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Deportation to Mexico: Resources to Meet Basic Needs

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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. We believe there is information here that can literally save lives, so 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.

Day-to-day life may be hard after you arrive. Many deported people struggle with finding housing, healthcare, getting a job, and paying for things. Others have trouble with addiction or mental health. Be patient as you figure things out. There are programs and people who can help. In this chapter, we share resources and ideas that may help you to meet the following basic needs:

- [Cost of Living Expenses](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Health Care](#)
- [Housing](#)
- [Transportation](#)
- [Government Financial Support](#)

The final section of this chapter covers **government programs** that offer some financial support for these basic needs. Most of the programs are for specific groups.

Cost of Living Expenses

Things are cheaper in Mexico than the US, but you probably won't make as much as you did before. You can see a doctor for free in Mexico's universal healthcare program or for around 100 pesos at a local pharmacy. Electricity is run by the government, which makes it cheaper also. Cell phones cost less than in the US, and landlines for local calls are even cheaper, although they aren't used much anymore.

Two exceptions are gas and clothes. Gasoline costs more, and clothing tends to cost more and be of lower quality. Clothes from chain stores don't last long, so if possible you may want to buy fewer clothes that are of higher quality.

Need Assistance? Here are a few places to start:

- **Food (p. 2):** Most major cities in Mexico have at least one soup kitchen or “comedor.” See the [directory](#) for locations.
- **Health care (p. 2):** The government provides a healthcare program for Mexican citizens called **IMSS-Bienestar**. Learn how to apply in the [Health](#) chapter.
- **Addiction (p. 3):** Groups such as Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous can assist you with addiction recovery. For a list of offices, go to aamexico.org.mx or narcoticosanonimos.org.mx.

Food

DIF (*Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* or Integral Family Development): The DIF program runs soup kitchens (*comedores comunitarios*) for vulnerable families. Search online for “DIF” and the name of your city or state to find your local DIF office. In addition to soup kitchens, DIF operates a food-pantry service where you can pick up nonperishable goods, like lentils, pasta, and canned foods. Some DIF offices also offer nutrition education and other family support, such as psychological counseling and adoption services.

Comedores para el Bienestar: Mexico City has its own food distribution system with two types of soup kitchens:

- **Comedores comunitarios** are community soup kitchens that charge 11 pesos per meal. They are open to anyone living in high-poverty areas, people over 65, children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, people without jobs, and people who are homeless.
- **Comedores públicos** are public soup kitchens that serve the same groups of people but are free. You will need to enroll to get meals. Find more on these programs at their official website: tinyurl.com/comedores-bienestar.

Tiendas Bienestar. These government stores sell food staples (like milk, beans, grains, and vegetables) and other basic goods at reduced prices. There are over 25,000 Tiendas nationwide (many are rebranded Diconsa stores). These stores can be especially helpful for people living in rural areas.

BAMX Bancos de alimentos locales. The nonprofit CSO BAMX runs 60 food banks located across Mexico. You can find their nearest location here: bamx.org.mx/bancos-de-alimentos.

Social Milk Program. This nationwide government program provides low-cost high-quality milk to families in need. Learn more at tinyurl.com/milk-program-MX.

Church soup kitchens. Many churches have soup kitchens. The Cathedral of Mexico City offers meals on Saturday mornings. Check with your local Catholic church to see if they can help. Search online for “comedores comunitarios” or “comedores públicos” in your area.

For contact information and other food programs, see the [directory](#).

Health Care

IMSS-Bienestar is a government healthcare program for all citizens who do not have access to other health care. It is most often used by Mexicans who are not employed or who cannot afford other health insurance. It provides medical, surgical, pharmaceutical, and hospital services, and it will cover expensive illnesses and life-threatening emergencies.

IMSS-Bienestar is currently available in 23 states. You can find out if this program is available in your state at registro.imssbienestar.gob.mx, and, if it is, you can register online at app-registro.imssbienestar.gob.mx. You can also register in person at any hospital or clinic that participates in the IMSS-Bienestar program. You will need your CURP, a photograph, an official ID, and your email address.

Call 911 for Emergencies. Just like in the US, you can call 911 if you're having an emergency. Other important or useful phone numbers include:

- Non-emergency police: 060
- Red Cross: 065
- City hotline: 070 (in some cities)
- Information: 040
- Fire department: 068
- Anonymous report (abuse or corruption by a government official): 089
- Highway emergency: 074

Mental Health and Substance Use

If you struggle with mental health or substance use, you can find support here:

Government Resources

- **SAPTEL (Helpline, (55) 5259-8121).** The SAPTEL hotline offers free guidance, referrals, psychological support, therapy, and emotional crisis intervention. Their Spanish-language service is free, available 24/7, and provided by trained and supervised psychologists. You can reach them at **(55) 5259-8121** or **(800) 472-7835**.

