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A New Path: Plan for Possible Deportation

Para leer esta información en **español** haz clic [aquí](#).

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This document is a work in progress and part of the larger publication, [A New Path: A Guide to the Challenges and Opportunities After Deportation](#), from the Education Justice Project at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. We are working on updating this guide for 2026 but recognize how urgently its content is needed. Please share this document widely. Please also share your feedback with us, including any omissions or errors. We can add updates before the next edition. Email us at reentry@educationjustice.net.

SUBHEADS:

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Plan for Possible Deportation

Knowing your rights can help you and your family be safe, but it does not guarantee that you will avoid arrest, detention, or deportation. That is why you need to have a plan and be prepared. It can reduce the stress of living with the threat of deportation, connect you to legal resources, potentially reduce the harm caused by the removal process, and help to empower you after it has begun.

In this chapter, we discuss:

- Creating a single file to contain all of your and your family's important information and documents (your "Be Prepared" file).

- Other things you'll want to consider after your deportation or return, like health care, money, and work.
- The choice of "self-deportation" or voluntary return.

Create a Be Prepared File

If you are arrested, the things you put into your "Be Prepared" will:

- Help your family members and friends (or your lawyer, if you have one) support you
- Help keep your family safe and taken care of
- Be an important part of re-building your life if you are deported

Your **Be Prepared** file should contain the following:

- **All your family's important documents.** We outline which documents you should gather in the first section of this chapter (see below). You may need to apostille some of these documents to be able to use them outside the US. See the "Apostille Process" section on p. 5 to learn more.
- **Emergency contact information.** This information will be useful for you and your family if you are detained. It will also be helpful for you if you get deported. Learn more in "Build Your Network and Collect Contacts" on p. 7.
- **Your family plan folder.** This will contain a written outline of your plan and important contacts and documents for your family's caregivers. Learn more in the "Create a Family Plan" section of this chapter on p. 9.

Gather Important Documents and Information

In [Know Your Rights](#), we encouraged you to gather the documents you might need in case of an encounter with ICE. In this section, you will learn what information and documents you will need if you are detained or deported. If you are deported, these documents will help you build a life in your country of origin.

As you gather these items, check them off on the list below and place them in your Be Prepared file. Put that file in a safe place. Make sure everyone in your family knows where it is. You may also want to share the location (or pictures of its contents) with a lawyer or your children's caregiver.

Be Prepared Checklist			
Document or information	Description	How to get it	Got it!

Alien Registration Number (A-Number). The letter A followed by 7 to 9 numbers	This is the number that ICE will use to identify you during removal proceedings. Your loved ones can use it to find where you are (learn more in “Locating Detainees” on p. 5).	Find it on a work permit, green card, immigrant visa, immigrant fee handout, notice of action, or other official immigration document.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Birth certificates (your own and your children’s)	In your country of origin, this will help you get other important IDs. Do not show non-US birth certificates to ICE agents while still in the US.	Contact the nearest consulate for your nation of origin (see directory). Some governments may have online services where you can order your birth certificate directly.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>If your children were born in the US, this chart shows how to order their birth certificates and get them apostilled in every US state: tinyurl.com/BC-Apostille</p> <p>NOTE: To avoid problems getting dual citizenship or other services in your nation of origin, make sure the parents’ names and places of birth on your children’s birth certificates match the names and places of birth on your own birth certificates exactly. This is an especially hard problem to solve after deportation to Mexico.</p>			
Immigration documents (for you and family members)	These include work permits, green cards, visas, or other documents showing your residence in the US.	See Know Your Rights for a list of documents that may be accepted as proof of residence in the US.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Security cards or Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN) for yourself or any family members	Social Security cards state your Social Security number (SSN). SSNs are issued to individuals authorized to work in the US. ITINs are given to people who need to file US taxes but are not eligible for an SSN.	To get a lost ITIN, call the IRS ITIN Hotline at (800) 908-9982. To ask for a replacement Social Security card, go to ssa.gov/myaccount/replacement-card.html or call (800) 772-1213.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage certificate or divorce decree	If you got married in the US, you may want or need evidence of your marriage after deportation.	You can get a marriage certificate from the county clerk’s office where you were married or divorced. This may need to be apostilled. (If you were married in Mexico, contact the Civil Registry in the	<input type="checkbox"/>

