



6-2020

## Deportees in Mexico City

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### Recommended Citation

Gomberg-Munoz, Ruth, Esmeralda Flores Marcial, Ana Laura Lopez, Magdalena Loreda, Adriana Sandoval, Reyna Wences, Dolores Unzueta, Rosi Carrasco, Martin Unzueta. 2020. Deportees in Mexico City. Research Report. June, 2020.

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# DEPORTEES IN MEXICO CITY

RESEARCH REPORT

JUNE  
2020

*Created by Project Solidarity*



## OUR TEAM

We are a binational team of researcher/advocates seeking to understand life after deportation and expand resources and services for the deported and returned community in Mexico, as well as for family members of deportees in the United States.



We comprise three Mexico City-based organizations: Deportados Unidos en La Lucha, Otros Dreams en Acción, and Yaotlyaocihuahui Ameyal; as well as two Chicago-based institutions: the non-profit group Chicago Community and Worker's Rights and Loyola University Chicago.



## PROJECT SOLIDARITY

Project Solidarity is a four-year, two-sited, mixed methods research project consisting of long-term community engagement, as well as semi-structured interviews with deportees, their family members, anti-deportation organizers, and deportee-rights organizers.



The goals of the project are to:

1. understand US-based mechanisms of immigrant policing, detention, and deportation, especially from "sanctuary" zones;
2. identify urgent needs of recently arrived deportees in Mexico City;
3. explore mid- and long-term challenges to reintegration for deportees in Mexico;
4. expand binational networks of information, advocacy, and resource-sharing;
5. Inform and assist local immigrant and deportee rights efforts in Chicago and Mexico City.



*Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives*

### CITATION INFORMATION:

Gomberg-Munoz, Ruth, Esmeralda Flores Marcial, Ana Laura Lopez, Magdalena Loredo, Adriana Sandoval, Reyna Wences, Dolores Unzueta, Rosi Carrasco, Martin Unzueta. 2020. *Deportees in Mexico City*. Research Report. June, 2020.



# REPORT OVERVIEW

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## REPORT METHODOLOGY\*

- 224 semi-structured interviews with deportees and returnees in Mexico City
- 60 semi-structured interviews with community organizers who work with immigrant and deported communities
- Long-term community engagement with undocumented workers, mixed status families and communities, and Mexican nationals who have been deported or returned from the United States.



# MIGRATION AND THE U.S.

**58%**

OF RESPONDENTS  
LIVED IN THE US  
MORE THAN 15  
YEARS

**61%**

MIGRATED FOR  
THE FIRST TIME  
BEFORE THEIR  
21ST BIRTHDAY

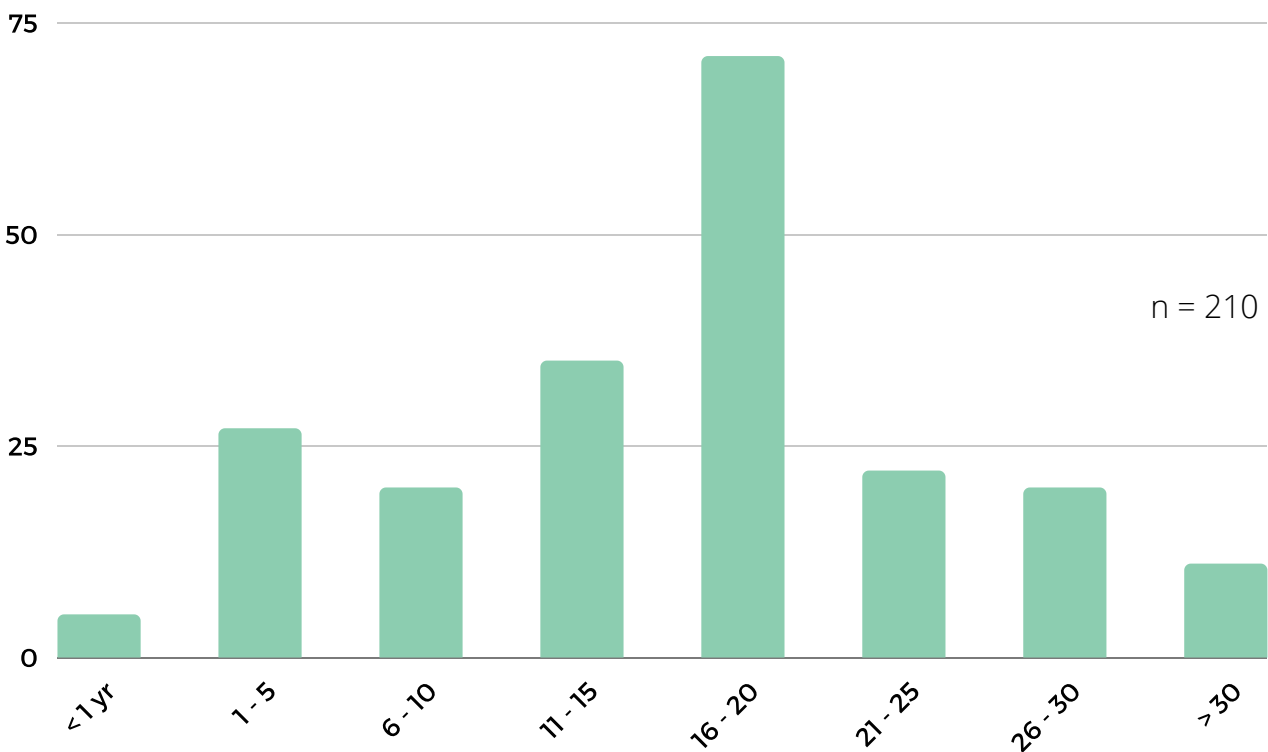
**66%**

MIGRATED FOR  
THE FIRST TIME  
IN THE 1990S

Our study affirms existing research that has shown that most undocumented people have lived in the United States for long periods and are deeply embedded in U.S. families and communities. Deportation severs people from their families, jobs, homes, and long-term communities. The longer a person has lived in the United States, and the younger they were when they migrated in the first place, the more difficulties they encounter in trying to build a post-deportation life for themselves in Mexico.

