



Resettlement Ambivalence and the Right to Stay in Florida During Times of Increased Immigration Enforcement

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INTRODUCTION

In an [original article](#) published in the *Journal on Migration and Human Security* in August 2026, Dr. Elizabeth Aranda, Liz Ventura Molina, Sophia Azuero, and Osaro Iyamu investigate the impacts of increased immigration enforcement in Florida. This article examines how enforcement-first immigration policies shape Florida immigrants' resettlement experiences, sense of belonging, and conceptions of home. Drawing on 53 interviews with immigrants with varying legal statuses and U.S.-born adult children of immigrants in Central Florida, and employing the right to remain conceptual framework adapted to the resettlement context, the authors argue that immigrants' resettlement intentions are best captured through the concept of **resettlement ambivalence**—a persistent tension between immigrants' understanding of their right to stay and the fear and uncertainty produced by an enforcement environment that makes staying precarious. The authors' findings show how enforcement can destabilize long-term resettlement, although most immigrants assert a moral and practical **right to stay** in the U.S.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, federal and state immigration policy shifts have extended surveillance, detention, and deportability into workplaces, schools, healthcare institutions, and local communities, several of which are sensitive locations that were previously considered to be safe places protected from immigration enforcement activities. In Florida, since 2023, three bills—**Senate Bill 1718 (SB 1718)**, **Senate Bill 2-C (SB 2-C)** and **Senate Bill 4-C (SB 4-C)**—that broadly criminalize and restrict immigration have intensified the enforcement landscape. These bills were enacted alongside presidential executive orders on mass deportations signed in early 2025. The resulting conditions have contributed to resettlement ambivalence among participants, though most continue to assert a collective right to stay grounded in family and home.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Enforcement restructured daily life** around risk, limiting mobility and long-term planning, and eroded belonging across all legal statuses, producing resettlement ambivalence.
 - Caroline, a 29-year-old US citizen whose parents are undocumented immigrants from Mexico, contemplated relocating if her parents were deported: "I think [of]... Florida and the US always as a home to me. I think the politics around it are very disappointing if it happens [parental deportation], we could build this anywhere else. We'll figure it out. If Florida doesn't want us, if the US doesn't want us, that's okay ... someone else will appreciate what we contribute."



- The familiarity of relational ties and security of home **complicated resettlement ambivalence**.
 - The current political climate had Natasha, a thirty-two-year-old undocumented immigrant from Jamaica who had been living in the U.S. for 10 years, “living on the edge.” She explained how she was afraid to go to work: “I’m scared that I may go to work one day and never get to, the chance to go back home.” However, familiar people and places helped her continue to experience Florida as home.
- Most participants asserted their understandings of their and their families’ **right to stay**, rooted in years of residence, family ties, and community contributions.
 - Norma, a twenty-eight-year-old DACA recipient from Mexico and a mother of two US-born children who has spent virtually her whole life in the U.S., shared: “We have dreams of having our own house, even of opening, like, another business . . . And sometimes those dreams kind of fall apart with everything that is happening right now. We don’t know whether to keep going or not . . . the good thing is that we have held on . . . as a family, the family is large and we are close, and if someone needs help, we are here.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **To the United States Congress:**
 - Implement pathways to permanent legal status for those with liminal or precarious statuses who have already built homes in the U.S.
 - Restore sensitive locations protections such as through the [Protecting Sensitive Locations Act of 2025](#) (H.R.1061/S.455).
- **To State and Local Governments/Authorities:**
 - Eradicate participation in local 287(g) agreements.
 - Increase funding for mental health and social services tailored to immigrant communities.
- **To Communities:**
 - Restrictive immigration policy environments may likely limit the opportunity for reform therefore requiring communities to step up to restore a sense of security to immigrants’ lives.
 - Accordingly, communities can engage in the following activities to support the well-being of immigrant communities:
 - Create mutual aid organizations
 - Mobilize volunteer mental health providers
 - Offer virtual counseling in native languages
- While these recommendations will not eliminate fear of immigration enforcement, they could strengthen immigrants’ sense of belonging and security and help sustain resilience.