WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION

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What About My Children

Family Separation Among Parents Deported to Honduras

Acknowledgments

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Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, youth, and other people who are often overlooked, undervalued, and underserved in humanitarian responses to displacement and crises. WRC works in partnership with displaced communities to research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for gender-transformative and sustained improvement in humanitarian, development, and displacement policy and practice. Since its founding in 1989, WRC has been a leading expert on the needs of refugee women, children, and youth and the policies that can protect and empower them. Through its Migrant Rights and Justice program, WRC monitors US detention and deportation policies, advocates for access to sexual and reproductive health care, and ensures that the rights of migrant women and girls are protected.

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Since its founding in 1986, **Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)** has mobilized health professionals, scientists, and forensic experts to document and investigate human rights violations—including torture, sexual violence, attacks on health care, and mass atrocities—using rigorous medical, public health, and forensic methods to create fact-based records of harm. Through its evidence-based investigations and survivor-centered documentation, PHR seeks justice and accountability for survivors and works to protect health workers and affected communities. PHR pairs this technical expertise with advocacy and partnerships with local and international organizations to influence policies and practices that uphold human rights, including conditions in US immigration detention and access to asylum.

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Executive Summary

Since taking office in January 2025, the second Trump administration has rapidly expanded immigration enforcement, including detention and deportation of individuals living in the US interior.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

> *Of all the years I've been here, this has been the most unusual and difficult year we've had. The emergency began on January 31 [2025], due to the change in government under the new [US] president. The difference is that now they are being mistreated more in [US] detention centers, especially. [...] And there are many cases of people who have been separated from their families, many cases.* ***If you ask those who came today, if you had asked who left children in the United States, 80 percent would raise their hands.***"[1]
>
> – Medical worker who works with deportees at La Lima Reception Center
>
> *"Todos los años que he estado aquí, el año más atípico o más difícil que hemos tenido ha sido este año. La emergencia inició prácticamente el 31 de enero, año por lo del cambio de gobierno del presidente. La diferencia es que ahora están siendo más maltratados en los centros detención sobre todo. [...]* ***Si usted le pregunta a los que vinieron hoy, si hubieran preguntado quiénes dejaron hijos en Estados Unidos, el 80 por ciento levanta la mano.***"
>
> – Trabajadora medicaque trabaja con deportados en el Centro de Recepción La Lima

At the same time, the administration has weakened or disregarded numerous existing laws, policies, and safeguards designed to ensure due process, protect family unity, and preserve parental rights, with profound consequences for immigrant families and receiving countries. Detentions and deportations are likely to accelerate significantly, as the administration continues to implement the $170 billion dollars Congress provided for immigration enforcement under H.R.1, the "One Big Beautiful Bill."[2]

Unlike in prior years, when the deported population largely consisted of individuals and families that had recently crossed the US-Mexico border, the second Trump administration has primarily targeted longtime US residents, many of whom have lived in the country for years or even decades. The pace and scale of immigration enforcement has increased exponentially; immigration arrests more than quadrupled in 2025,[3] leading to the highest rates of immigration detention in US history.[4] Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) own data confirms that **92 percent of the detention increase has been driven by people without any criminal record**.[5] Many of those detained and deported are parents with US citizen children.

Significant numbers of detained and deported parents are experiencing violations of US policy[6] designed to protect family unity and parental rights. However, there is little publicly available information to assess the scope and scale of those violations, which include **deporting parents without providing them an opportunity to bring their children with them.** When parents are deported quickly and without an opportunity to arrange for the care of their children, their children often remain in the US without stable caregivers or support. Many remain in the informal care of friends, family members, or even babysitters, often without formal custody arrangements or legal protections. Their caregivers may themselves be vulnerable to immigration enforcement, leaving these children in even more precarious circumstances.

To begin addressing this information gap, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) and Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) traveled to San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Researchers co-located with service providers in the reception centers that receive deportees and conducted dozens of interviews with

reception center staff, physicians and psychologists, government officials, and deportees themselves.

Researchers uncovered significant violations of the administration's directive on detained parents, which requires that parents facing deportation be given an opportunity to decide what will happen to their children.[7] **From the cases researchers observed, these violations are leading to many family separations that, absent meaningful assistance with reunification, may become long-term or even permanent.** Researchers also uncovered significant abuses of pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women who were detained in violation of US policy.[8]

Key Findings Include:

- **ICE is violating its own requirements to prevent family separations. Violations made evident to WRC and PHR through interviews with deportees and service providers include:**
  - ICE is often not asking the people they arrest if they have children.
  - ICE is often not ensuring that children of the people they arrest are safe, even when parents notify arresting agents that their children will be left alone or urgently ask to make immediate care arrangements for them.
  - ICE is often not allowing parents to decide what will happen to their children if they are deported, and in some cases is disregarding written attestations by parents who wish to be reunified with their children before removal.
- **Significant numbers of parents interviewed were deported without their children.** Many were never asked if they had children or given the opportunity to bring their children with them. Some parents were separated from infants, including one mother separated from a baby less than two months old.
- **Children who are left behind in the US when their parents are deported often face precarious or uncertain living situations.** Many parents reported leaving their children in the informal care of friends or family members.
- **Pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women are being detained without access to adequate nutrition and medical care.** Some were denied access to essential healthcare despite being in acute medical distress.
- **Receiving countries like Honduras lack the necessary infrastructure, financial support, and basic information** from the US government to help efficiently reunify separated families, which could lead to long-term separations.

While not the focus of this study, nearly every person interviewed discussed the dehumanizing and traumatizing treatment they experienced while in immigration detention. Most described inedible food, lack of privacy (including having to undress, shower, and use the toilet in front of other people), denial of medical treatment and medications, and pervasive verbal mistreatment. Many described not being able to contact their families or their attorneys. All were exhausted after frequent transfers between detention facilities throughout the US and multiple flights before arriving in Honduras. This report honors their stories.

The exterior of the La Lima CAMR, just outside the San Pedro Sula airport in Honduras. Credit: Melanie Nezer/WRC

Introduction

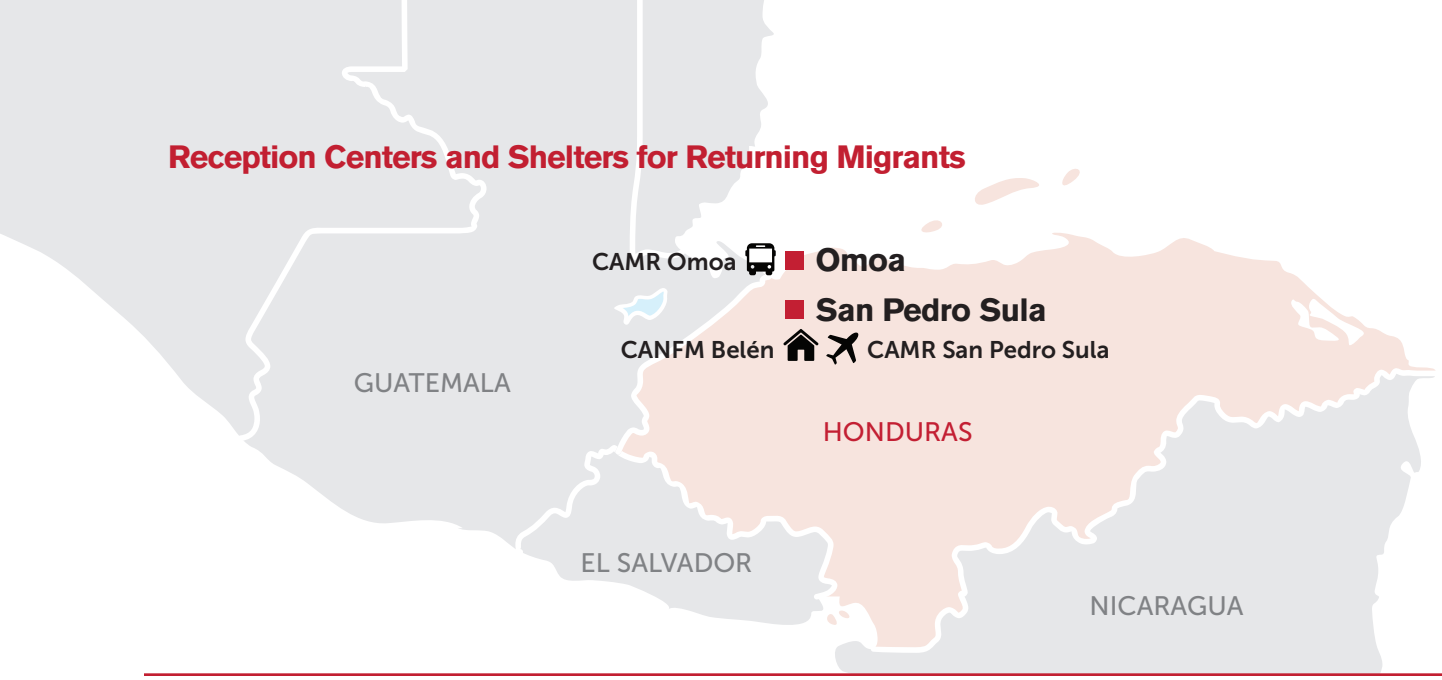
In November 2025, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) and Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) traveled to San Pedro Sula, Honduras to learn about the impact of current US immigration enforcement policy and practice on detained and deported parents.