		county where you were married.)	
<p>Passports</p> <p>(Note: We do not advise carrying or displaying a foreign passport unless you must.)</p>	<p>Gathering travel documents—for everyone in your family—will give you more options, before and after deportation.</p>	<p>Learn how to get a US passport at travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports.html.</p> <p>Get a passport from your country of origin by contacting your local consulate.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Military discharge papers</p>	<p>If you served in the US military or have a family member who has served, speak with an immigration lawyer. It is possible that your service could be a factor in stopping your deportation.</p>	<p>Contact the branch of the armed services where you served. Learn more about veterans' immigration resources in the Living with the Threat of Deportation chapter on (p. 2).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Driver's license</p>	<p>Some states allow people who are undocumented to get a driver's license (see "Driving While Undocumented"). While you can use your US license for a limited period of time after deportation to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, it's best to get a local license.</p>	<p>If you can get a US driver's license, get it. If it's expired, consider getting it renewed.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Bank account information</p>	<p>Gather information such as account numbers, routing numbers, and contact information.</p>	<p>This information can be found on your monthly statements or in your online account.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Health records, for yourself and your family</p>	<p>Gather a list of medications and allergies, medical conditions, and any other important health records for you and your family. Also gather your insurance information and your doctors' contact information.</p>	<p>Get this information from your medical providers or an online healthcare portal.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Education records, for yourself and your</p>	<p>School records, degrees, diplomas, and transcripts.</p>	<p>These can be requested from the schools. To be recognized in your country of origin, they</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

children		may need to be notarized, apostilled, and/or translated.	
Learn more: For the Apostille process, see p. 5. For transferring credits and enrolling in school, see the Education chapter.			
Car records	Car titles, license plate number, VIN/ID number, car loan and insurance information	Your vehicle's VIN should be on its title.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing records	Make a copy of your lease or sublease agreement, mortgage, or ownership documents.		<input type="checkbox"/>
Government assistance documents	Documents for programs such as TANF, Link, WIC, or Medicaid		<input type="checkbox"/>

★ Don't have all your ID documents? You can get some of these documents after your deportation. Learn more in the Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala sections.

If you will be deported to Mexico and want to get your CURP code, RFC, or birth certificate before leaving the US, you can:

- Look up your CURP at gob.mx/curp
- Use your CURP to find your RFC at www54.sat.gob.mx/curp/Consult
- Order your birth certificate at miregistrocivil.gob.mx or by talking to your local Mexican consulate (see [directory](#)).

★ **Locating Detainees.** If you have been detained, your family or community can use the ICE detainee locator to find you: tinyurl.com/ICE-tracker. Make sure they have your A-number (your "alien registration" number found on your immigration documents from ICE; if you didn't have one previously, you will be assigned one when you are detained). It will help them to locate you. A list of detention facilities, their addresses, and phone numbers can be found at ice.gov/detention-facilities. Although you will have the right to a lawyer, you may not be able to reach one while you're detained. Providing your A-number will also help an attorney locate you and figure out the status of your case.

★ **Do you have children who were born in the US?** If you haven't already registered them with your local consulate, you may want to. Doing this now, while you're living in the US, can save you time and trouble if you get deported. For more information, see [Getting Your IDs and Documents](#) in the Life After Deportation sections of this guide.

Apostille Process

An apostille is a special certificate that makes a document legally valid in another country. It proves that a US document is authentic. You might think of it as a passport for your documents.

Documents that may need to be apostilled		
State and county-issued documents	Education documents	Personal and business document
Birth, marriage, divorce, death certificates, court documents, powers of attorney, adoption papers	School reports, transcripts, certificates, diplomas	Affidavits, business agreements

Start the apostille process while you are still in the US. Most important official documents will need to be apostilled. To get more detailed information on which documents need to be apostilled, see the [Plan for Possible Deportation](#) chapter of this guide or speak with your local consulate.

