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GAPS

Decentring the Study of Migrant Returns and Return Policies

Framework paper on the concepts and typologies on returns - combined with four conceptual notes

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Summary

The overall aim of the GAPs project is to decentre the dominant, one-sided understanding of 'return policymaking' by bringing multiple perspectives into play and studying the complex interaction of diverse actors involved in the return processes; scrutinizing gaps and shortcomings in the governance of returns, with both its internal and external dimensions; and devoting specific attention to the study of practices. Developing a clear conceptual framework that describes how different actors identify migrant returns and how various disciplines are used to study return is a crucial step for decentring the dominant policy understanding and the focus of this paper. The paper underlines the context-specific use of the term which varies both among countries and regions. Specifically, this paper provides a conceptual framework for the clarification of whose return we are addressing – that is, whether of legal settled migrants, migrants without status, asylum seekers who have been refused, people under protection status, or people with tolerated or undefined status – and who is proposing the definitions and for what purpose. We introduce an analytical framework on the relationship between returns and coercion, while we elaborate the concept of 'coerced returns' as an overarching concept and spectrum. We thus propose a spectrum of returns based on coercion and taking the sites of return (before and after borders). We believe this approach may contribute to the scholarly calls to challenge the policy categories/dichotomies by illustrating how voluntary and forced mobilities are a continuum, not a dichotomy. The paper thematically links and complements the spectrum with the typology of return mechanisms taking into account both formal policies and informal practices in the governance of returns. Hence, we undertake several refinements to the concepts, labels, categories and typologies about return, specifically in relation to the actors, sites and levels of coercion. The conceptual discussion in GAPs builds on the rich body of work on migrant returns in several disciplines. this framework paper also adds the literature review pieces on return-related concepts used, principles underlined, highlights from the main debates in the disciplines of History, Economy, International Law and Anthropology.

The GAPs Project

GAPs is a Horizon Europe project that aims to conduct a comprehensive multidisciplinary study on the drivers of return policies and the barriers and enablers of international cooperation on return migration. The overall aim of the project is to examine the disconnects and discrepancies between expectations of return policies and their actual outcomes by de-centring the dominant, one-sided understanding of "return policymaking." To this end, GAPs:

- examine the shortcomings of EU's return governance;
- analyse enablers and barriers to international cooperation, and
- explore the perspectives of migrants themselves to understand their knowledge, aspirations and experiences with return policies.

GAPs combines its decentring approach with three innovative concepts:

- a focus on return migration infrastructures, which allows the project to analyse governance fissures;
- an analysis of return migration diplomacy to understand how relations between EU Member States and with third countries hinder cooperation on return; and
- a trajectory approach that uses a socio-spatial and temporal lens to understand migrant agency.

GAPs is an interdisciplinary 3-year project (2023-2026), co-coordinated by Uppsala University and the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies with 17 partners in 12 countries on 4 continents. GAPs' fieldwork has been conducted in 12 countries: Sweden, Nigeria, Germany, Morocco, the Netherlands, Afghanistan, Poland, Georgia, Turkey, Tunisia, Greece and Iraq.

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1. Conceptual Framework Paper on Returns

Zeynep Sahin-Mencütek (BICC) & Anna Triandafyllidou (CERC)

Introduction

The power of concepts, labels, and categories has been increasingly debated in migration and refugee studies (Snel et al. 2021; Crawley and Jones 2021; Crawley and Skleparis 2018). Yet the existing literature provides very little examination of the categories' relevance on return migration (Gemi and Triandafyllidou 2021) and deportation (Walters et al. 2022). As Cassarino (2004, p. 254) correctly notes, 'there are several definitional approaches to return migration and returnees' as these concepts are 'a multifaceted and heterogeneous phenomenon'. These definitions play a 'crucial role in orienting, if not shaping, the perceptions, taxonomies and policies adopted by governmental and intergovernmental agencies' (ibid.).

The Conceptual Notes prepared for the GAPS project shed light on the different disciplinary perspectives (sociology/anthropology; law; economics; history). They also point to the context-specific use of the term, which varies both among countries and regions as well as among who is using it (e.g. scholars, policymakers, practitioners, migrants, diaspora groups) and for what purpose. Indeed, it is important to clarify whose return we are addressing – that is, whether of legal settled migrants, migrants without status, asylum seekers who have been refused, people under protection status, or people with tolerated or undefined status – and who is 'doing the talking', in other words, who is proposing the definitions and for what purpose.

Our aim in this framework paper is not to add a new definition to the multiple ones on returns but to propose an analytical framework on the relationship between returns and coercion. Following on the heels of the literature reviews in this dossier that are part of this broader conceptual exercise (Rottman and Nimer 2023; Ozturk 2023; Istaiteyeh 2023; Barthoma 2023), we first discuss the different meanings assigned to return migration by different actors. We then look specifically at the relationship between the level of coercion and the return mechanism or procedure implemented, offering a thick description of the elements involved. The third section proposes a typology of return mechanisms and explores the entanglement of formal policies and informal practices in the governance of returns.

Returns: Actors and their Roles in Shaping Terminology

While return is a much broader conceptual and policy category (as discussed by Rottmann and Nimer 2023), here we focus on 'return policy' as defined by the European Union, notably when migrants are involved in 'return procedures' because their presence at destination is no longer desirable, allowed, or tolerated.

Such returns involve different **procedures**, whether the actual voluntary departure of the person, an expulsion (when a decision is handed to the person ordering them to leave the country within a number of days), a removal (notably when the expulsion is enforced and the person is deported), and readmission (of the person to their country of origin or a previous transit country by an agreement) or repatriation (specifically, the return to the person's country of origin) (cf. European Return Directive 2008; ECRE 2019; IOM 2019; UNHCR 2003). Particularly in the international law documents, the term of refoulement is also

commonly used 'as shorthand for any returns or non-admissions that violate the principle of non-refoulment' (IOM 2019, p. 170).

The adjective list of return and repatriation varies in relation to characteristics detected during the procedures such as voluntary, compulsory, State-induced, self-organised, or assisted returns, on the one hand, and those presented after the return process as safe, sustainable, permanent, or temporary, on the other (Chimni 2004; Crisp and Long 2016; Black and Gent 2006). They also refer to two 'poles' – what happens at the original destination country to enact the return and what then happens at the return destination country after the migrant has been returned.

Some actors are particularly engaged in promoting return terminologies and analyses, notably the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), the European Union (EU) institutions, national authorities, as well as academics and migrants themselves. Accordingly, the identifiable scales include policy texts and their implementation; research perspectives, whether quantitative or qualitative, about conceptual or policy issues; and lived experiences of those directly involved, i.e., the migrants. On these scales, there are interplays, overlaps, and gradual alignments, particularly between IOM-UNHCR and nation-states, as well as divergences over the definitions, policy objectives, and interpretations of guiding principles between returning and origin State actors, civil society, and migrants themselves. Anne Koch (2014, p. 905) illustrates how practices of both 'legitimise each other's engagement as well as the overarching return objectives of governments, and are, therefore, involved in norm-building regarding the acceptability of state-induced returns'. In many cases, EU-IOM joint programmes fund locally-owned civil society organisations in the origin countries as implementers. Their development and migrant-protection interests are brought in alignment with the European objective of curtailing irregular migration; they also 'keep imagining, and to some extent, performing alternative ways of dealing with migration' (Marino et al. 2022, p. 1). This all raises questions about knowledge production, norm-building, and epistemological discussions around returns, which is beyond the scope of this framework paper.[1]

States, particularly destination countries, are the main actors who have full authority over returning or not returning people; hence, they decide which term to use. They have complete discretion and power to categorise displaced people who arrived in the territory as asylum seekers, refugees, irregular, or tolerated through border control and bureaucratic processes. This is also reiterated in international law, which underlines that 'the states of destination have a legitimate interest in returning irregular migrants and failed asylum seekers who do not (or no longer) fulfil the requirements to remain in the territory of the State, and to secure the readmission of these migrants by their countries of origin' (IOM 2017, p.1). Furthermore, the country of origin is required by international law to accept the return of their nationals (ibid.).

[1] See Bradley, M. (2021) Realising the right of return: Refugees' roles in localising norms and socialising UNHCR. *Geopolitics*, pp. 1-28; Chimni, B. S. (1993) The meaning of words and the role of UNHCR in voluntary repatriation. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 5(3), pp. 442-460; Chimni, B. S. (1991) Perspectives on voluntary repatriation: A critical note. *Int'l J. Refugee L.*, *3*, 541; Koch, A. (2014) The politics and discourse of migrant return: The role of UNHCR and IOM in the governance of return. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40(6), pp. 905-923; Van Houte, M. and Davids, T. (2008) Development and return migration: from policy panacea to migrant perspective sustainability. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(7), pp. 1411-1429. For genealogy of return/repatriation concept see Hammond, L. (1999) Examining the discourse of repatriation: Towards a more proactive theory of return migration. In: *The end of the refugee cycle*, pp. 227-244.

Preliminary empirical work undertaken in the context of the project provides insights about the complexity of return procedures on the ground and how State policies shape such complexity. To illustrate the variations, we include two country examples: Turkey and Poland. In Turkey, for instance, these six categories of potential and actual people targeted for return procedures were identified: those targeted to be removed/at risk of being returned, i.e., irregular migrants (no registration at all, registered in the wrong city) such as Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians; those who might be targeted to be removed in the near future, e.g. as indicated by political discourse or change in geopolitical situation such as Syrians under temporary protection; those pushed back at border from Greece (often transit migrants, including Syrians); those denied when they tried to go (entered, applied for asylum, and rejected in Europe) such as Iraqi returnees from Greece; those with removal orders/briefly detained/people who had returned but came back; voluntary returnees as designated by IOM to de-dichotomise the forced/voluntary binary. In Poland, however, the categories of potential migrants who are already subjected or will be soon subjected differ and include: rejected asylum seekers; asylum seekers readmitted to Poland under the Dublin regulation,[2] e.g. Georgians; asylum seekers such as Iraqis coming from countries with low recognition rates or considered safe third countries; those pushed at the land border such as Chechens; beneficiaries of temporary protection such as those from Ukraine since their legal situation can change.

