3-4 years	15%	21%	16%
5-7 years	13%	13%	13%
8-10+ years	55%	51%	54%

¹ Missing values for years in the United States at the time of return/deportation: 2; years in Mexico at the time of return/deportation: 2

² All values have been rounded to the closest integer

Our interviews inquired about individuals' immigration status in the United States, their initial migration to the United States, and their return process. 37% of deported and 17% of returned had made multiple trips to the United States. Forty-nine of the individuals had been deported from the United States more than once, with some having had as many as ten deportations. When asked about past immigration status, 12% of those who were deported reported having lawful permanent residence, and 4% reported having status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program ("DACA"). Among the returned, 13% who left for Mexico before DACA took effect identified as qualifying for that deferred status, meaning that they most likely would not have returned to Mexico had DACA been enacted earlier. Another 2% of returned claimed lawful permanent resident status.

In discussing their return experiences, 64% of deported and 39% of returned individuals reported having experienced violence upon returning to Mexico. 42% of deported and 35% of returned who had experienced violence relocated to a different town or city after their violent experiences. Some of our deported respondents were stuck in locations paralyzed by narco violence. They explained that they returned to their places of origin to obtain birth certificates needed to obtain national identification cards. Since they cannot work without identification documents, they were unable to leave because they lack the funds to secure transportation. Only 6% of those

deported said they had savings upon their return to Mexico, while 56% of the returned reported savings.

Using two different questions, the research team also inquired about individuals' plans to return to the United States. First, we asked, "would you return to the U.S.?" Interestingly, 26% of deported and 22% of returned flatly said no. 22% of deported and 5% returned reported wanting to return to the United States at all costs, while 7% of deported and 34% of returned said they only wished to visit.

Second, when asked at the end of the survey "what are your future plans," the answers shifted slightly. Returned and deported persons, 32% and 34% respectively, expressed strong interest in staying in Mexico. Another 30% in each group stated they would return to the United States only if they could do so legally. 7% of the deported and 16% of the returned only wanted to visit the United States to visit family. Importantly, 29% of deported and 10% of returned would go back to the United States at all costs, even in unauthorized ways. Though 29% is a substantial number of affirmative responses, it is noteworthy that this response is higher than the percentage of deported individuals who answered affirmatively when asked directly whether they would return to the United States at all costs (22%).

The difference in answers is likely related to directness and the placement of the questions. First, we asked a direct question "would you return to the U.S.," after having discussed the challenges of deportation and return. Then we asked the same question in a more open-ended way at the very end of the survey, "what are your future plans," where they could provide any answer. Asked in a more open-ended way, research subjects came up with more categories: for example, go to Canada; only go to the United States if I can return legally; if I cannot enter legally, go to a Latin American country; go to the United States at all costs; and stay in Mexico. We did not provide answer categories for this open-ended question; the categories emerged from the respondents themselves. Hence, when asked very generally, it was obvious that respondents had thought about the questions, and it was not a binary decision between going back to the United States unlawfully or remaining in Mexico. There were more possibilities they had considered, so how and when the question is asked makes a slight difference in the answer. Despite those differences, more deported persons would go back unauthorized to the United States than would returned persons. These returned are, for the most part, only willing to go back to the United States legally or

to stay in Mexico; very few would risk living an unauthorized life in the United States again.

Table 5: Future Migration Intentions of Respondents¹

"Would you return to the U.S.?"	Deported (n=201)	Returned (n=72)
Yes, at all costs	22%	5%
Yes, but only legally	40%	34%
Yes, only to visit	7%	34%
Yes, not clear only to visit or at all costs	4%	3%
No	26%	22%
"What are your future plans?"	Deported (n=216)	Returned (n=76)
Go back to U.S. at all costs	29%	10%
Only go back to U.S. if do so legally	30%	30%
Only go to the U.S. for a visit	7%	16%
Go to another country (Canada or Latin America)	2%	9%
Stay in Mexico	32%	34%

¹ All values have been rounded to the closest integer

IV. ANALYSIS OF REINTEGRATION EXPERIENCES

The United Nations Migration Network Thematic Working Group on Return defines sustainable reintegration as “a process which enables individuals to secure and sustain the political, economic, social, and psychosocial conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood, and dignity in the country and community they return or are returned to, in full respect of their civil, political, social, and cultural rights.”¹¹³ To examine the return experiences of our research subjects and to determine to what degree they achieved sustainable reintegration, we analyze their economic, politico-institutional, and socio-cultural reintegration.¹¹⁴ Since our study took place during COVID-19, we also look at the impact of the pandemic and its exacerbating effect on the challenges to economic, politico-institutional, and socio-cultural reintegration.

113. Katie Kuschminder, *Return Migration*, in ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK IMMIGR. & REFUGEE STUD. 54, 57 (Anna Triandafyllidou ed., 2022).

114. See *supra* notes 27–30 and accompanying text for an explanation of our typology.

A. Economic Reintegration

In terms of human capital, 40% of deported individuals did not finish high school, 45% have high school diplomas, and 15% have some college and more. Returned individuals have greater levels of education, with only 22% with less than high school, 32% only high school, and 47% some college or more. Quite a few of the returned individuals obtained their college degrees in Mexico, after their return. For these returned persons, getting their college degree was a source of great pride, requiring great effort to revalidate U.S. school records, improve their Spanish language skills, and pay for college.

Experience and skills obtained through migration are another form of human capital. When asked if they had learned a skill in the United States that they had used to find employment in Mexico, thirty-seven deported persons and twelve returned persons answered affirmatively. These varied from using machinery in factories, to new construction techniques (especially Sheetrocking), to different ways of cooking food. We also asked if knowing English, for those who did, helped them obtain employment in Mexico. Eighty-nine deported and fifty-six returned individuals said yes. English was essential in obtaining employment in better-paying sectors such as call centers and hospitality work in tourist areas.

We asked our interviewees about their first, second, and last jobs in the United States, and their first, second, third, and current job in Mexico. The objective was to follow the employment progression of research subjects to ascertain if they experienced economic mobility. We compare our respondents' first and current job, first for deported individuals and then for those who returned under constrained conditions. The comparisons are imprecise because we have different numbers of responses for the first job and current job questions, but the responses provide us an idea of the employment trajectory of individuals.

Table 6: Jobs in Mexico Held by Deported Respondents¹

Type of Job	First Job (n=110)	Current Job (n=217)
Unemployed	11%	34%
Odd jobs	11%	10%
Working in fields	5%	0%
Construction	17%	9%
Restaurant Industry	7%	1%
Janitorial	2%	0.5%
Hospitality Industry	2%	1%
Call center	22%	26%
Translating and Interpreting	0%	2%
Professional services	0%	2%
Government job	1%	0.5%
Started own business	2%	8%
English teachers	4%	1%
Other	16%	5%

¹ All values have been rounded to the closest integer

For the deported, 11% reported not being able to find a job when they first arrived in Mexico. For many, the first job obtained was in the worst paid and in the most informal sectors, like working in agriculture, construction, restaurant, and janitorial services. Part of the difficulty in finding a job (or a better job) when they first arrive in Mexico is that most deported individuals do not have the INE card, which most employers require as proof of identity before hiring. In one of our interviews, a deported man told us about trying to get a job at a regional food restaurant near the Mexico City shelter where he had been staying for over a week. He had the needed experience but without an INE, the employer would not give him the job. Our survey also includes deported individuals who had arrived too recently to look for jobs (35% of deported), so they are not included in the employment table.

Once in Mexico for a period of time, our deported respondents were able to find better-paying and more stable employment in call centers, schools, or translation agencies. A few even found professional jobs. Over time, deported respondents increasingly turned to self-employment, both as a survival strategy and to improve their economic status. Only 2% started their own business as their first job in Mexico, but by the time of our interviews, 28%¹¹⁵ identified

115. Respondents were asked if they had a second current job, since many worked second jobs to make ends meet. 28% reflects 8% as the first current job and 20% who had a business to complement their first job.

self-employment as their current job. Yet significant numbers of deported individuals, 91%, considered setting up their own business (usually selling food or a wide array of items), pointing to a gap between ambitions and actualization.

Table 7: Jobs in Mexico Held by Constrained Returned Respondents¹

Type of Job	First Job (n=56)	Current Job (n=75)
Unemployed	7%	13%
Odd Jobs	4%	4%
Working in fields	2%	0%
Construction	4%	0%
Restaurant industry	4%	0%
Childcare	2%	1%
Hospitality Industry	0%	3%
Transportation	2%	1%
Call Center	2%	36%
Started own business	5%	9%
Government job	0%	1%
Professional services	4%	4%
Translating and interpreting	2%	8%
Medical field	0%	1%
Teachers (other than English)	0%	5%
English teachers	7%	3%
Hospitality Industry	11%	0%
Tour Guide	2%	0%
Other	18%	8%

¹ All values have been rounded to the closest integer

The work trajectory of returned individuals shared some commonalities with the path of deported persons. Like deported individuals, they started in low paid sectors and then transitioned to better paying work at call centers, with translating agencies, and in government and professional jobs.

Some differences exist. Though a sizable percentage of deported persons reported being unemployed when they first arrived, the percentage who remained unemployed as their “current job” was three times greater than for the returned, at 34%. Among returned individuals, only 7% experienced problems finding initial employment, with 13% currently unemployed. That difference is likely explained by the lack of family support and financial cushion that many deported experience in Mexico. Another difference is that while a higher percentage of returned persons found initial work as English teachers, at the time of our interviews, very few

individuals—deported or returned—continued work as English teachers. This near elimination of English teaching as an occupational category likely is due to the COVID-19 pandemic, where most schools in Mexico shut down entirely, rather than transitioning to online education. Finally, while nineteen deported persons reported earning pensions or other retirement benefits in the United States, only two returned persons reported these earnings. These numbers roughly correlate with the reported numbers of LPR status in our survey, suggesting that LPRs are less likely to choose to return to their countries of origin unless deported.

For both deported and returning individuals, there was some economic mobility, albeit limited. Those who spoke English and could work in call centers, tourist centers, or as interpreters and translators, earned the highest wages. Call centers for U.S. businesses are a particularly important source of employment. These call centers, found mainly in Mexico City and the U.S.-Mexico border, provide living wages for deported and returned persons. The most important qualification is native or near-native English fluency. Call centers hire many deported persons regardless of any criminal record, and often even if they have been unable to validate their U.S. studies. Fifty-one interviewees (thirty deported and twenty-one returned) worked in call centers at the time of the interview. Call center jobs are tedious, but they also offer a community of people who share a connection to the United States. They are also among the best paid jobs reported by our cohort. The respondents earned between \$5,000 pesos a week to \$27,000 pesos a week. For comparison, minimum wage in Mexico at that time was \$1,200 pesos a week. These jobs were absent in rural areas.

Additionally, a few interviewees who were fluent in English and Spanish reported that they became certified medical or legal interpreters and transcriptionists. The certification allowed them to work remotely in Mexico earning around \$12,000 pesos a week, ten times the Mexican minimum wage.

Unlike workers in the tourist industry, workers in call centers and in translation fields were largely able to move their work online during the pandemic. Most call centers provided laptops and headsets, but for those centers that did not, employees had to pay for their own equipment or risked losing their jobs. Some respondents in our survey had problems finding and paying for the fast internet service needed to work from their homes. Thus, some respondents who worked in call centers before the pandemic lost their jobs during the pandemic due to these logistical and financial barriers.

Despite these opportunities, most deported and returned faced several challenges in meeting their long-term economic and labor market needs. For most interviewees who did not speak English fluently, their reintegration was hobbled by the very low wages they received for work in beauty salons (\$750 pesos/week) or agriculture (\$800–1,000 pesos/week). Those who cleaned houses, worked in restaurants, worked in stores, sold food on the street, or laid bricks reported earning wages as low as \$1000 pesos per week. These low wages made it very difficult to support themselves and their families in Mexico and impossible to send money to family in the United States.

Deported and returned persons also faced problems with age and gender discrimination on the job market, as well as stigma for returning from the United States. 10% of deported and 12% of returned experienced age discrimination. They noted that it is very hard for individuals who are over forty years old to find work, often forcing them into self-employment. 2% of deported and 8% of returned also experienced gender discrimination. For example, women were told they had to look a certain way and be a particular physical size to be a salesperson.

In addition, both deported and returned persons reported that they were unable to get jobs because their work skills, often obtained in the U.S., lacked the recognized credentials or recommendation letters required in Mexico. For example, María, who went to the United States unauthorized at twenty years old and spent twenty-six years in Arizona and Colorado, was asked for recommendation letters.¹¹⁶ She had such letters for employers in the United States, but employers in Mexico did not accept them when she sought domestic work, making it difficult to get a job. John shared this experience, too. He went to the United States at age six and obtained a human resources and nursing certification at a trade school in Fort Worth, Texas. When he was deported, he tried to find jobs in those fields in Mexico. However, without validated certification, he was unable to find employment. “So that is a bit of a challenge,” he said.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, once in Mexico, respondents had limited opportunities to develop additional labor market skills unless they knew English or had a Mexican university degree. In this former case, there were opportunities for mobility in call centers such as learning new fields like IT or customer service. In the latter case, a

116. Interview with María (Jan. 14, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

117. Interview with John (Apr. 16, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

university degree made professional jobs accessible. But other than that, few jobs have labor market ladders that offer promotions and ability to learn new skills. These hindering factors to reintegration—low wages, discrimination, and limited mobility in the Mexican labor market—mean that the U.S. labor market is a continuing draw for people who have returned to Mexico.

B. Political-Institutional Reintegration

Politico-institutional reintegration refers to the ability of deported and returned persons to exercise their citizenship fully. This includes obtaining national identification and accessing government services designed to reintegrate returned and deported persons.

1. The Significance of National Identification Cards

Officially, an INE card allows a person to vote in all elections in Mexico. But because the process for issuing INEs is strict and thus relatively secure, INE cards are the most recognized and commonly accepted form of identification in Mexico. The INE card is typically required when opening bank accounts, entering a lease, seeking employment, obtaining medical care, accessing technical or higher educational programs, or even to pick up money that someone has wired to you.¹¹⁸ As explained in this section, the widespread reliance on INE cards and the concurrent security measures built into their issuance presents particularly difficult barriers for returning Mexican citizens, which further hinders their politico-institutional reintegration.

To get an INE card, applicants must be at least eighteen years old, prove their birth or naturalization in Mexico, and prove their identity.¹¹⁹ To prove their Mexican citizenship, applicants need a Mexican birth certificate or a CURP number (*Clave Única de Registro*

118. Lee Ragsdale et al., *A New Path: A Guide to Challenges and Opportunities After Deportation*, EDUC. JUST. PROJECT (2023), at 40, <https://reentryiltemp.web.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/A-New-Path-2023-English-Edition-Final.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/MBB7-3Z8E>]; *What are the Cash Pickup Requirements in Mexico?*, XOOM HELP CENTER, https://help.xoom.com/s/article/what-are-the-cash-pickup-requirements-in-mexico?language=en_US [<https://perma.cc/SRE3-YZH5>] (last visited Aug. 11, 2025).

119. *Documents to Request Your Credential*, INE, <https://www.ine.mx/credencial/documentos-necesarios/> [<https://perma.cc/BTM5-B7FW>] (last visited Aug. 6, 2024).

de Población)—a number that is equivalent to a U.S. social security number.¹²⁰ Created in 1996, Mexico assigns CURP numbers to Mexican citizens at birth; Mexican citizens born before 1996 can apply for a CURP with a copy of their Mexican birth certificate.¹²¹

Applicants who can prove their citizenship must still prove their identity and residence.¹²² In the usual course of things, people could prove their identity with a photo identification issued by the Mexican Government.¹²³ Because the INE card is designed to be used in elections, applicants also have to prove their local residence so that they vote in local elections.¹²⁴ Citizens prove their residency through a recent utility bill, bank statement, or leasing agreement.¹²⁵ Given that an INE card is often required to open a bank account or engage in similar transactions in the first place, the process for getting an INE card can feel circular, even under the best of circumstances. In practice, Mexican parents often accompany their adult age children to apply for INE cards. When parents present their own documents, they can attest to their child's identity and residence.

For deported and returned individuals, the bureaucratic process for getting an INE card can be Kafkaesque in its complexity and circularity. Proving their Mexican citizenship is difficult for a variety of reasons. Many return under circumstances where they do not have their Mexican birth certificate, were never registered at birth and never received a CURP number. Many also left Mexico before 1996 and the advent of the CURP system. The U.S.-born children of returned persons are entitled to Mexican citizenship because their parents are Mexican citizens,¹²⁶ but if the parents did not register their children at a Mexican consulate in the United States, those children face problems in obtaining CURP numbers.

120. *Electoral Registry*, INE (Apr. 22, 2017), <https://www.ine.mx/electoral-registry/> [https://perma.cc/H3ZM-GXAT].

121. *Frequently Asked Questions About the Unique Population Registry Code (CURP)*, GOBIERNO DE MEXICO [MEX GOV'T] (Apr. 3, 2019), <https://www.gob.mx/segob/renapo/acciones-y-programas/clave-unica-de-registro-de-poblacion-curp-142226> [https://perma.cc/2RGH-NQQP].

122. *Required Documents*, VOTO EXTRANJERO, <https://www.votoextranjero.mx/web/vmre/documentos-credencial> [https://perma.cc/87SH-XQ68] (last visited Aug. 14, 2024).

123. *Id.*

124. *Id.*

125. *Id.*

126. *Double Nationality*, GOBIERNO DE MEXICO [MEX GOV'T] (Dec. 21, 2022), <https://www.gob.mx/sre/documentos/double-nationality> [https://perma.cc/8BGM-7L9N].

Several returned individuals in our survey experienced these problems trying to get identification for their children and enrolling them in school.