Do you need a notary? Some documents need to be taken to a notary public and notarized before they can be apostilled. These include most personal and business documents (like contracts and affidavits) and some education documents. To find out if your education documents need to be notarized before they can be apostilled, speak with the school that issued your documents. You can also ask at the Secretary of State’s office in your state (see “How to Apostille“ below).

You can often find a notary public at a UPS store or a larger bank.

- ★ Schools and universities in many countries will require the diploma, not the transcript, as proof of your degree.

Government-issued documents (like those listed above) can be apostilled **without** being notarized first. But in some cases, if your document was issued a long time ago, you may need to request an updated copy before it can be apostilled.

Ask the Secretary of State about which documents need to be notarized and which don’t.

How to Apostille: Once your documents are ready, you can mail them or take them in person to a Secretary of State’s office in your state. They will charge a fee, finish the process, and send you your document with an apostille certificate attached to it. Use this state-by-state chart to learn more about how this works in your state: tinyurl.com/BC-Apostille.

- ★ **Translators:** If your country of origin requires that a document be translated, you will need to hire a certified translator. Other translations will not be accepted. In some cases, local state agencies in your country of origin may require that you use a **specific certified translator**.

Shipping Documents

If you get deported, you may need someone to send you the documents you have collected. Mailing documents to your country of origin through the post office can be expensive and can take a long time, and the postal service in some countries is unreliable. Send important documents by FedEx, DHL, or UPS. Consider sending copies to a family member or friend in your country of origin now, in advance of your possible removal or return. Scanning or carefully photographing your documents may also be helpful. You can keep them online and retrieve them later.

Note: Mexico now asks that people shipping packages to Mexico include the RFC or CURP of the person they're shipping to. That person would then need to show their RFC or CURP in order to pick up the package.

- ★ The Mexican government runs a program called Héroes Paisanos (gob.mx/heroespaisanos). It protects the rights of Mexican citizens as they enter, travel through, and leave the country. They publish a guide that's useful for planning your return to Mexico. Access it here: tinyurl.com/Heroes-Pais.

Build Your Network and Collect Contacts

Contact Friends and Family

If you are at risk of getting deported, don't wait to reach out to people who can support you.

Contact family members and friends in the US and in your country of origin. Be honest about what you may need from them. Let them know if you need housing, money, advice, or support. Think about how you might be able to contribute to their household as well.

Gather Important Contact Information

Whether or not you reach out now, write down the contact information for your family and friends in the US and in your country of origin—don't just keep it in your phone. Memorize the most important numbers.

In addition to friends and family, think about what other sources of support you may want to call on. **Write down their contact information and keep it in your Be Prepared file.** You can use a copy of the chart below to get started.

Support	Contact Information (Name, email, phone, WhatsApp, etc.)
Emergency caregivers for your children	
Consulate of your country of origin	
Lawyer/legal service providers (See the Getting Help to Oppose Your Removal chapter and the directory .)	
Your children’s schools or daycare centers	
Someone who can get your children from school or daycare if their emergency caregiver isn’t immediately available	
Employer or union rep	
Doctors, dentists, therapists	
Religious center (Church, mosque, etc.)	

Banks and financial advisors	
Insurance companies (health, car, home)	
Nonprofit immigration organizations (See our lists in the country-specific sections of the guide.)	

You may also want to reach out to organizations in your country of origin that help people after they have been deported. Doing this from the US will help you land on your feet. Learn more in the country-specific sections of this guide.

- ★ If you are a Mexican or Guatemalan national living in the US, your country of origin has created an app for you to use in case of emergency. Search online for the name of the country and “consulate app” to find them.

Create a Family Plan

Do you have young kids or elderly parents? Do you take care of other relatives or pets? A family plan can help keep them safe if you are detained or deported. It will help you arrange for your children’s care and education.

Your plan should include:

- A written outline describing what will happen if you are detained or deported
- A folder with important contacts and documents for your caregiver(s)

Keep these things together in your Be Prepared file, even if your family plan is not complete.