# MIGRATION AND THE U.S.

## HOW MANY YEARS DID YOU LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES?

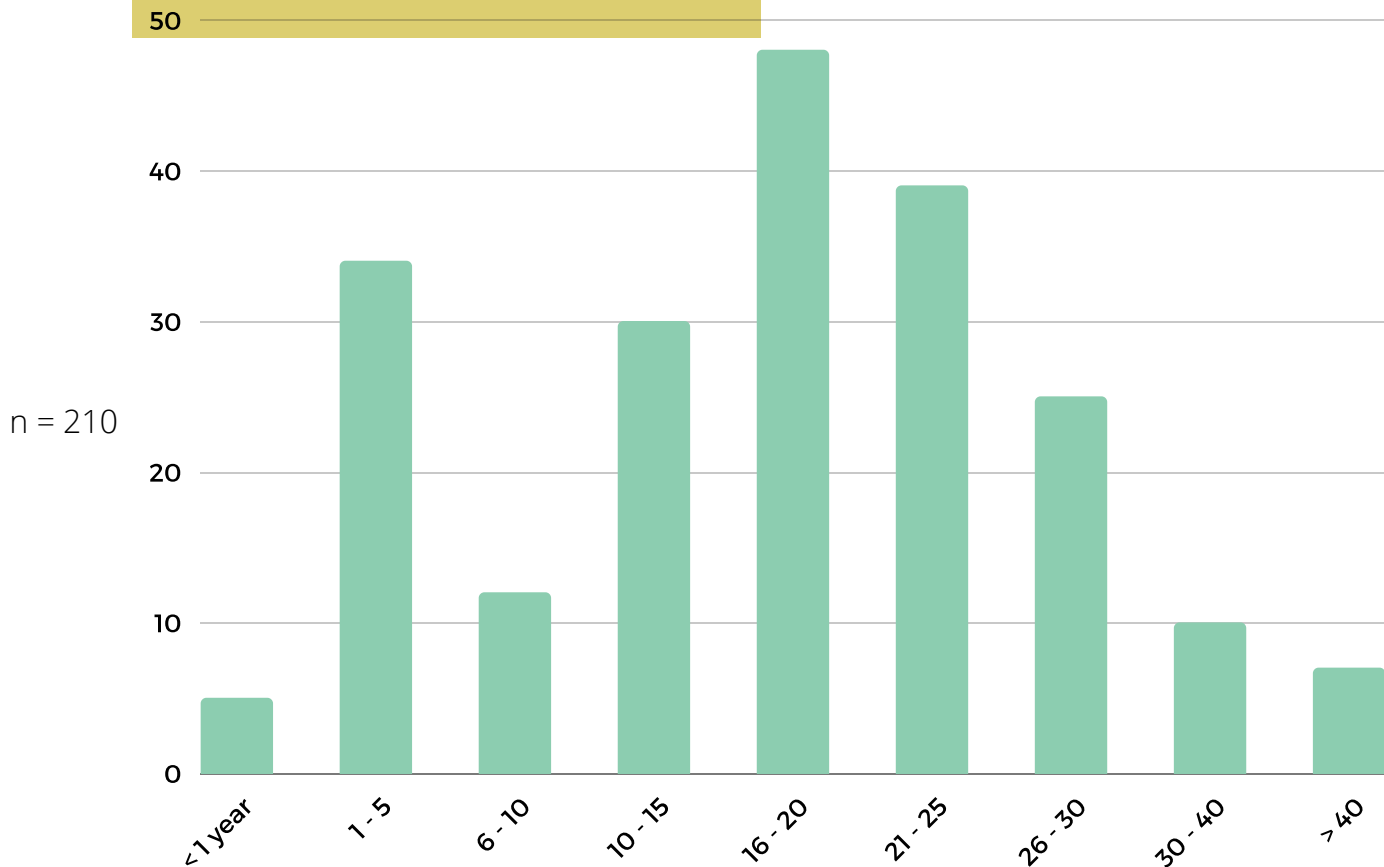


### A LONG TIME GONE

Length of US residence deeply influences post-deportation experiences. Simply put, the more time a person has spent in the United States, the harder it is for them to build a life in Mexico after deportation. This is not only because longer-term US residents are more likely to have children, homes, and investments in the United States, but also because their long absence from Mexico increases the likelihood that they lack identity documents, familial support, and community networks in Mexico. People who left Mexico as young children can struggle to speak fluent Spanish and find that their educational credentials are not accepted at Mexican institutions. Even those who migrated in their teens and twenties have had little experience navigating Mexican bureaucracy and society as adults.