Beyond national States, international organizations, mainly UN organs, have been particularly active in the last 20 years in promoting and shaping both the discourse and the policy of returns (Bradley 2021; Chimni 1993). Even before becoming a UN body, the IOM worked closely with UNHCR, including on returns (Bradley 2021). Gradually IOM took more prominent actions for conceptualization (or norm-building) of returns. This is also part of the dynamic that although IOM and UNHCR once had 'distinct worldviews', the IOM is 'currently the leading actor in terms of framing migration, thereby exerting a strong influence on global migration governance' (Green and Pécoud 2023). It is the same for the return and reintegration field, hence its definition is critical for shaping policy frameworks and normative narratives.

Return and repatriation

IOM identifies **return** as 'the movement of persons returning to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border' (IOM 2019, p. 186). Before the IOM's emergence as the lead actor in the return migration field, the UNHCR had been quite active in norm-building and had proposed 'voluntary' repatriation as part of a durable solution, using the term interchangeably with voluntary return. UNHCR prefers the term 'voluntary repatriation' to explain the State-involved mass returns (or expulsions) of asylum seekers or refugees from neighbouring host countries to the countries of conflict, particularly the UNHCR-led processes in Africa and Asia, such as the repatriation

[2] The Dublin II Regulation was adopted in 2003, replacing the Dublin Convention. The Dublin III Regulation (No. 604/2013) was approved in June 2013, replacing the Dublin II Regulation, Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast) https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/country-responsible-asylum-application-dublin-regulation_en

from Iran to Afghanistan or Bangladesh to Myanmar. Since the 1990s, along with the pressure from the international community (Hammond 1999), UNHCR has presented **'voluntary repatriation'** as one of the durable solutions, that is, 'any means by which the situation of refugees can be satisfactorily and permanently resolved to enable them to lead normal lives' (Chimni 2004, p.55; UNHCR 2016). No doubt that in this UNHCR definition, wording such as 'satisfactorily and permanently' and 'normal lives' is quite ambiguous. Three **durable solutions** proposed include voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement to third countries. UNHCR holds the authority to engage in repatriation and resettlement and assist 'governmental and private efforts to promote voluntary repatriation' (Statute 1950). The IOM has a mandate to be involved in assisted voluntary returns. At the UN level, the UN's Global Refugee Compact proposes the creation of conditions for the expedited return of irregular migrants (UN 2018).

Voluntariness is a critical feature of the terminology used by IOM and UNHCR (recently also by the EC), which repeatedly emphasise that the terms do not involve forced returns. **Voluntary return** is a formal policy defined as 'the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or third country, based on the free will of the returnee' (IOM 2019, p. 12). IOM underlines that 'voluntariness is assumed to exist if two conditions apply: (a) freedom of choice, which is defined by the absence of physical or psychological pressure to enroll in an assisted voluntary return and reintegration programme; and (b) an informed decision which requires the availability of timely, unbiased, and reliable information upon which to base the decision' (IOM 2019, p. 13; referred to in EMN 2023). However, existing empirical evidence contests the voluntariness aspect in returns, including practices in the IOM's own assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes (Maâ 2023; Bartels 2017; Blitz et al. 2005)

Regarding the return of migrants, **EU** legislation and its **member states**' respective national laws use more technical terms such as removal and readmission since there are no binding and uniform definitions of these terms. These concepts generally relate to the forced return (expulsion) of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants back to the country of origin or to the third 'safe country' despite some nuances. **Expulsion** refers to the legal order to leave the territory of a State and removal or deportation as well as to the actual implementation of such order in cases where the person concerned does not follow it voluntarily (IOM Dictionary 2019) *[comprehensive coverage].* **Removal** is 'the act following a deportation, expulsion, or removal order by which a State physically removes a non-national from its territory to his or her country of origin or a third country after refusal of admission or termination of permission to remain' (IOM Dictionary 2019, p. 180). **Readmission** is an 'act by a State accepting the re-entry of an individual (own national, national of another State – most commonly a person who had previously transited through the country or a permanent resident – or a stateless person' (IOM 2019, p. 169).

Compared to removal, expulsion, and readmission, the term deportation is used more often **by academia and civil society/activists**. Deportation is typically understood in terms of the forcible (often violent) removal by State authorities of a 'foreigner', usually a 'migrant', from a country in which she or he 'does not have citizenship' (Walters et al. 2022). There is a well-established deportation studies field that embraces critical perspectives and closely engages with the broader works of literature on 'critical geography, sovereignty and biopolitics, political economy, science and technology and race and postcolonial studies' as well as border studies since the early 2000s (Coutin 2015; Lemberg-Pedersen 2022; Walters 2018; Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2015). This scholarship challenges the State-centric

methodological assumptions and criticises the terminological choices by questioning the policy purposes behind them. For example, El Qadim (2014) argues that readmission should be considered a robust deterrence and control instrument within the EU migration regime instead of a neutral term. Spathopoulou and colleagues (2020) contest that the EU's readmission programmes, for instance in Greece, can be better called as promotion of 'self-deportation'.

It is also important to note that the use of return-related concepts differs among world regions. Policy papers addressing forceful returns from Europe to origin countries use the terminology of readmission of individual rejected asylum seekers and also assisted voluntary returns (Walters et al. 2022; Sökefeld 2019); in Africa or Asia, such documents use the terminology of repatriation (Crisp and Long 2016; Gerver 2018), while in Africa they also increasingly adopt the terminology of readmission (in relation to the EU externalisation efforts). In North America, policy papers do not hesitate to use the terms expulsion and deportation for forceful returns of unwanted irregular migrants from Central and South America in the United States (Goodman 2020).

Critical scholars of migration, including ourselves, question the indiscriminate use of notions of 'voluntary return' under the pretence of free will while such returns actually often involve apprehension of the migrant by the authorities and different forms of coercion, structural violence, and abuse (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022, p. 856; see also Spathopoulou et al. 2020; Rosenberger and Koppes 2018; Kalir 2017; Cleton and Chauvin 2020; Leerkes et al. 2017). As correctly noted by Anissa Maâ (2023, p. 92), 'migrants' entangled appropriations of return are defined in close relationship with a wide range of actors intervening during the process of return. Ultimately, migrants reformulate the meaning of their involvement in voluntary return into strategic, moral, relative, and symbolic terms'.

Contrary to policymakers' and implementers' assumptions, from the **perspective of migrants,** returns are not the end of the migration journey or return 'home'; instead, returns only serve as a part of the migration circle and a point in the mobility continuum (Gemi and Triandafyllidou 2021). Reflecting on this reality, migration scholars conceptualise returns more broadly, stating that return is 'a part of the wider mobility process in which the migrants engage' as one dot in a non-linear course that may include multiple emigrations and return segments as well as re-migration (whether to the same destination country or third countries)' (ibid., p.3). From the scholarly view, the label or category of 'return' has been used to refer to refugees who restart living in their former 'homes'; who come back to their countries of origin but live elsewhere within this country; and those internally displaced people (IDPs) returned to their former area of residences. In fact, return migration as a process is much broader and spans the migrant's plans for staying, returning, or moving on and has typically very little to do with coercion and expulsion (Gemi and Triandafyllidou 2021; Cassarino 2015).

For this reason, both migrants and human rights advocates prefer the use of terms such as deportation, expulsion, and forced return to identify the returns induced by States and coordinated by international organisations, clearly distinguishing between those and broader return processes.

Coercion and 'Returns'

This paper and the GAPs project overall focus more specifically on the return policies and procedures implemented by States and international organisations, albeit introducing also critical perspectives from the point of view of migrants, stakeholders, and experts. In this framework, the relationship between coercion and returns is particularly important and this is the focus of the next sections of this paper.

The links between return programmes/procedures and voluntariness/coercion are particularly complex. Scholars often question the extent to which the voluntariness principle is adopted in the return operations, given that migrants historically and currently are rarely included in the decision-making during State-induced returns (Kirui 2019). As early as 1999, Hammond (1999, p. 231) notes that:

> The voluntary nature of the decision to return may be difficult and even impossible to distinguish in cases where those who opt not to repatriate face the closure of camps, cessation of aid, and harassment by local security forces. Those who choose not to return may also face harassment and intimation from the host government or political groups in the country of origin whose interests repatriation may serve.

It is evident from the literature review that the vast majority of returnees from Europe or transit countries (such as Turkey, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco) do not wish to 'return' but were somewhat coerced one way or another. This defies distinctions between voluntary and forced return as a dichotomy and points to a continuum starting with a spontaneous voluntary return out of despair with one's situation to accepting a return after a refused asylum decision to resisting a coerced return and being deported and staying as irregular migrants. Some did not get a formal response to their asylum application but had waited too long under dire conditions. They observed others receiving negative responses or were told by their lawyers that they did not have a chance to get status. This group includes some who started an appeal process with the help of lawyers or NGOs but were still rejected or their processing was again too long, causing some to lost hope and hence decide to return, while others applied to the 'AVRR programs'.

We thus propose a spectrum of returns based on coercion and taking the sites of return (before and after borders). We believe this approach may contribute to the scholarly calls to challenge the policy categories/dichotomies by illustrating how voluntary and forced mobilities are a continuum, not a dichotomy (Erdal and Oeppen 2017; Crawley and Skleparis 2017; Carling and Schewel 2018) and how migration journeys are 'fragmented, non-linear, including different intermediate stops and multiple returns and new departures' (Triandafyllidou 2022, p. 1). It also points to the need for acknowledging not only the State's views but also the migrant perspectives towards return – which is the core aim of GAPs project by decentring the study of returns.