- ★ These websites will help you to create a family plan:
 - ilrc.org/family-preparedness-plan
 - informedimmigrant.com/guides/steps-take-prepare-family

Family Plan Outline

Decide who will take care of your children if you are detained or deported. Find an adult you and your children trust and know. If your children are old enough, you can include them in this decision.

Talk to the caregiver about your plans. Decide what should happen if you are detained or deported. How will they help to keep your children safe and secure? If your family plans to rejoin you in your country of origin, how can your children's caretaker help them reach you safely? (To read more about this choice, see "Relocating US Citizens in Your Family" on p. 10.)

Write down the caretaker's contact information and the plan you've decided on.

Do the same for caregivers for pets and anyone else who depends on you.

- ★ Make sure to list your caregiver as an emergency contact at your children's schools or daycares. Make sure they're on a list of approved caregivers who can pick them up.

Talk to Your Children. If your children are old enough, make sure they:

- Understand they will be taken care of if you are detained
- Know who will care for them until you can care for them again
- Have contact information for their temporary caregiver *and*
 - other nearby friends and family who they get in touch with if you are detained
 - friends and family who live in your country of origin, in case you are deported

If they're older, you should also make sure they understand what actions they should take in case of an ICE encounter at your home, your arrest, or your deportation.

Relocating US Citizens in Your Family

For the families of people at risk of deportation, the decision to relocate from the US is not easy. Plan ahead and talk openly with your loved ones.

If your spouse and children are US citizens and they decide to relocate with you, your spouse will have to find new friends and work. Your children will have to change schools. But if your family stays behind, they will miss you and be without your support. Both situations are very hard.

- ★ For information on continuing your family's education in your country of origin, see the country-specific sections of this guide. You may be able to make the transition easier while you're still living in the US.

Many family members who have moved to Mexico with their deported loved ones say they wish they had spoken more Spanish at home. Sadly, children who don't speak Spanish can get bullied in Mexican schools. Enrolling your children in Spanish classes while you're in the US may help.

Moving is not easy but if it's what's best for your family, it's worth it to rebuild a life together that's yours. -Katerina B.

Also, be aware that your relationships with your family may change after deportation. Maybe you used to send money home to support relatives. Now you may be the one who needs help. This can be tough. Some deported families have said they sent money home for years. But they did not feel welcome when returning home. Think ahead about this and how it might affect your family.

- ★ If you are a Mexican national and your US-citizen spouse or children plan to move with you if you get deported, see the [Getting Your IDs and Documents](#) chapter to learn what they should do before and after they leave the country.

Be prepared for shifting roles with your partner and kids, too. Maybe your partner didn't work in the US. But if your partner is a US citizen, they may be able to earn a higher income by working online for a US-based company. Your family will need to be open to change.

- ★ **Working remote for US dollars.** If there is a US citizen in your family who is of working age—and they decide to relocate with you to your country of origin—**one of the most important things they can do is find online work with a US company.** Many people have found online work doing customer service for US companies. Your family members might even be allowed to do their current job remotely from your country of origin. Earning US dollars abroad could make all the difference for your family's financial stability.
- ★ **Documents for US Citizen Families:** If you have US-citizen family members who will be moving with you to your country of origin, collect the documents in the chart below. They will help your family to stay together, go to school, and restart their lives in your country of origin.

Important Documents and Information for Migrating US Citizens		
Document	Children	Spouse or Other Adult
Birth Certificate	X	X
School Records	X	
Diplomas and Transcripts		X
Medical Records	X	X
Marriage Certificate or Divorce Decrees		X
State IDs or Drivers License	If possible	X
Passports	X	X

NOTE: It is very important that the parents' names and places of birth on children's birth certificates match *exactly* with the parents' birth certificates. Especially in Mexico, it is very hard to get this fixed after you arrive. (See the [Getting Your IDs and Documents](#) chapter to learn more.)

All of the documents listed above have already been listed elsewhere in this chapter—there's nothing extra for you to do here. This chart is just here to help you keep track.