# MIGRATION AND THE U.S.

## AGE AT FIRST U.S. MIGRATION



### AGE AND LABOR MIGRATION

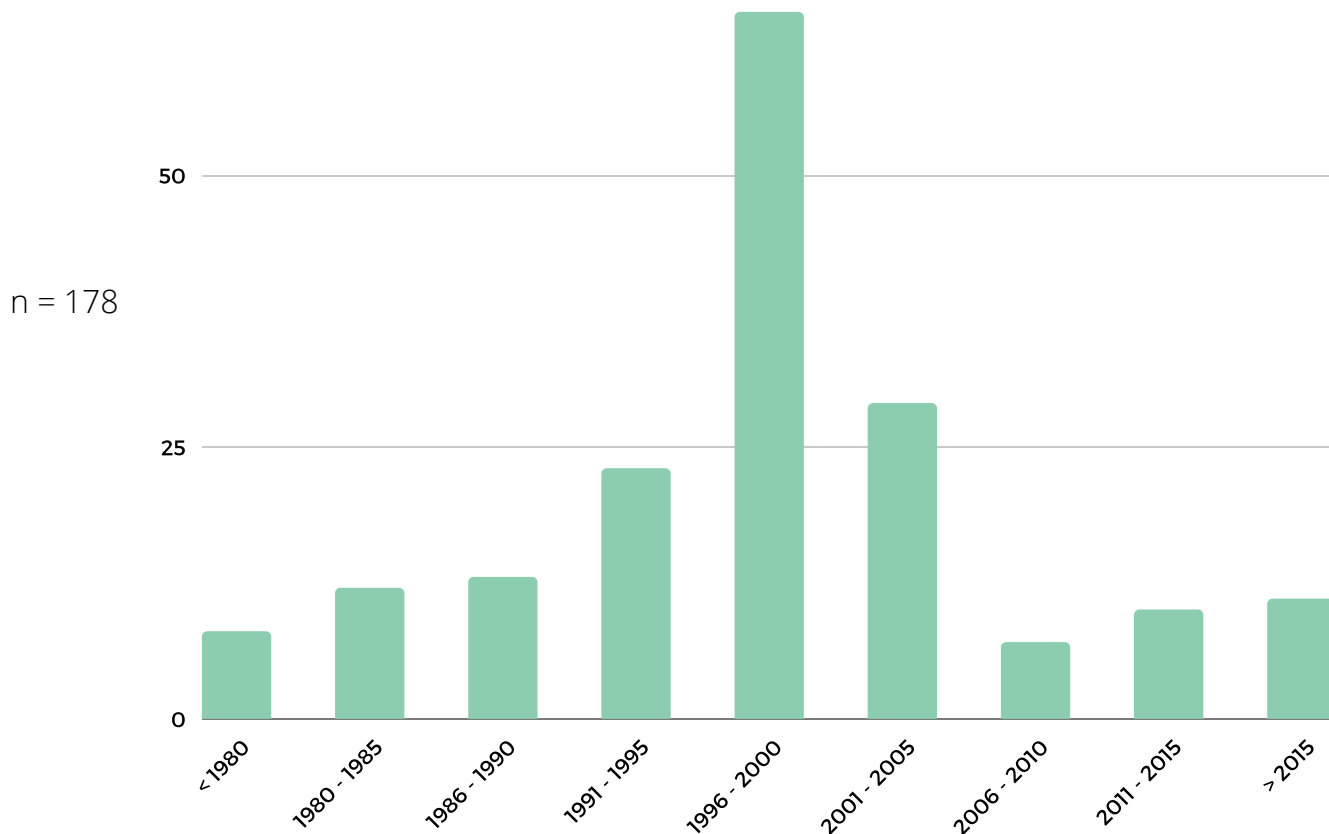
Like their labor migrant counterparts around the world, Mexican nationals tend to migrate as adolescents and very young adults. Migration at this age is typically related to the coming-of-age needs of young adults, such as gainful employment and economic independence. The people in our sample who first migrated between 1 and 5 years old are likely the children of labor migrants. Their high proportion in our study is due to the research participation of Otros Dreams en Acción, an organization that specializes in offering resources, services, and community outreach to youth deportees who were raised in the United States..



# MIGRATION AND THE U.S.

75

## YEAR OF FIRST U.S. MIGRATION



## THE NAFTA EFFECT

The spike in emigration from Mexico after 1996 is related to the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA. NAFTA allowed mass-produced US grain to flood Mexican markets, undercutting the price of corn and other foodstuffs and driving millions of Mexican farmers out of business. NAFTA also led to a sharp devaluation of the Mexican peso, spreading economic crisis into the middle-classes and urban areas. As Mexican workers and farmers tapped into decades-old migration channels and sought work in the United States, they faced historically punitive US immigration politics (e.g. IIRAIRA in 1996), including sections of fence erected along the US-Mexico border for the first time.



# DETENTION AND DEPORTATION

**33%**

OF  
RESPONDENTS  
WERE DETAINED  
DURING A  
TRAFFIC STOP

**87%**

SPENT TIME IN  
PRISON,  
DETENTION, OR  
BOTH

**10 YRS**

55% ARE BARRED  
FROM  
RETURNING TO  
THE US FOR 10  
YEARS OR MORE

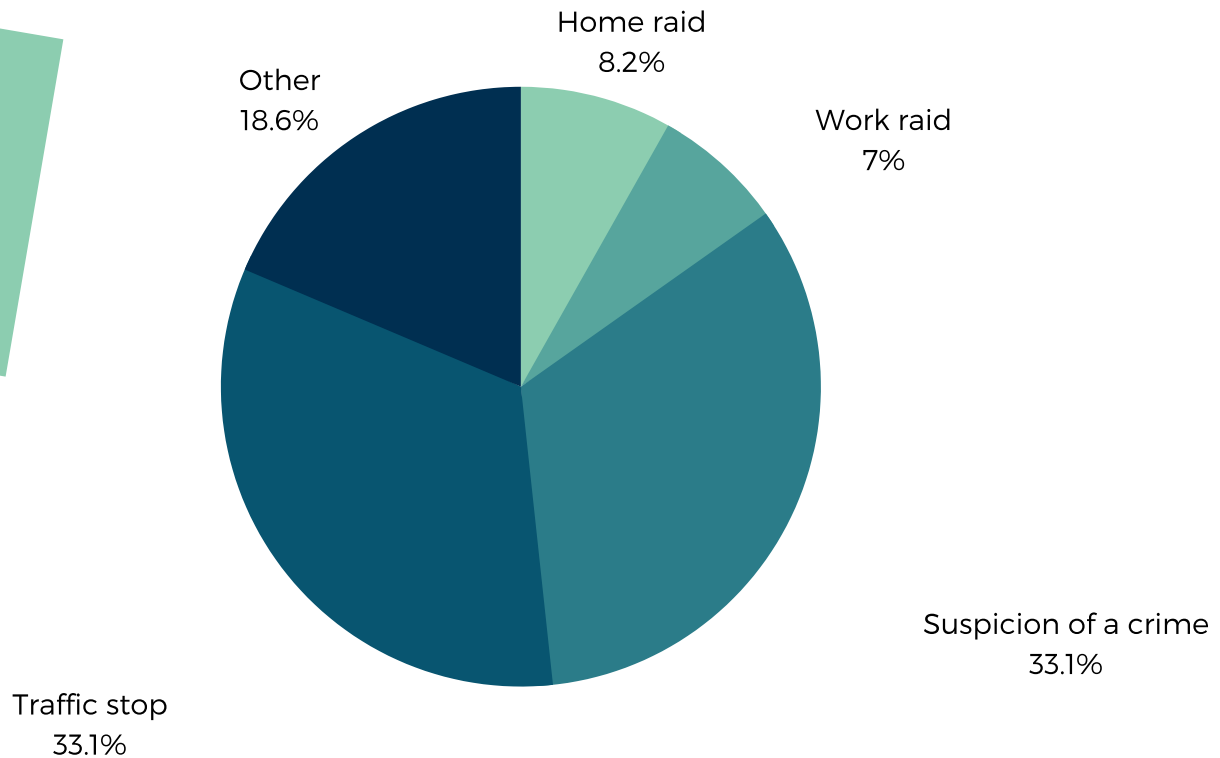
The deportation process of more than two-thirds of our respondents began with contact with a local police officer. After an initial arrest, most spent prolonged periods in detention and/or jail before being shackled and transported to Mexico City on an ICE-chartered plane. About 90 percent have been barred from returning to the United States for a period ranging from a few years to the rest of their lives. All of these factors--conflation of criminal and immigration systems; prolonged detention; and bars on US reentry--deeply shape people's post-deportation experiences in Mexico.