Though most Mexican birth certificates are now available digitally through a national database, applicants must have a CURP number and know their correct full name, birthdate, registration entity, sex, and the names of the adults who registered them (usually parents), in order to access the digital birth certificates.¹²⁷ Without this information or lacking a CURP, some interviewees were advised to return to their place of birth to get a reprint of their birth certificate, which often required traveling great distances. We interviewed a group of deported men who were advised to return to their home state of Chiapas to get their birth certificates, only to get stuck there in a narco-trafficking war between rival gangs. Without money to leave, they had to seek protection in a church shelter to stay alive.

Those who were able to obtain their birth certificates still faced the burden of proving their identity and local residency. Some deported were given a temporary Mexican identification card before being deported, but most deported and returned did not have any form of Mexican identification. While some tried to use their U.S. identification, their U.S. ID was rejected if their name on the U.S. ID differed from the name on their Mexican birth certificate (e.g., if their middle name was omitted or the order of the paternal and maternal last names was switched). To fix this problem, returning individuals were advised to engage a public notary¹²⁸ in the state of their birth, to authenticate their documents and, thus, their identity.

If they lacked documents and didn't have relatives or close friends who could attest to these elements, many returned faced long

127. See *Plataforma Nacional del Registro Civil* [National Civil Registry Platform], GOBIERNO DE MEXICO [MEX GOV'T], <https://www.miregistrocivil.gob.mx/> [https://perma.cc/7Q93-FYJF] (last visited Aug. 31, 2025) (providing digital access to Mexico's birth certificate database with proper documentation).

128. The public notary role in Mexico is filled by an experienced lawyer who is appointed by the state's governor. The notary's role is to authenticate documents and manage and secure the storage of legal records required to transact business and civil matters. To be a notary public, a lawyer must be at least 35 years old, have at least three years of experience working at a Notary Public office, and pass a specialization exam that proves their competence. *Legal Matters: Finding a Notary Public in Mexico*, MEXPERIENCE (June 6, 2024), <https://www.mexperience.com/finding-a-notary-public-in-mexico/> [https://perma.cc/D47P-5Z2V].

delays in getting an INE card that is so essential to daily life in Mexico. Some returned faced the additional problem of living in transitory housing like shelters, either because they can't afford more permanent housing, don't yet know where they want to settle, or cannot rent a home because they lack acceptable Mexican identification, which exacerbated the problem of proving residency. Several returned persons found a workaround for these barriers by asking representatives from nonprofit organizations to vouch for their identity and residency. Most nonprofits, however, are in Mexico City and the cities that border the United States. Only those who were in these areas and knew about the nonprofits could access this workaround.

Other returned persons face a timing problem: because INE cards are designed to be used as voting identification, Mexican law imposes a six-month moratorium on issuing new cards before national elections.¹²⁹ If individuals return to Mexico within that six-month period, they are unable to obtain INE cards, even if they have the required documents. The research team spoke with sixty-two individuals who could not obtain their voting identification card due to a six-month moratorium on issuing new voting identification cards before the June 2021 midterm election. Our respondents also reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many government offices were closed, including the INE offices that would ordinarily process the identification cards, which worsened the delays in getting identification. The end result is that many deported and returned persons, ironically, found themselves in the position of being undocumented in the land of their birth.

2. Formal Government Support for Deported and Returned Persons

Formally, the Mexican Government offers extensive support for its returning citizens, at the federal, state, and local levels. However, as detailed in Part IV.B.3, there is a very wide gap between the intended provision and the actual provision of these services. Misinformation or lack of information about the services and how returned individuals can access the services leads to some of that gap. But the Mexican Government's failure, at all levels, to provide the

129. Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales [LGIPE] [General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures], art. 331, Pfo. 5 [art. 331, para 5], Diario Oficial de la Federación [DOF, Official Register of the Federation] 23-05-2014, últimas reformas [latest reforms] DOF 01-04-2024 (Mex.).

services it claims to provide causes a considerable part of the mismatch. Changes in presidential administrations also exacerbate the gap, as new administrations often have different ideological priorities and, as a result, change programs, staffing, and budgets.

According to the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (“INM”), the Mexican Government has three main ways to support a “safe, orderly, dignified and humane return” to its Mexican citizens.¹³⁰ First, through the *Secretaría de Gobernación* (equivalent to the U.S. State Department), the Mexican Government offers information and support for deported and returned persons through its fifty-three consulates. The U.S. Consulates distribute consular identification cards known as *matrículas consulares*, passports, and birth certificates. Starting in 2016, they also process a special version of the INE card, the national electoral identification card commonly used as identification. Consulates also offer information on the documents needed for school recertification and provide tax exemptions for the import of household goods and tools.

The second formal assistance is through the eleven repatriation centers situated at the five border states within the United States, in addition to Mexico City.¹³¹ By law, the repatriation sites freely offer “water and food, medical assistance, repatriation letter[s], [a] print out of the CURP, information about available government services, transportation to local shelters, government offices and places of origin, discounts on bus tickets, information about labor market opportunities, national and international calls to contact family and trusted individuals, [and] support getting access to temporary shelters to cover basic needs.”¹³²

The third support for deported and returned individuals is the federal and state level offices that promote reintegration by making social programs accessible. Among the services that are offered through the *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores* (the Mexican equivalent to the U.S. State Department) are “medical and psychological assistance, access to employment, the right to identity, access to social program[s] that promote reintegration, certification and evaluation of capacities and acquired skills, revalidation of

130. *Dirección de Repatriación Digna*, *supra* note 32.

131. *Id.* The sites are located in Tijuana and Mexicali (Baja California Norte), San Luis Río Colorado and Nogales (Sonora), Ciudad Juárez and Ojinaga (Chihuahua), Ciudad Acuña and Piedras Negras (Coahuila), and Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa (Tamaulipas).

132. *Dirección de Repatriación Digna*, *supra* note 32.

studies, access to financial services, recuperation of belongings, juridical orientation related to Mexico, [and] advice on topics being discussed between the U.S. or Canada.”¹³³

Until March 2022, there was no central government body that addressed the needs of migrants who return “voluntarily” to Mexico. However, in April 2022, the *Secretaría de Gobernación* (akin to a blend of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and certain functions of the Department of Justice), in collaboration with the *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores* (Department of Foreign Affairs), announced an interagency roundtable to address the needs of migrants who return to Mexico. The goal of the *Mesa Interinstitucional para la Atención Integral a Familias Mexicanas Repatriadas y en Retorno* (Interinstitutional Working Group for the Holistic Attention to Returned and Repatriated Mexican Families) is to continue to promote and develop public policy and to address the needs of Mexicans who return to Mexico. Agencies are reported to be working together since December 2020 on this effort.

As part of that effort, the government set up a website entitled *Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas* (Unit for Migration Policy, Registry and Identity of Persons), which is an online one-stop shop that seeks to provide information to a variety of individuals, including local government agencies, to provide more support to nationals who return to Mexico. Returning Mexicans can apply for a temporary CURP, access civil registries, and access a job portal that highlights employment opportunities. In addition, migrants can pay into and seek services from the *Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social* (“IMSS,” Mexican Social Security Institute)—a national health program designed for medical care access for independent workers who have a Mexican address. The site also contains access to reports and statistics on migrant policy and offers contact information for the various government employees working on migration at the federal level through its *Centro de Estudios Migratorios* (Center for Migration Studies).

The Mexican Government has also established mechanisms to amplify the benefits of remittances, which are an important source of economic development for the country.¹³⁴ In 2002, the Mexican

133. *Id.*

134. In 2021, Mexico received \$51.6 million in remittances, and in 2022, it received more than \$58 million. In each of those years, approximately 95% of those remittances came from the United States. Juan Jose Li Ng, *México: Remesas Logran Récord de 58,497 md en 2022, Duplicaron su Monto en Solo 6*

Government created a program called “*Tres Por Uno*” (Three for One) to encourage remittances to pay for public infrastructure projects that would benefit the local economy.¹³⁵ The federal government agreed to provide up to 50% of the funding for a project, if the local government pitched in 25% and community groups of Mexicans in the United States contributed the final 25%. Society infrastructure projects such as street improvement, drainage systems, and community centers were eligible for up to \$1 million pesos of federal aid. Maximum federal funding available for school improvement projects had limits of \$250,000 or \$400,000 pesos depending on the type of project. In addition, smaller projects that benefited groups of families in a community had maximum limits of \$300,000 or \$500,000 pesos per project. To apply, migrants who wanted to send remittances through this program were required to form a group of at least ten individuals who could prove status as Mexican citizens and document their interest in a specific jurisdiction. The administration of López Obrador discontinued the program, although some states continue as *Dos Por Uno* (Two for One), combining state and local resources with remittances.¹³⁶

3. Actual Government Services Used by Respondents

Despite the resources invested by the Mexican Government in its consular services, very few of our respondents used these services. Only 12% of deported individuals and 15% of returned individuals reported ever using consular services, mostly for passports, consular identifications, and birth certificates. In theory, individuals in deportation detention can request consular services, but none of the deported persons in our survey did. Respondents also told us that the identification that is available through consular services has limited use in Mexico. Specifically, they reported that *matrícula consular*

Años [Remittances Reach a New Record of \$58.497 Million in 2022, Doubling their Amount in Only 6 Years], BBVA RSCH. (Feb. 1, 2023), https://www.bbvaresearch.com/wpcontent/uploads/2023/02/Remesas_Mexico_Cierre_2022.pdf [https://perma.cc/N2RJ-MFBF].

135. Francisco Javier Aparicio & Covadonga Meseguer, *Collective Remittances and the State: The 3x1 Program in Mexican Municipalities*, 40 WORLD DEV. 206, 206 (2012).

136. NANCY PLANKEY-VIDELA, REPORTE DE ENTREVISTAS A MIGRANTES RETORNADOS BENEFICIARIOS DEL PROGRAMA ACTIVIDADES PRODUCTIVAS PATRIMONIALES SECRETARÍA DEL MIGRANTE Y ENLACE INTERNACIONAL [REPORT OF RETURNED MIGRANT INTERVIEWS BENEFITTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF MIGRANT AND INTERNATIONAL LIAISON'S PATRIMONIAL PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES PROGRAM] 4 (2006).

(consular registration) cards are not accepted as identification, so getting the cards is useless. Even the recently developed consular-processed INE cards, they told us, are not accepted as legitimate identification in Mexico.

Among deported individuals, only 74% reported going through the repatriation centers.¹³⁷ 14% were deported in the middle of the night, which for certain vulnerable populations violates the *Memorandum of Understanding on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified and Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals*¹³⁸ signed by the United States and Mexico. In the MOU, DHS agreed to deport individuals only between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Those times correspond to when the repatriation centers are open, so deported individuals can receive services. Further, local agreements based on the MOU set the scheduled hours for repatriation between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

Of the 74% who were offered services, almost all received a repatriation letter (89%). The letter, processed by the Mexican Government at the center, contains the individual's photo, name, and birthdate, and is supposed to function as provisional identification. The letter also documents the individual's status as a deported person, making them eligible for bus discounts and a free INE card. But multiple respondents reported that the repatriation letter was not accepted as identification, with employers and others insisting on seeing an INE card.

Beyond the repatriation letter, the other services received at the repatriation centers varied, as detailed in Table 8 below. Though the repatriation centers should have provided deported persons with transportation, 72% of our respondents reported receiving no government assistance to travel from the repatriation center to their intended destination. Thus, many were left stranded at the border or in Mexico City, far from any potential support network in Mexico.

137. The 74% is a tabulation of all the deported who received services at repatriation sites (165 individuals), divided by total deported (222 in our survey) = 74.3% or 74% rounded. See *infra* tbl. 8.

138. MOU on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified & Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals, *supra* note 31. Though the United States and Mexico signed the MOU in 2004, the agreement is still in effect. DHS issued updated local guidance as recently as 2022. *Updated U.S.-Mexico Local Repatriation Agreements*, DEP'T OF HOMELAND SEC., <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/updated-us-mexico-local-repatriation-arrangements> [https://perma.cc/333P-R9NC] (May 31, 2022).

Table 8: Services Provided at Repatriation Sites¹

	Deported (n=184)
Services at repatriation site	
No services	11%
Repatriation letter only	34%
Letter and Food	16%
Letter, food, and bus ticket	13%
Letter, food, resource information, bus ticket	6%
Letter, information, food, taken to shelter	4%
Letter, food, hygiene kit, information, begin INE process, taken to shelter	14%
Other	2%
If received bus ticket	(n=34)
Full bus ticket	40%
Partial bus ticket	57%
Did not specify	3%

¹ All values have been rounded to the closest integer

Beyond their initial encounters at the repatriation centers, only 18% of deported individuals reported using other government services; similarly, only 13% of returned reported using other government services. This low usage of government services outside of the repatriation centers may be due to lack of centralized information about those services. Though the repatriation centers are obligated to provide information to deported individuals about other services that are available to them, only 24% identified the INM at the repatriation centers as their source of information about other government services. For deported persons, other sources of information about government services included state level offices (33%), friends and family (33%), government offices other than INM (16%), and employers (16%).

One bright spot in the provision of government services is government programs to provide grants or support to entrepreneurs to start their own businesses. While only 6% of our sample of all deported individuals reported receiving funds to invest in productive projects or businesses, we did learn of state programs that funded returned and deported individuals. The state of Guanajuato had the most robust state migrant office.¹³⁹ Its relatively stronger infrastructure as compared to other states and the federal government resulted, in part, from its history as a traditional sending state, with a large portion of its male population having gone to the

139. Guanajuato was used as a case study to provide a good snapshot of what a robust return program at the state level can do.

United States¹⁴⁰ Out-migration contributes to state development through remittances, thus the state's desire to harness those dollars and support its returning migrants.¹⁴¹ It is also a highly productive state in terms of the automobile industry, agriculture, and the gas and energy sector.¹⁴² These factors, along with strong ties to the United States,¹⁴³ have led to robust economic development. For these reasons, the state has been able to invest in its return population.

The success of grant programs is further borne out by the experience of a separate study, in which one of the co-authors interviewed twenty-six deported and returned migrants who had received entrepreneurship grants from the *Secretaría del Migrante y Enlace Internacional* (Migrant and International Outreach Department), a state agency in Guanajuato. Eighty-five percent were deported, with 89% men and 11% women. Most of them circularly migrated back and forth between Guanajuato and the United States every three to four years, returning on their own or through deportation. These twenty-six individuals received between \$40,000-\$70,000 pesos with which 33% set up construction companies, 5% invested into agriculture and cattle, 15% into food stands (mostly women), 7% fishing, 4% mechanic's shops, 4% beauty salons (solely women), 4% greenhouses (solely women), and 3% crafts studios. While most recipients were breaking even, 13% earned more than \$3,000 pesos a week, which was twice the minimum wage at the time. Another marker of success is that 29% of the grantees earned enough to hire other workers.

140. SECRETARÍA DEL MIGRANTE Y ENLACE INTERNACIONAL [SECRETARIAT FOR MIGRANTS AND INTERNATIONAL LIASON], GOBIERNO DEL ESTADO DE GUANAJUATO [GUANAJUATO STATE GOVERNMENT], MIGRACIÓN EN GUANAJUATO: DIAGNÓSTICO Y PROPUESTA DE POLÍTICA PÚBLICA [MIGRATION IN GUANAJUATO: DIAGNOSIS AND PUBLIC POLICY PROPOSAL], 2024 65–84, 76 (2024), https://derechoshumanos.guanajuato.gob.mx/docs/3136/E-Book_HORIZONTAL_-_Migracion_en_Guanajuato_diagnostico_y_propuesta_de_politic_5G0wYCe.pdf [https://perma.cc/TL4U-B25Q] (discussing Guanajuato as a sending state and its context within Mexico's experience with out-migration).

141. *Id.* at 160–69.

142. *Id.* at 115, 129–32; Ilse Becerril, *Diversificación industrial, pilar en la economía de Guanajuato* [Industrial Diversification, a Pillar of Guanajuato's Economy], EL ECONOMISTA [THE ECONOMIST] (Feb. 20, 2024), <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/estados/Diversificacion-industrial-pilar-en-la-economia-de-Guanajuato-20240220-0139.html> [https://perma.cc/GGV3-S8WE].

143. SECRETARÍA DEL MIGRANTE Y ENLACE INTERNACIONAL, *supra* note 138, at 18–22; Becerril, *supra* note 140.

In that study, thirty-eight-year-old Antonio, who has been migrating since he was sixteen years old and deported three times, received a grant.¹⁴⁴ He used the government grant to set up a food stall in the market of his small town. He started out seasonally but now has a food production line that delivers food to three communities, improving his life significantly. He told his story in a focus group, speaking for himself and the other five men in his group about the benefits of the grants:

[W]ith this help we got, we started to increase the tools to be able to work and we have no longer gone [to the United States]. Before, well we had to go there to work, right? But now we are working and we no longer have to go so far out . . . because we have work here in our own community It is not just a business, it's a living for all of us. Before we had to go far to work. . . . [W]e have improved by 40% because now we eat, and we eat together as a family. We don't have to have some eating over there in the U.S. and others here [in Guanajuato], not eating at the same table. Now we are here at the same table.¹⁴⁵

While this is a small sample, with modest government grants and benefits, all participants felt that the grant had improved their lives. Importantly, they felt more rooted in Mexico and less willing to go back to the United States. 39% said they would return only legally, 39% said not, and 22% said at all costs. Of those who would return even if illegally, 62% would do so to earn money to invest in the Mexican business they had started with the government grant so that they could come back to improve it. Thus, even with this modest grant program, the Mexican Government's objective of decelerating migration to the United States has been effective.