- **La Línea de la Vida (Helpline, (800) 911-2000).** This 24/7 Ministry of Health service is for anyone who is experiencing addiction, gender violence, suicidal thoughts, or other mental health challenges. You can also call for a friend or loved one. Mental health professionals will listen to you and provide guidance. Call them at **(800) 911-2000**.
- **IMSS-Bienestar.** The majority of hospitals and clinics that participate in this government healthcare program have psychologists on staff. There is also a special program for teenagers dealing with substance use issues called “Centros de Atención a la Salud del Adolescente” (CASA).
- **DIF (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia or Integral Family Development).** Your local DIF office may offer low-cost therapy. Here’s a directory of DIF locations in Mexico City: tinyurl.com/Mexico-City-DIF. For other locations, search online for “DIF” and the name of your town or city.

Support groups. If you’re living with an addiction, nonprofit support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (aamexico.org.mx) or Narcotics Anonymous (narcoticosanonimos.org.mx) can help.

Housing

If you have family in Mexico, you may want to stay with them at first. Mexico is very family-oriented. It’s common for many relatives to live in one house. You may even want to live with distant relatives.

Consider your options carefully. Where will you have family or friends to help you? Do you like a big city or a small town? Which areas have the kinds of jobs you are looking for?

Safety

Consider safety when choosing a place to live. Is it well lit? Does your building offer security? No matter where you live, be aware of what’s going on around where you live and avoid wearing flashy jewelry or using your phone in the street. Consider changing the lock as soon as you move in.

Renting

Costs: The cost of housing depends on where you live. If you don’t have a lot of money, you can rent a room in a shared house. Look for signs posted on telephone poles or at small businesses. Renting a room can cost around 2,000 to 4,000 pesos. Rent for a full apartment varies depending on where you live. In some places, it will be 5,000 to 7,000 pesos, but you may pay closer to US prices in larger cities or higher-end neighborhoods of Mexico.

Finding an apartment: Most people find rooms or apartments by word of mouth or by responding to ads. Facebook marketplace and Facebook groups are common ways to find

housing rentals too. If there's a neighborhood you like, walk around and look for "for rent" ("Se renta") signs in windows. These options may not be listed elsewhere. Here are a few websites that can help—but be aware that these websites often times only show a fraction of what is actually available:

- trovit.com.mx
- vivanuncios.com.mx
- inmuebles24.com

Once you've found a place and you go to meet the landlord, be sure to arrive on time and dress nice. Consider covering tattoos. Expectations may be different than what you're used to in the US.

Rental contract (*contrato*). Make sure to ask for a rental contract to protect yourself. If the landlord does not provide one, simple rental contract forms may be available at neighborhood stationary stores.

Security deposits. Just like in the US, security deposits are used by landlords to cover damage to the apartment after you leave. They can also be used for regular wear and tear. For instance, it is common to be charged for a new coat of paint when you leave. If your landlord requires a security deposit, they may keep it if you decide not to move in. Most security deposits are one month's rent, but there is no limit to how much a landlord can charge. It is important to get a rental contract in writing before paying a landlord and to also get a receipt after paying.

When you move in, take photos of any damage you notice; let the owner or manager know about these things so that you don't have to pay for them later. Also, be aware that landlords can use your deposit to cover your last month's rent. If your landlord is planning on doing this, they will not return your deposit to you when you move out. So be sure and ask your landlord about this before paying the final month's rent.

- ★ Sometimes a co-signer (*fiador*) is required by the landlord when signing a lease. A fiador must own property in the same state and is responsible for paying the rent if you don't.

Take your time. Get a plan together to achieve short and long-term goals. Ask questions. Everything changes, so ask and learn. -Brian N.

Breaking a lease. If you need to move out before your lease has expired, you will have to pay a fee for breaking the lease. The amount that you will pay will normally be listed in the rental contract.

Government Resources

Programa de Vivienda Social (PVS) (Social Housing Program). PVS helps people who need housing but don't have enough income to afford it. To learn more about PVS, including how to apply, visit tinyurl.com/Vivienda-Social.

INFONAVIT (Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores). The INFONAVIT program helps workers with formal jobs buy, build, or improve a home using low-interest loans. The loans are funded through mandatory employer contributions. To use the program, you need to be formally employed, have an NSS, and meet the program's requirements. To learn more about how the program works, visit portalmx.infonavit.org.mx.

Transportation

Most communities in Mexico have their own public transportation systems. For short and medium distances, passenger vans commonly known as *combis* provide an inexpensive way to travel. They usually follow a set route and run often, but they may wait to leave until they're reasonably full.