A first question to ask is whether return is truly voluntary or not. The voluntariness of the return can be assessed by the migrant's own perspective but can also be categorised in relation to who initiated it: the migrant, State authorities, an international organisation, or a civil society organisation.

In similar vein, we need to consider whether the return was eventually organised by the migrant or by a third party, fully or in part (notably assisted or not) and whether it included

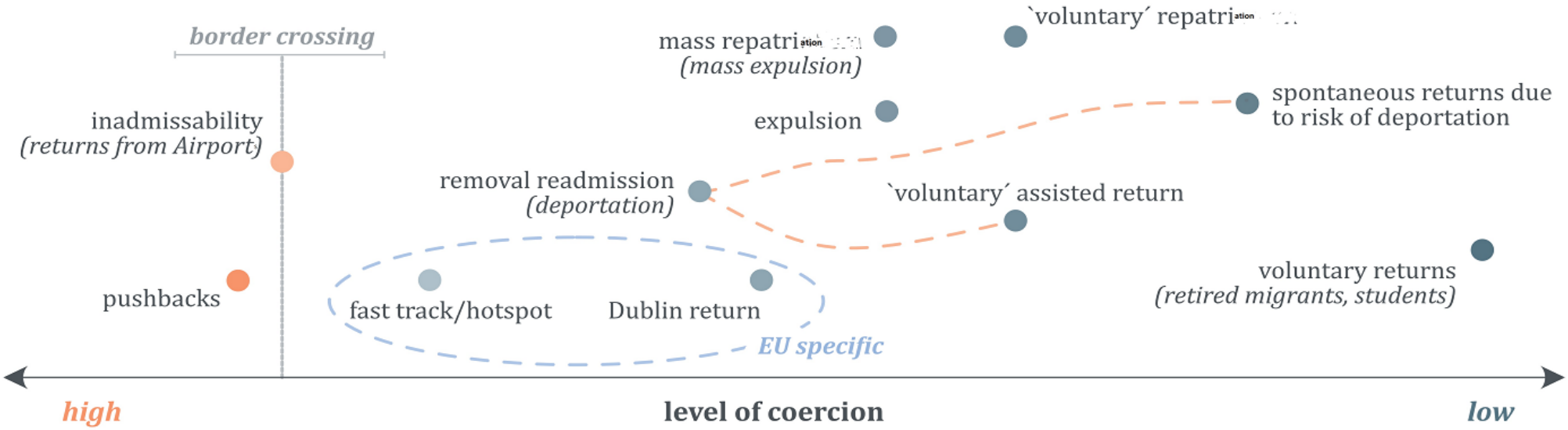
for instance incentives (e.g. a reintegration fee paid upon arrival at the origin country). Indicatively, we can consider whether the return was part of a larger project or initiative to incentivise returns and support reintegration within which the migrant may have decided to take the opportunity. We may also ask whether an 'assisted voluntary' return formed part of an enforcement campaign by a given destination or transit country, leading then to the apprehended migrants being given a 'voluntary' return option through an assistance programme.

In this case we should also consider whether a return was individual or whether it formed part of a larger program or campaign aimed at removing a set of people with a given status, for instance asylum seekers refused on first instance.

It is crucial to consider whether a return happens at the border, is notably a pushback or involves a deportation a few days after having crossed the border because the document has no status and may have been fast-tracked through the asylum procedure and been found inadmissible. Or whether the return happens from within the country, away from the border, after being apprehended or in any case as part of what we will discuss later as 'incentivising' returns.

Figure 1 complements this review by offering a visual representation of where and how return procedures happen.

Figure 1



Typology of Return Mechanisms

Building on the discussion of the previous sections, we propose **three mechanisms of return governance**: **pushing, imposing, and incentivising**. All three involve formal and informal policy instruments and practices (see Table 2); what differentiates them is the level of coercion and how informality is strategically deployed to achieve the desired outcome. Here, policy instruments refer to a 'type of institution' and a technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship and sustained by a concept of regulation' (Trauner and Wolff 2014, p. 9).

Table 1: Types of Return Governing Mechanisms and Related Formal and Informal Practices

Mechanisms	Formal policy instrument	Informal practices to implement policy
Pushing returns	Strict border controls at the first arrivals	Pushbacks, impeding admission and asylum claims
Imposing returns	Dublin regulation of the EU; readmission agreements; administrative detention for returning; deportation; mass voluntary repatriation	irregularisation; dehumanisation, abandonment, deprivation, withholding aid; closing camps; limiting access to the registration, essential services, and mobility; criminalisation
Incentivising returns	Assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes	Imposition of voluntariness or convincing by enticement

Pushing returns refers to enforcing returns of refugees and migrants 'back over a border – generally immediately after they crossed it – without consideration of their circumstances and without any possibility to apply for asylum or to put forward arguments against the measures taken' (ECCHR 2020). The formal policy of irregular migration control and border management is the basis for pushing returns.

However, our notion of 'pushing' returns focuses mainly on the informal – and illegal itself – practice of pushbacks. Pushbacks have been reported at several locations of the EU's external borders, including along the Western Balkans route and in the Western, Central, and Eastern Mediterranean (Stefan and Cortinovis 2021). Pushbacks are officially defined (by the 47th session of the Human Rights Council) as 'various measures taken by States which result in migrants, including asylum seekers, being summarily forced back to the country from where they attempted to cross or have crossed an international border without access to international protection or asylum procedures or denied of any individual assessment on their protection needs which may lead to a violation of the principle of non-refoulment' (European Parliament 2023). Pushbacks prevent migrants from effectively entering the country's territory and

impede access to admission and asylum claims. National border guards, customs, and police have been found to practice pushbacks, while the European Border Agency, Frontex, has also been implicated.

Imposing returns means officially forcing an order to leave that has to be obeyed by the 'irregular' migrants or refused asylum seekers. In contrast, their stay in the country of asylum or transit is deemed 'illegal'. Migrants may be coerced to return or maybe persuaded even if they are unwilling to do so. Imposing returns may occur through formal readmission or expulsion of a given migrant and their family. But imposing a return may also involve a mass voluntary repatriation of people who lack protected status and are deemed irregular migrants. While pushing returns usually happen on the way to the final destination, particularly during border crossings, imposing returns develop after one has arrived at their desired destination.

Regarding the imposition of returns in the EU, two formal policy instruments are critical: the Dublin regulation, which determines that an asylum claim needs to be processed at the first safe country of arrival, and readmission agreements with third countries of either the origin or of transit. Thus, if a migrant seeks asylum in another country and their fingerprints are found in the EURODAC (European Asylum Dactyloscopy) Database that collects data on asylum seekers and irregular migrants, they are returned to their first safe country of arrival where their fingerprints were taken upon entry to apply for asylum. In addition, if the national authorities apprehend a migrant without regularised status or a refused asylum seeker, they can be relatively quickly returned to their country of origin if that country has a readmission agreement with the government of arrival.

Incentivising returns refers to persuading refused asylum seekers or migrants without regularised status to 'voluntarily' return by offering some financial assistance. The EU's most famous formal policy instruments for return governance are the Assisted Return (AR) and Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes (AVRR). They are considered an ideal return mechanism to maintain the credibility and sustainability of the asylum system and unfold a humanitarian solution for irregular migrants as well as a way for the development of origin countries (EC Strategy 2021). These programmes offer migrants incentives to return voluntarily, and have become a central migration management tool in Europe (Lietaert and Van Gorp 2019). AVRRs are operated mainly by IOM with funding of interested European states and in partnership with local NGOs. For 2017, it was reported that EU member states run at least 96 AVRR initiatives, EU countries, including the UK before and since Brexit, have AR programmes. (Home Office 2021).

Currently, efforts such as capacity-building and knowledge transfer exist to establish national voluntary return mechanisms directly in transit countries (Mencutek 2022). Practices illustrate that voluntariness and assistance principles are conflated, while the line between formal and informal is blurred. Scholars argue that assisted voluntary returns hide the violence inherent to contemporary border regimes by masking it under the liberal democratic governing scheme and framing returns as 'voluntary' (Koch 2014; Spathopoulou et al. 2020). Voluntariness in the 'voluntary assistant returns' is also dismantled by a lack of preparedness, real alternatives, access to reliable and trusted information, and effective legal remedies (Crisp and Long 2016; Erdal and Oeppen 2017). Independent monitoring of the implementation of return, mainly regarding ethical and procedural standards, is rarely attainable (Pirjola 2007). Notably, essential ethical considerations like consent-taking are overlooked or manipulated at the practice level (Gerver 2018). Drawing from such realities about the implementation of

policies, many scholars put the AVRRs closer to the informality side in the formal-informal spectrum, voluntary deportation (Spathopoulou et al. 2020), or soft deportation (Leerkes et al. 2017) by showing their entanglements with the imposition of returns.

Discussion

It is important to challenge common binaries and show how return procedures are dynamic and need to be considered from multiple perspectives, particularly those of the migrants and civil society organisations, to showcase the policies' side effects. Our review and analytical framework, for instance, points to the fact that both **assisted/non-assisted (return)** and **voluntary/forced** return distinctions are continuums rather than binaries.

Considering also the hypocrisy behind the use of the term 'return' and so-called voluntariness, the question arises for this project of whether we should refuse the term and instead use terms such as expulsion, removal, or deportation.