For five days, WRC and PHR co-located with service providers in the Centros de Atención al Migrante Retornado (CAMRs) (Reception Centers for Returning Migrants).[9] The three CAMRs serve as the first reception point for every person deported from the US to Honduras and many regional migrants arriving by land. The Centro de Atención al Migrante La Lima (La Lima), located directly adjacent to the airstrip where deportation planes land in San Pedro Sula, provides initial intake and reception for every deportee arriving from the US. From there, parents who arrive with children and unaccompanied children are redirected to the Centro de Atención para la Niñez y Familias Migrantes (Belén), where they can receive specialized family services. The Centro de Atención al Migrante Retornado (Omoa) primarily receives regional migrants. The CAMRs were established in 2014 with substantial support and assistance from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), to better facilitate the reintegration of returned or deported Hondurans.[10]

At La Lima and Belén, WRC and PHR spoke with reception center workers, service providers, medical workers, social workers, and deportees themselves. In dozens of conversations, researchers learned about the alarming crisis of family separation resulting from what appear to be routine violations of Immigration and Custom's Enforcement's (ICE) own policies to preserve family unity and protect parental rights. **These include requirements that ICE ask whether the people they arrest have children, ensure children are safely with another party if the parent is arrested, and allow parents to decide whether to bring their children with them if they are deported.** Researchers also uncovered incidents of medical neglect and mistreatment of pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women who had been detained and, in some cases, deported without their infants.

These interviews echoed findings that both organizations have made over the past year. Since the start of the second Trump administration, WRC and PHR have been tracking significant levels of family separation, including in violation of US policy.[11] In July 2025, WRC travelled to reception centers across Mexico and Central America with the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), where researchers learned about hundreds of parents who were deported without being given an opportunity to decide whether they wanted to bring their children with them.[12] WRC has also been monitoring the detention and treatment of pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women in violation of US policy.[13]

The family separation crisis already unfolding is likely to increase exponentially as the Trump administration continues to spend the $170 billion dollars it received for immigration enforcement from Congress in the H.R.1 funding package.[14] To date, it is estimated that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has spent less than 10 percent of the funds; more than $150 billion dollars of these funds remain.[15] DHS continues to implement plans to massively scale up detention facilities and processing sites, including through the reported



Transportation and/or reception center Airport and/or reception center Reception center and/or shelter

CAMR = Centro de Atención al Migrante Retornado (Assistance Center for Returned Migrants)
CANFM = Centro de Atención para Niñez y Familias Migrantes (Assistance Center for Migrant Children and Families)

Source: GAO analysis based on International Organization for Migration Documentation

purchase of warehouses to serve as mass detention centers and deportation hubs.[16] Retrofitting these warehouses, hiring the necessary staff to operate the facilities, and other efforts to scale up immigration enforcement has taken and may continue to take time to implement, but is likely to result in substantial increases in the arrest, detention, and deportation of longtime US residents, including parents.

Timely and accurate information about the detained and deported population has also become increasingly difficult to obtain. Legal service providers, health-care workers, advocates, and even lawyers and family members have lost most of their access to US immigration detention facilities because of increasing government restrictions. Without access, there are few opportunities to monitor detention conditions, obtain information directly from the people who are detained, or provide detainees with information about their rights. In addition, DHS has effectively gutted its own monitoring and oversight agencies, leaving people in detention without avenues to report abuse.[17] Under these circumstances, traveling to receiving countries to speak directly with deportees has become one of the only ways to access information about detention conditions and deportation practices occurring in the US.

The purpose of this research is to inform US policy makers, international organizations, receiving countries, and the public about the immediate and lasting harms of current immigration enforcement practice and the urgent need for policy solutions that protect the health, safety, and rights of deported parents and their children. WRC and PHR also seek to provide Honduras and other receiving countries with information and recommendations to help tailor and enhance services to their returning nationals, some of whom have been in the US for years or decades and need different and greater support to successfully reintegrate. Both organizations also aim to prevent further family separations and reunify separated families by documenting systemic violations of existing family unity policies, identifying reforms to protect children and parents, and working with receiving countries like Honduras to establish systems to ensure prompt reunification of separated families.

Background

Immigration Enforcement in the Second Trump Administration

After taking office in January 2025, President Trump announced a "mass deportation" campaign, aimed at detaining and deporting undocumented US residents and barring the entry of new migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, to the United States. The campaign was publicized as an effort to detain and deport "the worst of the worst," namely violent criminals.[18]

During the first year of the administration, the US government engaged in a record number of immigration arrests, detentions, and deportations. Between January 2025 and November 2025, when WRC and PHR traveled to Honduras, the number of people held in immigration detention rose nearly 75 percent, from 40,000 to 66,000 people detained on any given day.[19] More recent data suggests that detention rates have soared even further, reaching almost 70,000 people by the end of 2025.[20]

Today, immigration detention is at the highest level of any time in US history. Contrary to the administration's stated intent of removing violent criminals, data shows that 73 percent of people who have been detained do not have any criminal convictions[21], and less than five percent have convictions for violent crimes.[22] In fact, **since the start of 2025, the number of people in US immigration detention on any given day without any criminal record whatsoever has increased by approximately 2,500 percent.**[23]

Instead, increases in the detained population have been largely driven by longtime US residents, many of whom have lived in the US for years or even decades. Significant numbers of them were detained during their prime working years.[24] Many detained people have active asylum claims or some other form of temporary legal status that allows them to live and work legally in the US. A substantial number are parents of US citizen children.[25]

At the same time as detention numbers have markedly increased, detention conditions have also deteriorated significantly. 2025 was the deadliest year since 2004 in ICE detention facilities, with more deaths in custody than occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic.[26] Evidence to date suggests that 2026 will likely see record levels of deaths in custody as well, with an average of one death every six days in the first two months alone.[27] Reports of insufficient or inedible food,[28] inadequate potable water,[29] overcrowding so extreme that detainees don't have space to lie down at night,[30] and life-threatening or even fatal lapses in medical care have emerged.[31] Pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women, whom ICE policy strongly counsels against detaining absent legal requirement or exceptional circumstance, have experienced especially perilous harms, including numerous reports of unattended miscarriage while in custody.[32]

The administration's deportation practices have followed similar patterns. Although deportation rates only increased approximately 18 percent from 2024 to 2025, the deported population, like the detained population, looks significantly different than in previous years.[33] As with the detained population, the majority of deportees are now longtime US residents. Also as with the detained population, ICE's own data confirms that the overwhelming majority of people

deported, as high as 88 percent for Latino populations, do not have criminal convictions.[34]

As significant as the numbers themselves are the policies, practices, and procedures now governing immigration enforcement.[35] Since the start of the new administration, ICE has changed, disregarded, or is no longer following longtime enforcement practices, due process requirements, or policies that afford detained immigrants a meaningful opportunity to protect their legal rights.[36] For instance, the eradication of immigration enforcement priorities (guidance to ICE on who to prioritize for enforcement, such as people with convictions for violent crimes) has contributed to the arrest and detention of significant numbers of people who would not have previously been detained.[37] The recission of the Protected Areas (or sensitive locations) Policy, which prevented ICE from engaging in immigration enforcement at locations like schools, hospitals, and houses of worship absent exigent circumstances, has similarly led to an increase in arrests in these locations.[38] Since May 2025, ICE has escalated arrests at courthouses where noncitizens appear for required proceedings in pursuit of lawful immigration status and at required check-ins with ICE officers.[39]

After arrest, ICE has also begun moving detainees between detention centers frequently.[40] In November 2025, the same month researchers travelled to Honduras, there were more than 1,000 ICE "shuffle flights" (transfer flights) between immigration detention facilities.[41] Frequent or rapid transfers, especially to detention facilities far from home, limit detainees' ability to receive visits from family and find or retain legal counsel, including to redress violations of their legal rights.