Important Contacts and Documents for Caregivers

Collect important documents and contacts for your children's (or other dependants') caregiver. Put them together in a folder for the caregiver. You can use a copy of the chart below to help you. Check off important documents as you gather them, and fill in contact information as you collect it.

Some of these documents are also on the Be Prepared Checklist on p. 12. Make copies of these documents. You should have one for yourself and one to put in your caregiver folder.

Contacts and Documents for Caregivers	
Document or resource	Description
Caregiver authorization documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Caregiver Affidavit (See “Legal Documents” below) ● Power of Attorney, if needed (See “Legal Documents” below) ● Legal Guardianship, if needed (See “Legal Documents” below)
Emergency contact information	<p>Doctor(s):</p> <p>Daycare:</p> <p>Babysitter(s):</p> <p>School(s) and/or teacher(s):</p> <p>Attorney:</p> <p>Family and friends in the US:</p> <p>Family and friends in your country of origin:</p> <p>Other important contacts:</p> <p>★ If you have a pet, include health information and veterinarian</p>

Your children's identification documents (originals and copies)	<input type="checkbox"/> Birth certificate(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Social Security cards <input type="checkbox"/> _____ (other official ID)														
Medical information	<input type="checkbox"/> Insurance cards <input type="checkbox"/> Vaccination records <input type="checkbox"/> Dental records <input type="checkbox"/> Health records														
School records and information	School portal or online access information: <input type="checkbox"/> Report cards <input type="checkbox"/> Transcripts <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule														
Money to care for your child, if possible	<p>You can use the table below to help you think about costs and include what you can afford in the caregiver's folder.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="509 989 1390 1514"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="509 989 1070 1052">List of Expenses</th> <th data-bbox="1070 989 1390 1052">Cost per Month</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="509 1052 1070 1115">•</td> <td data-bbox="1070 1052 1390 1115">\$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="509 1115 1070 1178">•</td> <td data-bbox="1070 1115 1390 1178">\$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="509 1178 1070 1241">•</td> <td data-bbox="1070 1178 1390 1241">\$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="509 1241 1070 1304">•</td> <td data-bbox="1070 1241 1390 1304">\$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="509 1304 1070 1367">•</td> <td data-bbox="1070 1304 1390 1367">\$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="509 1367 1070 1514">Total Expenses per Month:</td> <td data-bbox="1070 1367 1390 1514">\$ _____</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	List of Expenses	Cost per Month	•	\$ _____	•	\$ _____	•	\$ _____	•	\$ _____	•	\$ _____	Total Expenses per Month:	\$ _____
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Include these documents and contacts in your caregiver folder. Put that in your Family Plan folder. Keep that safe in your Be Prepared file.

Here's what your completed Be Prepared file should include:

- Your family's important documents
- Emergency contact information

- Your Family Plan folder, including:
 - Description of your plan
 - A caregiver’s folder with important contacts and documents

Legal Documents (“Caregiver authorization documents”). The legal documents below give your children’s caregivers the legal right to make important decisions on their behalf. Learn about each and decide what is right for your family. A lawyer can help you understand these choices. Here are a few options:

- **Caregiver Authorization Affidavit.** If you want your kids to have a caregiver in case you are detained or deported, **this form is necessary.** It will allow the caregiver to take your kids to the doctor and bring them to school. Each US state has its own form.
- **Power of Attorney.** This form gives a caregiver power to make most decisions that a parent would make for their child. This gives them more power than a caregiver authorization affidavit.
- **Legal Guardianship.** This option also gives your children’s caregiver more power, and it is more permanent than giving your caregiver power of attorney. It would mean you have fewer rights to make decisions about your kids. Ask a lawyer if you decide to let someone else be your children’s legal guardian.

For more information on how to find a lawyer, see the [Know Your Rights](#) chapter.

- ★ **Emancipation Petition.** If your children are 16 or 17, they may be mature enough to manage things on their own. An emancipation petition would let them stay in the US without you and without a legal caregiver or guardian. If you choose to do this, keep the paperwork in your Be Prepared file.