If you return to Mexico City, you'll have many options for getting around. The city has a good metro system that charges just 5 pesos per ride (about 25 cents). It also has metro buses, regular buses, taxis, bikes and Uber. Here are a few options:

Buses and Metro

Public transportation in Mexico is cheap, but ask people whether it's safe to use in your area. Try not to travel late at night by yourself. In some cities, buses have been the target of robberies.

Metrobuses: In Mexico City and other major cities, you will find Metrobús buses. They travel in their own lanes, which makes them a faster way to get around. In Mexico City, riders buy a card and recharge it. Rides are 6 pesos. Adults over 70 years of age, people with disabilities, and children under 5 ride for free.

Living in a small town, buses only pass every 45 minutes, and if you miss one you have to wait for the next bus to pass by. This is important if you work or need to go to the dentist or doctor. [Once,] I got stuck... it was getting late and I missed the bus, so I had to take a cab, which charged me 500 pesos for a 40 minute ride. -Ricardo

Metro: Mexico City's subway is the cheapest in the world at just 5 pesos. It is efficient but crowded. Stay aware and carry your valuables in a safe place. Do not keep them in your back pocket.

For a map of the subway system in Monterrey, Guadalajara, or Mexico City, you may want to download the "**Metro - Metrobús México**" app. It can also help with route planning, finding

nearby stations, and getting schedules and fare information. But to get official updates and live Metrobús arrival times, Mexico City's official Metrobús app, "**App CDMX**," is more reliable.

Carpool and Rideshare Programs

Many people in Mexico save money with carpool and rideshare programs. Talk to family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors about driving together and sharing the costs. You can find carpool programs online, as well. Start here: tinyurl.com/MX-carpool.

Taxis and Ride-Hailing Apps

You can take taxis in cities and towns throughout Mexico, but they are not always safe. Outside of train stations and metro stops, you will hear people calling, "Taxi? Taxi?" Their rides are expensive and could be scams. When possible, take taxis from authorized taxi stands or booths, such as those inside an airport or train station. Hailing a taxi is also possible, but before you do, try to ask a local which companies are trustworthy.

In many parts of Mexico, people use ride-hailing apps like Uber and Didi. These apps work the same in Mexico as they do in the US. If this is new to you, read Uber's safety tips before riding (tinyurl.com/uber-tips).

Biking

Biking is a healthy way to save money and explore. But it can be very dangerous in big cities. If you choose to bike, always wear a helmet, and be alert. Make sure your bike has reflectors and lights if you ride at night, and wear light, easy-to-see clothing.

Bicycles should follow most of the same rules as cars. They must stop at stop signs and traffic lights. Use hand signals to switch lanes or make a turn, and yield to pedestrians.

In some cities, you can rent bikes. For Mexico City bike rentals, go here: ecobici.cdmx.gob.mx. If you want to buy, you can save money at second-hand bike stores.

★ Going for a ride in Mexico City? Plan your route here: bbbike.org/MexicoCity.

It can be done, it's just your mindset. And I fall short all the time, we fall short. It can be done, it can. -Ivan R.

Cars

You may need to buy a car to get around. Car payments in Mexico go from 3,500 to more than 7,000 pesos per month, even for a used car.

★ **A note about buying from individuals:** Many people in Mexico buy cars directly from other people. If you don't know the seller, this can be risky. But if you choose to do this, here are some things to keep in mind:

- If possible, make sure the seller is someone you know and trust.
- If you don't know the seller, check with local police to make sure the car is not stolen.
- Have a trusted mechanic look at the car before you buy.
- Get copies of the seller's ID and proof of address (a utility bill for instance).
- Make sure to get a letter of sale filled out according to the laws of your state when you buy. You can find these letters in neighborhood stationary shops (*papelarias*).

Keeping Your Car Legal in Mexico

In Mexico, your vehicle needs current, registered license plates. This official SEMOVI website explains how to register your vehicle and what it will cost you: tinyurl.com/Vehicle-reg-MX. Many states also require an annual sticker that you would pay for separately. In some states, you must also pay a fee for a smog check.

Liability insurance that has been **issued by a Mexican insurer** is required to drive on Mexican roads, and there are penalties for driving without it.

If you plan on driving in Mexico City, be aware of what days you are allowed to drive your car. Due to extreme air pollution, certain license plate numbers cannot drive on certain days. There are many limits on out-of-state vehicles in Mexico City as well. When smog is very bad, this restriction will include more days. Learn more here: hoj-no-circula.com.mx.

Government Financial Support

The Mexican government offers cash assistance to Mexican citizens who need help. Most of these programs are run through the Secretaría de Bienestar (Ministry of Welfare). You can find your nearest Bienestar office at directoriodesucursales.bancodelbienestar.gob.mx.