For parents, rapid and/or frequent transfers between detention facilities can make it impossible to protect their parental rights. Most parents WRC and PHR interviewed reported being moved away from their loved ones and communities within hours of being arrested and being transferred to as many as four or five detention facilities in the US before being deported. Research supports these findings; **one study found a more than twelve-fold increase in the number of parents who were transferred to facilities far away from their families, despite US policy strongly advising ICE to keep primary caregivers and legal guardians close to their children as much as possible**.[42]

Most interviewees also reported being deported very quickly, with the time between arrest and deportation averaging as little as four or five days. Accelerated deportations similarly place enormous barriers to a detained parent's ability to access legal counsel to protect their parental rights, communicate or visit with their children, facilitate reunification if desired, or make arrangements for their children's long-term care if their children will remain in the US.

On the Ground In Honduras

In February 2025, the Honduran government adopted a National Emergency Strategy for the Protection of Honduran Migrants (Emergency Strategy) in response to an anticipated increase of US immigration enforcement and mass deportation of Hondurans.[44] As part of that strategy, the Honduran government established the *Hermano, Hermana, Vuelve a Casa* (Brother, Sister, Come Back Home) program within the CAMRs, to provide deportees with short-term services and immediate essential resources.[45]

In absolute numbers, deportations to Honduras were relatively comparable to prior years. According to data collected by the Honduran government's Sistema de Atención Integral al Migrante Retornado, or Comprehensive Care System for Returned Migrants (SIAMIR), which collects information on deportees to Honduras, the US removed approximately 38,000 people to Honduras in 2025 (roughly 85 percent male and 15 percent female). This represents a slight decrease from the 45,923 Hondurans DHS reported removing to Honduras in 2024).[46]

However, the the medical workers, attorneys, and other frontline professionals WRC and PHR spoke with in Honduras all personally observed the impact of the larger shifts taking place in US immigration enforcement. First, nearly every service worker commented on the increased *pace* and *speed* of deportations. Although the absolute number of deportees did not significantly increase in 2025, the number and pace of *deportation flights* dramatically accelerated. Between 2024 and 2025, the number of deportation flights increased by more than 50 percent; flights now arrive daily, including on weekends, leaving reception center staff no respite from receiving planes filled with exhausted and terrified deportees.[47]

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

> *"Now we are seeing a much more rapid process. They are detaining people at most a week. And we are hearing more that officials are refusing to even answer their questions or to talk to them.* ***We are seeing more people who are being returned after having lived in the US for many years, 15-20 years. They don't even know Honduras****."*[43]
>
> – Medical worker who works with deportees the La Lima Reception Center
>
> *Ahora estamos viendo un proceso mucho más rápido. Detienen a las personas por un máximo de una semana. Y cada vez escuchamos más que los funcionarios se niegan siquiera a responder a sus preguntas o a hablar con ellos.* ***Estamos viendo a más personas que regresan después de haber vivido en Estados Unidos durante muchos años, entre 15-20. Ni siquiera conocen Honduras****."*
>
> – Trabajadora medicaque trabaja con deportados en el Centro de Recepción La Lima

Second, reception center staff and service workers all noted the impact of new immigration enforcement practices. Many deportees reported being arrested at work or at home, during daily activities like running errands, at traffic stops or while driving, going to the doctor, attending hearings at courthouses and government offices, or picking up children from school. They arrived at the reception center days or weeks later, without having had any opportunity to prepare. For some, the reception center was the first opportunity they had had to communicate with their children or their children's caregiver since their arrest. WRC and PHR's observed similar trends in their conversations with deportees.[48]

Finally, nearly every reception center worker, government official, or other service provider WRC and PHR spoke with identified the challenges associated with the changing population of deportees, from recent border crossers to longtime US residents. For instance, many service providers noted that newly

A plane carrying Honduran nationals deported from the United States sits on the runway after landing at the San Pedro Sula airport. Credit: Melanie Nezer/WRC

arriving deportees lacked close ties to Honduras, including friends or family members who could support them.[49]

All of these changes—the accelerated pace of deportations, the trauma inflicted by new immigration enforcement procedures, and a deported population that has been in the US for a long time—place substantial burdens on receiving countries like Honduras, many of which lack the infrastructure necessary to support deportees. Service providers noted that deportees' lack of long-term ties to Honduras makes them far more vulnerable, isolated, and in need of more and different assistance than reception center staff and the Honduran government are able to provide. The collapse of vital foreign aid, including the abrupt termination of USAID programs, has further hobbled the ability of receiving countries like Honduras to support the returning population.[50]

From the moment they step off the plane, deportees face obstacles large and small. Frequently, mobile phones, passports and other documents, and money that are taken when they are detained are not returned when they land, violating both ICE and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) policies requiring immediate return of essential items.[51] Many arrive without needed medications.[52] For many deportees, ICE's failure to return cellphones and identity documents leaves them vulnerable to violence and coercion; for instance, without identity documents, some may be unable to secure housing or employment in the formal economy. Parents without their cellphones may be unable to communicate with their child or their child's caregiver.

Migrants entering La Lima are given food, a hot beverage, and an orientation by reception center staff. Staff then begin the process of intake, including collecting basic information from deportees to be reported to SIAMIR, requesting documents such as national IDs, enrolling deportees into government assistance programs, and providing them with an opportunity to call family members. All women and men who present with serious health concerns are referred for medical and psychological screening. Every migrant is provided a bus ticket to wherever else in Honduras they wish to go. The entire intake process lasts approximately one hour, before the reception center must be cleared to receive the next flight of deportees.[54]

In 2025, the *Hermano, Hermana, Vuelve a Casa* program further provided each person with a $100 debit card and $100 food voucher (issued in equivalent lempiras, the national currency of Honduras). However, according to the Emergency Strategy that created the program, funding for these benefits expired on December 31, 2025. At the time of publication, WRC and PHR were not aware of any steps the government has taken to renew the program or create successor programming to support deportees' immediate reintegration needs.[55]

It was during this period, as deportees first arrived, that WRC and PHR researchers conducted interviews. Many deportees were too exhausted, hungry, and terrified to speak with researchers, but others were eager to talk about what they had experienced. Overwhelmingly, testimony focused on family members and children left behind in the US, urgent wishes to be reunited, and deep-seated fears about what would come next.

Many of the women with whom WRC and PHR spoke arrived without bras and underwear, because ICE officers seized those undergarments as potential weapons. Most men appeared able to keep their underwear, but they rarely arrived with their shoelaces. [53]

Methodology

WRC and PHR researchers conducted semi-structured interviews over the course of five non-continuous days, from November 16–24.[56] During that time, 122 women and 1,065 men arrived at La Lima and 43 women and 30 men arrived at Belén.

Number of Deportees Arriving at La Lima and Belén **NOVEMBER 17 – 24, 2025**		
Women	**163**	**3** visibly pregnant **4** reportedly postpartum
Men	**1,094**	
TOTAL	**1,258**	

The number of deportees who arrived in Honduras during the seven total days that the researchers were present was lower than average, due to a disabled aircraft that blocked the airstrip from November 18–19. During that time, one flight of deportees arrived in Honduras but was temporarily rerouted to Guatemala when unable to land.

Although researchers encountered both mothers and fathers who were primary caregivers, interviews prioritized speaking with mothers. As a result, interviewers spoke with nearly all women present, at least briefly, and with several men. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 29 parents. **Of the 29 interviewees, three women were visibly pregnant. Four were postpartum, meaning they had children less than one year old. All four postpartum women had been separated from their babies, including one infant as young as two months old**.

In-depth interview subjects were largely self-selecting, comprised of women and men who were willing, physically able, and psychologically prepared to speak with researchers. For ethical reasons, researchers did not interview women who were in visible acute distress and discontinued interviews if a participant showed significant emotional distress. Participant wellbeing took precedence over data collection.