# DETENTION AND DEPORTATION

## HOW WERE YOU DETAINED?

75%

did not have the assistance of an immigration lawyer



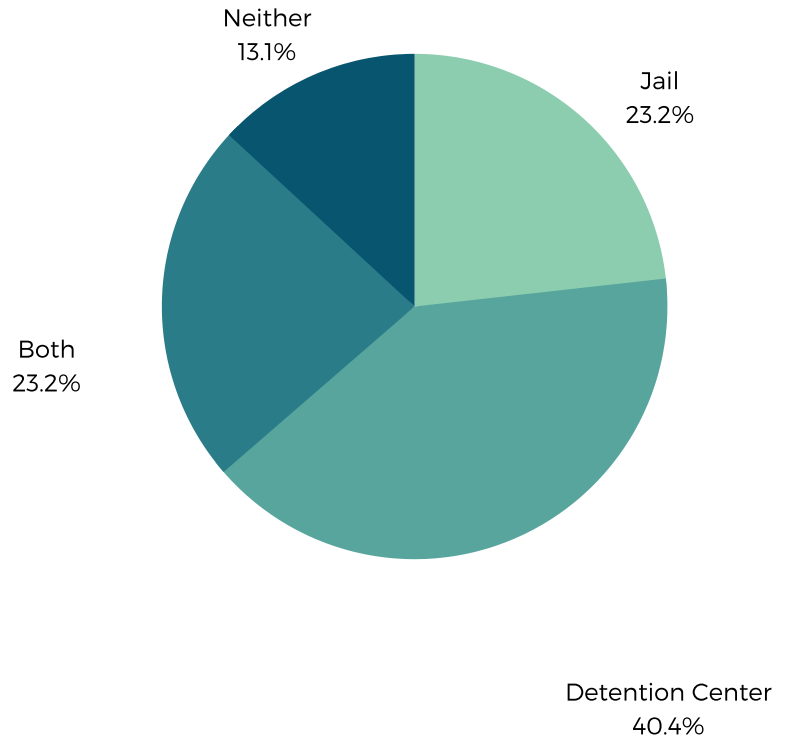
## CRIMINALIZATION OF MIGRATION

Our data affirm existing studies that have found that local police agencies play a central role in the enforcement of immigration laws. About two-thirds of our respondents were deported as a result of contact with a local police officer; one-third were detained during a traffic stop. This conflation of criminal justice and immigration systems has been institutionalized via programs such as Secure Communities and 287(g), which promote data sharing and cooperation between local police and federal agents. In addition, programs such as Operation Streamline prosecute undocumented migrants on federal criminal records for unlawful entry and reentry, sending them to prison for months and years prior to deportation.