These terms – particularly expulsion and deportation – have been largely dropped from the (EU) policy vocabulary for over 15 years now because of the negative connotation attached to them. At the same time researchers (Cassarino 2004; 2016; De Genova and Tazzioli 2022) have argued that the notion of 'readmissions' should also be challenged and we should actually speak of expulsions/deportations rather than readmissions. It is worth noting also that deportation needs to be understood as an executed expulsion. The term 'removal' has been used mostly to refer to individuals. Academics such as Jean-Pierre Cassarino and William Walters, among others, challenge researchers when they do not call practices deportation; using the terminology of 'readmission' can be one strategy.

Our suggestion is to adopt the term 'Coerced Returns' in keeping with the broad policy terminology but emphasising that returns that are part of these policies are coerced, to a greater or lesser degree. This will allow for our work to clearly connect and analyse national and EU legislation and policies (which of course include a variety of terms such as removal decisions, return decisions, expulsion decisions, and so on), while also providing for the necessary framework to critically analyse coercion in return governance.

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2. Concept note: Studying Return Migration from a Historical Perspective

Soner Barthoma (UU)

Introduction: The Significance of Historical Research

Neither return migrations nor politics of return are new. Nonetheless, as Russell King (2000, p. 7) pointed out, 'return migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration'. Although there has been an increasing amount of literature on return migration in recent decades, there remains a strong need to incorporate history as a disciplinary perspective into studies on return migration. This concept note aims to address this issue by presenting some initial ideas for adopting a historical approach to the study of return migration.

Beginning with the thought-provoking query of where history fits in migration studies, I will illustrate this with an analogy. In his acclaimed lecture in 1882, *What is a nation*?, Ernest Renan (2018) identified 'forgetting history or getting history wrong (*l'erreur historique*)' as an indispensable element in creating a nation. This conclusion can be extended to migration. Forgetting the historical origins and using migration history for contemporary debates can lead to distorted images and epistemologies of migration, where the knowledge and memories of historical experiences fade and become sedimented into pre-given facts about migration. As noted by historian Eric Hobsbawm in his book *On History* (1992), certain historical experiences become part of a broader historical memory, while others are overlooked. The history and memories of migration are often neglected in mainstream historiography, particularly in national histories such as those found in school textbooks. The impact of migration in the making of modern nations and nation-states recently received some scholarly attention (cf. Benjamin T. White, Laura Robson, see further down). Migration historians are well placed to offer a critical analysis of the foundational narratives of nations and nation-states.

Christophe Bertossi, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Nancy Foner (2021), in their introductory article to the special issue entitled *Past in the present: migration and the uses of history in the contemporary era*, analyse the notion of historical repertoires, which refer to elementary grammars of how the past is framed in contemporary public debates on immigration (ibid., pp. 4155, 4161). The authors discuss the divergences between US and European scholarship regarding the function of history in the context of immigration studies. American immigration scholarship has traditionally focused on past events, given the significant role that immigration has played in American history (Bertossi et. al. 2021, p. 4156). In the European literature, however, contemporary migration scholars have placed significant importance on history; for instance, social historian Leo Lucassen's (2005) comparison of pre- and post-World War II immigrants in Europe demonstrates similarities in exclusion and integration patterns.

Migration scholars have generally paid little attention to the historical understanding of migration, often mentioning history merely as contextual background to the present. Nancy Green has noted that while historians may see parallels between contemporary migration patterns and those of earlier periods, sociologists often prioritise the notion of novelty (Foner 2005, p. 3). Historians Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen and Patrick Manning argued in their book *Migration History in World History* (2010, p. 4) that scholars, policymakers, and the media often ignore relevant historical analogies and perceive current developments as unprecedented. This emphasis on uniqueness, novelty, and unprecedentedness appears to be prevalent in many academic works (Bertossi et al. 2021), indicating a dearth of historical perspective in several studies.

For instance, using crisis rhetoric to frame migration is not a novel practice. Lucassen et al. (2010, p. 4) refer to the example of the economic historian William Cunningham (1897), who observed that Russian Jewish immigrants to London were as unassimilable as southern Europeans in the eyes of many American commentators and politicians around 1900. Before World War I, both the right and the progressive left in the US commonly feared 'unskilled and defective poor immigrants' (ibid.). The recurring patterns they refer to as 'moral panics' demonstrate how fear irrationally dominated public discourse and argue that revisiting historical accounts can offer a valuable temporal comparison for the present day, aiding our comprehension of both continuity and change, and ultimately placing recurrent moral panics in a more balanced context (ibid.). Thus the debate on migration (including returns) would benefit from the long-term insights developed in the field of migration history. Migration historians have the potential to rectify misrepresentations of the past, unveil collective amnesia around migration, and elucidate the logic behind the construction of collective memories.

Historical Approach to Migration and Returns

Historians approach migration as an integral part of human history. As Patrick Manning (2005, pp. 8-9) notes, migration is 'the underlying human impulse' that connects different parts of the world and creates social, cultural, and economic links. This statement is equally valid for returns, which constitute an inherent aspect of all forms of human movement. People do not only move from one place to another but also 'return' to their point of origin or continue to another destination. This non-linear understanding of mobility is crucial for understanding the historicity of return migration and broader patterns of human mobility.

Overall, historians studied return migration as an inextricable part of migration across a range of historical periods. They sought to identify the longitudinal patterns of human movement, whether voluntary or forced, by examining social, economic, cultural, and political factors that shape the return migration processes within the broader context of migration history. By examining historical data and sources, historians aimed to reveal the factors that influence individuals' and groups' decisions to return to their home countries. Additionally, they analysed the impact of return migration on the sending and receiving countries, how individuals negotiate their sense of belonging and identity upon returning to their home countries and communities, and how these factors shape their experiences and interactions.

The historical origins of modern-day return policies can be traced back to pre-modern and ancient times where exiles, deportations, and forced expulsions of individuals or groups from territories were commonly practiced. These actions were particularly prevalent in contexts involving wars, conquests, and the expansion of empires. Scholars such as Jan Felix Gaertner (2006) have noted that these methods were often employed as punishment tools, while also serving strategic and demographic purposes. States were granted power to determine who could reside in a territory as well as the circumstances under which an individual could exercise their *right of return*. Typically, the exercise of this right was directly related to the cessation of hostilities following a conflict, or with the changes of established social, political, or economic power structures. With the rise of nation-states, a change in terminology can be observed and deportations were employed as a political instrument, not only to define the boundaries of a nation-state *externally* but also *internally*. This led to the expulsion of 'undesirable groups' from the boundaries of nation-states with the goal of forming an 'imagined' and 'homogenised' community. For instance, during the 1880s, the US federal government established the nation's initial deportation policies, which reflected the 'racism and nativism of the era', targeting Chinese immigrants in addition to 'idiots, prostitutes, alcoholics and public charges' (Hester 2020).

Indeed, scholars have emphasised the strong link between nation-states and deportation practices, viewing deportations as a type of forced displacement with historical roots in colonial conquests and genocides (e.g. Lindberg 2023; Walters 2002; Peutz and De Genova 2010). They argue that deportation has been widely utilised as a 'nation-building device' (Lindberg 2023), a 'technology of citizenship' (Walters 2002, p. 282), and a form of 'infrastructure of racism' (Khosravi 2019, p. 114). As noted by Aristide R. Zolberg (1983), the formation of new States after the two world wars was a 'refugee-generating process'. From a historical perspective, many nation-states were founded by deporting particular groups, which involved an element of demographic engineering. Forced return, in the form of deportation and the like, was widely implemented to carry out this 'nation-building project'.

Before delving into the specifics of what can be termed a historical approach to return migrations, it would be helpful to contextualise the topic by providing a brief overview of major historical milestones. The periodisation below, however, is merely tentative and does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of all the return movements of refugees and displaced people.

Tracing Patterns of Returns in the Early Modern Period (ca.1500-1800)

Some historians have noted a significant rise in worldwide geographic mobility as a defining feature of a global early modernity. In early modern Europe, religious and confessional minorities stood out as the most prominent group of migrants (Behrisch et al. 2023). They established diasporas to maintain their unique cultural and linguistic identity across generations. From the perspective of return migration, these diasporic formations were crucial in preserving ties with their country of origin or imagined homelands.

Another example from the early modern period is the persecution and mass migration of Palatines and Huguenots in Europe. They sought refuge in England where they were recognised as Protestants fleeing Catholic oppression. In the early eighteenth century, the discourse around naturalising 'Poor Palatines' in England is fascinating and draws parallels with current migration debates. Advocates of Palatine integration stressed their potential to augment the British economy, citing their abilities as skilled farmers and craftsmen. Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe* and supporter of this political stance, wrote a pamphlet defending the 'Poor Palatines' in 1709 and campaigned for legislation to naturalise foreign-born Protestants. However, the hospitable stance faced escalating challenges with the surge in migrant numbers (Dresser and Fleming 2001).

The Tories waged a propaganda campaign against migrants and the Naturalisation Act, arguing that these migrants were a drain on the economy, taking jobs from the English poor and posing a threat to the nation's security because they were not members of the Church of England. This narrative, resembling modern-day populist rhetoric, garnered support from specific segments of society. Due to the unfavourable social and political climate, numerous Palatines were resettled in the American colonies. Historians emphasise the role that transnational religious minorities such as the Huguenots and Palatines played in the expansion of capitalism and migratory routes across the Atlantic (ibid.).

The Age of Migration and Returns (1850-1913): Returning Europeans from the US

From the late eighteenth century onwards, Europeans started to migrate on an extensive scale, and this migration had a substantial impact on both the European continent and beyond (de Haan et al. 2023, p. 75). This particular era, as described by Castles and Miller (1998) and de Haan et al. (2023), helped shape a 'global migration system' with a variety of actors, such as sending and receiving countries and the migrants themselves, playing a role its multiple processes. For instance, government policies of the host country constituted a significant factor in determining the fate of migrants. In the US, the surge in migration commenced only after a court in Indiana prohibited the 'redemption system' that had compelled destitute newcomers to become bonded servants upon borrowing money for entry (de Haan et al. 2023, p. 82). This judicial ruling unintentionally led to a massive influx of migrants and broader societal transformations.