Using a semi-structured format allowed researchers to collect specific information about compliance with US policy, while also providing interviewees with an opportunity to share any information they deemed important or relevant to their own experience. Researchers also used guided questions to elicit information about certain areas of experience, like access to healthcare. In interviews with pregnant women, researchers asked about access to medical care and other relevant services, the adequacy of care provided, and whether prenatal care was offered. In interviews with separated parents, researchers asked about the circumstances of separation, the involvement of US officials, the duration of separation, and whether parents had been able to maintain contact with their children.

WRC and PHR took steps to protect the security of all participants, including implementing measures to maintain confidentiality at all stages of the research. Interviews were designed to avoid the collection of identifiable information.

Findings

FINDING 1:

ICE is routinely violating its own directive on protecting the rights of detained and deported parents.

Since 2013, ICE has maintained policy to protect detained parents and their children.[57] These directives, known as "parental interest policies," provide guidance to ICE on how to engage with parents who are subject to immigration enforcement, including detention and deportation. Past versions of these policies have included guidance on whether and when primary caregivers should be detained, measures to ensure children of arrested parents have immediate care, guidelines on visitation between detained parents and their children, processes to enable parents to participate in child welfare proceedings, and other necessary steps to preserve family unity. They also include provisions that ensure parents can decide what happens to their children if they are deported.

On July 2, 2025, the Trump administration replaced the Biden-era directive, *ICE Directive 11064.3, Interests of Noncitizen Parents and Legal Guardians of Minor Children or Incapacitated Adults* (Parental Interest Directive), with new guidance, *ICE Directive 11064.4, Detention and Removal of Alien Parents and Legal Guardians of Minor Children* (Detained Parents Directive).[58] The new policy significantly weakened many of ICE's obligations towards detained parents and their children, including many of the provisions around visitation, communication, and cooperation with state child welfare agencies.[59]

However, the policy maintains (among other mandatory provisions) two firm requirements.[60] First, ICE must ask any person they detain at the time of arrest whether they are the primary caregiver of a minor child[ren] and, if yes, enter that information into a system of record.[61] Second, ICE must give parents facing deportation an opportunity to decide whether they want to bring their children with them or have them remain in the US, even though there is no longer a mandatory requirement to facilitate that decision.[62] (Facilitation, which is now only required to the extent operationally feasible, can include any arrangements necessary for a parent to operationalize their choice, such as extra time to arrange legal guardianship for a child remaining in the US, secure necessary documents like visas and passports, or arrange for a child to travel to the facility with a suitable caregiver so that parent and child can be removed together.) **Put simply, ICE must ask anyone they arrest if they have children; if they do, ICE must allow those parents to decide what happens to their children if they are deported, even if they are not required to help *facilitate* choice.**

WRC and PHR found routine and frequent violations of various requirements set out in the Detained Parents Directive. Of the dozens of parents WRC and PHR interviewed and the hundreds more we learned about from reception center staff, the majority of deportees were never asked if they had children when they were arrested and were not given an opportunity to decide what would happen to their children before they were deported.

These interviews suggest that other provisions are also being violated. These include a requirement that ICE ensure any children present at the time of arrest are safely cared for, either by a caregiver of the parent's choice or through the child welfare system/law enforcement. The Detained Parents Directive also requires that ICE record that information in its system of record.[63]

The majority of parents WRC and PHR spoke with reported never being asked about their children and being given no opportunity to bring their children with them, despite wanting or asking ICE to be removed together. However, the research team also spoke with parents who did not want to be reunified, or declined to tell ICE about their children out of fear. Researchers also learned of other parents who wanted to arrange for their children to remain in the US with spouses or trusted caregivers but were deported *with* their children against their wishes.[64] In some cases, parents may also choose to be deported without their children for other reasons, such as an urgent need to escape the conditions in detention. Parents who did not seek reunification with their children before removal may still desire reunification after removal and may need assistance to do so.

The range of responses indicate that there is no one "correct" course of action for parents, and no single solution that will meet the needs of all parents in every circumstance. Rather, it suggests a number of critical gaps in US law, policy, and practice that fail to provide parents with a meaningful opportunity to make decisions about what will happen to their children.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

> *"Last Monday, I was dropping off my son—who has a disability— at school. I left him and when I came back, I saw that some men were coming.* ***They didn't ask me anything, they just put me in handcuffs****, and I couldn't say even a word. That's how they detained me."*[65]
>
> – Mother deported without her 11 year-old son
>
> *"El lunes pasado, andaba dejando a mi hijo—que tiene discapacidad—en la escuela. Lo dejé y cuando venía de regreso, vi que venían unos hombres.* ***No preguntaron nada, sólo me pusieron las cachas,*** *y no pude decir ni una palabra. Así me llevaron detenida"*
>
> – Madre deportada sin su hijo de 11 años

Specific findings include:

ICE is not routinely asking people they arrest whether they have minor children or ensuring that any children present have safe care.

In dozens of conversations, the research team heard stories of parents who were arrested without being asked if they had children or if their children were safe. More than half of the parents researchers interviewed said that at no time during their arrest, detention, or deportation did ICE ask if they had children.[66] Some reported being told not to speak when they tried to volunteer information about their parental status, or being ignored when they managed to communicate with the ICE officer detaining them.[67]

Interviews also suggested that ICE is regularly violating requirements contained in the Detained Parents Directive that ICE ensure that the children of any parent they arrest have safe care.[68] One father who was arrested leaving his house told the arresting agents that his three year-old daughter was in the house with a babysitter and begged to at least be allowed to go inside and tell the babysitter that he was being arrested. Because his wife had already been detained, he urgently needed to secure care for his child. "They just kept yelling at me to get on the ground," he reported. "I tried to get away but they threw me to the ground and wouldn't let me say anything. They beat me really badly." He was never given an opportunity to contact the

babysitter or arrange care for his child, but the babysitter, who was concerned when the father never returned home, stayed with his daughter for 11 days.[69]

Other parents similarly reported being unable to make short-term care arrangements for their children, thus leaving their children alone or in potentially dangerous situations. One mother of four, whose husband had previously been deported, told researchers that her children were left entirely alone until their grandmother could travel from another state to care for them.[70]

Parents in detention are not being given the opportunity to determine what will happen to their children if they are deported.

The majority of parents WRC and PHR interviewed reported being given no opportunity to decide what would happen to their children when they were deported. One 27 year-old woman who was arrested while stopped at a traffic light was never asked if she had children, nor told that she could bring her 11 year-old son back to Honduras with her. When she talks to him on the phone now, he repeatedly begs her for reassurance, asking, "We're going to be okay soon, won't we?"[72] Another woman (quoted above), 22 years old and five months pregnant, was separated from her two year-old daughter; she reported never even being given an opportunity to speak with an ICE officer to tell them about her child.[73]

Some parents reported trying to tell their arresting officers that they had children and being ignored. One mother, who was arrested outside a hospital after a medical appointment, had three of her children with her and three others at home. According to the physician who recounted her story, she repeatedly told her arresting officers that she had three other children whom she would want to come with her, but she was dismissed. The family is now separated, with three children in Honduras and three left behind in the US.[74]

Even parents who provided written or verbal statements to ICE declaring that they wanted to bring their children with them were not reunified in advance of removal. As one mother who was deported without her daughter told researchers, *"Yes, look, they gave me a form and I filled it out—here's my name, look—and there I made it very clear that I wanted to bring my little girl. But they didn't listen to me. I told them, 'Look, I already signed, let me bring my children. They are with the older child and a sister of mine.' But even so, they did not bring her to me. I waited and waited. [...] Last night, at about 7pm, they told us, 'We're leaving.' And I thought, 'Well, I'm going with my girl.' But no, they didn't care. They kept us there until this morning, all night, hand[s] cuffed by the stomach. [...] and me feeling like I was drowning."*[75]