# DETENTION AND DEPORTATION

## WERE YOU HELD IN JAIL AND/OR A DETENTION CENTER?

**32%**  
of respondents  
were detained  
3 - 6 months

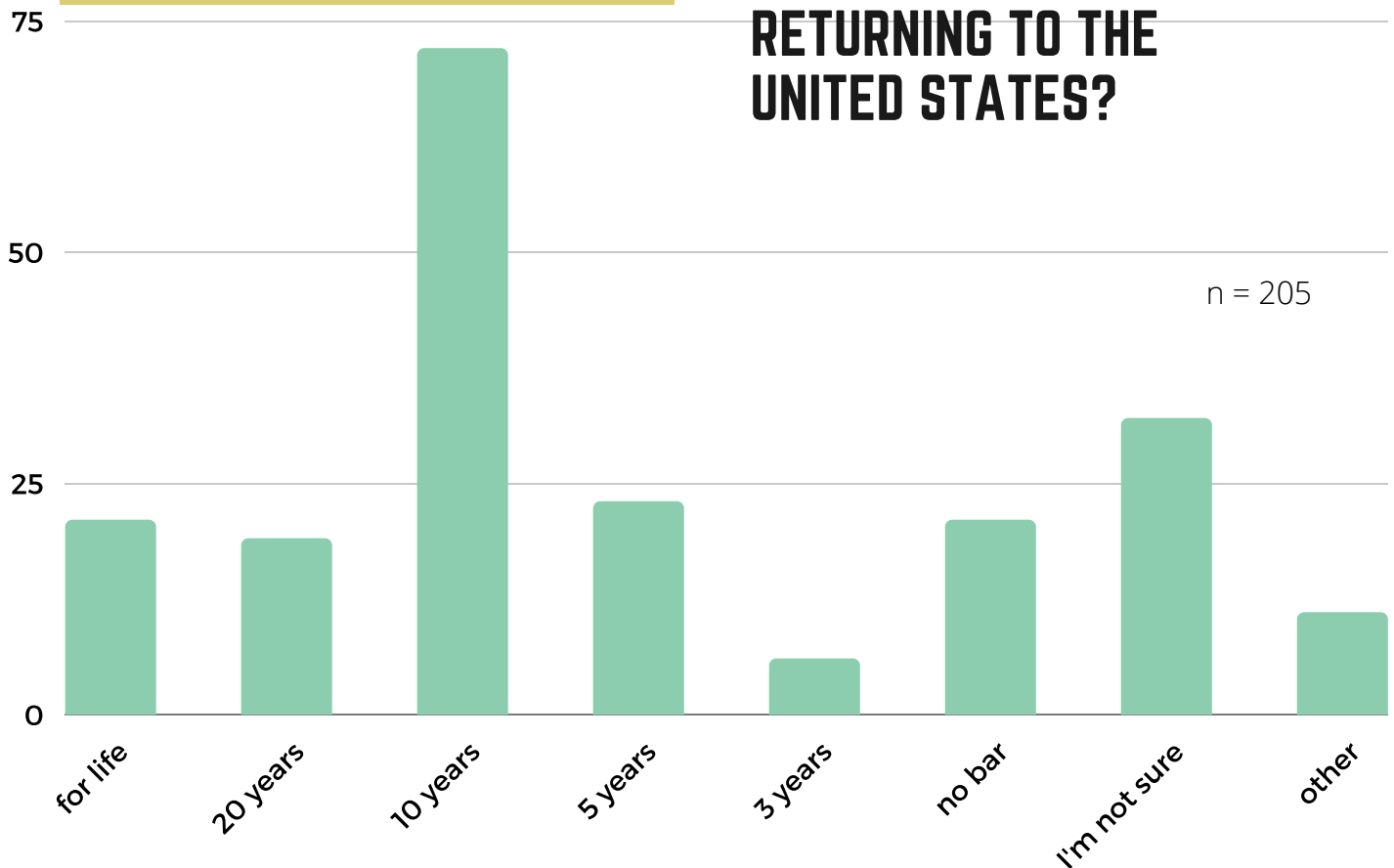


### PROLONGED DETENTION

While respondents can report with accuracy that they were held by U.S. authorities, we found that the distinctions between jails and immigrant detention centers were often unclear. There are a few reasons for this. First, detained immigrants are counted as "beds" by ICE, and about 1/3 of ICE "beds" are inside of local jails. Second, U.S. authorities rarely clearly explain to people what is happening to them. Third, while U.S. law distinguishes criminal and immigration systems, and detention centers are not considered jails (which is why children can be held in them and detainees are denied due process rights), detention centers look, feel, and act like jails.

# DETENTION AND DEPORTATION

## HOW LONG ARE YOU BARRED FROM RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES?



### THE PUNISHMENT/EL CASTIGO

Nearly 90 percent of our respondents are barred from legally reentering the United States for a prolonged period. Lifetime bars are conferred on people who have ever claimed to be a U.S. citizen, as well as those who reentered the United States after being deported. The most common bar is the 10-year bar for unlawful presence. Anyone who has lived in the United States for a year or more without authorization is automatically subject to this 10-year bar, which prevents even people with U.S. citizen spouses and children from being able to return. In Spanish-speaking U.S. communities, the 10-year bar is colloquially known as "el castigo," or the punishment.



# FAMILY

**78%**

OF RESPONDENTS HAVE FAMILY IN THE US

**84%**

OF DEPORTED PARENTS ARE APART FROM THEIR CHILDREN

**73%**

OF RESPONDENTS' CHILDREN ARE US CITIZENS

For our respondents, family separation is one of the biggest and most painful impediments to rebuilding life after deportation. Sudden separation from partners and children creates an overwhelming desire to re-migrate in order to reunite with family. Parents who stay in Mexico often lose custody of, and even contact with, children who remain in the United States. An ongoing lack of pro bono legal assistance in the United States impedes deported parents' attempts to regain custody over and visitation with their children.

## GENDER AND FAMILY SEPARATION

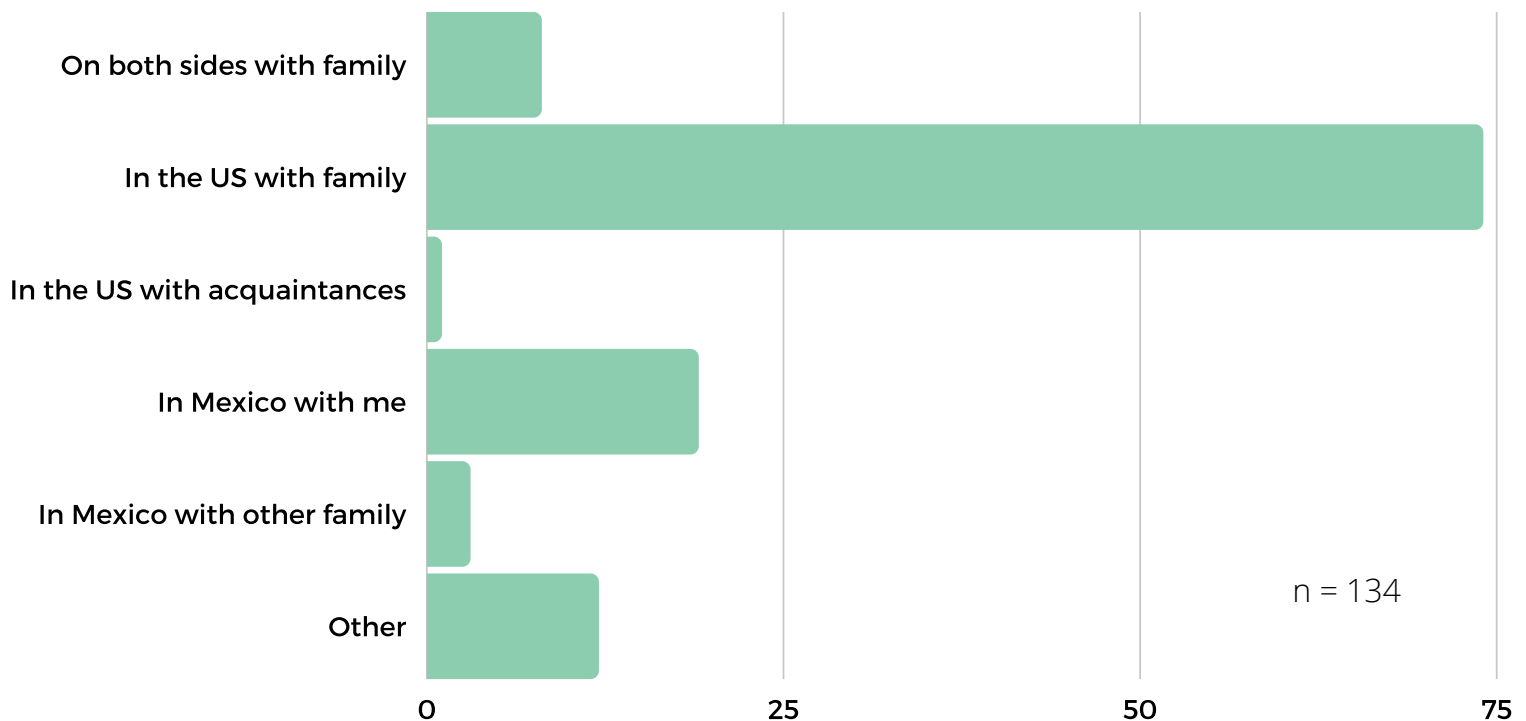
Our research suggests that the gender of the deported parent plays an important role in determining family configuration after deportation. When fathers are deported, children are more likely to remain the United States with their mothers. Men are disproportionately deported from the U.S., leading to very high rates of father/child separation. Mothers of young children, in particular, appear more likely to retain custody and bring their children with them to Mexico.