Technological advancements throughout history have had a direct impact on human mobility, including return migration. In the early modern period, the scale of intercontinental migrations was relatively modest. The development of infrastructure – including highways, waterways, and railways – allowed more individuals to move away from their homes and social habitats. These same transport systems also facilitated people returning to their homelands, keeping in touch with relatives, and maintaining ties to their homeland through the proliferation of the telegraph and significant expansion of the press (de Haan et al. 2023, p. 75). Migration and return migration rates rose due to the shift from sail to steamships that reduced the cost and duration of the transatlantic voyage during the 1850s and 1860s. Travel time from Europe to the US shrank from one month in 1800 to eight days by 1870 (Hugill 1993; Cohn 2005). As a

result of this transportation revolution, Keeling (2010) estimates that eastward journeys (from the US to Europe) increased from 18 per cent of total transatlantic travel in the 1870s to 30 per cent by the 1900s. Due to technological advancements, the migratory pattern of this era has shifted from linear to circular.

Historical records demonstrate that the extent of return migration correlates with migration. Approximately 55-60 million individuals departed Europe and relocated primarily in the Americas during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Before the war, in 1914, Argentina had the largest immigrant community with 58 per cent of its eight million residents being first- or second-generation immigrants from Spain and Italy (de Haan et al. 2023, p. 80). Many of these migrant communities were geographically concentrated in the US, such as the Irish in Boston, the Dutch who founded Holland in Michigan, and the 'German Belt' spanning Ohio, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Missouri (de Haan et al. 2023). This clustering allowed for ongoing interaction with their homeland, keeping the notion of return alive and creating conditions for a potential re-emigration to their European homelands.

According to Abramitzky et al. (2016), who compiled extensive data sets from Norwegian and US historical censuses during the Age of Mass Migration (1850-1913), it is noted that 30 million European migrants moved from Europe to the US in this period, and one-third of them eventually returned to Europe. During the period 1908 to 1923, official statistics from the US government showed that a comparable proportion of around 35 per cent of approximately 10 million immigrant arrivals left the country and returned to their countries of origin (Gould 1980; Wyman 1993, pp. 10-12; Hatton and Williamson 1998, p. 9). Some have suggested that these return rates may have been as high as 70 per cent, according to Bandiera et al. (2013).

Return rates vary between different immigrant groups. For example, a mere five per cent of Jewish immigrants to the US returned to Europe, whereas 59 per cent of Bulgarians and Serbians returned before World War I, and half of the Italians who migrated to the US between 1905 and 1915 subsequently returned to Italy (de Haan et al. 2023, pp. 82-83; see also Wyman 1993, p.11 and Gould 1980). Zachary Ward (2016) collected the first dataset from Ellis Island arrival records between 1917 and 1924 to investigate migrants' intentions to stay or return home. His findings revealed that although only 15 per cent of the immigrants who arrived in the US in this period reported their intention to return home during entry, 40 per cent eventually did. Ward argues that the high rate of unplanned returns can be explained by the difficult initial years after arrival, which were more challenging than expected. The numbers decreased in the 1920s when new migration quotas were introduced. Additionally, contextual factors aside, it is important to consider the changing nature of migration motivations. Return is partially linked to the initial motivations for migration, but these early motivations are not fixed and often change during the post-migration period. For instance, in the early 20th century, some people moved to the US temporarily to accumulate savings and subsequently returned home to marry or purchase property. Return migration could also arise due to unemployment, sickness, or personal and family reasons. Edward A. Steiner (1906), an observer of the period, recognised

that return migrants typically fell into two disparate categories: 'those who go home because they have succeeded and those who go home because they have failed' (Steiner 1906).

Applying this logic, Francesco Cerase (1974) identified four different typologies in his study of Italian returnees from the US that illustrate four different types of return: 'the return of failure' in the host country, 'the return of conservatism' focused on investing in the home country, 'the return of retirement', and 'the return of innovation', where returnees are viewed as agents of change in their home country. Returnees of this era experienced an improvement in their financial standing compared to their pre-migration situation, purchasing farms on making other investments when returning (Wyman, 1993, pp. 79,132). 'He who crosses the ocean can buy a house', a popular phrase in Italy at the time, reflects the impact of temporary migration to the US (Cinel 1982: 71).

As several studies have shown, return rates increased during periods of economic downturn, e.g. following the panics of 1893 and 1907. A period of unemployment was a significant factor in facilitating the return journey of migrants back to their home (Wyman 1993, p. 79). A large number of returnees suffered from illnesses or injuries due to strenuous work conditions in the US. Tuberculosis, which the Irish dubbed 'the American disease', was common among the returnees (ibid., p. 85). Migrants were also targeted by popular animosity during economic downturns; particularly those who intended to return home, were singled out for not assimilating into mainstream American society and instead prioritising short-term financial gain (Foner, 1997, p. 367). This negative perception was also evident in official documents (cf. the Dillingham Commission's 1907 report[3]) and several policies restricting migration were put forth for debate. For instance, in 1896, Representative John Corliss (R-MI) proposed an amendment suggesting that no one should be allowed to enter the US while still maintaining a residence in a foreign country (Wyman 1993, p. 104).

Rising Nationalism, Political Exiles, and Their Return Trajectories

The emergence of new nation-states, the rise of nationalism, and the dissolution of three multi-ethnic empires resulted in significant population shifts and facilitated the development of diasporic communities with strong connections to their countries of origin. Understanding these communities is crucial for comprehending specific return trajectories (de Haan et al. 2023, pp. 75-76). As previously stated, the idea and myth of return flourished and was bolstered amidst diasporic communities in correlation with the exponential growth of nationalism.

Another type of 19th-century European migration involved political exiles who played significant roles and influenced millions during their exile and upon their return. Prominent political and intellectual figures from this era include Karl Marx (1818-1883), who spent most of his life in Belgium, France, and England and produced influential work. The leader of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), spent many years in exile, as did other notable political figures such as the Pole Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), the German Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), and the Italian Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) (ibid. p. 76). The

[3] The US Immigration Commission report in 1911, about the negative view of 'new immigrants' from southern and eastern Europe and their 'unwillingness' to integrate into American society

Frenchman Victor Hugo (1802-1885) wrote some of his most famous works, including *Les Misérables*, while in exile in Guernsey.

Political exiles, typically, maintained involvement in politics and intellectual life in their home country. This extensive connection continuously fostered the discourse of return among this cohort and inspired some to aspire to change their nation's political system. The exiles were primarily comprised of a highly educated elite group. Their strong subjectivity allowed them to turn their exile into a space for innovation, particularly in 19th-century Europe. They published countless books, newspapers, and magazines and made significant contributions to intellectual and political life in their home countries and beyond. This aspect is an important topic beyond the scope of this conceptual note.

Migration of the 'Colonial Subjects' and of 'Administrative Personnel' Through Imperial Networks

Another trajectory for studying the migration and returns of this era is the 'imperial networks' through which 'colonial subjects' migrated to imperial centres as did a large number of administrative and military personnel (and their families) to colonies. The colonisation settlement underwent an essential shift during the 1920s and beyond, especially after the US introduced quota laws, which led to a shift in migration trajectories.

Following World War I, the colonies emerged as the principal destination for European emigrants. More than 400,000 individuals departed Britain to settle in colonies, while some 700,000 French citizens migrated to Algeria following its occupation in 1830 and its incorporation as a department of the French state in 1848 (de Haan et al. 2023, p. 83). Italy witnessed a similar pattern of immigration in the mid-1930s through the settlement programme initiated by Mussolini, and Portugal pursued its emigration programme to Angola and Mozambique, which constituted 50 per cent of Portuguese emigration in the 1950s. After World War II, decolonisation movements forced many European settlers to return. The repatriated millions of Europeans (British, French, Italian, Belgian, Portuguese, and Dutch) benefited from 'assisted return' and 'reintegration programmes' (Daniel et al. 2023, p. 93). Interestingly, these two terms are widely being used in EU's current return and readmission policies. During the same period, the auxiliaries of colonial armies often received less support. A specific group, the *Harkis*, who served as auxiliaries for the French Army during the Algerian Independence War (1954-1962) and relocated to France, were permanently placed in camps (ibid.). This example highlights the underlying racial discrimination and segregation present in the nation-state project: being a crucial part of the French military in Algeria did not warrant equal citizenship status. The effects of 'returnees' on the host countries will be discussed in the next section.

Repatriations in the Aftermaths of WWI and WWII

The scale of World War I, in terms of population mobilisation and the extent of bloodshed, resulted in a vast displacement of people. In 1917, the war triggered the forced migration of seven million people (Daniel et al. 2023, p. 86). In the war's aftermath, the term 'return' was

used to describe the process of repatriating soldiers and refugees to their country of origin. The League of Nations played a significant role by establishing repatriation commissions and envoys to deal with specific refugee groups – including Russians, Armenians, and Germans – and assist in their return to their homes. However, none of these efforts resulted in long-term arrangements (Lowe 2017). Katy Long (2013a) provides a comprehensive examination of the history of repatriation by tracing its roots in the early days of the international refugee regime following the end of World War I. Long (ibid.) criticises the international community's focus on repatriation as the ultimate solution to refugee crises and for overlooking the needs of refugees who are unable or reluctant to return.

Repatriations were also employed as a means of creating homogeneous nation-states. Repatriation of Greeks from Turkey and Turks from Greece during the 1920s and 1930s took place in the wake of the Greek-Turkish War as part of the population exchange agreement between Greece and Turkey. The populations were resettled on the basis of their ethnic and religious identities.