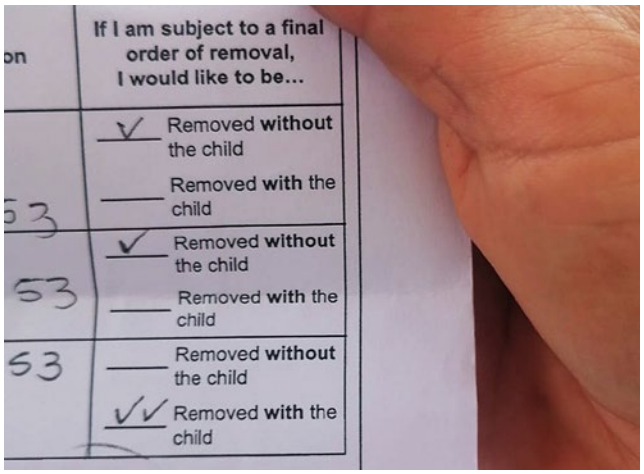
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"It's that they didn't ask me anything. They didn't talk to me, only to yell at me, to humiliate. ***They never said: 'You have a daughter, you can bring her,'*** *because I would have brought [my daughter], she is very attached to me."*[71]

– 22 year-old pregnant mother separated from her two year-old child

"Es que no me preguntaron nada. No hablaban conmigo, sólo para gritarme, pa' humillar. ***Nunca me dijeron: 'Tienes una hija, la puedes traer',*** *porque yo hasta de pronto la hubiese traído a [mi hija], ella es bien pegada a mí."*

– Madre de 22 años, embarazada y separada de su hijo de dos años



Excerpt of ICE Form 71-076 *Pre-Removal Parental Election,* filled out by the mother quoted on this page. Despite the form indicating her stated intent to have two of her children remain in the US and one be removed with her to Honduras, she was deported without this child.

Parents who were asked about their children expressed fear of exposing their children to enforcement, or of leading immigration officials to the undocumented family members caring for them.

The majority of parents the team encountered or heard about through reception center staff, medical workers, and other professionals were never asked if they had children or given an opportunity to tell ICE they wanted to bring their children with them. However, WRC and PHR researchers did learn of a smaller number of parents who *were* asked if they had children, but who declined to tell ICE about them out of fear.

The fear parents expressed took many forms. Some parents feared exposing their children to the dangers they themselves faced in Honduras. Others feared exposing their children to the enforcement and detention conditions they had endured in the US. One woman reported initially trying to tell ICE about her children, but changing her mind once she experienced the conditions inside the detention center.[76] Another, detained at a traffic stop while driving home from work, made clear to the arresting officer that she would have wanted to bring her children with her, but she did not want to put her children through the process she herself encountered.[77] A third mother, separated from her three children, including a three month-old baby, told ICE that she did not want to bring her children with her because she feared they would be shackled in the same manner as she observed adult detainees being shackled on removal flights.[78] Across interviews, WRC and PHR heard reports of anxiety about directing ICE to the home of the undocumented friend or family member caring for their child[ren], for fear that ICE would detain and deport those individuals as well.[79]

Some parents are deported with their children despite wanting them to remain in the US.

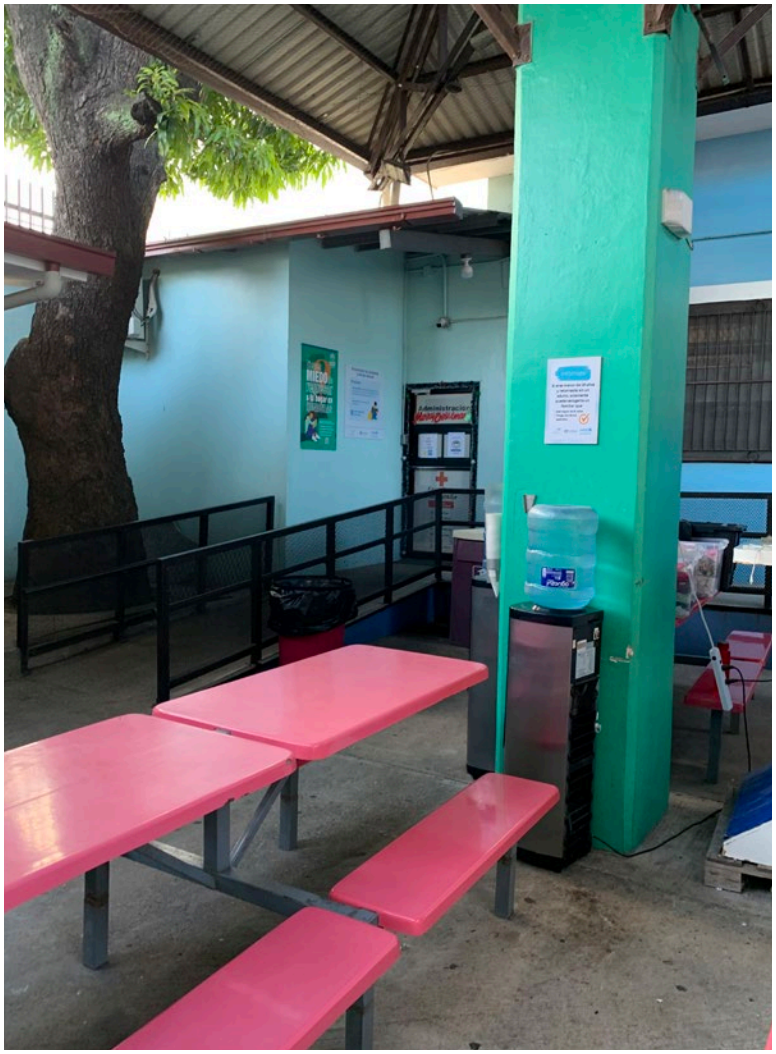
Although the majority of parents whom the research team encountered were deported without their children against their wishes, WRC and PHR also heard stories of parents whose US citizen children were deported with them, over their express wishes to have them remain in the US. As one reception center worker recounted, *"We see mothers who are not given the option of letting their US citizen children stay. Last month we saw a mother with two Honduran children and one US citizen [child]. The father had a green card, but the mother was not given the opportunity to let the US citizen stay with the family. She asked if she could talk with a lawyer or call her husband and they said no. She burst into tears here because she was not given any opportunity to let her child stay with the husband."*[80]

Some of these children had severe medical needs their parents knew they could not address in Honduras. One physician at Belén described cases of several US citizen children who were deported in the middle of treatment for serious, even life-threating conditions, with no way to continue treatment in Honduras. These include one child deported midway through a series of surgeries for spina bifida with a myelomeningocele,[81] and another deported while receiving essential post-operative care after having a kidney removed due to cancer. In both cases, the children had insurance to cover their ongoing treatment in the US.

FINDING 2:

Barriers to family reunification after a parent is deported without their child could lead to prolonged and possibly permanent family separation.

Once a parent is deported without their child, they face significant barriers to reunification, if reunification is their goal. These include legal and administrative barriers, financial barriers, and in some cases no way to physically reunify with the child. Neither US law nor policy recognizes a right to reunification if a parent is deported, including if that parent is deported in violation of ICE policy. There are also no established procedures within DHS for facilitating international reunifications, or guidance from the US government to receiving countries on how facilitate them. Receiving countries like Honduras also lack the funding, infrastructure, information, and experience necessary to reunify separated families. The impact of these barriers can turn preventable separations into long-term ones, with options for reunification deeply uncertain.



An eating area in the Belén family reception center for children and parents who are deported with their children. Credit: Melanie Nezer/WRC

The challenges facing parents seeking to reunify are myriad. First, reunification is extremely complicated, involving many state, federal, and sometimes international agencies. It can also be subject to multiple state, federal, and international processes and requirements. For instance, a US citizen child may require a US passport to board an international flight *and* a visa or a passport from the receiving country to arrive there. Although historically ICE has partnered with state child welfare agencies, other state or federal government authorities, and consulates to facilitate the necessary administrative work to ensure that parents and children can be deported together, the Detained Parents Directive no longer requires this cooperation.[82] In the absence of ICE's required cooperation, state child welfare agencies, humanitarian organizations, and other assisting agencies frequently lack the time, information, and assistance necessary to ensure that children have what they need to be deported with their parents. Many also lack the funding, resources, and knowledge to continuously and effectively assist families with reunification.