Assess Your Finances

Save as much money as you can. Detention and deportation can be expensive. Save for:

- Legal fees
- Travel expenses
- Childcare expenses
- Living expenses while you look for work after your return or deportation

If you don’t have a lot of money but know you will be deported, see if family or friends can help. If you’re being detained, a friend or family member can go to the detention center and drop off a bag for you that includes cash (US dollars or your country’s currency).

If you don't have savings, think about how you will get money after your return or deportation. Will someone lend you money? Will you rely on wire transfers from loved ones in the US?

Charles Schwab is a US bank that does not charge ATM fees or foreign transaction fees anywhere in the world when you use its debit card. They even reimburse fees charged by other banks. Open an account and ask for two debit cards. Keep one for yourself and give one to a loved one in the US. Your loved one can put money in the account. Then, you can withdraw it for free in your country of origin. This way you won't have to rely on wire transfers which have fees.

Wise is a smartphone app and website for global money transfers that has very low transaction fees. This could help you move money from your US bank account into a bank account in your home country (a family members' or your own).

Plan for Health Care

If you are at risk of deportation, it's a good idea to address any health concerns now. If you can, get a dental exam, an eye exam, and a physical exam. Search for local free and low-cost health clinics in your area.

Next, get your medications ready. If you take prescription medication, get at least a 30-day supply. If you keep them in the original bottle and bring your prescription, you may be able to take them with you if you are detained and deported. Gather your medical records as well (for more on what documents and information to collect, see the checklists above).

Finally, learn about how you can apply for government health care or private health insurance in your country of origin. Learn more about health care in your country of origin in the country-specific sections of this book.

Plan for Employment

You may be worried about finding a job after deportation. Think about the skills you have as someone who has lived in the US. English language skills will take you far. So will an understanding of culture in the US. The Mexican government, for instance, has a program to fill many English-teaching positions. These jobs have good salaries and benefits.

Learn more about employment opportunities in the country-specific sections of this book.

There are some things you can do while in the US to make your job search easier after your return or deportation:

- **Education:** Improve your education and learn new skills. Get your GED, take college classes, or get vocational training or certifications.
- **Volunteer:** Gain work experience while supporting a cause you believe in.

- **Language:** If your English could be better, work on it. Take a class, talk to native speakers, and read in English. If your Spanish (or other language of your country of origin) is rusty or non-existent, try to improve it while you are in the US.
- **Update Your Resume:** Write, translate, or update your resume or *currículum* for your country of origin. There are some differences between what should be included on a resume in the US and in other countries. The [resources section](#) in the back of the guide includes sample resumes.
- **Network:** Talk with family and friends about your plans. They can help you get information, connect with new people, and find work after deportation. Ask friends and family in your country of origin to share your resume with employers.
- **Research:** Learn about what fair pay is in your country of origin. Find out what people in your field can make, if there is a minimum wage, and what the average wage is in different parts of the country. Consider researching job boards and other job-hunting resources beyond your immediate network.

Be hopeful. Many people have found jobs after deportation. With the right preparation and attitude, you can, too.

- ★ **Can you do your work online?** Spain has a visa program for “digital nomads” that may allow you to live in Spain while working online for your current employer or clients (if you freelance). If you are from certain Latin American countries, you would also be eligible for citizenship after two years. That would allow you to live not only in Spain, but in any EU country. Learn more at wisar.pro/visa-nomada-digital-espana-2025-freelancers. Learn about other countries offering digital nomad visas here: tinyurl.com/investopedia-nomad-visas.

Be ready to pivot. Be patient with yourself. You're eager to ... do all of those things. Be realistic with yourself, what you can really do, what is within your control. You're going to be facing a lot of things. -Roberto L.

- ★ **Prepare Before You Leave:** If you're a Mexican national living in the US, you can take online classes through Mexican institutions. These classes range from basic to university-level education. Learn more about these programs and other educational resources for Mexican nationals here: tinyurl.com/Guia-IMA.