Unfortunately, Guanajuato stopped this program during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the funds for health services. After President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's election in 2018, the federal government also defunded similar micro-enterprise seed grant programs it had established. Though our data collection ended prior to President Claudia Sheinbaum's election in 2024, the federal government has renewed its efforts to develop programs to provide economic assistance to deported individuals, largely in response to the Trump administration's mass deportation plan.¹⁴⁶ In January

144. Interview with Antonio (June 21, 2022) (audio on file with authors).

145. *Id.*

146. Rodríguez Mega & Correal, *supra* note 16.

2025, President Sheinbaum announced a new program aimed at reintegrating Mexican nationals deported by the United States.¹⁴⁷

The program, called *México te Abraza* (Mexico Embraces You), aims to coordinate reintegration efforts between departments in the federal government and civil society, to ensure that deportations comply with treaties and other bi-national agreements, and to guarantee that returning individuals will be welcome and reintegrate in their home communities.¹⁴⁸ As part of the program, Mexico plans to open nine welcome centers along the U.S.-Mexico border to receive people who have been deported.¹⁴⁹ At the welcome center, various government agencies will arrange transportation to individuals' hometowns, provide medical care, help individuals enroll in social welfare programs, and give deported individuals cash cards worth 2,000 pesos (about \$100).¹⁵⁰ However, unlike the discontinued Guanajuato program in our study and the discontinued federal, micro-seed grants, this program only serves deported individuals, leaving returned individuals without support.¹⁵¹

But our survey results show that these types of grant programs have positive results on several metrics. They improve the immediate economic condition of recipients. They strengthen

147. *Id.*

148. *México te Abraza* [*Mexico Embraces You*], GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO [MEX. GOV'T] (Jan. 28, 2025), https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/971337/28enero25_M_xico_te_abraza.pdf [<https://perma.cc/JZ2Z-A42Y>].

149. Rodríguez Mega & Correal, *supra* note 16.

150. *Id.* The program also worked with CCE, *Consejo Coordinador Empresarial* [*Business Coordinating Council*], a coordinating body of private business organizations, to find job placements for deported people. Amy Stillman & Maya Averbuch, *Mexico's Pledge to Give Deportees Jobs Hits Snag Over US Flights*, BLOOMBERG LAW (June 11, 2025), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-06-11/us-deportation-process-hinders-job-employment-for-migrants-back-in-mexico> [<https://perma.cc/L34W-PNVK>].

151. GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO, *supra* note 145. Critics of the program also point out at least two shortcomings: it focuses on returning people to their home villages and cities with job scarcity or high risks of violence, and the welcome centers are in dangerous cities that lack economic opportunity. Rodríguez Mega & Correal, *supra* note 16. As of June 2025, it has also been underused, with only 4% of deported Mexican nationals (1,500/~40,000) receiving services. Stillman & Averbuch, *supra* note 147. The underuse of these services is largely attributed to a mismatch between where services are located and where the United States is deporting people. *Id.* The welcome centers are along the U.S.-Mexico border, and the job assistance is available primarily in Mexico City. *Id.* But the Trump administration has deported more people via air, and instead of flying people to Mexico City, it has deported people to cities in Mexico's southernmost states lacking welcome centers and jobs. *Id.*

returned and deported people's political-institutional reintegration. And they lessen individuals' desire to make dangerous return journeys to the United States.

Table 9 provides more details about the government services used by respondents in the larger sample of 222 migrants.

Table 9: Use of Government Services upon Returning to Mexico¹

	Deported (n=36)	Returned (n=6)
Shelter	8%	0%
Medical support	32%	33%
Loans	8%	0%
Unemployment	17%	0%
Scholarships	6%	17%
Cash Transfers	17%	0%
Job Bank	6%	0%
Productive investment	6%	0%
Help with paperwork	14%	50%

¹ All values have been rounded to the closest integer

These are the services obtained in addition to the services found at the repatriation sites. Generally, then, our survey results suggest that the impact of Mexican Government services is limited to repatriation centers, and even there, the benefit of those services is uneven.

C. Socio-Cultural Reintegration

Socio-cultural reintegration concerns how well deported and returned persons can reincorporate into community and family life, participate in social organizations, as well as the state of their physical and mental wellbeing.¹⁵² Under this rubric, key considerations are how the receiving community perceives the returned person and whether they experience stigmatization. Rejection by one's community in Mexico after the trauma of return can deeply affect a person's sense of belonging in Mexico, which in turn shapes a person's intention to stay in Mexico or return to the United States.

For several reasons, socio-cultural reintegration may be more difficult to study than the other forms of reintegration. First, its

152. Cassarino, *supra* note 27, at 257.

metrics are more challenging to measure. And second, socio-cultural reintegration may need to be studied over a longer time period than either economic or political-institutional reintegration. In our study, we look at respondents' answers relating to their family and community ties, both in the United States and Mexico. Then, we zoom in to analyze their access to housing and education, two critical resources for successful socio-cultural reintegration. As we did in our section on political-institutional reintegration, we analyze the important role that the Mexican Government—at the federal, state, and local levels—plays in this reintegration. We also study the significant, and often more impactful, role that nonprofit organizations have taken with this reintegration.

1. Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations in Mexico play a fundamental role in the reintegration process, particularly along the socio-cultural dimensions. In our sample, the nonprofit sector played a much more significant role in the reintegration process than did the Mexican Government. The majority, 91% of deported individuals in our sample, reported they did not receive assistance from nonprofits at their arrival repatriation site. Yet, 51% of the deported population stated they had used the services of a nonprofit. A smaller sample of the constrained returned individuals, 21%, reported using NGO services.

Nonprofits, meanwhile, complained that the government, at multiple levels, would not allow them to receive deported individuals in the repatriation centers, despite the important and free services they provided.¹⁵³ Instead, the NGOs reported that they were required

153. The Mexican Government has a history of stifling and restricting civil society advocacy and actions at the federal and local level and across administrations. SARAH BAUMUNK & LINNEA SANDIN, MEXICAN CIVIL SOCIETY: RECLAIMING SPACE AMIDST IMPUNITY 11–12 (2018), https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181227_BaumunkandSandin_Mexico_layout_v7_0.pdf [<https://perma.cc/FZM7-SVCS>]. For example, in 2019, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador prohibited the distribution of federal funds to civil society organizations (“CSOs”), despite approval of that distribution by Congress. *Mexico*, INT’L CTR. FOR NONPROFIT LAW (June 27, 2025), <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/mexico#maincontent> [<https://perma.cc/9M2Y-867H>]. Under the current administration, the government has continued to withhold funds and has “introduced regulations that undermine [CSO’s] sustainability and independence.” *Id.* At the local level, in 2023, Mexico City withdrew from the Open Government Partnership, an international

to try to talk to deported individuals outside of the centers, where these individuals were understandably suspicious of being approached. The nonprofit organizations do this work, despite having little funding and few employees. Reintegration nonprofits fall into two categories: those that are like first responders, tending to immediate needs, and those that advocate for a “dignified return.”¹⁵⁴

The organizations that respond to immediate needs are more common in border cities like Tijuana, Juárez, and Matamoros, providing food, shelter, and other basic needs. These nonprofits, most of them shelters, are operated by religious groups, private organizations, and the government. The shelters used by our respondents included *Casa del Migrante* (Migrant House) in Tijuana and Chiapas, *Familia & Solidaridad* (Family & Solidarity) in Mexico City, *Dulce Refugio* (Sweet Refuge) in Matamoros, *Casa de los Amigos* (House of Friends) in Mexico City, and the Catholic Church *Monte de Zión* (Mount Zion) in Chiapas. They offer temporary shelter to the most vulnerable, often prioritizing women and children. But given the large numbers of Central American and Caribbean migrants who transit through Mexico en route to the United States, these shelters are often over capacity; sometimes, shelters can only provide migrants with the basics: a phone call, a shower, and clean clothes.

With the exception of Tijuana and Matamoros, dignified return nonprofits are in the interior of the country and mostly in Mexico City. Deported and returned individuals established and staff most dignified return nonprofits. Their experiences inform the work they do. They provide some immediate relief but focus on what they call “accompaniment” in navigating government bureaucracies to obtain the INE card, school revalidation, and other paperwork. Several deported and returned individuals commented on how sharing their stories and experiences with others who experienced the same trajectories helped them regain their voice, agency, and sense of belonging. Sara, who arrived in the U.S. as a six-month-old and was deported at twenty-one from Michigan said, “It helped me so much [to contact the organization]. You know, just learning more about my

organization that seeks “an international partnership of 76 countries, 105 local governments and thousands of civil society organizations working together to build more transparent, inclusive, participatory, and accountable governments.” *The Government of Mexico City Withdraws from International Partnership on Open Government*, OPEN GOV’T P’SHP (June 6, 2023), <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/news/the-government-of-mexico-city-withdraws-from-international-partnership-on-open-government/> [https://perma.cc/BGF5-NM8D].

154. Otros Dreams en Acción, *supra* note 34.

situation and knowing that I am not the only one suffering and struggling.”¹⁵⁵ Sharing her story with individuals who have also felt stripped of their dignity and identity through deportation helped her recover her sense of self.¹⁵⁶

Dignified return organizations also lobby for local, state, and federal policies that make reintegration easier and more dignified. For example, in 2006, a network of nonprofits successfully advocated for Agreement 286 from the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Department of Public Education) that eliminated the requirement of the apostille to validate U.S. school records. The apostille process in Mexico requires returned persons to get the U.S. documents certified by the issuing agency in the United States, sent to Mexico, and translated by an approved translator in Mexico. As noted in Part IV.C.5, many educational institutions do not know about or abide by this Agreement, continuing to demand the expensive and difficult apostille certification. Thus, dignified return nonprofits have continuing work to educate government bureaucracies.

Those who used the nonprofit services found out about the services in various ways. Thirty-seven percent of deported and 67% of returned persons stated that they found the nonprofit services online. Thirty-nine percent of deported reported that officials from the INM took them to the nonprofit services, with another 8% hearing about services at the repatriation center. Other sources of information for deported individuals were from other deported persons (4%), friends (1%), and nonprofit organizations in the U.S. (1%). Returned individuals were more likely to find out about NGO services from the internet (44%), family (11%) and school (11%).

Table 10, below, details the services that nonprofits provided our respondents.

155. Interview with Sara (Apr. 22, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

156. In general, our interview subjects also shared an experience of discrimination in the United States based on their lack of immigration status and association with Latinidad, many as unauthorized workers in poor working conditions, many from a working-poor-class background, and as men. The legal policies in the United States that target these shared identities result in “Latinos, and anyone associated with Latinidad by accent or perception of foreignness in spite of whiteness [being] treated as a deportable population.” Elizabeth Aranda & Elizabeth Vaquera, *Racism, the Immigration Enforcement Regime, and the Implications for Racial Inequality in The Lives of Undocumented Young Adults*, 1 SOCIO. OF RACE AND ETHNICITY 88, 98 (2015), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2332649214551097> [<https://perma.cc/WUA7-SVZ8>].

Table 10: Use of Nonprofit Services upon Returning to Mexico¹

	Deported (n=196)	Returned (n=72)
Used Non-profit Services		
Yes	51%	21%
No	49%	79%
Among Those Who Sought, Service Type	Deported (n=103)	Returned (n=14)
Shelter and food	42%	8%
Legal services	19%	0%
Mental health support	11%	8%
General support	14%	8%
Transportation to hometown	2%	8%
Job connections	5%	23%
Assistance with ID	2%	0%
Educational certification	2%	31%
General information	3%	8%
Scholarships	0%	8%

¹ All values have been rounded to the closest integer

A few significant patterns are worth noting. For those who were deported, the top services were (1) shelter and food (42%); and (2) legal services (19%), reflecting the precarious circumstances under which they returned to Mexico and their desire to find legal help to address the resulting legal issues. Returned, on the other hand, sought a variety of services, focusing on their reintegration into Mexican society.

2. Family

Not surprisingly, respondents who had family members and established communities in Mexico returned to find opportunities and networks for support more easily. Family members in Mexico provided financial and informational support for our respondents. Several deported individuals noted how they called Mexican aunts and uncles when they were returned at the border. Their relatives either sent money for them to take a bus or drove to pick them up. Deported individuals without close family ties in Mexico, however, were often stranded. Family members also assisted returned persons by providing them an initial place to live, while they looked for a job and more permanent housing.

Respondents described complicated emotional relationships with their Mexican relatives. Because of increased border enforcement during past decades, Mexican citizens have been unable to travel back and forth, keeping family members separated for long

periods of time. If our respondents maintained their family relationships while living in the United States, they described receiving emotional support and encouragement from their Mexican relatives. But other respondents reported that their Mexican relatives distrusted them because of their clothing or tattoos or assumed that they were criminals because of their deportation. Some respondents had trouble communicating due to their limited knowledge of Spanish.

José, for example, who is now thirty-one years old and fully bilingual, went to Dallas when he was five years old.¹⁵⁷ He was deported in 2019 after serving five years in prison for gang affiliation.¹⁵⁸ Living in a small rancho or small town in San Luis Potosí, he worked at construction jobs and at a car wash because of limited employment options.¹⁵⁹ Although he was married in the United States, he had no children. He moved around in Mexico, first arriving to the small town then working in call centers in Mexico City for a short time and then returning to the town.¹⁶⁰ His dream is to have his own construction company and set up a shelter for returned and deported individuals in his current town. Shelters are important to him because he received housing from a shelter and support from nonprofit organizations.¹⁶¹ Although establishing himself in Mexico has been difficult, he does not want to return to the U.S., even if that means separation from his wife and family in Texas. In our conversation with him, he shared how living with his relatives was not easy. When we asked him if he ever experienced stigma, he responded,

In like, the local community or your own family in Mexico. Because you've been back. . . . One thing they know [is] that you're deported and [they] criticize you. And they say, [you've been] in America for your [whole] life, and you don't have anything down here. . . . And when I got deported, I had nothing. So, they criticize me. "You went to America and you did not do anything." . . . I lived as an American, I was right there, imagine. You get criticized, you kind of get bullied by your own people. Your own family.¹⁶²

157. Interview with José (Mar. 20, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

158. *Id.*

159. *Id.*

160. *Id.*

161. *Id.*

162. Interview with José (Mar. 20, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

Often, finances became an issue. Some reported that their Mexican relatives assumed that they had more money than they did and expected them to pay for more of the living expenses, all while the deported and returned persons were struggling to adjust to Mexico's lower wages. One returned individual related how her parents had sent money back to Mexico, with instructions for their Mexican relatives to invest it, but when her family returned, the money had been spent instead.

Perhaps less intuitive is the role that family members *in the United States* played in respondents' socio-cultural integration. On the one hand, maintaining family ties across the border helped with respondents' mental health, easing their social isolation and fears of abandonment. These ties were easier to maintain if the U.S. family had legal immigration status in the United States, allowing them to travel to Mexico. Underscoring the close U.S. ties that deported individuals in our study have, we found that deported individuals were twice as likely to have U.S. family members visit in Mexico than returned persons. U.S. family members also provided financial support, sometimes for the long-term.

On the other hand, having close U.S. connections kept many respondents focused on the U.S., impeding their reintegration into Mexican society. More specifically, close family ties in the U.S., especially the presence of a minor child in the U.S., motivated our respondents to return to the U.S., risks notwithstanding. Our findings are consistent with other studies. For example, the Migrant Border Crossing Survey of 1,109 repatriated unauthorized Mexican migrants in five border cities found that social ties to the U.S., operationalized as calling the U.S. "home," years in the U.S., and having a U.S. citizen child, are the best predictors of future crossing back to the U.S.¹⁶³

163. See Martínez, *supra* note 12, at 1188 (2018); Eduardo Torre Cantalapiedra & Luis Enrique Calva Sánchez, *Criminalización, Separación Familiar y Reemigración a Estados Unidos de Varones Mexicanos Deportados* [Criminalization, Family Separation and Reimmigration to the United States by Deported Mexican Men], 36 ESTUDIOS DEMOGRÁFICOS Y URBANOS [DEMOGRAPHIC AND URB. STUD.] 663–65, 641 (2021) (shows that although the criminalization of immigration in the United States has been an effective strategy in deterring reimmigration, deported men who attempt to remigrate do so to reunite with their children, even if it means doing so without legal means), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27011717> [<http://dx.doi.org/10.24201/edu.v36i2.1971>] [<https://perma.cc/8WCR-MVM8>].

Our survey responses add dimension to this discussion. First, a substantial number of our respondents and their U.S.-based families settled along the border to be closer to each other. Faced with substantial criminal penalties if they are caught crossing illegally into the U.S., the respondents stayed on the Mexico side of the border, waiting for visits from their family members. Sometimes, those visits came as regularly as every weekend. Though those visits had positive benefits, they also created suspended lives for our respondents, stunting their reintegration into Mexico's society and culture.

Second, our results suggest that a sizable number of respondents (14%) only want to return to the United States for short visits with family. Many people did not want to return permanently to the United States to avoid experiencing (or repeating) the traumatic experience of discrimination, detention and deportation. And others talked positively about the lives that they have established in Mexico.