Second, Honduras and many other receiving countries lack the resources, infrastructure, and US government cooperation necessary to help parents

reunify with their children. While Honduras has taken significant steps to support deportees, including those articulated in the government's Emergency Strategy, they are unable to effect returns on a systemic scale without large-scale funding and support. This is also true of other receiving countries in the region.[83]

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

> *People do not know what to do once they are taken by ICE. They do not know what to do if their children are left in the US. We [Honduran officials] can't go to detention centers anymore. We were allowed before January 2025, but now we are not. We try to tell the parents that they will not have to pay to bring their children back to them. [Most people do not know about our program and do not know to ask, or they are afraid.]* ***Because people were treated as criminals in the US, they are afraid that we will treat them as criminals****, so people are afraid to leave their phone numbers [when they come through the CAMRs]. They are afraid sometimes to say that they left children back in the US. We try to give them some time, like a month, to re-offer services."*[89]
>
> – Official from the General Directorate for the Protection of Honduran Migrants
>
> *"Las personas no saben qué hacer una vez que ICE las detiene. No saben qué hacer si sus hijos se quedan en Estados Unidos. Nosotros [los funcionarios hondureños] ya no podemos ir a los centros de detención. Se nos permitía antes de enero de 2025, pero ahora no. Intentamos decirles a los padres que no tendrán que pagar para que les devuelvan a sus hijos. [La mayoría de las personas desconocen nuestro programa y no saben preguntar, o tienen miedo].* ***Debido a que las personas fueron tratadas como delincuentes en Estados Unidos, temen que nosotros las tratemos como delincuentes****, por lo que temen dejar sus números de teléfono [cuando llegan a través de los CAMRs]. A veces temen decir que dejaron a sus hijos en Estados Unidos. Intentamos darles un tiempo, como un mes, para volver a ofrecerles los servicios."*
>
> – Funcionario de la Dirección General de Protección al Migrante Hondureño

WRC and PHR observed many of these challenges. For instance, the Emergency Strategy lists family reunification as one of its priority areas and, during the visit, WRC and PHR learned of some coordinated actions the government is taking to reunify deported parents with children left behind in the US. These actions include working with Honduran consulates in the US to locate the child, obtain the required legal documents and travel permissions, and provide a consulate-approved guardian to accompany the child to Honduras. **Despite not being widely advertised, Honduran officials reported to researchers that 400 parents have sought reunification through the Honduran government over the past year.**[84]

WRC and PHR were unable to obtain official data on the impact of these actions, including information on the number of families reunified or average length of time of reunification. However, interviews with government officials and reception center staff revealed significant challenges. First, **the government has not established a formal program that can receive and process parents' claims and does not have established mechanisms for publicizing information about this work.** Many of the people with whom WRC and PHR spoke in the reception centers were not aware that the Honduran government could possibly assist parents with reunification.

Second, although receiving countries like Honduras may have identified a need for family reunification, many lack the funding, infrastructure, and expertise necessary to formalize nascent programs or goals. The loss of USAID funding along with other funding cuts in 2025 impacted the capacity of countries across the region, including Honduras, to support deportees.[85] In 2026, Congress has worked to continue funding in the region, but questions remain about whether and how those funds will be implemented.[86]

Third, ICE's failure to document required information[87] about the parents they detain, including whether someone is a parent and what provisions were made for their child's immediate care can further impede a receiving country's ability to reunify. At present, Honduran officials lack critical information from the US government about when parents of children are deported, where those

children are, whether the child is subject to state child welfare involvement, and what agencies might be involved in reunification. Absent this information, receiving countries may need to engage in complex family tracing work that is costly, time consuming, and administratively challenging to do without US government assistance.

Deported parents themselves also face substantial legal and administrative burdens to reunification. For instance, Honduran law requires that both parents sign documentation consenting to the return of a child to Honduras.[88] Although a deported parent can appeal to the Honduran Office for the Secretary of Children, Adolescents, and Families (SENAF) if the other parent cannot be found, those appeals are time-consuming and costly to both the parent and the government. If the other parent is detained, missing, has been deported to another country, or if the parents are not in contact (including due to violence or abuse), reunification may be expensive, delayed, or functionally unattainable.

FINDING 3:

US policies of forced separation traumatize parents and children and put them at risk.

In nearly all interviews with parents, reception center workers, government workers, and medical professionals, WRC and PHR heard stories of the physical and psychological impacts of detention, deportation, and family separation. In addition to their own psychological trauma, many parents discussed the trauma their children have experienced since their deportation.

Many of the parents with whom researchers spoke reported many of the physical and psychological symptoms associated with psychological trauma. These include experiencing physical pain, along with an inability to sleep or eat. Many reported losing a significant amount of weight during detention and constantly thinking about their children and the uncertainty of their situation. Researchers also witnessed many women arriving in acute emotional distress, including uncontrollable crying and visible panic. According to a medical worker at the reception center, this distress was closely linked to the separation from their children. Many had had no contact with their children or their caregivers for days or weeks. Uncertainty over reunification also contributed to the feeling of helplessness and panic.[90]

The trauma of separation is equally severe for the children left behind. One mother, whose four and six year-old US citizen daughters were living with their grandparents, reported that they had been physically unable to talk to her on the phone because they were crying too hard to speak.

Equally concerning are the possible physical and psychological harm to children left behind in the US without short or long-term care. As documented above, the interviews surfaced repeated instances of ICE arresting parents without allowing them to

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I was detained for three months, without knowing what was going to happen with my daughter. Nobody cared. They said ugly things, like as a migrant you have no rights. The treatment there is terrible. ...But look, nothing compares with the psychological. ***They killed me psychologically****."*[91]

– 35 year-old father separated from his daughter

Estuve detenido tres meses, sin saber qué iba a pasar con mi hija. Nunca me preguntaron si podía traérmela, y eso era lo que yo más quería. ...No me dejaron ni hablar. A nadie le importaba. A uno le dicen cosas bien feas, que como migrante no tiene derechos. El trato ahí es terrible. ...Pero mire, nada se compara con lo ***psicológico. A mí me mataron psicológicamente."***

– Padre de 35 años separado de su hija

make either short or long-term care arrangements for their children, while also failing to make those arrangements themselves.[92] Failing to ensure that children are safe and adequately cared for at the time of parental detention exposes the children in question to immediate risk and longer-term harm, including emotional distress, disrupted schooling, and unstable caregiving environments.

Both WRC and PHR documented the long-term physical and mental health harms on parents and children from the first Trump administration's "zero-tolerance" family separation policy.[93] Even reunified families have expressed persistent and irreparable psychological trauma. As PHR physicians documented, many met the clinical criteria for severe mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depressive disorder even years later.[94] This evidence suggests that the extreme pain and trauma caused by the family separations witnessed in Honduras may have similar lasting effects, which the research team's own medical expert and local medical professionals have already begun to document.

Women who had just arrived back in Honduras after being deported from the United States. Credit: Melanie Nezer/WRC

FINDING 4:

Pregnant women are not getting the care they need for healthy pregnancies.

Since 2021, the US has maintained policy (2021 Pregnancy Directive) that presumes pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women should not be detained, except under certain exceptional circumstances. [95] If pregnant, postpartum, or lactating women are detained, the policy requires that they be detained in conditions that are suitable for their physical and mental health needs and are monitored regularly to ensure that that detention remains safe and appropriate. The policy also contains provisions for their treatment and care while in detention, including medical screening and access to prenatal care. Other ICE policies, including the 2025 National Detention Standards, which provide guidelines to detention centers regarding the care and treatment of detainees, contain protections for pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women, including limiting the use of restraints.[96]

In the months leading up to the trip, WRC and PHR had been tracking significant violations of the 2021 Pregnancy Directive.[97] WRC's Detention Pregnancy Tracker—a nationwide reporting tool that allows legal service providers, healthcare workers, and others to submit confidential reports about detained pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women they encounter—has surfaced numerous instances of mistreatment, inadequate healthcare, insufficient food, and use of shackling and other restraints.[98] There have also been reports of women being transported in their second and third trimesters, including on long bus rides and flights, in violation of US policy and against medical advice.[99]

Nearly five percent of the women deported to Honduras in the week that WRC and PHR were present were visibly pregnant or reported being postpartum, meaning they had babies less than one year old.[100] All four of the postpartum women had been separated from their infants, without any opportunity to bring their babies with them. Medical staff at the reception center reported additional instances of pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women who had been deported over the previous year.