After World War II, there were also extensive repatriation efforts to return displaced persons, prisoners of war, and refugees to their home countries. This included the repatriation of some 40 million civilians from different European countries who were displaced during the war. The Allies drew up plans that differentiated between 'refugees' and 'Displaced Persons'. The former was defined as 'civilians not outside the national boundaries of their country'; the latter described as 'outside the national boundaries of their country by reason of the war' and expected to return to their countries of origin with the assistance of Allied authorities (Banko et al. 2022). The newly established United Nations formed separate bodies to deal with European, Palestinian, and Korean refugees.

The end of the war created a decade-long mass movement of populations from east to west and vice versa. Historian Bernard Wasserstein (2011) referred to these groups of distressed people who searched for safety and a new home as 'wanderers'. The peace settlements at the end of World War II forced another massive number of people to leave their homes, driven by a process of ethnic sortition. This resulted in the expulsion of approximately 3.5 million German nationals ('*Volksdeutsche'*) from Polish territory, 3.2 million people from Czechoslovakia, and approximately 225,000 people from Hungary. The vast majority of these '*Heimatvertriebenen*' (expellees) settled in the Western occupation zones, increasing the total number of migrants in the newly established Federal Republic of Germany to roughly 12 million individuals (Daniel et al. 2023, p. 89). After the war, nearly two million Poles were compulsorily transferred from eastern areas of Poland that had been annexed by the USSR. Additionally, the involuntary repatriation of four million Russian POWs in German custody served as another significant instance. A considerable number of Soviet populations resisted repatriation, instead seeking refuge in Western Europe, the United States, Canada, or Australia (Daniel et al. 2023: 88; Wasserstein, 2011).

Decolonisation and Repatriations in the Post-War Period

Decolonisation led to mass population movements and repatriations. Following the partition of British India in 1947, Hindus and Sikhs repatriated to India from newly-formed Pakistan, while Muslims migrated to Pakistan from India. This mutual repatriation of Hindus/Sikhs and Muslims aimed to establish ethnically and religiously homogeneous nations, similar to the Greek-Turkish population exchange. The mass population exchanges resulted in the displacement of individuals from their historical homelands and livelihoods in the name of settlement of a war between countries. In the aftermath of the war and throughout the Cold War, repatriation policies implemented by the international community were predominantly presented as a 'successful solution' that aligned with the nationalist and liberal tenets of decolonisation movements and were seen as the 'only' way to address States' refugee problems, even when returns were neither voluntary nor safe (Long 2013b).

After the Algerian War of Independence, repatriation waves included French citizens, *Pied Noirs* (European-descended Catholics and Sephardic Jews), and pro-French Algerians (*Harkis*) who opted to leave Algeria and return to mainland France. Within a few months in 1962, about 900,000 Pied Noirs and approximately 90,000 Harkis with their families fled to France (Daum 2015). The treatment of the Harkis is an exemplary case as they were unwanted by the French authorities and forced to live in camps for many years without any formal recognition.

One of the most poignant instances of repatriation occurred during the Bangladesh refugee crisis. In 1971, the war culminating in the independence of Bangladesh spurred around 10 million Bangladeshi refugees to escape to India, resulting in the most significant singular displacement of refugees in the latter half of the 20th century. In 1973, UNHCR played a pivotal role in facilitating the transfer of a significant number of peoples between Bangladesh and Pakistan – one of the largest population exchanges in history (UNHCR 2000). Katy Long's (2013b) evaluation report highlights the contentious implications of the collective decision-making surrounding the global community's repatriation policy, resulting in concessions that deviate from the universally-endorsed principle of voluntary refugee repatriation. Several studies, such as the cases of the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar in the early 1990s and the return of Rwandan refugees from Zaire and Tanzania in the mid-1990s, have shown that the principle of 'voluntariness' has been pushed to its limits (Barnett 2000, p. 8). Long (2013b) contends that repatriation operations entail a trade-off between competing interests, with some actors willing to compromise the principle of voluntariness to facilitate refugee returns. In extreme cases, framing returns as 'voluntary' may serve as a form of linguistic manipulation to justify politically expedient returns that do not satisfy minimum protection standards (ibid., p. 1). Despite the disconnect between the universal principle of voluntariness and its implementation, Long supports the continued relevance of the principle of voluntariness and proposes that UNHCR's repatriation operations be based on the criterion of 'safety'.

Return Migration of Guest Workers and Post-Soviet Era 'Voluntary' Returns

In the 1970s and 1980s, the return of guest workers in Europe is a noteworthy case to examine the notion of voluntary returns. After the post-World War II economic boom, various European nations including Germany, France, and the Netherlands employed foreign workers to overcome labour shortages. These guest workers had initially planned to stay on a temporary basis. At least this was the initial perception and expectation of both receiving States and guest workers themselves. Consequently, in subsequent years, some guest workers and their families chose to return to their countries of origin voluntarily. This was due to changing economic conditions, family reunification, or a desire to reconnect with their cultural roots (Wessendorf 2007).

Razum et al. (2005) emphasise that Turkish returnees from Germany were not only motivated by economic factors but also by value-oriented motivations. Rittersberger-Tiliç et al. (2013) came to a similar conclusion. The authors present various factors that influenced returnees' decision, such as attaining or failing to attain migration objectives, parents' desire for their children to receive education in Turkey or grow up in their authentic cultural upbringing or both, the absence of future opportunities for their children to pursue higher education in Germany, as well as marriage, homesickness, difficult working conditions, health issues, and retirement. King and Kilinc (2013) identified five narratives of return among Turkish returnees in their study: return through a family decision; return as a traumatic experience; return as an escape for a new start; return as self-realisation; and return and the 'Turkish way of life'.

Another wave of (voluntary) returns took place after the fall of Soviet regimes in 1991. Some nine million people (UNHCR 2000) found themselves on the move, having either found themselves outside their 'homelands' following the drawing of new national boundaries or having been deported by Stalin in the 1940s. Chudinovskikh and Denisenko (2017) note that migration flows between former Soviet republics after the breakdown of the Soviet Union are to a large extent the result of Soviet-era migration. The end of political restrictions opened up a free space for mobility. Returnees had different motivations: some had the desire to participate in political and economic transitions in their home countries, while for some the driving factor was a sense of national identity and belonging that were reconstructed after the fall of Soviet system. Voluntariness of these movements were highly structured by contextual factors shaped by economic (labour shortages), political (as an enabler and promotor of these movements), and social factors (e.g. family ties).

Returnees: Actors of Social Change?

One emerging topic in the work of historians is the impact of returnees on their home and receiving countries. In his extensive book, *Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent* (2019), Peter Gatrell argues that migration has been a fundamental force in shaping modern Europe, It has led to the creation of new communities and cultures and challenged traditional notions of national identity, generating both conflict and opportunity. Migration is

viewed as both a cause and a consequence of societal transformations (Manning and Trimmer 2020). Various historians have reached similar conclusions regarding the positive effects of migration (cf. Lucassen, Feldman and Oltmer, 2006). However, certain case studies demonstrate that neither immigration nor return migration generates unambiguous favourable results or leads to significant social change in the receiving countries. For instance, Cerase's (1974, p. 245) case study on returns from the US to southern Italy found that 'returned migrants cannot function as vehicles of social development'. In general, the potential impact of refugee returnees on the social or economic development of the origin country is rarely achieved (Mielke 2023; Van Houte and Davids 2008).

Historians have examined the short- and long-term impact of newcomers (including returnees) on the social fabric of host societies (Manning 2013; Lucassen and Lucassen 2014). The social historian Leo Lucassen (2021, p. 431) argues that migrants, including 'repatriates', had a more profound infrastructural impact on the receiving societies. Returnees bring 'new cultural experiences' ranging from technology to food and from ideologies to bureaucratic practices to the receiving society (ibid.). Lucassen particularly focuses on 'organisational migrants' –bureaucrats, soldiers, missionaries, and international skilled workers or NGO employees– whose migratory pattern is primarily determined by their organisational affiliation. Many organisational migrants moved through imperial networks and left their homeland only temporarily. African American soldiers who spent one or two years in Germany post-World War II provide a compelling example of the influence of cross-cultural migrants as they experienced a non-segregated society while in Germany. They were able to date White women and were treated equally by the locals. This experience enlightened them to alternative ways of living outside of their own racist society. Upon returning to the US, many of these African American soldiers became involved in the Civil Rights Movement (Lucassen 2021, pp. 433-435). Another example provided by Lucassen (ibid.) includes the French colonial experts who upon their return to France shaped the development of France's migration and integration policies. These colonial experts became advisors in Muslim affairs affiliated with the CTAM (*Conseillers Techniques pour les Affaires Musulmanes*), perpetuating the colonial divide between Western and non-Western societies that has subsequently become a key aspect of categorising immigrants since the 1970s. This practice was not unique to France, as all colonialist countries can trace their colonial legacy in contemporary migration and citizenship policies.

Diaspora Groups, Homeland, and the Myth of Return

Overall, scholars have recognised the significant contribution of diaspora communities in shaping and promoting a global cosmopolitan culture. The formation of diasporas, as outlined by Manning and Trimmer (2020), is essential for understanding the main patterns and cycles in the complex and diverse world of global migration and, more broadly, the heightened interconnectivity of various localities, socio-economic structures, and political systems.