For example, forty-eight-year-old Pancho, migrated to Washington state when he was twenty-nine where he worked in the fields, restaurants, and construction.¹⁶⁴ During his seventeen years in the United States, he also had two daughters. When asked if he would go back to the United States after having been deported twice, he said the following:

In principle, at the beginning, yes. I had that desire to return to the United States. But now I think that despite everything, the life here in my country, I'm free. I can live and travel. Well, now with a pandemic, I can't, but you know. I think that I've done more things in these last four years that gave me satisfaction than seventeen years in the United States. In the United States, I was able to buy cars, a house. But really things that filled me, made me satisfied, I had not done the way that I've done these past four years. And so, through activism, and the community service and volunteer service to people who need it, which in this case are deportees, I think it just provides a great satisfaction that I could not have obtained over there. And to go back to the U.S., if I go back, I would like to go back as a tourist to go see my daughters, to be a week and come back. Because they're old, or they're older now. And they

164. Interview with Pancho (Jan. 23, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

have their own life. And so I don't have to go back for them, my daughters don't depend on me. But rather I would go back to visit on a trip, on vacation to see them.¹⁶⁵

Yet punitive U.S. immigration laws make it nearly impossible for someone in Pancho's circumstances to return to the United States, even for a visit. Our results suggest high demand for short-term visas for deported and returned persons. And though our current immigration system nominally offers these visas through its humanitarian parole program,¹⁶⁶ the visas are notoriously difficult to get.¹⁶⁷ Despite their availability, USCIS generally has not accepted family reunification without a compelling reason like medical illness as a basis.¹⁶⁸ Further, the current administration has ended several humanitarian parole programs and sought to deport people who are in the United States through those programs.¹⁶⁹ Skeptics may be concerned about the sincerity of applicants like Pancho who say that they only want to visit the U.S. temporarily, but there could be ways to insure compliance—like a refundable bond that the applicant posts

165. *Id.*

166. 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(5)(A) (permitting DHS to grant humanitarian parole).

167. 8 C.F.R. § 212.5(b) (2025) (providing that noncitizens shall only be paroled into the U.S. “on a case-by-case basis for ‘urgent humanitarian reasons’ or ‘significant public benefit,’ provided the [noncitizen] present neither a security risk nor a risk of absconding...” and setting out the limited categories of noncitizens eligible for humanitarian parole).

168. *See, e.g.,* USCIS, Guidance on Evidence for Certain Types of Humanitarian or Significant Public Benefit Parole Requests (Oct. 11, 2022), <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian-or-significant-public-benefit-parole-for-noncitizens-outside-the-united-states/guidance-on-evidence-for-certain-types-of-humanitarian-or-significant-public-benefit-parole-requests> [<https://perma.cc/NF5Y-KFRY>].

169. Abbie VanSickle & Adam Liptak, *Supreme Court Allows Trump Administration, for Now, to End Biden-Era Migrant Program*, N.Y. TIMES (May 30, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/30/us/politics/trump-immigration-supreme-court.html> [<https://perma.cc/3WSS-UVGS>] (reporting on the Trump administration's termination of temporary protected status for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans). The administration has also appeared to be disinclined to grant humanitarian parole in individual cases. For example, it terminated the humanitarian parole of and sought to deport a four-year-old girl who was in the United States to get life-saving treatment but eventually backtracked after public outcry. Dani Anguiano, *White House Restores Legal Status of Child with Life-Threatening Illness*, THE GUARDIAN (June 3, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jun/03/trump-four-year-old-humanitarian-parole-medical-care> [<https://perma.cc/DKV3-RXVL>].

and receives back when they return to Mexico. Expanding the humanitarian program would benefit not only the returned and their immediate families but could also decrease their incentive to return to the United States illegally.

3. Community

The respondents in our survey largely lived in urban areas. Relative to rural areas, urban areas provide more job opportunities related to labor market options, availability of services from civil society and governmental organizations, and infrastructure such as fast internet and reliable electricity. Most respondents first arrived to urban locations, with 76% of them staying in the urban areas and 5% moving on to rural areas.

Respondents reported multiple moves, with their age and gender often affecting their geographical choices. Older returned and deported men who started in the cities frequently moved to the countryside because of lower cost of living. If they could access fast internet, they could keep their virtual jobs, if they had them, and live in a more affordable and safer locale. Women, however, preferred to live in urban areas: 79% of women settled in urban areas compared to 68% of men. Having lived and worked in the U.S., deported and returned women had grown accustomed to a degree of freedom and autonomy afforded by working outside the home to contribute to family income.¹⁷⁰ Thus, upon their return to Mexico, they generally preferred cities where family members and neighbors had less control over their movements and behaviors.¹⁷¹

Young, deported men also preferred cities. For many, their initial stop was in rural areas, where their family support system

170. This is a robust finding across the globe for women. See RUSSELL KING & AIJA LULLE, *Gendering Return Migration*, in HANDBOOK OF RETURN MIGRATION 53, 56 (Russell King & Katie Kuschminder eds., 2022) (arguing that migration is a fundamentally gendered phenomenon).

171. Other scholars have noted the role of patriarchy in smaller cities and villages and the constraints on women's role in their family and participation in the labor market. See, e.g., María Isabel Ayala & Aurelia Lorena Murga, *Patriarchy and Women's Multidimensional Agency: A Case Study of a Mexican Sending Village*, 59 WOMEN'S STUDS. INT'L F. 1, 3 (2016) (discussing the ways in which patriarchy enforced a gendered division of labor with women in the role of mothers). Deborah Boehm notes that women who migrate "are criticized for transgressing community norms." Deborah A. Boehm, INTIMATE MIGRATIONS: GENDER, FAMILY, AND ILLEGALITY AMONG TRANSNATIONAL MEXICANS 89 (2012) (reporting on fieldwork in San Marcos, Hidalgo, a town of around 13,000 people).

was. But coming from U.S. cities, they reported experiencing culture shock.¹⁷² Their tattoos, clothing, and broken Spanish further stigmatized them in these rural communities. Many of them also clashed with families who assumed that their deportation was due to criminal activities.

Faced with this discrimination and mistreatment from their family or rural communities, many young men left for the big cities. There, many found community with other deported individuals at call centers. But the call centers could be isolating and inhibit reintegration into Mexican society. As noted earlier, most call center jobs gave many of our respondents a living wage, allowing them to capitalize on their English fluency. But the call centers also kept deported and returned individuals in a bubble, speaking English all day, socializing with other culturally American workers on and off the job, and separate from the Mexican workforce. For example, Juan, a thirty-one-year-old who went to the U.S. when he was eight years old and returned to Mexico with his family at fifteen, describes his work in call centers in the following way:

Well, personally, I feel like I've never really integrated into Mexico, you know? Like labor wise, most of the job that I do has been for a company where I'm either providing tech support over the phone for people in the U.S. or providing some sort of support for the U.S. in some way, right. There's not a lot of places where I'm able to earn a competitive salary unless I'm working for somebody in the U.S. or outside of Mexico. Like, sometimes it's a little odd, right? Why can't I be a part of like the economy here? Why do we have to depend on another country's

172. Other studies of people deported from the United States to Mexico have also reported on the culture shock that the people they interviewed experienced on their return. Beth Caldwell's interviewees were disoriented by the differences in quality of life, scared about crime, felt uncertain because of their unfamiliarity with things like the public transportation system, and struck by the extreme poverty, disrepair, lack of plumbing and running water in rural areas. CALDWELL, *supra* note 14, at 57–58. Others have described how people returning are facing increased levels of violence because of flares in violence in areas like Michoacán, Chiapas, parts of Oaxaca, Tamaulipas, and Sinaloa, and the attendant forced migration as a result. *See, e.g.*, Bermúdez Tapia, *supra* note 13; NELSON ARTEAGA ET AL., LA VIOLENCIA EN MÉXICO: FEMINICIDIOS, DESAPARICIONES, EJECUCIONES [VIOLENCE IN MEXICO: FEMICIDE, DISAPPEARANCES, EXECUTIONS] 244 (2024); Arun Kumar Acharya & Jennifer Bryson Clark, *Narco-Violence, Forced Displacement, and Sex Trafficking: A Qualitative Study in Mexico*, 22 GLOB. CRIME 205, 205 (2021).

interest for me to be able to work here. That's a major concern.¹⁷³

These call center interactions provided our respondents with shared connections and empathy in a new and often hostile environment. But by limiting their interactions, respondents like Juan failed to integrate along socio-cultural metrics.

4. Housing

Unsurprisingly, those who chose to return, even under constrained conditions, had the most success finding housing upon their return. Returned individuals who had time to arrange a place to stay, tended to have stronger connections to family in Mexico, and some had been sending money back to Mexico to build housing. Only 23% of returned individuals reported problems in finding housing, with 85% staying with relatives when they first arrived.

By contrast, for people who were deported, finding housing was often challenging. Thirty-seven percent of deported persons reported problems in finding housing. Only 58% of the deported arrived at a relative's home, and often that relative was a stranger. Despite these fragile family connections, 31% of the deported persons in our survey reported receiving financial support from Mexican family members, particularly in the early days of their return.

Deported persons without family connections often experienced homelessness during their initial days in Mexico. Individuals reported not having money to rent housing or even the identification necessary to pick up money that family or friends had wired them in Mexico or the United States. These individuals reported sleeping at the bus station to try to protect themselves from crime, violence, and cartel recruitment. Others reported pooling together resources with deported persons to help each other get to a safe destination, but they had to make hard decisions about whom to trust. Sometimes, deported persons who received money from U.S. family members would rent hotel rooms but became homeless once those funds dried up. 34% of those deported indicated they stayed in shelters hosted by nonprofit organizations, and another 18% reported staying in government subsidized shelters when they arrived.

173. Interview with Juan (Feb. 18, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

5. Education

Education as a metric for socio-cultural reintegration is particularly important for those returning as children or as young adults seeking to continue their education in Mexico. Under Article 3 of Mexico's Constitution, access to education is not only a universal right but part of the State's affirmative obligation to its children.¹⁷⁴ The Mexican education system has three levels: basic (kindergarten to junior high), medium superior (high school equivalent) and superior (university and graduate education). Despite the obligatory nature of education for children, only 62% actually get to junior high school.¹⁷⁵ Poverty and lack of parental education are often cited as causes of this low educational achievement, but investment in public education may also play a role.¹⁷⁶ In addition, during the pandemic, many schools closed and went virtual, leaving behind those without computers or access to reliable internet. These students often lose contact with their schools altogether, and as many as 5.6 million kids were left at risk of dropping out.¹⁷⁷

For returning Mexican citizens, these usual educational barriers are amplified by their problems transitioning into the Mexican educational system. As previously discussed, legislation to validate foreign education in Mexico passed in 2015,¹⁷⁸ but Mexican

174. Mónica Jacobo Suárez, *De Regreso a "Casa" y Sin Apostilla: Estudiantes Mexicoamericanos en México* [Back "Home" and Without Apostille: Mexican-American Students in Mexico], 48 SINÉCTICA [KINETICS] 1, 4 (2017).

175. Benjamin G. Gibbs & Tim B. Heaton, *Drop Out from Primary to Secondary School in Mexico: A Life Course Perspective*, 36 INT'L J. EDUC. DEV. 63, 64 (2013).

176. *Id.* at 65. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that Mexico spends significantly less than other countries on its public education system and its total funding of public education decreased from 5.1% to 4.2% as a share of its GDP from 2015 to 2021. See *Education at a Glance 2024: Country Note - Mexico* OCED (2024), at 5, available at https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/09/education-at-a-glance-2024-country-notes_532eb29d/mexico_40647691/7376478c-en.pdf [https://perma.cc/C64E-GPNM] (citing an average annual expenditure of \$3,513 per student from primary to tertiary education, compared to \$14,209 in over 100 countries surveyed).

177. Alexandra Zapata Hojel, *The Damage of Mexico's Pandemic School Closures Has Been Catastrophic*, SLATE (July 08, 2021), <https://slate.com/technology/2021/07/mexico-pandemic-school-closures.html> [https://perma.cc/462V-LWKC].

178. Acuerdo Secretarial 286 [Departmental Agreement 286], Diario Oficial de la Federación [DOF, Official Register of the Federation] 30-10-2000, últimas reformas [latest reforms] DOF 18-04-2017.

school officials still continue to impose bureaucratic requirements such as apostilles for birth certificates of foreign-born children.¹⁷⁹ Integrating children into the Mexican educational system can pose problems for those without the proper documentation to verify their identity or their educational background and attendance. For children born in Mexico, the identity issue can be addressed by identifying their birth records. If the birth was not registered, statements by family members or those who assisted at the birth given to Mexican public notaries may help establish identity.

Returning children born in the United States face slightly different documentation problems. If they have at least one parent with Mexican citizenship, then they are also Mexican citizens at birth (citizenship *sanguinis* or citizenship by blood).¹⁸⁰ But to obtain proof of their Mexican citizenship, the parents must register them at any Mexican Civil Registry office or any Mexican consulate in the United States, submit required identity documents, and pay a fee.¹⁸¹ The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that of the 1.4 million individuals who returned to Mexico in the five year period between 2005 and 2010, 300,000 were children born in the United States.¹⁸² Based on the 2015 Mexican Census, scholars project that there are approximately 600,000 U.S. citizen students in Mexican educational institutions, from pre-kindergarten to high school.¹⁸³

These additional steps, for returning children born in Mexico or the United States, take time, resources, and community connections that returning families may not have in abundance.

Among our survey respondents, fifty-five parents (twenty-five deported and thirty returned) reported that they had trouble getting

179. Jacobo Suárez, *supra* note 163, at 8; Mónica Jacobo Suárez, *Returned Migrant Children and Youths in Mexico: Findings, Advances, and Pending Issues* (2015-2022), 17 NORTEAMÉRICA 241, 251-52 (2022), <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/1937/193775454011/> [<https://perma.cc/2QXL-AW6S>].

180. Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos [Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico], capítulo II, artículo 30, CP, Diario Oficial de la Federación [DOF, Official Register of the Federation] 05-02-1917, últimas reformas [latest reforms] DOF 17-05-2021.

181. *How to Get Mexican Citizenship by Descent*, NOMAD CAPITALIST (May 30, 2025), <https://nomadcapitalist.com/global-citizen/mexican-citizenship-by-descent/> [<https://perma.cc/EG2E-C296>].

182. Jeffrey S. Passel et al., *Mexicans Sent Back to Mexico by U.S. Authorities*, PEW RSCH. CTR, 1, 8 (Apr. 23, 2012), <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2012/04/23/iii-mexicans-sent-back-to-mexico-by-u-s-authorities/> [<https://perma.cc/VH7A-CKQQ>].

183. Jacobo Suárez, *supra* note 168, at 245.

their children's school documents from the United States apostilled or in a form that Mexican authorities would accept. Mexican authorities require those documents for enrollment in Mexican schools. The continuing problems—and confusion—over the apostille requirements were discussed earlier. Significantly, 83% of returned persons with children experienced problems getting their children's U.S. school documents accepted, suggesting that in planning their returns, most parents either were not informed about the Mexican Government's requirements or received erroneous information. Notably, only 15% of returned individuals consulted a Mexican consulate before returning. These problems point to two ways that the Mexican Government could improve the reintegration process: ensuring that parents understand what documents school enrollment requires and providing parents with better, more accurate information before they leave the United States.

Returning children who come from broken family structures face even more hurdles. We met a young woman with a U.S. citizen mother whose Mexican father took her to Mexico when she was only two years old. Because her U.S. birth certificate did not list her father, she has been unable to establish her citizenship. She could attend Mexican schools through junior high (basic education), but she experienced problems trying to enroll in high school because she did not have a CURP, an enrollment requirement.

To continue her education, she has been advised to obtain a U.S. court order to amend her birth certificate to include her father's name. But that birth certificate must be verified, or apostilled, in the United States, translated into Spanish, and then presented to Mexican authorities. This young woman's situation is further complicated by her father's death and her lack of a relationship with her U.S.-citizen mother, illustrating the binational difficulties of resolving these complicated citizenship questions. After multiple attempts and advocacy by a nonprofit organization, she was able to get a provisional license to enroll in high school. Nonetheless, the school will not grant her diploma until she receives a CURP, blocking her ability to enroll in a Mexican university.

Examples of local governments and schools that are working with families to enroll students in school are rare. Because of name inconsistencies (e.g., the reversal of the paternal and maternal surnames), other Mexican children have trouble proving parentage

and the Mexican citizenship necessary to attend public schools.¹⁸⁴ The difficulties in establishing identity or citizenship to access a CURP seem to arise as individuals pursue higher levels of education—beginning with high school. Accordingly, children lose educational opportunities, limiting their future economic mobility.

In our interviews, we heard that the lack of literacy, particularly in written Spanish, was also a barrier to education. Those returned persons without literacy in written Spanish found it difficult to not only complete their coursework, but also to navigate the Mexican higher educational system that requires filling out multiple admission forms. We found it was easier for those who graduated from a secondary school in Mexico to enroll in a Mexican university. Returned individuals who had older siblings who attended Mexican universities also reported more success with enrolling in higher education programs.

6. Physical and Mental Well-Being

The Mexican Constitution offers a right to health care access¹⁸⁵ and since we talked with our respondents during the pandemic, health care needs were quite salient. In Mexico, health care is primarily delivered through the public health system, but some care is also delivered through private insurance.¹⁸⁶ For those not covered by either government or private health insurance, the *Instituto de Salud para el Bienestar* (“INSABI,” Health Institute for Wellbeing) provides health insurance.¹⁸⁷ Established in 2020, INSABI is available at no cost to individuals who present their identification

184. *Id.*

185. Norma C. Gutierrez, Mexico: Availability and Cost of Health Care—Legal Aspects, L. LIBR. CONG., GLOB. LEGAL RSCH. CTR., at 1 (2014). *See also* Miriam Bello, *Mexico’s Right to Health*, MEX. BUS. NEWS (Feb. 25, 2021), <https://mexicobusiness.news/health/news/mexicos-right-health> [<https://perma.cc/AX2D-HBW4>] (describing the constitutional right to health and how this right works in Mexico).

186. José E. Urquieta-Salomon & Héctor J. Villareal, *Evolution of Health Coverage in Mexico: Evidence of Progress and Challenges in the Mexican Health System*, 31 HEALTH POL’Y PLAN. 28, 29 (2016), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25823751/> (discussing that 95% of Mexicans were covered by public health insurance and the remainder by private insurance).