The team's interviews and medical staff reports confirmed the lack of medical care, poor detention conditions, and inadequate nutrition that WRC and PHR have been tracking over the past year. Each of the pregnant women with whom the team spoke shared stories of poor and degrading treatment, little to no medical care, and lack of access to clean water or healthy food. Only one reported being transported to a medical facility for prenatal care.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

> *"Two days ago,* ***they took me to the hospital to see a gynecologist, but they took me in handcuffs, like I was a criminal****. And while they were examining me, the guards didn't leave; they just stayed there. They sent me to take a urine test, and do you know what they did? They tied one of my hands to a pole in the bathroom, and with the other I had to hold the urine container, and the guard was standing outside with the door open. It would have been better not to have gone. …It was really awful."*[101]
>
> – Woman who was pregnant while in detention

> *Hace dos días* ***me llevaron al hospital a ver a una ginecóloga, pero me llevaron esposada, como si yo fuera una criminal****. Y cuando me estaban examinando, los guardias no se salieron; ahí se quedaron. Me mandaron a hacer una prueba de orina, y ¿sabe qué hicieron? Me amarraron de una mano a un tubo en el baño, y con la otra tuve que agarrar el botecito para la orina, y el guardia ahí afuera, con la puerta abierta. Mejor no hubiera ido. …Fue algo bien feo.*
>
> – Mujer que quedó embarazada mientras estaba detenida

She was placed in shackles throughout her medical appointment, including in the examination room and while giving a urine sample. **She also reported being constantly surveilled by ICE officers, who were physically present in the examination room and the bathroom**.

Reception center workers and medical staff reported instances of medically significant, even life-threatening lapses in medical care experienced by pregnant women in immigration detention. One medical worker described the case of a 25 year-old woman approximately 13 weeks pregnant who began bleeding inside the detention facility. Despite repeatedly informing guards of the bleeding over several days, she received no medical attention and was deported while still actively bleeding. She arrived in Honduras in an emergency condition and had to be transferred immediately to hospital care.

In another case, also reported by medical staff, a 40 year-old woman was deported without receiving medical care for almost two weeks after experiencing a missed miscarriage—a condition in which the fetus miscarries but remains inside the uterus.[102] The condition carries a high risk of infection and can lead to life-threatening complications such as sepsis and can even prove fatal if left untreated; however, the woman was deported 10 days after receiving the diagnosis, having received no medical care for her condition in custody. By the time she landed in Honduras, she was in acute medical distress and required immediate hospitalization.[103]

Medical staff also cited additional challenges providing medical care to detained pregnant patients. These women frequently arrive in Honduras without clinical records, test results, or other medical information, making it difficult to assess what care—if any—they received while detained. As one doctor reported, *"The main problem is the lack of information received about pregnant patients. There is no clarity about examinations, check-ups, or medical history. The authorities only provide a sheet with general information, and the CAMR does not have the equipment for obstetric evaluations."*[104]

Each of the women reported experiencing acute trauma, emotional distress, and fear for their health and the health of their unborn children. The team personally witnessed acute emotional breakdowns of pregnant women upon arrival in Honduras. Reception center staff confirmed that they routinely observe extremely high levels of emotional distress in the pregnant women who arrive at the center, including pregnant women who arrive "emotionally destroyed," with symptoms of extreme anxiety, panic, and psychological exhaustion.

Pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women may experience multiple violations at once.

Pregnant women who also have other children, and postpartum and lactating women who are detained and deported without their children, may experience violations of multiple policies simultaneously. A postpartum or nursing woman who is detained in violation of the policy and deported without an opportunity to be reunified with her child, experiences both detention violations *and* family separation in violation of policies that protect her parental rights. **Postpartum women who are deported without being given an opportunity to reunify with their children are, by definition, separated from infants who may be entirely dependent on their care.**

Conclusion

The dozens of interviews the team conducted in the Honduran CAMRs revealed the very real human consequences for parents and children of an immigration enforcement system in crisis.

The parents who were deported without their children that WRC and PHR spoke to all faced, at best, a long and uncertain road to reunification. Many of the reception center staff and frontline professionals expressed grave concern for the deportees they were encountering, including for the parents who were not given any opportunity to make decisions about their children. As one reception center worker expressed, *"I don't understand why they can't implement these [immigration enforcement] policies with more humanity.*[105]

The scope and scale of these types of family separations is likely to worsen in the coming months and years as the impacts of H.R.1 funding are realized. Between researchers' interviews in November and publication of this report, the administration has begun purchasing warehouses to detain thousands of non-citizens. One proposed facility in El Paso, Texas, could house up to 8,500 people, making it the largest detention facility of any kind in the country.[106] Conditions in these and other immigration detention conditions are expected to deteriorate further, due to overcrowding, inadequate services, substandard facilities, and other concerns already present in facilities of this scale. In addition to expanding detention into large warehouses, there are also concerning updates on care for those in detention, as recent reports suggest that ICE is no longer paying for detainee medical care, increasing the likelihood of harmful or even fatal medical complications in such large-scale facilities.[107]

Drawings by a 12 year-old deportee show her emotions as expressed through characters in the film Inside Out. She reported drawing the character Sadness the biggest because it was the feeling she had the most.
Credit: Diana Flórez/WRC

At the same time, receiving countries are receiving fewer aid dollars and even less assistance with reintegration and support programs for returning populations. In the absence of meaningful assistance to manage and meaningfully integrate deportees, receiving countries like Honduras are unable to provide the kind of assistance that separated parents need to reunify with their children living in the US. These countries require both sustainable funding and technical assistance to formalize programs that can help separated parents efficiently

comply with the complex legal and administrative requirements necessary to reunify with their children in their country of origin.

The US government, international organizations, and other global actors also have a critical role to play. Below, WRC and PHR provide some recommendations for Congress, the Department of Homeland Security, international organizations such as the United Nations High Commission of Refugees and the International Organization of Migration, and other global actors like development banks. These recommendations include ways to ensure that parents who are deported without their children can efficiently and effectively reunify in the receiving country, if reunification is their wish. They also include recommendations for facilitating deportees' integration into receiving countries like Honduras, including augmenting existing programming to mitigate protection risks. Central to many of these recommendations is a recognition that integrating and addressing returning populations, especially vulnerable populations, should be prioritized across international and US federally-appropriated funding streams and programming, especially as the scale of deportation and the number of returned deportees from the US increases.

WRC and PHR also include recommendations to the government of Honduras on ways to better assist and integrate their returning nationals, including deported parents. Many of these recommendations, especially around data collection, engagement with the US government, and programming to assist returnees with integration, are also relevant to other countries in the region, who are experiencing similar repatriation flows.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

> *There in Eloy it was horrible. A colleague's blood pressure dropped because she told them that she suffered from depression, but they did not give her medication or anything. They didn't want to take her to the doctor. And we began to shout that the woman was going to die, but they shouted at us that if we continued to make a fuss, they were going to send us to a punishment room. [...]* ***But we didn't care, mind you; that's when solidarity comes out, and we continued shouting.***"[108]
>
> – 35 year-old mother
>
> *Allá en Eloy fue horrible. A una compañera se le bajó la presión porque ella les dijo que sufría de depresión, pero no le dieron medicamento ni nada. No la querían llevar al médico. Y nosotras comenzamos a gritar que la mujer se iba a morir, pero ellos nos gritaban que si seguíamos haciendo escándalo nos iban a mandar a un cuarto de castigo. ...* ***Pero no nos importó, fíjese; ahí a uno le sale la solidaridad, y seguimos gritando."***
>
> – Madre de 35 años

During the visit, the team observed the critical role played by reception center staff, medical providers, attorneys, social workers, and other service providers in supporting individuals returning to Honduras following deportation. Under significant resource and operational constraints, these professionals provide essential services at a critical and traumatic time in someone else's life.

Interviews also reflected the persistence of parental efforts to maintain family ties following separation, as well as informal networks of mutual support among deported individuals. Despite the conditions described throughout this report, many interviewees reported shared coping strategies among parents facing separation from their children. WRC and PHR hope that this report can serve as much a testament to their bravery, dedication, and resilience as it is to the harms they experienced.

