

BROKEN HOPE

Deportation and the Road Home

Executive Summary



Listen at reunite.us/listen/brokenhope-english or scan the code.

What if you were forced to pack your belongings and leave your family, friends, career, home, and life behind? Could you say good-bye to everyone and everything you love, not knowing if you will see them again? That is what deportation is: permanent banishment from your home, family, friends, and job, from a life built over years. It is an extreme action that causes lasting harm to everyone it touches.

“It’s not easy to be in a country for almost twenty years and build your life and one day, it stops. It’s a long way to get experience in another country. To learn English. To go to school at nighttime. To learn. Go to work. And then one day they say stop. You don’t have it [anymore], you have to leave. **The day [ICE] told me that — it was the end of the world for me.**” — Goura Ndiaye



Goura at work in Columbus

Maryam Sy, an organizer with the Ohio Immigrant Alliance (OHIA), spent hundreds of hours interviewing people who were deported to find out what they wanted the world to know.

“A lot of these people went through, I think, the hardest part of their life when they were deported,” she reflected. “Because it was like a broken hope, like the government broke their hope. They came to America to seek asylum for a better life.”

Broken Hope: Deportation and the Road Home is a collaboration between the OHIA and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) that highlights the experiences, hopes, and dreams of 255 people who were deported from the United States, as well as their loved ones. They are part

of OHIA's #ReuniteUS campaign, which seeks to change policy so that more people who were deported can return.

They exist

Sy interviewed people born in 27 countries, primarily in Africa. They built lives in at least 20 U.S. states, with a median residency of 17 years. They speak more than 22 languages. Two hundred and eleven know two or more languages, and 83 know at least four.

Seventy-three are parents of a child or children living in the United States, and nine of the people interviewed are married to citizens. Many worked legally while in the U.S., paying taxes and accruing Social Security retirement income they cannot access after deportation. Those who had businesses were forced to close them. Families who have mortgages are struggling to keep their homes.

Seven people returned to the U.S. legally after the Biden administration took office, and at least one has a green card. Four people died after being deported. Most are still fighting to reunite with their families while trying to stay safe in their countries of origin or find a new home.

They matter

One person interviewed for the #ReuniteUS campaign said, "I have kept my courage for my family. Now I am desperate because my life is sad, especially when I see my daughter by video call. I have never hugged her, and it hurts."

Immigration detention and deportation unravels lives, with crushing consequences for children, partners, parents, and communities. *Broken Hope* connects the experiences of people in #ReuniteUS with studies that show these harms are universal. And it details how deportation is an extreme response to a visa problem.

Said another person interviewed by Maryam Sy, "I have a daughter, and I miss her. She needs me in [her] life. I just want to have a life, I can't survive in Africa. In America I had an opportunity to see my daughter grow. I want my daughter to grow up with me. I want her to know who I am."

As a result of deportation, individuals and families, including young children and people of advanced age, experience:

Economic insecurity, including lack of access to food, housing, health care, and childcare; serious mental health problems, resulting in self-harm and long-term damage; Adverse Childhood Experiences, toxic stress, and poor physical health; disruption of education and career goals; persecution, exploitation, homelessness, and

a lack of safety; the stress and financial strain of becoming a “single parent” unwillingly, and overnight; feeling powerless to help the people they love; and fractured bonds and relationships.

The fallout of deportation impacts the person who is deported and everyone it touches. Removing valued individuals from their families and communities weakens both, as well as society as a whole.

But it doesn't have to be this way. The impact of deportation is a human-made problem, and the solution is also in the hands of people.

They want to come home

Demba Jobe, who was deported to The Gambia, wrote, “I'm still in love with my wife. Love my family, you know, and I wish to come back and stay with them, you know, and continue the life I was doing with her because she nee[ds] me. I need her.”

The people involved in #ReuniteUS want their existence and experiences recognized. When Saidu Sow's wife and daughter came to visit him in Mauritania, weeks after he was deported, he sent a video message out to the world.



Saidu's daughter visiting him in Mauritania

“The reason why I wanted y'all to have this video was to show to y'all guys 'cause you help immigrants, maybe a decent individual could have a look at it. They probably might have a little heart about separating families because I'm a victim of that, and that thing will follow you. 'Cause it follows me right now. Like, I'm emotional and I'm, I feel like sometimes there's no hope, I feel like it's over. The world is ending for me, you know?”

The road to return exists, but leadership and action are needed

Broken Hope: Deportation and the Road Home lays out steps that the Executive Branch, Congress, the media, and the immigration movement should take to center the experiences of deported people and their families, and pave their paths home.

The book urges the Executive Branch to end the use of immigration jail; broaden paths to return in existing policies and directives, including the use of humanitarian parole; support motions to reopen, waivers, and other applications from people who have

access to immigration status under the law; and help people who were deported access retirement benefits they have earned.

Broken Hope also calls on the administration to review immigration policies and structures from a racial equity lens, including agency decisions and how the immigration courts operate.

Recommendations for Congress include passing legislation to repeal key provisions of the 1996 immigration laws and enhance legal options for return; abolishing immigration jail; and supporting the executive actions outlined above.

Broken Hope: Deportation and the Road Home challenges the media to report untold immigration stories, such as the true impacts of deportation and the bonds between people who were deported and their communities in the U.S. Moreover, editorial policies that prohibit the use of anonymous sources must be repealed. Forcing people in precarious positions to reveal their real names silences them, and robs the public of knowing their stories.



Issa Sao returns in time for his daughter's birthday

Finally, the book calls on the pro-immigration movement, including funders, to include people who were deported in their advocacy goals and campaigns.

The long-term goal of #ReuniteUS is bigger than return. It's a shift in paradigm, a vision for a future where immigration laws are fair and humane. Where the system is designed based on what is good for people and society, not racism, repression, and harm.

There's so much more

Read on for more observations from the #ReuniteUS interviews, data from other research, and examples of how racism led to the drafting of specific immigration laws. Learn how immigration policy changed—and didn't—between the Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations.

Read the #ReuniteUS back-story—from the community response to workplace immigration raids to the men from Mauritania and other countries who bravely organized inside U.S. immigration jails to stop deportations and end detention contracts.

Meet Ibrahima, Goura, Saidu, Tina, Issa, Jesus, Demba, Alfredo, Seyni, Brigido, Fatima, Seydou, and Abdoulaye: heroes, survivors, and strivers all. They are intelligent, kind, and hard-working people who found safety, for a time, in the United States.

Their dream is to come back home.