187. Luis Javier Cortes-Adame & Octavio Gomez-Dantes, *The Termination of Seguro Popular: Impacts on the Care of High-Cost Diseases in the Uninsured Population in Mexico*, 46 THE LANCET REG’L HEALTH – AMERICAS 1, 1-2 (2025).

and CURP.¹⁸⁸ There is no age limit to qualify for INSABI; however, if an individual lives in an area where wealth indicators are above average, they may not qualify.¹⁸⁹ In addition, treatment of cancer, heart attacks, diabetes, major surgeries and other diseases that require long-term care, and the accompanying medication, are not fully covered by INSABI.¹⁹⁰ A relatively new institution, INSABI is especially important to workers in the informal labor market. Informal workers comprised 55% of the population older than fifteen in 2024.¹⁹¹

As with education, substantial gaps exist between health care access in Mexico as it formally exists and as it is actually accessed by Mexican citizens. Our respondents faced problems obtaining the national identification necessary to access INSABI; for mixed-status families in particular (where individual family members have different citizenship statuses), their different citizenship statuses complicate accessing healthcare.

Amanda, who had lived in the U.S. since she was four years old and whose family returned to Mexico to rejoin her deported father, described her access problems:

We just couldn't get health care here. My dad . . . didn't have an ID at the time. . . . And then my mom, she didn't have an income at all. And also, my [sic] siblings didn't have a Mexican birth certificate. So, for example, my little brother . . . he cut his finger. And I was like, so where do we take them? We take them to the Red Cross here, and they're like, well, we can stitch them. And then we take them to a private doctor. And they're like, well, he needs a, like an actual doctor, he needs to go to the emergency room. And then the emergency room says, well, he's American, take them to the American side. And then the American side says, well, he doesn't have healthcare. So, where do we take him?

And now, now that I'm older, now that I have a job, now I get Social Security [IMSS] here . . . but my

188. *INSABI: The Free Healthcare System in Mexico*, GUARDIAN INS. MX, <https://guardianinsurancemx.com/insabi-the-free-healthcare-system-in-mexico/> [https://perma.cc/EGH6-KR5Q] (last visited Sep. 9, 2025).

189. *Id.*

190. *Id.*

191. Jose Sanchez, *Labor Informality Rate in Mexico from 1st Quarter 2010 to 1st Quarter 2024*, STATISTA (Aug. 23, 2024), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1341146/labor-informality-rate-mexico/> [https://perma.cc/Z8WG-TENV].

siblings still struggle with it. And my mom, I had to put her under my [Social] Security to be able to help her have any type of health care because there's no free care.¹⁹²

As her story makes apparent, Amanda's family faced several structural problems trying to access healthcare. Without national identification, Amanda's father could not access government care (and if he tried to get identification during the pandemic, the local INE office would have been closed or operating at very reduced capacity).¹⁹³ While she was still a minor, Amanda could not access healthcare on her own, and as U.S. citizens, her brothers did not have a right to government-run health care, until they could substantiate their Mexican citizenship.¹⁹⁴ The family could pay for a private doctor, but that private care is expensive and limited.¹⁹⁵ Now, finally, as an employee at a call center, Amanda has access to IMSS, and she can pay an extra premium to cover her Mexican citizen mother.¹⁹⁶

We wanted to know how the return to Mexico and the reintegration experience has affected their physical and mental health, so we asked whether their health was better, the same, or worse since they returned. For physical health, the most common answer was the same (52% deported, 45% returned). Substantial numbers also reported that their physical health worsened (35% deported, 34% returned). More returned persons reported that their health improved (20%) than deported persons did (13%). Table 11 below shows those results.

192. Interview with Amanda (Apr. 9, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

193. *Id.*

194. *Id.*

195. *Id.*

196. Amanda may not have known about INSABI at the time of the interview because it had only been operating for a year.

Table 11: Physical and Mental Health Since Returning¹

	Deported (n=202)	Returned (n=73)
Physical Health Since Returning		
Better	13%	20%
Same	52%	45%
Worse	35%	34%
Mental Health Since Returning		
Better	4%	18%
Same	18%	20%
Worse	62%	39%
Worsened and then improved	16%	16%

¹ All values have been rounded to the closest integer

Without being specifically asked, fourteen respondents volunteered that they were healthier in Mexico. Most credited the “fresh,” “natural,” “organic,” “homemade,” “not processed,” and “not full of preservatives” food that they ate in Mexico, as compared to the cheap and unhealthy fast food they ate in the U.S.

Twenty-six-year-old Daisy, who returned to Mexico from Albuquerque, New Mexico, at fourteen years of age when her family was deported, directly compared her lifestyle in the U.S. and in Mexico.¹⁹⁷ When asked if her health had improved, worsened, or stayed the same upon return to Mexico, she responded,

While I would say for better, for better, I mean, I remember when I was in the States, I used to eat a lot of junk food. Like McDonald's. So, it was very often that we would eat McDonald's and stuff like that. In Mexico, or you get to eat like homemade tortillas, you get to make food. It's just different. I mean, I eat healthier.¹⁹⁸

Alma provided a more structural response.¹⁹⁹ Having lived in the U.S. since she was two years old, she responded:

Yes, I think my health has changed for the better. I've lost weight. And I feel just better about myself. Definitely. But I think that has a lot to do with, like I was saying before our life in the States, where we're used to having everything at our fingertips, fast food, restaurants, hop on your car, go to McDonald's, three in the morning, who cares? You know, when you get hungry, you pop in your car, and you go. And here,

197. Interview with Daisy (Apr. 30, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

198. *Id.*

199. Interview with Alma (Mar. 26, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

first, it's expensive. Second of all, not everybody has a car. And third of all, everything closes early. So fast food is expensive here, it's definitely a perk to be able to go to a fast-food restaurant. So, I think that more than anything [that] is the main reason why have I gotten healthier.²⁰⁰

When asked if they used medical services, 32% of deported persons said no, compared to 2% of returned, underscoring the greater vulnerability of the deported. Moreover, 71% of returned individuals received medical care from government offices while only 35% of deported persons used government medical services. Deported individuals were more likely to obtain physical medical services from nonprofits (23%), while only 2% of returned individuals saw a doctor through a non-profit. Table 12 shows the type of care and the type of provider from whom deported and returned individuals received medical care.

Table 12: Health Care Providers¹

	Deported	Returned
Of Those Who Used Physical Health Care	(n=102)	(n=43)
Provider		
Government	40%	57%
Private doctor	16%	24%
Both government and private	11%	17%
NGO	33%	2%
Of Those Who Used Mental Health Care	Deported	Returned
Provider	(n=42)	(n=12)
Government	7%	10%
Private doctor	5%	45%
NGO	86%	45%
Church	2%	0%

¹All values have been rounded to the closest integer

The government was the most consistent provider of physical medical services for both groups, with nonprofit organizations providing crucial mental health services. During COVID, respondents who had established citizenship, and thus the right to access care at IMSS hospitals, could not do so because the hospitals were caring for COVID-19 patients. Like their fellow Mexican citizens during this health care crisis, many respondents had to pay out-of-pocket to see a private doctor.

200. *Id.*

Gauging mental health is another way to examine socio-cultural reintegration. Many returned persons experienced trauma from their deportation, separation from family and community, or incarceration/detention in the U.S. Some people who were deported also experienced violence during the deportation process. In addition, the majority of individuals we interviewed discussed the difficulty they have in adjusting to life in Mexico after prolonged absences. Among the deported, their mental health got worse (62%) or got worse before improving (16%); only 4% reported that their mental health got better after returning; and 18% reported that their mental health remained the same.²⁰¹

Returning individuals fared slightly better, but many also reported mental health decline: 39% reported that their mental health got worse; 16% reported that their mental health got worse before improving; and about equal percentages reported that their mental health stayed the same (20%) or got better (18%). The 18% who reported that their mental health improved after returning to Mexico reflects, we believe, relief from the pressures of being undocumented in the United States, which was an important factor in their decisions to leave.

In general, many respondents expressed the relief from the pressure of being undocumented as “being free.” For example, when we asked Oscar, who had lived in the U.S. for three years and returned to Mexico when he was fourteen, whether his health had

201. Though these statistics reflect the individuals in our study and their own evaluations of their mental health, they are consistent with other studies that have noted the stigma and negative mental health effects of deportation. *See, e.g.,* Schuster & Nassim Majidi, *supra* note 14, at 14 (looking at stigmatization of deported Afghanis and finding that “stigmatisation may be seen as a way of punishing those who have failed to repay the family’s investment and as a way of holding on to the dream of a better life in a distant destination”); Romo-Martínez et al., *supra* note 41, at 57 (discussing lack of public mental health services for deported and returned individuals); Ana Vila-Freyer, *¿Las Raíces en el Lado Equivocado de Sus Vidas? Jóvenes Retornados y Deportados Desde Estados Unidos a Guanajuato* [Roots on the Wrong Side of their lives? Young Returnees and Deportees from the United States to Guanajuato], 12 MIGRACIONES INTERNACIONALES [INT’L MIGRATIONS] 1, 18 (2021), (noting that for many young, deported or returned people “la primera etapa del proceso del retorno se acompaña de depresión” [the first stage of the return process is accompanied by depression]); Erin R Hamilton et al., *Legal Status, Deportation, and the Health of Returned Migrants from the USA to Mexico*, 42 POPULATION RSCH. POL’Y REV. 16 (2023) (finding mental health outcomes are worse for people who are deported).

changed after he returned to Mexico, he thought it was “even better.”²⁰² He explained:

I had this, like I said, worry in the back of my back every day, you know? Like we were gonna get deported. I even developed like a skin reaction to this entire pressure that I had in not having money and stuff like that. When we came back, I was able to find a very, very helpful doctor that helped me work with it, and ever since, it's gone. But it was really bad. I thought it was like skin cancer or something like that, because it was all over my chest, my arms, my face. And I looked like a little pink and white. And, you know, it was, it was hard. . . . Yeah, at the end of it they said like “well, you were just really, really stressed.”²⁰³

In response to a question about what the most enjoyable part of being back in Mexico was, Oscar likewise responded:

Being able to go anywhere without any restrictions. I recall when I was in middle school, somebody said they were going to make this trip to D.C. And I really wanted to go, right, up north, and they said, “well then you better don't, because you might have some problems, if they, they happen to, you know, stop the bus for whatever reason, and check on you guys.” And, you know, there were certain areas in California that we couldn't go into because immigration was there constantly checking people. It was just, you know, something, some kind of fear that you always have in the back of your mind, you know, like thinking, you become a little paranoid to be honest. Like you're just looking around and I think that I, I appreciate that freedom [in Mexico] that you can go anywhere²⁰⁴

Other respondents also reflected the idea of freedom from the stress of deportation, both in answers about how their health had improved and in response to the question of what they enjoyed most about being back in Mexico. Indeed, the most common response to that question was some version of “I am free.”

Respondents who said they had mental health needs reported that mental health services were unavailable to them because of the cost of the services, lack of therapists and mental health services in

202. Interview with Oscar (Apr. 29, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

203. *Id.*

204. *Id.*

Mexico, or the stigma they would face for seeking treatment.²⁰⁵ 66% of deported and 67% of returned said they received no mental health care.

Among those who received mental health care, 86% of deported individuals received care from NGOs, while returned individuals were split between NGOs and private doctors (45% each). Respondents reported that mental health providers in Mexico did not understand the experiences of deported and returned individuals and therefore lacked empathy in their treatment. Respondents also reported that lack of Spanish fluency was a problem in seeking care. Much of the successful mental health support seems to come from connections made through other similarly situated individuals, many of them affiliated with NGOs or found through English-centered jobs (like call centers) or Facebook.

For example, Maria, a forty-three-year-old separated mother, part of a mixed-status family, was deported in 2017 after getting a traffic ticket in Denver.²⁰⁶ Having only a middle school education and speaking little English, she worked odd jobs in the U.S. like babysitting and domestic work.²⁰⁷ Back in Mexico City, she started her own cleaning business and makes enough to pay her bills comfortably.²⁰⁸ However, she had a difficult time when she arrived. She had spent six months in an immigration detention facility before arriving in Mexico. That detention meant that her family in Mexico presumed she was a criminal and was not welcoming. She found support from nonprofit organizations comprised of individuals with similar experiences.²⁰⁹ They provided emotional support and helped her obtain identification in Mexico. In tears, she talked with our team and explained:

Well yes, the truth is it is a difficult process because I have suffered so much discrimination in the

205. There are significant barriers to receiving mental health care in Mexico, including the unavailability of mental health care and the stigma associated with seeking it. Robin E. Gearing et al., *Mental Health Help-Seeking in Mexico*, 31 GLOB. HEALTH PROMOTION 55, 56 (2023). Sociologists have attributed the stigma to a number of factors, including “belief that mental health disorders are associated with personal weakness,” “lack of faith in the system due to failed previous healthcare experiences,” belief that mental health care is not masculine, religious attitudes (mental health concerns are actually a spiritual problem), and lack of exposure to other people with mental health problems. *Id.* at 56, 62.

206. Interview with Maria (Jan. 14, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

207. *Id.*

208. *Id.*

209. *Id.*

workplace, from people, from my own family... the simple fact of being a person who's been deported, they are criminalized in their own country and the same in the United States. People don't know the laws, they don't understand the immigration process and nevertheless, we are still judged without knowing. For example, I have siblings that I have to deal with because I am a very reserved person, I don't really talk about my life, and well because I am not in constant communication they out of nowhere tell me "be good" or "don't do bad things... you saw what happened to you in the United States"... it's like Oh my God! You don't even know what or why I was deported and they keep talking so it has been a difficult process.²¹⁰

Yael, who moved to California with her family when she was eleven years old, also had a hard time when she returned to Mexico at fifteen.²¹¹ Her family overstayed their visa, and living in the U.S. without a social security number caused great anxiety for her parents.²¹² Moreover, her parents wanted their children to go to university, a plan that seemed impossible in the United States at the time.²¹³ Hence, they returned. Now, at twenty-eight, she recalled what it was like coming back to Mexico and then finding a community in the nonprofit *Otros Dreams en Acción* ("ODA," Other Dreams in Action).²¹⁴ She shared the following:

So, you come back to your country, but you are not seen as Mexican. You are considered something else. Also, it's really different to live four years of your adolescence in another country, with another language, and then you return to a place where people live differently. It's almost like you are an outcast. . . . Well, [now I am part of ODA] it's more about the community. In reality, it's about being with people who have lived the experience like me, or that we are "Spanglish" . . . [It would have been great] . . . to be able to talk about those shared experiences . . . when I returned.²¹⁵

210. *Id.*

211. Interview with Yael (June 5, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

212. *Id.*

213. *Id.*

214. *Id.*

215. *Id.*

Many people who returned, especially those who went to the United States as young children, reported that they did not feel as culturally connected to Mexico, and that made it difficult for them to develop community. They found this community in nonprofits or their workplaces, where they connected with people like them.

Many respondents talked about the stigma attached to having returned from the United States. All respondents with tattoos reported being treated like criminals in Mexico, and it was worse for those who returned to more rural areas. Other interviewees said that the way they dressed, or their accent made others perceive them negatively or as not authentically Mexican. Forty-eight-year-old Adán had lived in Las Vegas since he was twenty-six, landscaping and washing limousines.²¹⁶ When asked if he feels stigmatized by others because he was deported, he responded,

Yes. Because of the way we speak as well, there are times that they say. . . . “Hey, you’re in Mexico now.” And they would say, “Get off your plane, get off your plane.”²¹⁷ And in terms of how they speak They say you’re speaking like a *Norteño*. There’s different things. . . . I think it’s because of the different accent. Because a lot of people too, they know that we’re deported and they’re rejecting us, like in our work, and I say it again, they think that you did something, they think that you killed someone or raped someone in the United States, because you were in immigration detention. They think that you stole or did something worse, and no, just because of not having migratory status. They, they say well . . . “why did you, why did you come back? Did you kill someone or what?” No, it’s just because I don’t have a license.²¹⁸

With respect to health outcomes, then, our respondents generally felt physically healthier, but many still faced mental health challenges from the stigma associated with deportation, the trauma of their deportation experience, or the culture shock of return. Others experienced challenges with accessing care. Still, many of the respondents who underwent constrained return ultimately experienced relief when they no longer had to worry about deportation and responded that they felt freer in Mexico.

216. Interview with Adán (Jan. 29, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

217. In English, this would be similar to “get off your high horse.”

218. Adán, *supra* n. 204.

In sum, respondents experienced both opportunities and challenges with respect to economic, politico-institutional, and socio-cultural reintegration. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges that our respondents faced with respect to all three measures of reintegration. We turn to its impact next.

D. COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic deeply affected respondents, whose work ceased, decreased, or went online. While 19% of deported and returned persons said that the pandemic did not affect them negatively, over 80% reported deterioration in life and work conditions. A full third of deported and about a quarter of returned individuals lost their jobs. Restaurants and small stores closed, tourist areas emptied, and domestic workers lost their cleaning and cooking jobs. José, a self-employed barber who lived in the U.S. for eighteen years until his deportation in 2018, had to close his doors, a common experience among the self-employed.²¹⁹ As work disappeared, respondents experienced food and housing insecurity, along with greater uncertainty about their futures. Many respondents lost their work-provided health insurance, and others noted it took them three to six months to find another job, often with worse working conditions.

For other respondents, work decreased. Some establishments, like supermarkets, open air markets, and medical institutions, reduced their hours and their personnel. 21% of deported and 23% of returned experienced reduction in work hours, making it hard to cover living expenses. Several deported and returned persons saw their customers at market stands decrease significantly. Moreover, as the pandemic affected supply chains in Mexico and around the world, prices for everyday goods increased, further cutting into consumer spending. For others in our respondent group, the reduction in work took the form of losing overtime opportunities or working the same amount for less pay.