Recommendations

The Government of Honduras should:

1. Strengthen the Capacity of Systems to Support Deportees.

a. Formally designate returning populations as a priority group for reintegration support within national migration and protection policies. Special attention should be paid to vulnerable populations, including children, families, and separated parents, to ensure programming that meets their specific needs.

b. Increase staffing, technical capacity, and budget allocations for Migrant Assistance and Reception Centres (CAMRs).

c. Streamline and formalize coordination between the CAMRs, the Secretariat for Children, Adolescents, and Families (SENAF), consular services, and local authorities to ensure timely identification, referral, and follow-up for reunification and on protection cases.

d. Integrate SENAF's actions to reunify separated parents into the CAMR's reception program. Representatives of SENAF should be stationed in the CAMRs to collect information from deported parents and provide information on any available reunification assistance and requirements for reunification post-removal. Staffing should include people with expertise in the US child welfare system, to facilitate coordination with US child welfare agencies.

e. Ensure continued funding for the Hermano y *Hermana, Vuelve a Casa* program or develop a successor program to help address the immediate reintegration needs of deportees.

f. Standardize referral pathways for psychosocial, health, and protection services through the *Hermano y Hermana, Vuelve a Casa* or successor program, including through coordination with municipal authorities; develop specialized psychosocial and protection protocols for vulnerable populations and high-risk groups, including pregnant, postpartum, and lactating women.

g. Seek information from the US on the parental status of every deportee, as that information has been collected by ICE and recorded in ICE's system of record, to better facilitate reunification. That information should be shared with the SENAF and the Honduran Foreign Ministry, to help facilitate family reunification programming.

h. Work with the US government to streamline processing of passports and required travel documents for children of deported parents who require reunification.

i. Through Honduran consulates in the US, provide clear pre-detention and deportation guidance to Honduran nationals, including information on SENAF requirements for reunification (such as required documentation). Honduran consulate staff should consider engaging the state child welfare agencies in which their consulate is located, to help information-share about Honduran children and US citizen children of deported Honduran nationals who may be in state child welfare agency custody, whether due to

An eating area in the Belén family reception center for children and parents who are deported with their children. Credit: Melanie Nezer/WRC

immigration enforcement or for another reason.

j. Establish procedures for people who are deported without their personal belongings, including identification documents, phones, and other essential items; and work with the US to ensure timely and consistent return of deportee possessions.

2. Create formal and standardized data collection practices on the returning population.

a. Standardize the collection of demographic information and information about protection risks, including strengthening and expanding existing SIAMIR and National Institute for Migration data collection systems to include additional protection-related variables such as parental status, presence of US citizen or foreign national children, and length of residence in the US.

b. CAMR staff should include questions about the parental status of deportees, including about US citizen and foreign national children and reunification needs at initial intake; and refer identified parents to co-located SENAF staff.

c. Collect information on women who are pregnant, nursing, or postpartum (i.e., who have babies less than one year old).

d. Collect information on deportees with major medical conditions and work with the US on timely transmission of ICE medical records.

e. Develop mechanism to document health services delivery and coordination with municipal authorities throughout Honduras to better identify country-wide health needs and migration/diaspora populations.

International organizations, including UNHCR and IOM, should:

1. Work within Honduras and across the region to address protection needs of deportees.

a. International organizations should prioritize deported populations, especially vulnerable populations, across protection and humanitarian agendas.

b. The UN should advocate for ensuring that a portion of the $2 billion dollar US-UN humanitarian funding agreement, for which Honduras is a designated recipient, is allocated to address the specialized protection needs of deportees, especially women, children, and families. This allocation should include gender-responsive programming to prevent and address gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive healthcare needs, femicide, and family separation.

c. UNCHR should engage in regular and ongoing consultation with the government of Honduras and other governments in the region to expand opportunities for deported Hondurans who may meet the definition of refugee and face persecution in Honduras upon repatriation. UNHCR should work with host countries in the region to help coordinate response plans and establish fair and efficient procedures for refugee status determination.

d. International organizations should work with the Honduran government to improve monitoring and tracking of deportees who are subject to persecution or killed upon return, and to improve programming for populations that are especially vulnerable to violence upon return.

2. Improve reintegration for deportees.

a. UNICEF and other child-focused international organizations should provide technical assistance and expertise to the Honduran government, including SENAF and the Honduran Foreign Ministry, to assist with their family reunification programming and family tracing. These organizations should also work directly with the US to ensure swift and child-centered repatriation of separated children living in the US whose parents wish to reunify.

b. International organizations should work towards providing and supporting short- and medium-term shelter and protection services to deliver immediate assistance to deportees who no longer have family or kinship support networks in Honduras with whom they can reside upon return.

c. International organizations working with the Honduran government should work towards longer and more sustained integration-focused services for recent deportees, who have different needs than those previously returned from the US.

US Congress should:

1. **Codify parental interest protections, including a right to reunification before and after removal. Among core parental interest protections for detained parents, the legislation should also include:**

   a. Remedies for parents who are removed without their children

   b. A requirement that DHS appoint a National Coordinator on state child welfare and reunification issues for parents subject to immigration enforcement, as well as a requirement that DHS mandate assistance from the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs and the Department of Health and Human Service's Office of Refugee Resettlement, as necessary.

   c. A requirement that ICE transmit data to Consulates on deportees known to be parents in advance of removal, as well as any information required to be collected on the status and location of children under the current detained parent directive or any successor policy issued by the Department.

   d. Required quarterly reporting from DHS to Congress on the number of parents subject to a final removal order who elected to leave their children in the US, the number of parents subjected to a final removal order who elected to reunify with their children, and the number of parents for whom no preference was recorded.

   e. Resume requiring semi-annual reporting from DHS to Congress on the deportation of parents of US citizen children, broken down by nationality.[109]

   f. Require coordination between ICE and state child welfare agencies to facilitate reunification before and after removal.

2. **Include a prohibition in DHS appropriations bill text** that prevents ICE, CBP, and other immigration agencies from using any appropriated funds for enforcement that violates laws or DHS policy pertaining to family separation, specifically the Detained Parents Directive.

3. **Designate humanitarian and other funds** to support reintegration systems and programming across the region, including family reunification, family tracing, and support programs.

The US Department of Homeland Security should:

1. **Identify, document and protect medically vulnerable individuals in ICE custody.**
   Require ICE and CBP to conduct timely, standardized medical and mental health screening at intake and throughout custody, consistent with ICE Health Service Corps directives and the various applicable Performance-Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS); CBP Enhanced Medical Directive; and CBP Transport, Escort, Detention Standards (TEDS), to identify existing vulnerabilities including pregnancy, postpartum status, chronic medical conditions, disabilities, and serious mental illness, and to document these vulnerabilities in CBP and ICE systems of record. Such information should be shared to the extent possible with the consulates of the countries where the individuals are deported to.

2. **Implement existing presumptions of release for pregnant and postpartum women as required by the ICE Pregnancy Directive.**
   Establish an ICE policy to prohibit transfer or deportation of individuals with unresolved, unstable, or emergent medical conditions, consistent with ICE Health Services Corps (IHSC) medical guidelines on appropriate clinical care and medical clearance prior to movement or removal.

3. **Require standardized documentation of all medical events and medical care for those in DHS custody.**
   DHS should also enable flagging of high needs in all differing systems of record (CBP and ICE). Ensure such documentation is available for internal oversight, independent investigation, and accountability processes, consistent with ICE detention oversight and death review requirements.

4. **Within the Department, create a National Coordinator on child welfare and reunification issues for parents subject to immigration enforcement.**
   Consider an interagency taskforce that would include relevant DHS agencies, the Department of State Consular Affairs, the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement, and other agencies as necessary for facilitating reunification and facilitating required identification for travelling.

5. **Track compliance with ICE's Detained Parent Directive.**
   DHS should issue quarterly reports to Congress on all EARM (ENFORCE Alien Removal Module) data inputs as required by sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.5., and 5.6 of ICE Directive 11064.3. These anonymized reports should be make publicly available on the ICE website.

International donors and development banks should:

1. **Integrate deported populations** into bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks as a protection priority and ensure that they are systematically reflected in donor policy frameworks, country strategies, program design, and funding priorities.

2. **Support systems for return and integration** in receiving countries, including programming to strengthen data collection, family reunification, and reintegration.

3. **Invest in research** to generate evidence-based analysis of protection risks, barriers to reintegration, and other specific needs of returned populations, to inform funding decisions.

Bags of personal belongings confiscated by ICE and returned to deportees in Honduras.
Credit: Diana Flórez/WRC

Endnotes

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