**83%**

identify as men

# FAMILY

## WHERE ARE YOUR CHILDREN NOW?



## THE PROBLEM WITH THE APOSTILLE

About 10 percent of our respondents brought their children to Mexico after deportation. Most of these children are U.S.-born and, thus, U.S. citizens. While staying together as a family has innumerable benefits, parents of these children face a host of bureaucratic barriers to applying for children's dual citizenship, school enrollment, and public services such as health care in Mexico. One significant barrier is the requirement that U.S.-issued documents such as birth certificates and school transcripts be "apostilladas," or have a seal affixed by U.S. government agents; many documents must have also been issued within the last year and/or have a Mexican address. These barriers leave children in Mexico "illegal in Mexico," as one parent put it, and unable to access much-needed services.



# WORK AND HOUSING

54%

OF RESPONDENTS DO NOT HAVE LONG-TERM HOUSING IN MEXICO

33%

DO NOT HAVE A JOB

54%

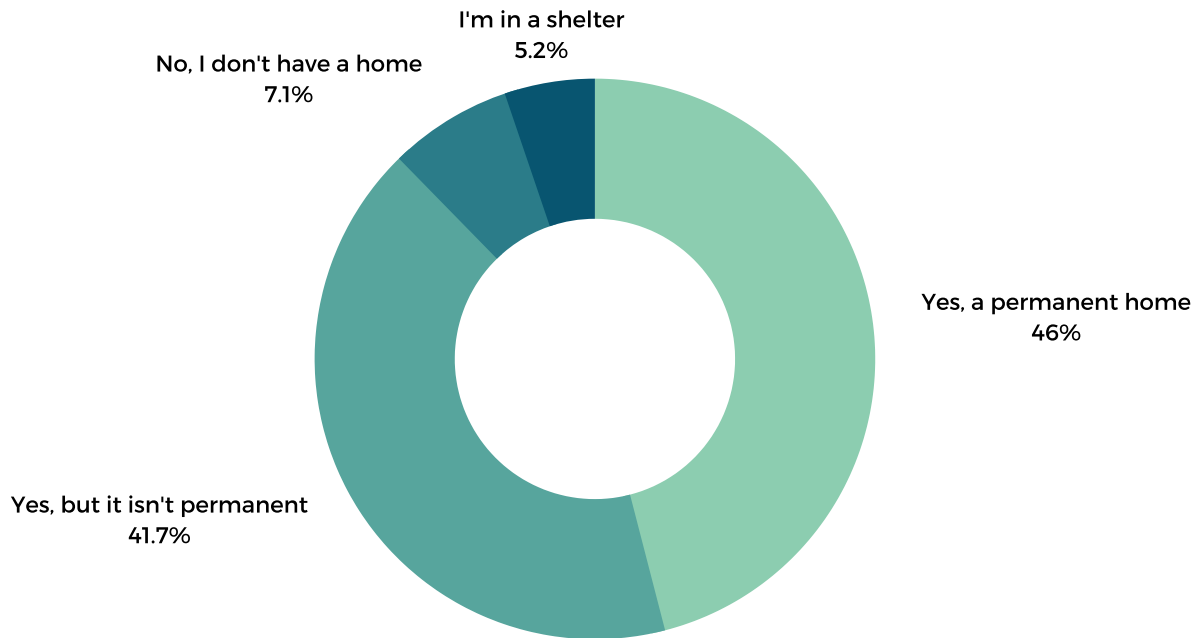
HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY SERVICES FROM THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT

Deported and returned migrants face particular challenges to finding stable work and housing in Mexico. Many lack the identity documents they need to apply for employment and housing assistance. Deportees in Mexico additionally face stigmatization and criminalization. People who spent many years and decades in the United States often lack the familial and community support networks in Mexico that most of us rely on to find leads on jobs and homes. Further, respondents report barriers to accessing Mexican government support--even programs specifically designed for returned migrants.