Some jobs could go online. Schools went virtual for those students who could follow with a laptop or smart phone, requiring more labor from teachers who now had to prepare new lectures, try to keep students' attention, and reach out to those left out by lack of technology. Some call center workers, as noted earlier, went online to what they call "home office." A few establishments provided laptops

219. Interview with Juan (May 29, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

and headsets to work from home, but many required employees to provide their own. In addition to a laptop and headset, strong and fast internet was a prerequisite. In these cases, if workers could not establish the conditions to work from home, they lost their employment. English teachers, translators, and transcribers were in a similar situation. A common complaint with online education was that families had limited access to computers. Daily, families had to make decisions about the difficulty they experienced with educating and caring for their children.

Ignacio, who returned to Mexico under constrained conditions after a lawyer advised him that he would be jailed and deported for committing a crime, discussed how his family had to juggle the competing needs.²²⁰ After living in San Diego for fifteen years, Ignacio slipped into call center work in Mérida.²²¹ When the pandemic hit, his job provided a home office, but it was difficult to continue working.²²² He explained,

Yeah, I think [the pandemic] affected everybody. All of us. Yeah. First, my family was going to come visit us. And that's when everything happened. So didn't get to see them. And then, um, well, everything was in lock up. They gave us home offices. And with our babies, the thing is that they closed the daycares. So, we had to work and have babies at home. It was hard. It was crazy.²²³

Ignacio was not the only one balancing new-found daycare and childcare responsibilities while working at home. Amanda, who previously explained her family's challenges with healthcare, worked two online jobs, barely making ends meet.²²⁴ When the COVID pandemic began, she had to share her work computer with her two school-aged children.²²⁵ Often, her kids had to use her smart phone for school and repeatedly interrupted her to print out worksheets or to use her computer for assignments.²²⁶ While these pandemic difficulties were universal, they were more severely felt by individuals in our sample with a limited social support system in

220. Interview with Ignacio (Mar. 27, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

221. *Id.*

222. *Id.*

223. *Id.*

224. Interview with Amanda (Apr. 9, 2021) (audio on file with authors).

225. *Id.*

226. *Id.*

Mexico and limited financial means to acquire all the technology necessary to perform optimally.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous section analyzed the study participants' reintegration experiences and identified the barriers to their economic, political-institutional, and socio-legal reintegration. In sum, our survey findings demonstrated that the relative degree of vulnerability that individuals experienced impacted their return and reintegration. The most vulnerable were deported persons, especially in the initial days after deportation. The deportation process itself also resulted in long-term vulnerabilities, including long-term health care needs and lingering stigma and discrimination. Those involved in constrained returns also experienced barriers to reintegration, like those who were deported. But their ability to choose the timing of their return helped reduce, though not completely overcome, these barriers and the negative impact of their vulnerabilities generally.

Building on these identified barriers to reintegration, this section proposes policy interventions. Because the current deportation system and reintegration processes are so flawed, we recognize that myriad interventions could be proposed. We choose to focus on interventions that (1) are grounded in the experiences of our respondents and (2) are feasible for governments on both sides of the border to implement, to facilitate successful reintegration in Mexico. Though there is substantial overlap among these interventions, we find it analytically useful to divide these interventions into five areas: deportation policies and procedures; documentation; information and education; services; and immigration reform. To advance these interventions, we also propose bi-national collaborations among governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the actors making up the legal and social networks.

A. Policy Interventions that Address the Challenges to Reintegration

1. MORE HUMANE DEPORTATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Our respondents who were deported described a process filled with uncertainty and fear about returning to Mexico. Many individuals did not understand or were not adequately informed about their deportation proceedings, including what was happening

to them and what legal rights they had. This could be the result of not having the right to an appointed counsel during removal proceedings. But even for people who had immigration counsel during deportation proceedings, it does not appear that immigration attorneys counseled their clients about what happens after deportation and how to adequately prepare for the reintegration process. Respondents reported not knowing when they would be deported or to where, which made it very difficult to coordinate with family members or attorneys. As a result, deported individuals did not know what to expect in Mexico, so they were confused and scared when they were dropped off at the border by U.S. immigration authorities.

The U.S. government's deportation policies and practices exacerbated this confusion and fear. ICE did not tell respondents when and where they would be deported, so they could not notify family members who might be able to pick them up (Mexico side) or to send financial assistance (U.S. or Mexico side). Some respondents reported that ICE did not return their belongings when they were deported, so they did not have cell phones to contact family members in the U.S. or Mexico or lacked identification. These practices violate ICE and the U.S. Marshals' standards that require returning belongings to detainees.²²⁷

Respondents also reported feeling physically endangered upon their return to Mexico. Most were deported to locations along the U.S.-Mexico border, an area that has experienced a recent spike in violence.²²⁸ That violence not only exposes deported individuals to danger, but also damages their mental health, which hinders their successful reintegration. Furthermore, deportation under these circumstances increases their vulnerability to recruitment by gangs who cruise these areas.²²⁹ One NGO representative who participated

227. See generally Walter Ewing & Guillermo Cantor, *Deported with no Possessions: The Mishandling of Migrants' Personal Belongings by CBP and ICE*, AM. IMMIGR. COUNCIL (Dec. 2016), https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/deported_with_no_possessions.pdf [https://perma.cc/98PU-6R6P] (elaborating on the handling of migrants' belongings by border authorities).

228. Julian Resendiz, *Mexico sends 400 soldiers to Juarez amid spike in violence*, BORDER REP. (Feb. 7, 2024), <https://www.borderreport.com/immigration/border-crime/mexico-sends-400-soldiers-to-juarez-amid-spike-in-violence/> [https://perma.cc/W5AQ-J4FZ].

229. Bermúdez Tapia, *supra* note 13.

in our May 2023 conference noted that the gangs particularly value recruiting U.S. veterans who have experience with armed combat.²³⁰

The threat of violence was exacerbated for those who were deported in the middle of the night, which violate U.S. protocols and agreements it has signed with Mexico. Specifically, these protocols and agreements require the U.S. to deport people generally between 6:00 a.m. at the earliest and 10:00 p.m. at the latest, and require the U.S. to notify the Mexican Government of deportations to ensure people deported have access to an INM-run reception center.²³¹ As noted in Part IV.B and as analyzed further in this Part V.A.4, the Mexican Government's provision of services at the repatriation centers has been inconsistent. For example, if the U.S. departs people at 2:00 a.m., there is no meaningful opportunity for the repatriation centers or the NGOs, who should be more fully incorporated into this reintegration process, to provide any services.

Given the pro-enforcement orientation of the Trump administration, advocacy for more humane deportation policies may seem unrealistic. Yet there is no inherent contradiction between the administration's desire to implement mass deportation and our recommendation that those deportation policies be more humane. Even with its anti-immigrant positions, the Trump administration has a vested interest in more humane deportation policies. Our research shows how the traumas of the current deportation process hinder reintegration for returning Mexican citizens, and other research has shown that those who reintegrate successfully are less likely to try to reenter the U.S. illegally.²³² Because the U.S. would directly benefit in the form of lower enforcement costs, there is political room to move on our recommendations.

Our recommendations center around the proposition that the U.S. government should honor its own protocols and agreements related to the deportation of Mexican nationals. First, the U.S. should inform individuals when their deportation date and place have been set, so that they can work with the Mexican Government, family members, and lawyers to get the essential Mexican identification and to otherwise prepare for a post-deportation life. Second, U.S. prison

230. SLACK, *supra* note 13, at 45.

231. MOU on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified & Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals, *supra* note 31; *Updated U.S.-Mexico Local Repatriation Agreements*, *supra* note 136.

232. See, e.g., Kuschminder, *supra* note 39, at 107 (finding those who reintegrate successfully are less likely to try to reenter the U.S. illegally).

officials should ensure that deported individuals get their personal belongings back. Without their identification or cell phones, these individuals are at a disadvantage in starting their reintegration back into Mexican society. Finally, the U.S. should cease its middle-of-the-night deportations.

Some may oppose our recommendations because they want to make it harder for deported individuals to return illegally to the U.S. and see the current process that hinders communication and planning as necessary to separate these individuals from smugglers or others who might help them to return. Even if this argument is empirically correct, it ignores the short- and long-term costs of this chaotic deportation process. In the short term, those who experience physical violence and mental trauma through the deportation process suffer, which should concern us all. In the long term, that trauma negatively affects their ability to reintegrate successfully and increases the likelihood that they will try to enter the U.S. illegally, with its attendant risks and costs.

2. Documentation

Our survey results detail the many ways that the lack of documentation hindered the reintegration of respondents. Without an INE card, respondents were turned down for jobs and denied the opportunity to rent housing or even to pick up money wired by relatives. Without a CURP, they were denied government-funded benefits, and without certified birth certificates, they could not enroll their U.S. or Mexico-born children in public schools. In other words, they were denied services, benefits, or opportunities that were crucial to their successful reintegration.

For our recommended interventions here, we start with INE cards, which serve officially as proof of cardholders' eligibility to vote in federal and local elections. As explained in Part IV.B.1, the cards are issued through a process that is considered secure and reliable and are necessary as proof of identity for both government and private transactions. To obtain an INE card, an applicant must provide evidence of their identity, their Mexican citizenship, and their residency (to determine their eligibility to vote in local elections).²³³

233. *Required Documents*, *supra* note 120; Acuerdo de la Comisión Nacional de Vigilancia, por el que se Modifican los Medios de Identificación para Solicitar la Credencial para Votar en Territorio Nacional, Aprobados Mediante Diverso [National Vigilance Commission Agreement, by which the Means of Identification Required to Solicit the Electoral Identification are Modified in the

We recommend several interventions to help reduce the barriers associated with the lack of identity.

For those who are deported, the *Constancia de Repatriación* (repatriation certificate) issued by the Mexican Government at repatriation centers is supposed to serve as proof of identity because it is issued with the deported person's photo. However, survey respondents indicated that this document is not accepted as a form of identification.

A public campaign and targeted communications should be developed to educate employers, bank representatives, money order establishments, and others to assure access to rights and benefits.²³⁴ The repatriation certificate, moreover, is needed to obtain the INE card. Its usefulness in the INE application process underscores the importance of the U.S. carrying out deportations only during hours when the repatriation centers are open, as we recommended in Part V.A.1 above.

National Territory, Approved through Diversification], INE/CNV28/AGO/2020, ACUERDO INE/CNV14/JUN/2023, Diario Oficial de la Federación (DOF, Official Register of the Federation), DOF 19-9-2023 (Mex.).

234. *México te Abraza* [*Mexico Embraces You*] is a good start. See GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO, *supra* note 145. It is a reintegration program launched in 2025, in response to the increased deportations from the U.S., designed to support deported individuals upon arrival and facilitate their social and economic reintegration. The *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, in coordination with other federal agencies, offers immediate assistance at ports of entry, including transportation, food, medical care, and psychosocial support. A central feature of the initiative is the *Tarjeta Bienestar Paisano* [*Countryman Welfare Card*], a government-issued debit card providing 2,000 MXN in emergency aid and access to health insurance, civil documentation, and social services. Sara González, *Programa 'México te Abraza': la Tarjeta Bienestar Paisano y Otros Apoyos que Recibirán los Migrantes Deportados por Trump* [*Mexico Embraces You: The Countryman Welfare Card and Other Support That Migrants Deported by Trump Will Receive*], EL PAÍS [THE COUNTRY], (Jan. 21, 2025, at 23:30 EST), <https://elpais.com/mexico/2025-01-21/programa-mexico-te-abraza-la-tarjeta-bienestar-paisano-y-otros-apoyos-que-recibiran-los-migrantes-deportados-por-trump.html> [<https://perma.cc/QY8E-B9RA>]. The program also includes vocational training and job placement support, with 50,000 jobs reserved for deported individuals through public-private partnerships. Elia Castillo Jiménez, *Claudia Sheinbaum Celebra los 50.000 Empleos para Repatriados Mexicanos que Abrió el Sector Empresarial* [*Claudia Sheinbaum Celebrates the 50,000 Jobs for Mexican Repatriates Created by the Business Sector*], EL PAÍS [THE COUNTRY] (Jan. 29, 2025, at 15:06 EST), <https://elpais.com/mexico/2025-01-29/claudia-sheinbaum-celebra-los-50000-empleos-para-repatriados-mexicanos-que-abrio-el-sector-empresarial.html> (on file with the *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*).

To prove their Mexican *citizenship*, those who have been deported must provide a copy of their Mexican birth certificate or their CURP (akin to a U.S. social security number). The digitalization of birth certificates is an important advance in the INE documentation process, but accessing it requires having and knowing your CURP. As explained in Part IV.B.1, some of the deported were never registered at birth and never received a CURP number and/or left Mexico before 1996 and the advent of the CURP system; alternatively, some returnees may have a CURP but may not know it. Thus, not having a CURP is a major stumbling block for deported individuals applying for an INE card. If the Mexican Government provided an expedited process for locating or assigning CURP numbers (perhaps at the repatriation centers), that would significantly enhance the ability of deported persons to get the all-important INE cards.

Finally, regarding the *residency* requirements, the Mexican Government should consider issuing an INE card de-linked from the cardholder's local address, in the same way the INE cards are issued from its U.S. consulates. Though respondents complained that the consulate-issued INE was not as widely accepted, this acceptance problem could be addressed with more public education from the Mexican Government, including educating its own government agencies to accept these cards (see more in Part V.A.3 below). As our survey results indicate, many deported individuals do not have family and community ties to be able to overcome the residency requirements to obtain a regular INE card, at least for the first critical months in Mexico. In the meantime, the deported individuals are denied access to employment, housing, medical care, and other services that are crucial to their successful reintegration.²³⁵

Our documentation recommendations also extend across the border, to the deportation process itself. Lawyers who are representing clients in deportation proceedings have a duty to ask whether their clients have the Mexican identification documents discussed above and to help obtain these documents before deportation. U.S. lawyers must counsel their clients who are at risk of deportation to utilize Mexican Consulate services to secure documentation they need, including a CURP. The Mexican Government can also play an important role at this stage, by visiting their citizens held in detention centers and helping them obtain these

235. See *supra* Part IV.A.1.

crucial documents. This detention assistance would be an effective extension of the mobile consulate services that they already provide.

Our recommended policy interventions would also benefit individuals who return outside of the deportation context, and we also offer the following recommendations. Because they can usually choose the timing and location of their return to Mexico, returning individuals should obtain these Mexican documents before returning to Mexico: the consulate-issued INE card, a Mexican birth certificate, a Mexican passport, and a CURP number. Though they will undoubtedly experience bureaucratic delays and hurdles with these processes in the U.S., they can ask for assistance from the fifty-three consulates in the U.S. or lawyers or community groups, without the simultaneous pressures of trying to reintegrate in Mexico.

If they have children, returning parents would be well advised to establish their children's Mexican citizenship, by obtaining their Mexican birth certificates or applying for dual citizenship for children born in the U.S. To facilitate their children's enrollment in Mexican schools, parents should get the children's certified U.S. birth certificates. If the birth certificates contain erroneous information, the parents should file the required applications to correct that information. One specific problem that some respondents faced was the discrepancy between U.S. and Mexican naming conventions. In Mexico, the naming conventions of Spanish surnames include using both the paternal and maternal last name, while the U.S. includes only the paternal surname.²³⁶ Obtaining U.S. records and fixing errors in the records are immeasurably easier while parents still live in the United States.

A related recommendation is for the U.S. and Mexico to develop best practices for their government-issued vital documents to avoid these problems. For example, U.S. states and the federal government should allow the use of paternal and maternal last names. And both Mexico and the U.S. should write out the date and month to avoid confusion from differing national conventions.

236. For example, the common usage for a Mexican national with the name Nicolás Rodríguez Sánchez in the U.S. would drop one of the last names. If Nicolás Rodríguez Sánchez attempted to retain his paternal last name in the U.S., he would be known as Nicolas Rodriguez. However, there are a multitude of ways in which names are changed in the U.S. Nicolas could try to safeguard his maternal last name and use it as a middle name—Nicolás Sánchez Rodríguez; or use his paternal surname as a middle name—Nicolás Rodríguez Sánchez. Paternal and maternal names may also be hyphenated to retain both. A woman's name may be further altered through marriage.

Our documentation recommendations here and our recommendations related to services in the next subsection underscore the importance of quality information and education. Even if the Mexican Government were to adopt these recommended substantive changes, their ultimate impact would depend on how effectively the government communicates that information. That information primarily needs to be communicated to their returning citizens (e.g., information about the availability of consular services to obtain necessary identification before returning to Mexico). For example, the Mexican Government has a website that allows new arrivals to apply for a temporary CURP, access civil registries, and view a job portal that highlights employment opportunities for new arrivals.²³⁷ But information about these services needs to be more widely and consistently disseminated.

The Mexican Government also needs to effectively communicate information to its own government agencies and to the larger public. The lack of clear intra-agency communication can otherwise undermine any reforms that the government makes to ease the reintegration process for its returning citizens. For example, although *Acuerdo 286* abolished the apostille and certified translation requirements for foreign school records, most schools still demand them, which creates additional hurdles for returning parents who want to enroll their children in Mexican schools.²³⁸ Looking to the future, if the Mexican Government wanted to move forward with issuing consulate-style INE cards within Mexico, the government could (1) require its agencies to accept the cards as identification and (2) engage in a public information campaign to encourage private parties to do the same.

3. Services

Recognizing that all service providers, whether governmental or nonprofit in nature, operate with limited resources, our policy

237 . *Lo Más Buscado: Trámites con Más Visitas* [Most Searched: Procedures with the Most Visits], GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO [MEX. GOV'T], <https://www.gob.mx/tramites> [<https://perma.cc/8G3P-LMGN>].