Another issue studied by historians is the displacement and the repatriation or non-repatriation of minority and exile communities. Historically displaced and exiled communities

– especially those who have suffered mass expulsions such as Armenians, Kurds, Palestinians, and Christians from the Middle East – hold a 'nostalgic' desire to return to their 'imagined' homeland, while also acknowledging the emergence of substitute locations (Chatty 2010, p. 294). According to Cohen (1997), these minority groups are classified as a classical 'victim diaspora' due to their traumatic exile and the strong sense of victimhood incorporated into their diasporic identity. Nostalgia fosters attachment to a home space, which is an essential component of diasporic consciousness. Thus, home is depicted as a mythical space of blurred memories at both the individual and collective levels. Memories are crucial in shaping diasporas and preserving diasporic identities. Diasporic consciousness is constructed on the basis of what Maurice Halbwachs (1992) refers to as 'recollection' or culturally embedded memories (Erll 2011). Halbwachs argues that these recollections foster continuity and self-awareness within the group. Memories of the homeland and family stories are transmitted within a socio-cultural habitus (Bourdieu 1977, p. 53), where diasporic consciousness is fostered across generations. Second-generation immigrants, who were born in diaspora and have never seen their parents' homeland, view home as a mythical space. I contend that for exiled populations, home is thus tied to the past and anchored in familial and cultural memories.

Another dimension of diasporic consciousness is what Vertovec (1997) defines as the awareness of decentred attachments – 'multi-locality' that connects dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups at global level in different localities. This awareness of decentred attachments demonstrates how diaspora groups can affiliate with multiple localities to position themselves physically and emotionally in different contexts. For scholars on transnationalism (Portes et al. 1999, p. 219), subjective evaluations by migrants of their homelands and self-identification play a vital role in their decision to return and their reintegration process. Numerous studies have been conducted on the perception of homeland among Turkish returnees. Kilinc (2014) shows in her article how second-generation Turkish-Germans constantly renegotiate their identities. Ayse Parla (2013) explored the concept of homeland among Bulgarian-Turkish returnees. She noted the ambiguity surrounding the 'original' location of homeland and emphasised that its location changes in both individual itineraries and across migrants who belong to the same migration wave and often mistakenly viewed as a monolithic entity.

The myth of return constitutes an essential part of diasporic consciousness, serving as the final piece of this analytical puzzle. This institutionalised discourse and well-established rhetoric are particularly prevalent among exiled populations who view their stay in host countries as temporary. Madawi Al-Rasheed (1994) explains in her study among Iraqi Arab and Assyrian refugees in London that the myth of return within a diasporic community is dependent on past refugee experiences and the group's relationship with its country of origin. Historians commonly use the term 'myth of return' when discussing non-return of exiled communities. Adherence to this myth is a powerful discourse in the diasporic consciousness. While the mythical portion pertains to the imagination of home or homeland, the real aspect displays the act of returning (ibid., pp. 200-201).

Drawing from literature on diaspora and transnationalism, historians also focus on issues related to belonging, changing identities over time, and relationships between diaspora

and homeland, as well as the roles of diasporic organisations, 'homeland-oriented diasporic humanitarianism' (McCallum Guiney 2023), 'collective remittances' (Galstyan and Ambrosini 2023), and memory – all of which are relevant to the issue of return/non-return. For instance, there exists a vast body of literature on the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland, restitution (reclaiming their confiscated property), and compensation (Chatty 2010). While this scholarship is distinctive in light of the Palestinians' status, the same issues are pertinent to the displacement experiences of numerous minority groups and are deemed essential for returns.

Historical Methodologies for Decentring the Study of Returns

Historians have proposed various approaches to studying migration. The same methods can be applied to suggest some basic points for developing a historical approach to study return migration and the politics of return.

Methods for studying returns

Historians Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen, and Patrick Manning (2010, p. 18) argue that migration can be studied using a framework that covers a long period, wide geographical range, and a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The authors emphasise the significance of **longitudinal studies, an all-encompassing and inclusive global approach** that also critiques the dominance of Western historical writing and highlights the need for a multi-disciplinary framework.

Another method was proposed by Stephen Castles (2008). Castles argued against the fragmentation in migration studies and highlighted the failure to understand the historical nature of migration in migration scholarship, leading to false assumptions of one-way causality and an inability to understand the overall dynamics of migratory processes and their embeddedness in processes of societal change. Castles proposes an interdisciplinary approach, known as '**migration systems theory**' to study both ends of the migratory flow, which is sensitive to historical formations such as 'prior links between sending and receiving countries based on colonisation, political influence, trade, investment, or cultural ties' (ibid., p. 5).

One important approach proposed by historian Patrick Manning (2003) is the '**relational world history-writing methodology'**. This method calls for an analysis of both local and global historical forces, as well as the experiences of individuals who attempted to utilise or oppose these forces.

Historian Klaus J. Bade notes that traditional historical migration research focused on movement in geographic spaces and spatial mobility. However, the emergence of transnationalism in the 1990s led to a shift towards micro-historical approaches that focus on social spaces, including meso-level network theories and theories and typologies of transnational social spaces and migrant identities (Bade 2001, p. 9810). Bade proposes that **historical migration research** should study the longitudinal patterns of migration movements, their volume, trajectories, and structures, as well as the behavioural patterns of migrants in relation to their socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, e.g., region, class, group, and gender (ibid., pp. 9810-9811).

Historians have explored connections between the past and present in various methods. Nancy Foner (2005) identifies two approaches she terms **'then-to-now'** and **'then-and-now'**. The former is a temporal perspective that highlights the role of history and its evolution in explaining contemporary phenomena. In the latter approach, comparisons are drawn between historical events and social and cultural patterns of the past and the present to identify similarities and differences. However, the aim is not necessarily to explain the present through the lens of the past (Bertossi et al., p. 4160).

Lauren Banko, Katarzyna Nowak, and Peter Gatrell (2022) propose a '**refugee-focused approach**' to develop historiographies of migration and analyse how migrants interacted with the refugee category while experiencing and negotiating displacement. Banko and colleagues emphasise that in the early period, historians had a policy-driven and institution-centric approach to refugees. This resulted in various publications on different aspects of the interwar refugee regime, such as the League of Nations' operations and the prehistory of legal and institutional establishment including UNHCR, but that refugees were not considered in these studies (ibid., p. 6). For instance, there is limited understanding of the experiences of Greeks and Turks during the involuntary population exchanges of the 1920s. Although previous studies offered critical knowledge, the authors argue that they overlooked displaced individuals and the socio-economic, cultural, and political worlds that refugees helped to create. By exceeding the State's power, the concept of '**refugeedom**', as coined by the authors, encourages a global perspective. This includes focusing on global events and processes that led to mass population displacement as well as global and diasporic connections that acknowledge non-state-centric experiences and practices (ibid., pp. 2-3).

Decontextualising migration and return historiographies

Developing a historical approach to migration and returns necessitates critically examining migration and return historiographies, including academic literature. This critical engagement with the existing wealth of literature will open new avenues for writing history from the perspectives of actors excluded from writing their own history. Understanding migration and returns from the perspective migrants and returnees, co-writing down their experiences, and giving these experiences an analytical power should be a keystone of a historically-informed academic research.

Pluralising & decentralising history

The prominent Africanist historian Terence Ranger (1994) was one of the first scholars to critically analyse the problematic legal categories of refugees and underscore the need to integrate refugees and returnees into the mainstream of social history. Similarly, historian Paul Kramer (2020) encouraged fellow historians to think *with*, not just *of* refugees. The concept of refugeedom aims to provide refugees with their rightful place in history by decentralising and pluralising it (Banko et al. 2022, p. 8). Pluralising history involves shifting the focus from knowledge production channels produced in the Global North to the Global South to explore new epistemologies and adopt a more inclusive approach toward studying and discussing the history of migration. This approach also aims to pluralise geography (Cole 2021).

In line with pluralising the histories and historiographies[4] of migration, the history of migration as we know it is dominated by the history of groups that were literate and thus had their history somewhat written down and documented. To move beyond this limited approach, it is necessary not only for migration historians, but also for other disciplines studying migration and returns, to make clear the historicity of each case in their methodologies. A perspective from the Global South sheds light on categorisation issues in the aftermath of decolonisation. The politics of categorisation have operated over time and space, necessitating a global approach to their examination.

Limited functionality of legal definitions: incorporating microhistories into the general framework

Historians have problematised formal legal and administrative definitions and terminologies and their dominance, analysing them as manifestations of the refugee regime, which are products of the nation-state order (cf. Banko et al. 20-22; Soguk 1999; Haddad 2008; Zetter 1988). Lucassen and colleagues (2010) highlight the limitations of existing formal categories in explaining the complexity of migrants. They argue that, like labour migrants, refugees rely on information and expectations about work and opportunities from their personal networks when making decisions. The authors emphasise that all refugees have both political and economic motivations. A historical perspective elucidates that socio-politically constructed dichotomies of migration – regular versus irregular, economic migrant versus refugee, voluntary versus involuntary – obscure the intricacies of migration.

A focus on microhistory will offer novel epistemologies for interdisciplinary research to grasp how migrants and returnees engaged and negotiated with 'legal definitions'. Different agentic responses are shown in historical case studies. Migrants caught in situations of displacement engaged with the legal definitions imposed on them in disparate ways. For example, Palestinians adopted the term 'refugee' to draw attention to their exile and resist local integration or resettlement (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016). Additionally, there has been a productive discourse on Palestinians' usage of the term *Nakba*, which refers to the 1948 mass displacement. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon initially resisted using the term, seeing it as a permanent status for their temporary situation, preferring 'returnees' (see Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007). In contrast, repatriates in India during the Partition era rejected the 'refugee' label and demanded to be recognised as full citizens (Rahman and van Schendel 2003). This difference in the perception of a legal, hierarchical label can only be understood through a historical study that examines the counter-narratives developed within migrant communities in relation to the legal classifications imposed upon them.