Learn About Your Country of Origin

You may have culture shock when you arrive in your country of origin. Things may have changed a lot since you were last there, or you may not remember being there at all. Learning about the culture may help you adjust. Read and watch the news. Pick up a history book or even a novel from a writer from your country of origin.

To get an idea of what to expect in your country of origin, read the country-specific sections of this guide.

When I got [to Mexico], I couldn't get a job because I wasn't fluent in Spanish, I wasn't up to date with current events, with the culture. Study up on the history, culture, politics. You need to know all that to move around and not stick out like a sore thumb. -Israel G.

“Self-Deportation” and Voluntary Return

Some people are considering returning to their country of origin rather than staying in the US. The US government is encouraging this—by making people’s lives very difficult in the US, and then by making it easier for them to “self-deport.”

This has also been called “forced return” and “departure under duress.” We consistently use the term “self-deport” because we want to be clear. We also acknowledge that “self-deport” fails to convey the harm that is often caused by forcing people, under duress, to make this painful choice.

If you are trying to decide if you should “self-deport,” here are a few things to consider:

- Will “self-deportation” make it easier or harder to return to the US later?
- Would returning to your country of origin be dangerous? Would it be more dangerous than staying in the US?
- What resources do you have to make the trip and get established in your country of origin? What other resources are available?
- If you do choose to “self-deport,” should you use the CBP Home App?

This guide can't tell you what's best for you and your loved ones. But it can help you better understand your options.

Don't rush into a decision based on fear. Talk to a licensed and experienced immigration attorney who can help you explore all your options. Don't give up hope! You may still qualify for asylum or other protections (learn more in the [Getting Help to Oppose Your Removal](#) chapter).

“Self-deportation” through the CBP Home App: If you decide on “self-deportation,” the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) Home app is one option that can make some parts of your return easier, but it also has some risks.

- ★ **What's the difference between CBP One and CBP Home?** The CBP One app helped people apply for asylum. The US government shut it down in 2025. Two months later, they launched the CBP Home app. The CBP Home app helps people “self-deport” by allowing them to tell the government that they plan to return to their country of origin. People who use the CBP Home app to do this may be eligible for financial and travel assistance. You can learn more here: dhs.gov/cbphome.

Benefits and Risks of Using CBP Home	
Potential Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Less stress and trauma than detention and deportation ● Financial assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No guarantees of future reentry ● Limited protection from detention ● Personal information shared ● Penalties if you stay
<p>For an up-to-date and in-depth explanation of the pros and cons of using the CBP Home app, check out the National Immigration Law Center explainer, “Know Your Rights: CBP Home,” at nilc.org/resources/know-your-rights-cbp-home</p>	

NOTE: If you decide to “self-deport,” you are not required to use the CBP Home app to do so. Talk to a licensed and experienced immigration attorney before you decide on anything.

“Self-Deportation” vs. Voluntary Departure

“Self-deportation” is *not* the same as voluntary departure. Voluntary departure is a legal process where an immigration judge decides if a person can leave the US without a formal deportation order. A voluntary-departure grant occurs in court.

Voluntary departure can help you avoid the legal penalties of formal deportation. It can also make it easier to get a family, work, or humanitarian visa, and you may be able to apply for waivers to lift lengthy re-entry bans. This means you might be able to return to the US sooner if you choose voluntary departure instead of “self-deportation.” But not everyone qualifies for voluntary departure.

“**Self-deportation,**” on the other hand, is an independent decision, not a court process. The National Immigration Project publishes an “explainer” on the risks of “self-deportation.” Check it out here: nipnlg.org/work/resources/costs-self-deportation.

We highly encourage you to speak with an experienced immigration attorney to help you understand your options.

Other Resources: the Assisted Voluntary Return Program

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) Program is a free program that helps people make informed decisions about whether to return to their countries of origin. The program serves people from 11 countries in Central and South America as well as Mexico. People receive help to prepare for departure and support when they return to

their country of origin. The program assists with lodging, food, medical care, documents, travel tickets, and more. Check out their website to learn more: tinyurl.com/AVR-Program.