238 . Mónica Jacobo Suárez, *With Dual Citizenship Comes Double Exclusion: U.S.-Mexican Children and Their Struggle to Access Rights in Mexico*, in ACCOUNTABILITY ACROSS BORDERS: MIGRANT RIGHTS IN NORTH AMERICA, 179 (Xóchitl Bada & Shannon Gleeson eds., 2019); BRYANT JENSEN & MÓNICA JACOBO, WHEN FAMILIES ARE DEPORTED: SCHOOLING FOR U.S.-CITIZEN STUDENTS IN MEXICO 4 (2018), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4zc8b0nh> [<https://perma.cc/TU3W-BF8Q>].

interventions are crafted with the goal of helping these service providers to operate more effectively and efficiently. We direct most of our recommendations toward the Mexican Government because they have capacity, and the duty, to provide needed services for returning Mexican citizens.

The first takeaway regarding services the Mexican Government provides is the infrequency of their use. For services provided in Mexico, only 16% of deported individuals reported using services beyond the repatriation centers where they were initially processed upon return; similarly, only 8% of returned individuals reported using any government services. For services provided by consulates in the U.S., only 12% of deported individuals and 15% of returned individuals reported using these services. None of our respondents reported using consular services while in immigration detention.

As we noted in Part V.A.2 above, facilitating the documentation process would enable more returning individuals to access the services on the same footing as other Mexican citizens. And as with our recommended documentation interventions, the Mexican Government must better educate returned and deported citizens about the scope of its services and how to access them to enhance their reintegration experience. For deported individuals, one obvious access point for this education is at repatriation centers. There, they can receive information about government-provided services. Given the stressful nature of the deportation process, the centers should spread this information in multiple formats: orally, in brochures that the individuals can take with them, and through a QR code that is accessible later. To maximize the effectiveness of their education campaign, the Mexican Government should lean into its existing network of consulates and provide this information to their citizens *before* they return. This would benefit both those who are deported and those who return on their own.

The second takeaway regarding services is the need to prioritize better mental health care. Our respondents spoke in compelling terms about the trauma of deportation and return and the mental health struggles of reintegration; the younger respondents talked about the stress of reintegrating into a society where they had little or no knowledge of the culture or language. Though some were able to find mental health counseling through nonprofit organizations, there is still a gaping hole between the urgent need for these mental health services and the almost non-existent level of services available. Moreover, service providers need to be trained to

understand the experiences of deportation and return, experiences that most Mexican citizens do not have, so that they can provide appropriate care. To that end, the Mexican Government should consider the peer counseling model used by NGOs to provide mental health care, perhaps in partnership with them (we discuss these possible partnerships in our Developing Infrastructure section Part V.B below).

The third takeaway is that the Mexican Government should reinvest in long-term programs to help its returning citizens. Studies show that immigrants returning to their home countries bring new skills and ideas that can invigorate the home country's economy.²³⁹ We noted earlier the success that the state of Guanajuato had with its small business grants that allowed returning Mexican citizens to start their own businesses. With grants ranging from \$40,000-\$70,000 pesos (approximately \$2,000-\$3,500 USD), the recipients were able to start their own businesses, including construction companies, beauty salons, and food stands. Most recipients earned just enough to support themselves and 13% earned more than \$3000 pesos a week, twice the minimum wage at the time. Significantly, 29% earned enough from their businesses to hire other workers.²⁴⁰ Thus, with one-time grants, the Mexican Government can help returning Mexican citizens support themselves and, in some cases, even other Mexican citizens.

Furthermore, if the government better publicizes its services, it can improve the lives of returned and deported persons, both in the short term and long term. Encouraging—and publicizing—these economic contributions would also help to decrease the stigma that returning citizens face, as they are often derided as criminals and people who impede Mexico's society and economy.²⁴¹

Finally, lawyers and community advocates in the United States also have the dual responsibilities of educating themselves about these documentation processes and then sharing that information with those facing deportation, their families, and those considering returning to Mexico on their own. As we noted in our Introduction, one of our research goals is to synthesize our findings by reintegrating literature and jumpstarting this conversation in legal circles. Obtaining recognized documentation before returning to Mexico is key to a successful reintegration. U.S. immigration lawyers

239. Hagan, *supra* note 35.

240. PLANKEY-VIDELA, *supra* note 134.

241. CALDWELL, *supra* note 14.

must use the tools already provided through the Mexican Consulates to help prepare families for deportation. In addition, community advocates should advise individuals to ensure that someone in the U.S. has their date of birth, full name, and A-number (if available) to make it easier to find them and provide them with legal advice when they are detained.²⁴²

4. Immigration Reform

Our last policy intervention is directed at the U.S. government. In sum, we recommend that the U.S. government make it easier for returned Mexicans to visit family in the United States. Under current law, those lawful visits are practically impossible to obtain. Those who have been previously deported are barred from reentering the U.S. for five to twenty years (a five-year bar for those deported from the border areas,²⁴³ a ten-year bar for those who are deported from the country's interior,²⁴⁴ and a twenty-year bar if the person has been previously deported²⁴⁵). Those who have been convicted of aggravated felonies face a lifetime bar to reentry.²⁴⁶ Even those individuals who returned to Mexico voluntarily may face bars to reentry for three or ten years if they were unlawfully present in the U.S. for certain periods of time.²⁴⁷ If a Mexican citizen waits out the specific bars that apply to them, the decision to grant a visa is still discretionary,²⁴⁸ and an applicant with a previous removal, a criminal conviction, or periods of unlawful presence in the U.S. may be denied a visa on discretionary grounds.

Our findings present compelling reasons to make these U.S. visits more feasible. Many respondents, especially those who were deported, do not have family or community support systems in Mexico. Respondents described the mental and emotional trauma of family separation, including parents not being able to watch their children grow up, spouses divorcing because of the stress of

242. An A or alien number is also known as a USCIS identity number. *A-Number/Alien Registration Number/Alien Number (A-Number or A#)*, U.S. CITIZENSHIP & IMMIGR. SERVS., available at <https://www.uscis.gov/glossary-term/50684> [<https://perma.cc/Y5EX-UH35>].

243. 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(9)(A)(i).

244. *Id.*

245. *Id.*

246. *Id.*; 8 U.S.C. §§ 1182(a)(9)(A)(ii)–(iii).

247. 8 U.S.C. §§ 1182(a)(9)(B)(i)(I)–(II).

248. 8 U.S.C. § 1201(a)(1) (authorizing consular officers to issue immigrant and nonimmigrant visas).

separation, and adults unable to take care of elderly parents still in the U.S. Thus, there are many humanitarian reasons why the U.S. government would want to allow these Mexican citizens into the U.S. for short visits.

Our research and the research of others suggest that there are also *pragmatic* reasons to facilitate these visits. First, enabling more returned Mexicans to return for lawful, temporary visits can actually enhance reintegration. As an example, U.S. consulates in Mexico have issued short-term supervised visitor visas for humanitarian reasons—such as elderly parents visiting terminally-ill children or participating in significant family events.²⁴⁹ The U.S. government can create a pressure valve for the feelings of emotional separation that might otherwise push returned Mexican citizens to try to reenter the U.S. illegally, if it expands these types of programs that allow short, supervised visits to the U.S. for returned individuals. If these Mexican citizens can visit the U.S. lawfully, they may be able to shift psychologically from the allure of life in the United States to the reintegration realities of life in Mexico. For those returnees who are camped out on the U.S.-Mexico border awaiting visits from their U.S. family members, they may be able to move into more permanent, safer communities in Mexico's interior. For these and other returning Mexican citizens, the opportunity to return to the

249. Sub-national governments in Mexico pushed these initiatives to address special circumstances and respond to public pressure, but the initiatives were not formal visa processes. For example, the Mexican states of Michoacán and Zacatecas established initiatives to support their residents who applied for visitor visas to the United States. The goal is to reunite elderly parents with their U.S.-based children, many of whom are undocumented and unable to travel to Mexico. These programs helped elderly applicants—typically aged 60 and over—obtain U.S. B1/B2 visas by assisting with documentation, coordinating group interviews at U.S. consulates, and organizing supervised travel to the United States for short-term family reunification. Two initiatives include *Palomas Mensajeras* [Carrier Pigeons], coordinated by the government of Michoacán, and *Corazón de Plata* [Silver Heart], organized by the Zacatecas State Institute for Migrant Assistance. SECRETARÍA DEL MIGRANTE DEL ESTADO DE MICHOACÁN [SECRETARIAT OF MIGRANTS OF THE STATE OF MICHOACÁN], *Programa Palomas Mensajeras* [Carrier Pigeon Program], <https://michoacan.gob.mx/palomas-mensajeras/> [https://perma.cc/A6YP-B8UC]; INSTITUTO ESTATAL DE MIGRACIÓN DE ZACATECAS [STATE MIGRATION INST. OF ZACATECAS], *Corazón de Plata* [Silver Heart], <https://migrantezac.gob.mx/corazon-de-plata/> [https://perma.cc/7W3F-HYYQ]. Both programs exemplify the role of subnational actors in transnational migration governance and consular diplomacy. Xóchitl Bada & Shannon Gleeson, *Subnational Immigration Governance: Mexicans in the United States and Their States of Origin*, 41 ETHNIC & RACIAL STUD. 2125, 2132–34 (2018).

U.S. lawfully may have the beneficial effect of making Mexico feel more like home, rather than a prison.

Second, and related to the first point, our research suggests that large numbers of deported and returned individuals only want to return to the U.S. on a temporary basis. Specifically, a third of deported (32%) and returned individuals (34%) in our study want to remain in Mexico, about another third (30%) would only return to the U.S. if doing so legally, and 7% of deported and 16% of returned only wanted to return to visit family in the U.S. While we could legitimately question the sincerity of these expressed intentions in individual cases, we think that there are sizable numbers of returning Mexican citizens who only desire to visit the U.S. on a temporary basis. The increased immigration enforcement in the U.S. and the severe penalties for illegal reentry (including long prison sentences) make illegal status in the U.S. much less desirable.

Immigration reform may seem like an impossible ask, given the anti-immigrant positions taken by the Trump administration and much of Congress. But an administrative mechanism already exists in U.S. immigration law that would allow for people like our respondents to obtain temporary visas, despite problematic immigration records (e.g., deportations, criminal convictions, and unlawful presence) that would otherwise make them inadmissible. That mechanism is the parole program that authorizes the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services agency (USCIS) to allow otherwise inadmissible individuals to enter the United States temporarily for “urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons.”²⁵⁰ The reasons we have articulated above for allowing individuals like the respondents in our survey to return would qualify as either one of those reasons.

The parole program requires an application (Form I-131).²⁵¹ To facilitate the processing of applications, USCIS could issue internal agency guidance as to the criteria that should be considered for individuals like the survey respondents. To address concerns that

250. 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(5)(A) (authorizing case-by-case parole for “urgent humanitarian” or “significant public benefit” reasons). For a discussion of the legislative history and different administrations’ approaches to humanitarian parole, see Farooq Chaudry, *The Past, Present, and Future of Humanitarian Parole*, 2024 UNIV. CHI. LEGAL F. 307 (2024) (surveying the doctrine’s evolution).

251. U.S. CITIZENSHIP & IMMIGR. SERVS., I-131, APPLICATION FOR TRAVEL DOCUMENTS, PAROLE DOCUMENTS, AND ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE RECORDS, available at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-131> [<https://perma.cc/5SX4-HYHE>] (last visited Jan. 30, 2025).

parolees would not return to Mexico at the end of their visa term, the U.S. government could require proof of integration and roots in Mexico, as it does generally when it issues visas. That proof could include proof of employment, educational records, and assets in Mexico. For individuals who do not have sufficient assets because they are minors or have low levels of education and income, a family member could put up a bond to assure their return. While these recommendations may benefit higher income families more, it is a useful starting point for a visa process that is otherwise unobtainable for individuals like the survey respondents.

B. Developing Infrastructure to Address Long Term Challenges

In the previous section, we offered specific interventions that we believe are in the realm of the possible for the Mexican and U.S. governments, lawyers, and community advocates. Yet, we know that even the most straightforward intervention requires extensive, and long term, infrastructure, involving all these parties. In this section, we develop our thinking on these infrastructures—collaboration between NGOs and the Mexican and U.S. governments, collaboration across borders, and a binational legal and social network. The infrastructure ideas build on our research findings and from the conversations we had at the convening we organized in Mexico City in May 2023. At this convening, we invited academics, government officials, and immigrant advocates, many of whom were immigrants themselves, to share our findings and to discuss reintegration processes more generally.

1. Collaboration between NGOs and Mexican and U.S. Governments

The first crucial infrastructure is meaningful collaboration between NGOs in Mexico and the governments in both Mexico and the U.S. Our findings show that nonprofits were effective service providers, effective both in the quality of services provided and in reaching a large segment of the returning respondents. Some of the NGOs are staffed by people who had experienced the deportation and return processes themselves, so they have expertise that enables them to provide appropriate services. Yet NGOs are reportedly being excluded by the Mexican Government in developing and implementing government programs and not being allowed to greet

arriving deported individuals.²⁵² Still, one could easily imagine alternative scenarios where the NGOs partner with the Mexican Government at these initial, and crucially important, encounters to provide services and information that could ease the reintegration process for returning Mexican citizens. That partnership could include input into the scope and content of government-provided services; a physical presence at these centers, airports, and bus stations; and financial support so that NGOs can broaden the scope of their services.

Beyond the initial encounters when Mexican citizens return, NGO-governmental cooperation could also help at other junctures. Our findings showed that people subjected to deportation and even constrained return are more vulnerable when they first arrive in Mexico. The first jobs that people held were in the worst paid positions and in the most informal sectors, and Mexico limits how many employees can be non-Mexican nationals, which limits jobs available to returned who lack proof of their nationality. But individuals' economic situation generally became more stable as they gained more information about jobs, became a part of job placement networks, and obtained information or assistance in getting their required identifications and credentials. The Mexican Government could jumpstart the economic reintegration process by better engaging with NGOs on policies that would address the vulnerabilities that people experience when they first return. And, at a minimum, allowing NGO workers to disseminate information and connect newly returned and deported people with access to job networks and resources to overcome initial barriers to the labor market.

The U.S. government's policies would also benefit from the input and expertise of Mexican NGOs. Because the U.S. has a vested interest in decreasing illegal reentries, it also has an interest in facilitating the successful reintegration of returning Mexican citizens. As we explained in Part V.A.4 on Immigration Reform, giving temporary visas to returned Mexicans can actually help them reintegrate into Mexican society. Thus, the Department of State should invite representatives from Mexican NGOs to attend its regular meetings with stakeholders to address concerns on various types of visas.²⁵³ Likewise, other U.S. government agencies, like

252. See *supra* note 150 and accompanying text.

253. See, e.g., *State Department Meets with Key Stakeholder on Visa Denial Report; Commits to Continued Engagement*, NAFSA (Aug. 10, 2023),

USCIS, that are involved in processing nonimmigrant visas could invite NGOs in Mexico to their external stakeholder events about nonimmigrant visas or schedule quarterly stakeholder meetings for issues related to people who have returned to their countries of origin.²⁵⁴ NGO staff have expertise, so they could provide helpful insights into the visa process as experienced by returned individuals. ICE and CBP would also benefit from Mexican NGOs' expertise and input on the detention and removal process. Where ICE and CBP are not following their own guidelines and protocols to ensure a safe and humane return, NGO participation can hold the agencies to account for those failures. Though litigation based on the agencies' failure to follow their own guidelines is unlikely to succeed, NGOs could organize to put public pressure on agencies and lobby for changes to regulations and law that would codify the guidelines.²⁵⁵

Other U.S. agencies could benefit from the input and participation of NGOs focused on returned Mexicans, including federal and state labor enforcement agencies, and the Social Security Administration. These agencies are important in addressing some of the issues that impact economic reintegration. For example, the Wage & Hour Division in the Department of Labor could work with NGOs to develop an outreach program that would best reach victims of wage

<https://www.nafsa.org/state-department-meets-key-stakeholders-visa-denial-report-commits-continued-engagement> [<https://perma.cc/H9FW-SQBW>] (reporting on State Department meeting with stakeholders and next steps regarding visa denials).

254. See, e.g., *Upcoming National Engagements*, USCIS, <https://www.uscis.gov/>

[outreach/upcoming-national-engagements](https://www.uscis.gov/outreach/upcoming-national-engagements) [<https://perma.cc/T87S-NNJG>] (last visited July 27, 2024) (listing upcoming USCIS public engagement events); *Asylum Division Quarterly Stakeholder Meeting*, USCIS, <https://www.uscis.gov/outreach/asylum-division-quarterly-stakeholder-meeting-2> [<https://perma.cc/JP3U-P6KQ>] (last updated Dec. 4, 2019) (providing quarterly asylum division stakeholder meeting materials); *Teleconference on EB-5 Investor Visas: Opportunities and Challenges*, USCIS (Sept. 3, 2020), <https://www.dhs.gov/teleconference-eb-5-investor-visas> [<https://perma.cc/QK9D-94LX>] (providing questions and answers on EB-5 visas and related challenges); *Stakeholder Call with USCIS on VAWA, U, T, ILRC* (Dec. 13, 2022), <https://www.ilrc.org/resources/>

[stakeholder-call-uscis-vaawa-u-t](https://www.uscis.gov/stakeholder-call-uscis-vaawa-u-t) [<https://perma.cc/KU7T-QGUF>] (summarizing USCIS call with stakeholders on humanitarian visa categories).

255. See Angela D. Morrison, *supra* note 64, at 686–91 (discussing how immigrant rights advocates organized to publicize detentions of DREAMERS, confronted and engaged in direct action in response to the agency's detention of DREAMERS, and lobbied the administration for changes to policy, all resulting in the DACA program).

theft in the U.S. who have subsequently returned to Mexico. Similarly, the Social Security Administration could work with NGOs to reach individuals who are entitled to earned retirement benefits.

