



Friday, 21st of March 2025

Joint Statement from FAiR, GAPS, MirreM and MORE in Response to the Reference to these Four Projects in the European Commission’s Proposal for a Regulation Establishing a Common System for Returns

We, the undersigned EU-funded research projects, issue this joint statement to clarify our position on the European Commission’s Proposal for a [Regulation Establishing a Common System for Returns](#) (the “proposal”).

The [proposal](#), published on the 11th of March 2025, states it has “been informed by several EU-financed (ongoing) research projects in the field of return and irregular migration”, referring specifically to the FAiR, GAPS, MirreM, and MORE projects. While the proposal states that it was “informed” by our research, it does not transparently state how this has been done. This may create the impression that we actively contributed to, or were directly consulted for its development, which is not the case. We are interested to know if the upcoming Commission Staff Working Paper will offer a more detailed explanation of how our project findings were considered.

Research-based policymaking should be encouraged and is certainly one of the objectives of our projects, yet rigorous research must not be exploited through selective interpretation or misrepresentation of findings. Indeed, some statements made in the context section of the current proposal run contrary to our findings.¹

Call to Action

We see the reference to our projects as an obligation to actively engage in a discussion with the Commission regarding this proposal. In the coming months, FAiR, GAPS, MirreM, and MORE will host events and activities with policymakers and other stakeholders. We invite the Council, the European Parliament, and the Commission to join us in a constructive, evidence-based dialogue to ensure our projects’ findings are fully considered.

Signed,

FAiR, GAPS, MirreM, and MORE
Contact information below

¹ Note to the editor: Each project has covered diverse areas of migration policy. For concrete recommendations, please get in touch with the principal investigators from each individual project. Contact details are enclosed. See also Annex: Criticisms of the proposal in comparison with key research findings.

Contact information EU-funded Migration projects:

Finding Agreement in Return (FAiR)

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Motivations, Experiences and Consequences of Returns and Readmissions Policy: Revealing and Developing Effective Alternatives (MORE)

[Olga Jubany](#), Principal investigator, Universitat de Barcelona

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De-centring the Study of Migrant Returns and Readmission Policies in Europe and Beyond (GAPS)

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Measuring Irregular Migration and Related Policies (MIrreM)

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Annex: Criticisms of the proposal in comparison with key research findings

Finding Agreement in Return (FAiR):

The Emphasis on Forced Returns

The proposal focuses on strengthening forced returns without increasing investments in voluntary return programmes. Additionally, it includes stricter sanctions for migrants. FAiR's research shows that discourses from the Global South are generally more favourable about voluntary returns than about forced returns (see [FAiR's working paper on migration discourses and enforced return policies](#), [FAiR's working paper on policy instances and the legitimacy of returns](#)). The increased emphasis on forced removals is both a less humane and a less sustainable long-term strategy.

Would you like to know more specifically on this topic of forced returns? Please reach out to [Arjen Leerkes](#), Principal investigator, Erasmus University Rotterdam via fair@eur.nl.

From Measuring Irregular Migration and Related Policies (MIrreM):

Distorted statistical data on return decisions

The context section of the proposal refers to what is often discussed as the 'deportation gap' and claims that only one in five persons ordered to leave is actually returned. However, a recent [MIrreM policy brief](#) argues that this gap is, to some degree, a statistical distortion, for several reasons, including the fact that the same person may receive return orders from more than one country and therefore produce an overcount on the European level once all data are aggregated. Moreover, there are also limitations with national data, for example voluntary returns often go unrecorded which decreases the return rate. These issues are also explored in a [subsequent brief](#) prepared by the European Parliament Research Service, which equally highlights problems such as poor data, double-counting and the issuing of return orders to persons who are already known to be non-returnable.

If you are interested in more information about data on irregular migration, please contact Albert Kraler, Principal investigator, The University for Continuing Education Krems via info@irregularmigration.eu.

From De-centring the Study of Migrant Returns and Readmission Policies in Europe and Beyond (GAPs):

The proposal emphasizes that "the Commission, the EU Agencies, and the Member States continue to work on enhancing the effectiveness, availability, and use of alternatives to detention." The GAPs [policy brief](#) recommends that detention be used only as a last resort, with alternatives considered first. The proposal also assumes that "in cases of insufficient cooperation, the Commission can propose restrictive visa measures." However, our extensive research on origin countries and the conditions of international cooperation regarding returns/readmission indicates that such restrictive measures, or the threat of them, do not significantly impact sustainable cooperation and do not necessarily alter government behaviour. Instead, they tend to hinder legal mobility. Additionally, our findings raise concerns about the effectiveness and potential side effects of the 'return hub' concept. For more information, please see GAPs [publications](#) and [blog](#).

If you are interested in more information, please contact Principal investigators: Zeynep Sahin-Mencütek, Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies, and Soner Barthoma, Uppsala University via gaps.return.migration@gmail.com.

From Motivations, Experiences and Consequences of Returns and Readmissions Policy: Revealing and Developing Effective Alternatives (MORE):

The empirical results of the [MORE](#) research indicate that heightened return measures are inefficiently balanced as they generate further irregularity, require significant resources, and lead to a reduction in fundamental rights. These findings also reveal that alternative measures and existing practices, across member states, provide a more comprehensive, sustainable, and effective response compared to return policies. Furthermore, the [research](#) demonstrates that detention is not a suitable tool for its intended purpose, as it is often used punitively rather than as a governance mechanism. [Findings](#) also highlight that eliminating detention is both feasible and beneficial, as evidenced by existing examples, and that other measures outside of confinement can be effectively implemented with fewer harmful consequences.

If you are interested in more information, please contact [Olga Jubany](#), Principal investigator, Universitat de Barcelona via info@moreproject-horizon.eu.