- ★ The government automatically distributes benefit payments through the **Banco del Bienestar** card. You can use the card to withdraw cash, check your balance, or make purchases—just like you use a standard debit card. You can avoid bank fees by using Banco del Bienestar offices or ATMs.
- **Programa para el Bienestar de las Niñas y Niños, Hijos de Madres Trabajadoras** (Program for the Wellbeing of Girls and Boys, Children of Working Mothers) provides bimonthly financial support to children, adolescents, and young people in vulnerable situations due to the temporary or permanent absence of one or both parents. The program offers two kinds of support:
 - **Support for Children of Working Mothers** is available when one or both parents are absent from the household due to abandonment, migration, or other reasons. It

provides 1,650 MXN every two months for children without disabilities under age 4, and 3,720 MXN pesos every two months for children *with* disabilities under age 6. It supports a maximum of three children per household.

- **Support for Children and Youth Orphaned by Maternal Loss** provides bimonthly payments of between 830 and 1240 MXN to children and young adults (under the age of 24) who are in a vulnerable situation due to the death of their mother. Learn more at tinyurl.com/Children-and-Mothers.

- **Pensión para el Bienestar de las Personas con Discapacidad** (Program for Individuals with Disabilities) provides bimonthly payments of 3,200 MXN to individuals under 65 years old with permanent disabilities in 24 Mexican states. In the other 8 states, the benefit is for people under 30 years old, and beyond that age, only Indigenous or Afro-Mexican people and people in highly marginalized communities are eligible. If the applicant cannot register in person, they may appoint a representative, who must present their own ID, CURP, proof of address, and proof of their relationship to the applicant. Learn more at tinyurl.com/BE-disabilities.

- **Pensión para el Bienestar de las Personas Adultas Mayores** (Senior Support Program) provides bimonthly payments of 6,200 MXN to individuals aged 65 and older. Applicants may choose to have a representative complete the registration process for them, as long as the representative provides valid ID, CURP, proof of address, and proof of their relationship to the applicant. Learn more at tinyurl.com/Sr-Support-MX.

- **Pensión Mujeres Bienestar** (Women's Wellbeing Program) provides bimonthly payments of 3,000 MXN to women who are from 60 to 64 years old. The program is designed to support women's economic independence. Learn more at tinyurl.com/Womens-Wellbeing-MX.

- **Coordinación Nacional de Becas para el Bienestar** (National Wellbeing Scholarships) are available to all students enrolled in public institutions, including preschool, upper secondary, and higher education. For support for younger students and their families, see the "Enrolling Children and Transferring Their Progress" section. For scholarships supporting higher education, see "Scholarships and Financial Aid." Both sections are in the "[Education](#)" chapter.

Although it does not offer cash assistance, the **National Institute for Elder Adults** (INAPAM) offers benefits on a variety of discounts on products and services for adults age 60 or over. To qualify for INAPAM benefits, you first must obtain INAPAM credentials at your local Bienestar module. Learn how at tinyurl.com/INAPAM-reqs. Learn more about INAPAM benefits at tinyurl.com/INAPAM-benes.

Unemployment Benefits

In the US, unemployment insurance is available to almost everyone. Mexico does not have a similar program, but there are a few state and federal programs that can help.

In Mexico City, you will have access to the **Mexico City Unemployment Benefit** (Programa seguro de desempleo de la Ciudad de México). This program's goal is to help workers get jobs and training. It offers unemployment benefits for up to three months, including a monthly payment equal to one month of minimum-wage payment (currently 3,349 pesos).

To qualify, you must be over 18 and live in Mexico City. You must not have a job, but you must be looking for one. You must not receive other income transfers, such as a pension.

For information on requirements and how to apply, visit segurodedesempleo.cdmx.gob.mx or contact them at segurodedesempleo@cdmx.gob.mx, (55) 5709-3233, or (55) 5038-0200.

If you live outside of Mexico City and are looking for state-level unemployment programs, search online for the name of the state and key terms like “seguro de desempleo” (unemployment insurance) or “apoyo de desempleo” (unemployment support).

IMSS Unemployment Benefits for Formerly-Employed Private Sector Workers: If you are unemployed but previously had a job with IMSS (Mexican Social Security Institute) benefits and a pension, you may be able to access some of your pension funds now. Normally, you have to wait until you are 60 years old and have worked for 500 weeks to get these funds. But this program allows unemployed people to get up to 30 days' worth of savings from their pensions once every five years. This means you will have less money for your retirement, but depending on your situation, it may be worth it.

For more information, visit tinyurl.com/early-IMSS-withdrawal. To apply, go in person to your local IMSS office. Find it here: imss.gob.mx/directorio.