2. Collaboration Across Borders

The second crucial infrastructure is to develop networks between the U.S. and Mexico, as integration into a new way of life takes time and requires the support of multiple actors with cultural capital and access to information. The networks we envision would involve actors who provide a variety of legal and social services: lawyers, educators, mental health professionals, and social service providers in both countries. In addition to improving the reintegration experiences of returning Mexican citizens, the networks could also foster cultural exchange and build cultural competency capacity.

As an initial matter, we recognize that there are existing binational agreements between Mexico and the U.S. dealing with migration, but these agreements are solely governmental in nature and focused on the mechanics of deportation. What the deported and returned population needs is a transnational community that accompanies them through integration. In the U.S., model programs that promote integration are available in areas with large immigrant populations like the city of Dallas and Los Angeles County which both have established immigrant integration programs.²⁵⁶ To aid reintegration, the Mexican Government has a website that allows new arrivals to apply for a temporary CURP, access civil registries, and access a job portal that highlights employment opportunities for new arrivals.²⁵⁷ However, there is not a centralized mechanism where

256. *Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs*, OFF. EQUITY AND INCLUSION, CITY OF DALLAS, <https://dallascityhall.com/departments/office-of-equity-and-inclusion/wcia/Pages/Welcoming-Strategic-Plan.aspx> [https://perma.cc/VQ5S-AN9B] (last visited July 24, 2024) (outlining Dallas strategic plan for immigrant inclusion and welcoming initiatives); *Welcome*, LAC4YOU, L.A. COUNTY OFF. OF IMMIGRATION AFFS., <https://oia.lacounty.gov/> [https://perma.cc/MN2L-7U49] (last visited July 24, 2024) (providing resources and information for immigrants in Los Angeles County); see also Michael Fix et al., *Los Angeles on the Leading Edge: Immigrant Integration Indicators and their Policy Implications*, MIGRATION POL'Y INST. (Apr. 2008), https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/NCIIP_Los_Angeles_on_the_Leading_Edge.pdf [https://perma.cc/N442-6P6C] (analyzing indicators of immigrant integration in Los Angeles and their policy implications).

257. *Lo Más Buscado*, *supra* note 201.

government officials, academics, and advocates in both countries can share and access information that facilitates integration by compiling resources in a centralized office.

In the legal services context, it is possible to imagine law school clinics that already work with binational populations as an important component of such a network. Clinical programs in both countries can leverage their expertise and their student body to work in teams to address common binational legal issues involving custody orders, birth certificates, education records, asset transfers, and estate planning. Students in both countries who are bilingual can practice their language skills and learn how to transition those skills to a professional setting. Expanding legal education in this way also allows for binational understanding of legal issues that are currently viewed only through a national lens. Exposing law students to each other can also help cement the need for improved understanding and collaboration between Mexican and U.S. lawyers. Currently in the U.S., there are several law schools experimenting with this type of binational collaboration. Loyola Law School in Los Angeles and the University of Texas, Austin School of Law have piloted programs that bring their students to Mexico and Central America, to provide legal assistance to those country's citizens, in collaboration with local law schools.²⁵⁸ With the benefit of a large financial gift, Loyola Law School has gone one step further to establish the Binational Migrant Advocacy Project ("BMAP") in Mexico, a binational legal clinic that helps Mexicans, including returning Mexicans, with legal issues spanning both sides of the border (e.g., helping U.S. citizen children

258. Marissa Montes and Yanira Lemus, clinical faculty at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, discussed their collaboration with Salvador Guerrero at Universidad Iberoamericana in Ciudad de México. The two schools have developed a relationship to work together in providing Mexican immigrants and those who return to Mexico after living in the U.S. Loyola Law School secured a grant that permitted a group of students to travel to Mexico to meet with individuals to provide legal information and advice, alongside Mexican students at Iberoamericana. Marissa Montes & Yanira Lemus, clinical faculty, Loyola Law School, Address at the AALS Clinical Conference in St. Louis, MO: Resistance Beyond Borders, Binational Advocacy in the Clinical Setting (May 2, 2024). Clinical faculty Elissa Steglich and Kathryn K. Dyer from the University of Texas School of Law also discussed their efforts to secure funding that supported a small group of law students' travel to Mexico to engage in legal work with refugees in Mexico. Elissa Steglich & Kathryn K. Dyer, clinical faculty, University of Texas School of Law, Address at the AALS Clinical Conference in St. Louis, MO: Following the Border: Law School Clinical Programs in the Era of Externalized and Internalized Migration Policies (May 3, 2024).

moving to Mexico obtain proof of their U.S. citizenship, so they can more easily derive Mexican citizenship).²⁵⁹

The American legal profession would benefit from greater competency regarding deportation issues. Returning to a problem that we discussed in our Introduction, most U.S. judges, lawyers, and law students have little to no understanding of what happens after deportation. Many lawyers view their client's deportation as their final point of client engagement. But as we argued in Part V.A, lawyers have the duty both to educate themselves about the post-deportation life that their clients will experience and to prepare their clients for that life. That education and preparation can be facilitated by national listservs that law schools, law school clinics, immigration professors, and other advocates are already plugged into. Such a network would also help legal professionals understand how Mexico and U.S. legal practices differ, including in terms of ethics and the differences between legal systems.

A binational legal and social services network will also require the active engagement of lay advocates. We define lay advocates to include NGO leaders, educators, and social service providers in both countries. In Part IV.C.1, we discussed the effectiveness of NGO leaders in Mexico in providing critical services to returning Mexican citizens. These same leaders could play a crucial role in working with lay advocates in the U.S., sharing their experiences and expertise. The lay advocates could, in turn, work with returning Mexican citizens to navigate the Mexican bureaucracy to obtain the necessary documentation for themselves and their children *before* their return.

Another impactful source of lay advocacy are the educators in U.S. public schools. Currently, in response to the threat of deportation, immigrant rights organizations, social workers, and educators have worked through the public school setting to better educate and provide resources to parents about their parental rights, their rights as workers, and the need to develop safety plans and

259. Interview with Marissa Montes, Director & Co-Founder, Loyola Immigrant Justice Clinic (Nov. 13, 2024). *See also Transformative Gift Launches First Binational Clinic in Mexico to Support LMU Loyola Law School's Immigrant Justice Clinic*, LMU LOY. L. SCH., <https://www.lls.edu/thellsdifference/facesoflls/transformativegiftlaunchesfirstbinationalclinicinmexicotosupportlmuloyolalawschoolsimmigrantjusticeclinic/> [https://perma.cc/JD9X-ATG5] (outlining resources that educators can use to help them foster environments at their schools which support their immigrant students and their parents).

guardianship plans, in case parents are deported.²⁶⁰ Under our envisioned infrastructure, lay advocates in the schools would expand their efforts to educate and encourage parents to use the resources that the nearest Mexican consulate office offers. Immigrant rights advocates must emphasize the importance of formalizing the dual citizenship that children of Mexicans have, in case the parents are deported. Efforts like these could be expanded to provide more comprehensive resources focused on reintegration. Another area where educators, as lay advocates, could have meaningful impact is to help improve the educational attainment for individuals in the U.S. who are vulnerable to deportation or who are considering return. Our study demonstrates that higher educational attainment translates into better job opportunities for returning individuals; indeed, one of the top recommendations made by the returned and deported individuals in our survey was to get more education before returning to Mexico.

Lay advocates working in health care could also help develop the training needed for mental health providers in both countries to counsel individuals impacted by family separation because of immigration policies. From our survey and our Mexico City convening, there is a great need for improved cultural competency among healthcare providers, especially those who provide mental health care.

Finally, focusing on collaboration across borders offers opportunities for creative interventions using technology. The governments in Mexico and the U.S. may find inspiration in the Backpack 26 project. This project helps individuals impacted by migration, often due to natural disasters, political instability or economic conditions, to safely store and share identity, educational and other documents.²⁶¹ Named after Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,²⁶² Backpack 26 uses an online storage

260. See, e.g., *For Educators: Supporting Undocumented Students and Their Families*, INFORMED IMMIGRANT, <https://www.informedimmigrant.com/resources/educators/educators/> [<https://perma.cc/75UF-DXLP>] (outlining resources that educators can use to help them foster environments at their schools which support their immigrant students and their parents).

261. *Helping Refugees Reclaim Right to Education*, U.C. DAVIS GLOBAL AFFAIRS, <https://globalaffairs.ucdavis.edu/a26backpack> [<https://perma.cc/PCD3-2YE2>] (last visited July 27, 2024).

262. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads:

“1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional

platform that allows students, or their parents, to create and access digital portfolios that include common documentation required by educational institutions.²⁶³ Backpack 26 has recently expanded for use by a Spanish speaking audience under the name “Mochila,”²⁶⁴ and its developers are trying to support communities in need, including those experiencing migration to the U.S.-Mexico and Mexico-Central American borders. The developers offer training modules that could be adopted by educational institutions, government agencies, and nonprofits to support the reintegration of Mexicans in Mexico. Ultimately, however, online platforms can only serve as repositories for existing documentation. Greater international collaboration is necessary to help individuals navigate administrative and legal processes to recreate lost, stolen, damaged, or missing documentation.

VI. CONCLUSION

The issues our research has raised have urgent salience. As President Trump implements his mass deportation program, with extensive support from some states,²⁶⁵ the number of deportations and constrained returns will continue to increase dramatically. We focused on Mexico in our study because it is the country that both

education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

See G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (Dec. 10, 1948) https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf [<https://perma.cc/8NRB-ALEZ>].

263 . *Backpack Help*, U.C. DAVIS, <https://backpack.ucdavis.edu/help> [<https://perma.cc/ATT4-2JYJ>].

264 . *Artículo 26 Mochila*, U.C. DAVIS, <https://backpack.ucdavis.edu/es> [<https://perma.cc/R8WF-LLSK>]; *Más acerca de la Mochila* [More About the Backpack], U.C. DAVIS, <https://backpack.ucdavis.edu/es/mas-acerca-de-la-mochila> [<https://perma.cc/D2TN-RW3C>].

265. Josh Hinkle et al., *State of Texas: ‘Whatever It Takes’—State Leaders Vow to Support Trump Border Security, Deportation Efforts*, KXAN (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.kxan.com/state-of-texas/state-of-texas-whatever-it-takes-state-leaders-vow-to-support-trump-border-security-deportation-efforts/>.

sends the most immigrants to the U.S. and, especially in recent years, has received record numbers of those immigrants back, but our findings are relevant for every country facing the challenges of reintegrating its citizens. Here, we summarize our recommendations for Mexico and offer thoughts on how those recommendations could be expanded to other countries.

Based on our findings, we recommend policy interventions in four main areas that would facilitate the successful reintegration of Mexican citizens: deportation procedures, documentation, services, and immigration reform. We start with recommendations for the deportation process because the clear majority of Mexicans return through deportation. By its nature, deportation is a traumatic process, but our research suggests that deportations are being executed in ways that unnecessarily increase that trauma, putting deported persons on a vulnerable footing for the reintegration challenges ahead. Our recommendations here focus on simply asking that the United States and Mexico abide by the practices that they have already agreed to in their *Memorandum of Understanding on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified and Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals*, signed in 2004.²⁶⁶ Those practices center on the principles that the conduct and manner of repatriations should respect the human rights and dignity of Mexican nationals deported pursuant to U.S. law. The ability to communicate with family—in and outside the U.S.—should be a guiding principle during repatriation.

From those principles flow specific practices: (1) that the points of repatriation should be established based on scheduled hours of operation and available staffing, and Mexico should ensure the points of repatriation are fully staffed with appropriate local, state, or federal authorities responsible for the health, safety, and welfare of Mexican nationals; (2) DHS should timely notify Mexican authorities about cases where additional preparation is necessary because the person being deported is an unaccompanied minor or individual with medical, mental, or other special needs; (3) incapacitated persons, unaccompanied minors, and other vulnerable individuals in particular should be deported during daylight hours to ensure their safety; and (4) when individuals report mistreatment or potential human rights concerns, authorities should immediately follow-up and investigate.

266. MOU on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified & Humane Repatriation of Mexican Nationals, *supra* n. 31.

The MOUs reflect the U.S.'s institutional acceptance of its obligation to abide by these principles and practices. As we have explained, following through on this obligation has concrete benefits for the U.S., as successfully reintegrated persons are less likely to try to return illegally.

The second area for our recommendations deals with documentation issues. As we have documented, returning Mexican citizens face numerous barriers when trying to obtain an INE card, a CURP number, or the other documentation they need to successfully reintegrate into Mexican society. We offer specific policy interventions in Part V.A.2, but in sum, returning Mexicans face these barriers because the Mexican identification system is designed for Mexicans living in Mexico, with few accommodations for those who have lived outside the country for extended periods of time. The resulting irony is that because of these barriers, returning Mexican citizens, many of whom were undocumented in the U.S., remain undocumented in their home country for significant time periods.

In applying these recommendations to other countries, the U.S. government should start by working with foreign governments to make sure that every person who is deported leaves with national identification from their home country. To make this task more manageable, the U.S. could start with the foreign governments of countries where it currently departs the most people to. Besides Mexico, those countries are Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.²⁶⁷

Our third area of recommendations concerns services. Our finding that returning Mexican citizens have serious unmet needs related to health care, employment, housing, and education is perhaps not surprising. But our related findings—that (1) many returning Mexican citizens don't know the full range of government services available, and (2) NGOs already provide effective and culturally sensitive services for returning Mexican citizens—point to promising opportunities in the provision of services.

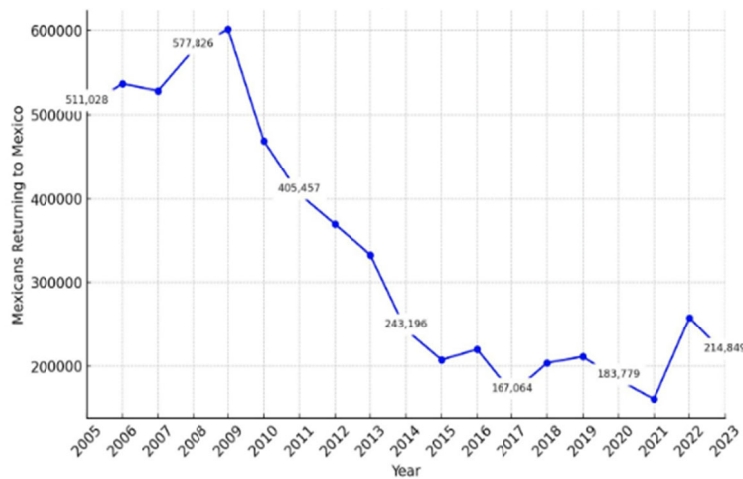
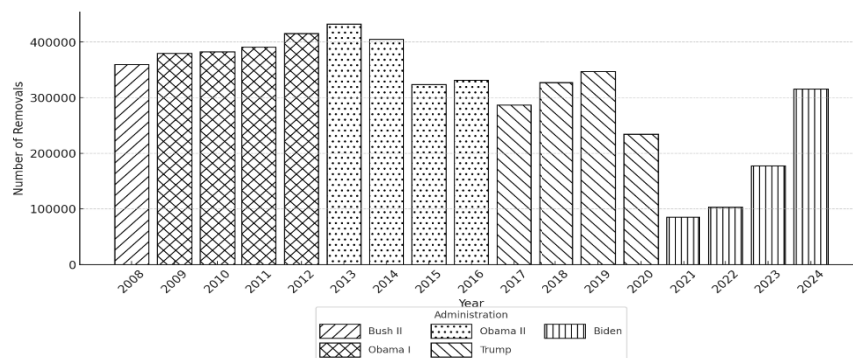
These two findings are related: one presents a problem, and the other presents a possible solution. The Mexican Government, at

267 . *Outcomes of Immigration Court Proceedings*, TRAC IMMIGR., <https://tracreports.org/phptools/immigration/closure/> (choose "Deportation Cases" under "Number of Cases"; then choose "Removals" under "Outcome Type"; then choose "Immigration Court State: All-Removal Order" from the first dropdown menu; then choose "Nationality: All-Removal Order" from the second dropdown menu).

the federal and state levels, must better communicate information about its services, and if and when it makes policy changes to improve services for its returning Mexican citizens, it needs to communicate those changes for their consistent implementation. If the government were to form an active collaboration with NGOs, in both Mexico and the United States, the government could benefit from the communication channels that these NGOs have with returning Mexican citizens, their families, and their larger communities. Besides more effective communication, collaboration with NGOs, along with educators, lawyers, other important service providers, and the U.S. government itself, would allow the Mexican Government to develop long term solutions to facilitate successful reintegration of its citizens. Creating and sustaining binational networks underscores the structural fact that deportations and returns involve two nations; similarly, successful reintegration also requires the collaboration of those countries.

Our fourth and final area of policy interventions is focused on U.S. immigration reform. Simply stated, we must recognize that deep family and social ties continue to exist when individuals are deported or return to their country of origin. Yet people who are deported or have returned to Mexico on their own are often blocked from getting nonimmigrant visas to visit the United States. The U.S. Department of State and USCIS should allow these individuals who have established lives in Mexico to visit the United States on a temporary basis, either through its humanitarian parole program or the regular nonimmigrant visa system. The opportunity to visit the U.S. for short, lawful stays would create a pressure valve for returning Mexican citizens, encouraging reintegration by making Mexico feel more like a home than a prison.

APPENDIX A

Figure 1: Mexicans Returning to Mexico from the United States, 2005-2023.²⁶⁸**Figure 2: Removals by Presidential Administration**

Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics
 Note: 2024 data is through August 2024.

268. *Boletines Estadísticos [Statistical Bulletins]*, GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO [MEX. GOV'T], http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es/PoliticaMigratoria/Boletines_Estadisticos [<https://perma.cc/PDL4-E3HF>] (including links to yearly statistics for the repatriation of Mexicans from the United States).