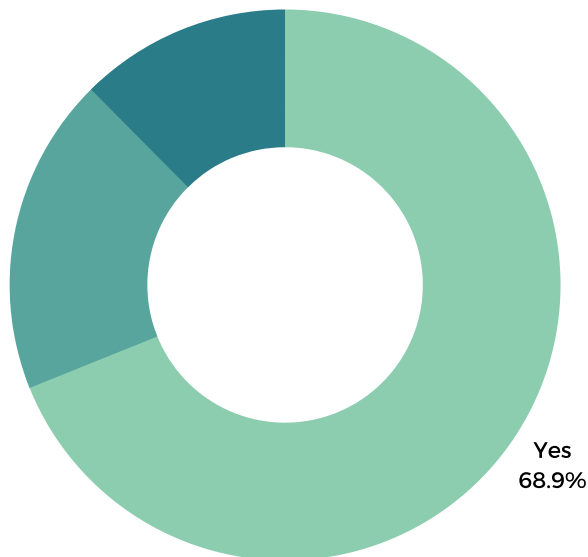
# WORK AND HOUSING

## DO YOU HAVE A HOME IN MEXICO?



No, and I don't know where I can work  
12.4%

No, but I'm sure I can find work  
18.7%



## DO YOU HAVE A JOB IN MEXICO?

# WORK AND HOUSING

**25%**  
work in  
construction



## MONEY LEFT BEHIND

Our research shows that when people are deported, they are not only forced to leave their homes and families, but they also frequently lose unpaid wages, tools and other work materials, and workman's compensation benefits.

Recuperating wages and benefits housed in the United States is a complicated process that often requires the assistance of a Spanish-speaking attorney located in the United States who can work with the deported persons' family on a legal case.

## INJURIES, EMPLOYERS, AND ICE

Undocumented US workers are at especially high risk for work accidents, and they are entitled to workman's compensation benefits under US law. However, Ameyal has discovered a disturbing trend of employers calling ICE on undocumented workers who file for accident compensation and seek to exercise their labor rights. Deportation interrupts the process of legal complaint, making it extraordinarily difficult for deported workers to receive compensation from US-based employers.

## TRANSLOCAL COLLABORATION

Ameyal and Chicago Community and Workers' Rights have formed a translocal collaboration to help people who have been deported claim their wages, tools, and other benefits that are owed to them from the United States.

# WORK AND HOUSING

## WHAT SERVICES SHOULD THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT PROVIDE?

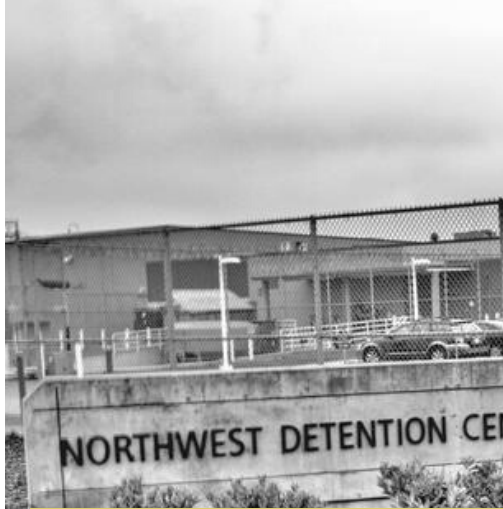
### THE MEXICO CITY RUNAROUND

The problem with the apostille is not the only bureaucratic regulation that hinders deportees from accessing resources and services in Mexico. Respondents report running an endless maze in Mexico City, arriving at one office only to be shunted to another, to arrive at the second and be told they're in the wrong place. At each juncture, deportees face prolonged transit times, long waits and seemingly arbitrary red tape. Consular documents issued in the United States are often not accepted in Mexico; documents issued more than a year ago are not eligible for proof of recent US presence; requirements for employment assistance can include letters of recommendation from US employers; and even once deportees successfully apply for services or benefits, they might not receive them. People who were undocumented in the United States often find themselves entangled in ongoing struggles to prove their existence to state agencies.

A word cloud of Spanish terms related to migration and government services. The most prominent words are 'trabajo' (work), 'apoyo' (support), 'reinserción' (reintegration), 'programas' (programs), 'atención' (attention), 'salud' (health), 'ayuda' (help), 'laboral' (labor), 'poder' (power), 'identificación' (identification), 'información' (information), 'gobierno' (government), 'seguimiento' (follow-up), 'albergue' (shelter), 'salida' (exit), 'deportación' (deportation), 'regreso' (return), 'diferencia' (difference), 'programas' (programs), 'atención' (attention), 'salud' (health), 'ayuda' (help), 'laboral' (labor), 'poder' (power), 'identificación' (identification), 'información' (information), 'gobierno' (government), 'seguimiento' (follow-up), 'albergue' (shelter), 'salida' (exit), 'deportación' (deportation), 'regreso' (return), 'diferencia' (difference).

# 5%

received govt  
assistance  
earmarked for  
return migrants



# PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

**27%**

OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DURING DETENTION OR DEPORTATION

**1.5K**

DETAINEES ARE HELD IN THE NW DETENTION CENTER IN WA, MANY WITH CHRONIC ILLNESSES

**0**

NUMBER OF MEXICO CITY SHELTERS THAT PROVIDE ADEQUATE HEALTH CARE SERVICES TO DEPORTEES

Our respondents grapple with myriad deportation-related traumas, including arrest, prolonged detention in poor conditions, violence and abuse, deportation, family separation, financial insecurity, homelessness, lack of familial and community belonging, and denied pathways to social esteem. Many report that they have lost their roles as parents, providers, and esteemed community members. All of these factors combine to erode deportees' physical and emotional health.

# PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

## INJURY AND WORK

Denial of workman's compensation benefits is not the only consequence of deportation after injury. People who are deported with serious injuries and illnesses are often unable to join the work force in Mexico and experience high rates of poverty and homelessness. Workers with a valid US social security number who had lived in the United States for more than 30 years may be able to request a disability pension from the American embassy.



## A COLLAPSE OF LIFE

Most deportees have spent years and decades building lives in the United States. When they lose these lives through deportation, they experience profound emotional health problems. Despairing, most deportees can only think of immediately returning to the United States, and it can take a year or more before they reconcile themselves to starting their lives anew in Mexico. Many deportees experience depression, anxiety, and emotional paralysis long after their deportation from the United States.

# PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

## COVID-19

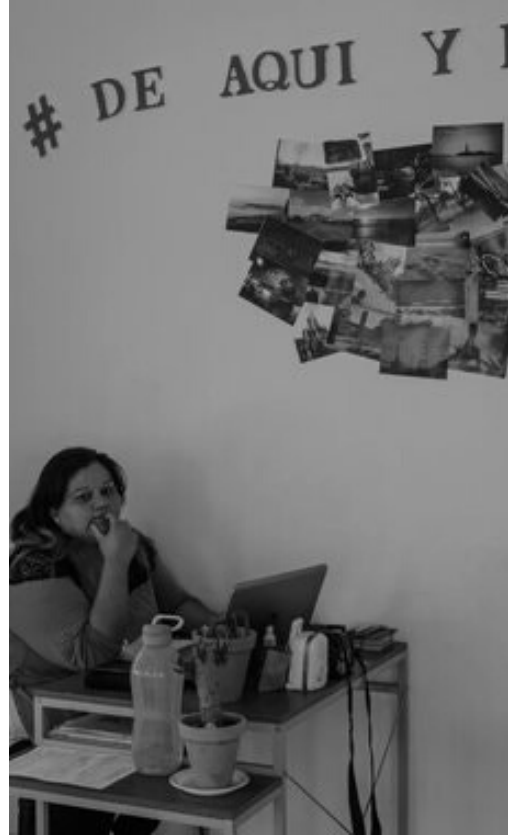
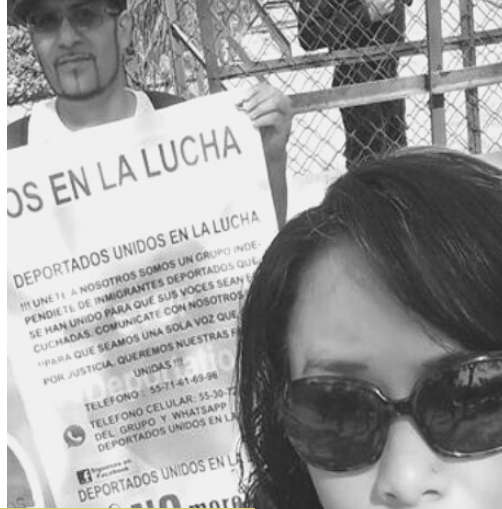
While immigrant detention centers are hotbeds for the spread of viruses such as COVID-19, the US government has showed no inclination to reduce detentions or slow the deportation of potentially infected people.

## DEPORTING GRAVELY ILL MIGRANTS

In August of 2019, the Donald Trump administration ended a program known as "medical deferred action," which had provided some legal protection from deportation for people with extreme medical needs. And people needing treatment for renal failure, cancer, heart disease, cerebral palsy, and other life-threatening conditions are often deported with no follow-up services, assistance, or care. .

## JOSÉ MARTÍN DELGADO JAIMES: DEPORTED TO HIS DEATH

Organizers with Otros Dreams en Acción (ODA) have found that people with grave illnesses are routinely deported to Mexico with no plan for their follow up care. Once in Mexico, deportees who need urgent medical care face a bureaucratic maze trying to document their eligibility for treatment at public hospitals or clinics. The lone Mexico City shelter meant to receive deportees with illnesses was designed for people with addictions and does not have any full-time medical staff. In 2019, José Martín Delgado Jaimes died of renal disease after his deportation from the United States. Delgado Jaimes's prolonged detention in The Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington worsened his illness, but the final blow was delivered by Mexican authorities who accused him of possessing fraudulent documents and denied his health insurance application. Shortly after, Delgado Jaimes died "a completely preventable" death (La Resistencia 2019).



# COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

127K

NUMBER OF MEXICAN NATIONALS DEPORTED FROM US IN FY 2019

3 NUMBER OF NON-PROFIT ORGS IN CDMX THAT PROVIDE ACCOMPANIMENT TO DEPORTEES

Our research shows that the consequences of deportation linger long after deportees' arrival in Mexico. Needs related to identity documents, legal assistance, work, housing, and health care keep returned migrants in ongoing exchanges with Mexican state agencies and community organizations, underscoring the importance of outreach, resources, and services for deported migrants. In particular, there is a significant demand for trans local networks of organizations and resources that can address the complex and multi-jurisdiccional context of life after deportation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



## TRANSLOCAL NETWORKING

Our findings suggest that deportees are in need of resources and services at all points during their deportation experience--from the time of arrest until long after their arrival in Mexico. We additionally find that deportees often need access to documents and services housed in the United States, while their US families and advocates require information pertinent to Mexican law and society. Networks that facilitate the translocal flow of information and assistance are crucial for successful service provision after deportation. We recommend investment in organizations seeking to establish and grow such trans local collaborations.



## PRESIDENTIAL DECREE

Mexican nationals who have been deported should be able to exercise their rights as citizens under Mexican law. However, our research indicates that multiple barriers exist that prevent deportees from accessing their rights in Mexico. In particular, we recommend that the president of Mexico issue a decree to observe Article 30 of the Mexican constitution, which grants the children of Mexican citizens access to dual citizenship under the law.



# RECOMMENDATIONS



## A SHELTER FOR DEPORTEES

The number of deportees who face housing precarity indicates a need for public shelter. Because deportees are often denied entrance at migrant shelters and end up at centers for people with addiction, we recommend that Mexico City build a housing shelter specifically for deportees and returnees. We further recommend that this shelter provide assistance with employment, family reunification, and housing.



## GRASSROOTS PROTOCOLS

Our research reveals the critical importance of grassroots models of reintegration after deportation. Given the local specificities of Mexican bureaucracies, we recommend support for local and translocal efforts to construct, disseminate, and implement protocols for return migrants seeking to attain identity documents, legal assistance, work, and housing after deportation. We further recommend funding of community based accompaniment models, as well community outreach and support for the deported and returned community.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



## **CEASE COLLABORATION WITH ICE**

Given the ubiquity of rights violations and the destructiveness of deportation, we recommend that Mexican government agencies cease all cooperation with U.S. ICE. We further recommend that the Mexican government reallocate funds from deportation assistance towards support for the deported and returned community in Mexico.