State-building processes occur by externalising groups from the imagined community and deporting them from the territory, following a logical sequence. Studies have also examined the impact of refugees on shaping states. For instance, Benjamin Thomas White's (2017) work on the French mandate period of Syria illustrated how French officials established

[4] Here, the author deliberately used the plural form to show the multiplicity of histories that can be accounted for human movements.

a ‘buffer zone’ in Syria to consolidate colonial rule by settling Armenians. The placement of refugees prompted a reactive response among Syrian Arabs who constructed the notion of a ‘Syrian nation’, viewing Armenian refugees as both a threat and an example of Syrian hospitality. This interaction played a significant role in the formation of the State, as White (ibid.) notes. Examining the involvement of Assyrian refugees in shaping modern Iraq, Laura Robson (2017) analysed how the British and French colonial authorities, with the approval of the League of Nations, relocated Assyrian refugees to remote border regions in northern Iraq to consolidate their State power. The British viewed Assyrian refugees, who were forcibly displaced from present-day Turkey (Hakkari, Bothan region), as a valuable resource in combatting Iraqi resistance. This narrow-minded approach bolstered British control during their mandate, but it also reinforced the call for an independent Iraqi state, resulting in the 1933 Simele massacre of Assyrians. This event was later cited by Raphael Lemkin as a prime example when he presented his legal definition of ‘genocide’ to the League of Nations conference on international criminal law in Madrid (Safi 2018).

Another aspect that needs to be included in micro-histories of migration and return is the aspirations, experiences, and encounters of refugees and how they give meaning to each segment of the mobility. Banko et al. (2022) correctly assert that refugees' own experiences with space, networks, and institutions, the meaning of diaspora, as well as return for refugees who have embarked on repatriation journeys, are part of global histories of displacement. Another trope that has received considerable attention in micro-historiographies is the meaning of ‘home’ or the idea of homecoming and imagined returns, which offer dominant insights into the idea or myth of return and practices at the individual and group level (cf. for ‘homecomings’ studies by Cerase 1967; 1974; Stefansson and Markowitz 2004; Conway et al. 2005; Newbury 2005). Studies on ‘ethnic/diasporic return’ include those by Tsuda (2009). Studies on the construction of ‘home’ include those by Hammond (2004), Christou and King (2010), Stefanson (2006), and den Boer (2015).

Concluding Remarks

Historical research is well-suited to providing comprehensive explanations of the socio-economic processes and political developments that have shaped migration and return trajectories. As an interdisciplinary approach, the historical analysis of (return) migration is vital for examining patterns of continuity and change in migration and return policies from a longitudinal perspective, as well as for understanding the agentic responses of migrants and returnees.

Two questions are at the forefront of migration scholarship. How much history has been integrated into the field? To what extent have historians included various types of micro histories of (return) migration in their studies? In recent years, there has been a multidisciplinary effort to incorporate the lived experiences of migrants into the history of migration. It is important to consider the perspectives of those who have personally experienced migration to gain a full understanding of the phenomenon. These experiences serve as first-hand accounts of what occurred during their journey and upon their arrival. Each discipline studying migration should consider posing a similar inquiry about the extent to which

history is fully incorporated as a fundamental element in their epistemology. Additionally, how do these studies use micro-level experiences and historiographies in their theories? These and other related inquiries can be further explored. This conceptual note sought to explain the importance of history in migration studies, while also highlighting some key questions and preliminary remarks for understanding (return) migration from a historical perspective.

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3. Anthropology of Return Migration

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Introduction

This review paper outlines the history of anthropological research on return migration, first as a 'natural' homecoming experience and then in terms of more critical work on forced return and refugee return. The paper progresses from a focus on anthropology as a disciplinary approach to address interdisciplinary work (including anthropologists, sociologists, cultural theorists, and scholars from other related fields) that has contributed to the study of return governance, voluntariness, deportation, and re-migration.

Anthropology of Migration and Return

Early anthropologists ignored the study of migration because it did not fit with their notion of timeless and bounded cultures (Brettell 2003). In particular, return migration was not seen as worthy of study in anthropology and other disciplines, leading it to be called 'the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration' (King 2000, p. 7). Returning home was assumed to be the unproblematic reinsertion of the migrant into the original society – or it was believed that immigrants would never return. Noticing that many migrants intended to return but did not, anthropologists focused on the 'myth of return' (Al-Rasheed 1994; Anwar 1979; Dahya 1973; Zetter 1994; 1999), the 'return illusion' (Brettell 1979), or the 'ideology of return' (Rubenstein 1979). Anthropologists in the emerging field of diaspora studies in the 1990s emphasised the persistent presence of home as a symbolic resource while actual return to the mythic home remained strangely unexplored (cf. Clifford 1997; Tololyan 1991). In fact, return migration clashed with dominant narratives of assimilation, multiculturalism, and transnationalism that delineate the history of migration research (Stefansson 2004, p. 5).

Anthropologists first discussed return migration in a 1979 series on the topic in the *Papers in Anthropology* series (Rhoades 1979). This was followed by an *Annual Review of Anthropology* article in which return migration was defined as 'the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle' (Gmelch 1980). Although the review's author, George Gmelch (1992), later published a book on the subject of Caribbean returnees, return migration remained a neglected topic. When transnationalism became a hot trend in the discipline in the 1990s, scholars started focusing on the ties that immigrants maintain with their countries of origin such as remittances, construction of homes, and participation in politics and cultural and social activities (Brettell 2003; Basch et. al. 1994; Foner 1997; Glick Schiller et al. 1995; 1992; Kearney 1995; 2005). Ironically, in their focus on sending and receiving countries as a single transnational field, return migration rarely became a distinct topic of study. Return home was seen as a brief intersection in a 'transnational migration circuit' (Rouse 1991, p. 14). Furthermore, immigrants who returned permanently were considered 'temporary migrants' and therefore less worthy of study than permanently transnational migrants.

In the 2000s, return migration finally began to receive scholarly (and anthropological) attention with edited volumes (Conway and Potter 2009; Markowitz and Stefansson2004; Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Long and Oxfeld 2004) and in-depth ethnographies,

including studies of long distance nationalism for Haitian-Americans (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001), consumption practices of Moroccan-Italians (Salih 2003), home and belonging for British-born Cypriots (Teerling 2014), Greek returnees' emergence as a 'counter-diaspora' (King and Christou 2014), Mexican-Americans' reintegration efforts (Rothstein 2016), highly educated Somali returnees' nation-building struggles (Galipo 2019), Bulgarian-Turks' partial ethnic inclusion (Parla 2019), and German-Turks' ethical predicaments in their homelands (Rottmann 2019). At this time and in subsequent years, there was a lot of overlap with sociologists, geographers, and others. For example, in the volume edited by Anghel, Fauser, and Boccagni (2019), researchers reported on in-depth studies with ethnic Germans 'returning' to Romania's Transylvania region, workers from Libya and Ivory Coast to Ghana, and German-speaking returnees in Turkey and Romania among others.

Concept of Return Migration

In the initial approaches to return migration within anthropology, return migration as a concept or process was largely a neutral, descriptive term, aligning with the official EU definition: 'The movement of a person going from a host country back to a country of origin, country of nationality or usual residence usually after spending a significant period of time in the host country whether voluntary or forced, assisted or spontaneous'.[5] Yet, such a definition of the term 'return migration' is, in fact, problematic (King 2000): return is construed as natural, as a teleological move of migrants back to the place 'where they truly belong'. Researchers have shown over and over again that such a simplistic definition does not reflect the reality of return migration for several reasons.

First, many migrants do not simply go to one country and return to their origin country permanently. Scholars tried to develop typologies of returns based on temporality and intention. One attempt identified three types: returns as one-time occurrences ending migration trajectories; returns as repeated occurrences; and returns as part of a continuing migratory process (Tsuda 2019). Another typology identified four types of return: occasional and short-term visits to see kin and friends; seasonal returns; temporary returns of a longer duration and with the intention to remigrate; and finally permanent returns, including resettlement (King 2000). All such typologies run into the same problem: the subjects of ethnographic research rarely fit neatly into any one typology. Migration experiences are multilocal; migrants may feel a 'belonging' to two or more places, not just to their 'home' country. Typologies further fail to focus on how intentions might change during the migration process (Kuschminder 2017, p. 7), and scholars have demonstrated that migrants' ideas are affected by movement through life, not merely between places (Olwig 1998). A second – and related – issue with defining return migration is with the labelling of any migrant as a 'returnee'. In some studies, migrants happily take up this label, but in others they do not refer to themselves or even think of themselves as 'return migrants' (Rottmann 2019). Furthermore, there are many cases where there can be no true 'return' to the status quo. For example, countries, regions, cities, and individuals can change drastically, making the notion of return or homecoming essentially meaningless. On the other hand, the most extreme kind of

[5] https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/return_en

permanent return is probably the return upon death (Abu-Lughod 2011; Pauli and Bedorf 2018; Stefansson 2004).

A major finding for scholars studying return is that it is challenging for the migrants, who often face difficulties or impossible homecomings, resulting in ambivalence, ambiguity, misunderstandings, and disenchantment (Stefansson 2004; Gmelch 1992; Tsuda 2003; Huseby-Darvas 2004). Yet while they identify numerous spatial and social challenges – for example, research focused on conflicts in neighbourhoods, schools, and public spheres for German-Turkish return migrants (Rottmann 2013; 2015; 2018) – researchers also find joy, satisfaction, connection, and successful reintegration (Rottmann 2019). The study of return migration has provided a particularly fertile ground for anthropologists to explore concepts of 'home' and 'belonging' as places of tension between multiple forms of inclusion and exclusion (Brun and Fabos 2015; Olwig 2012; Parla 2019; Rottmann 2019).

Anthropology of Refugee Returns

The majority of early studies of return migration in anthropology were not focused on refugee, asylum seeker, or irregular migrant return. It was only in the 1980s that anthropologists started to study refugees, with the publication of ethnographies like Peter Loizos's *The Heart Grown Bitter* (1981) about Cypriot war refugees and B. E. Harrell-Bond's *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (1986) about Ugandan refugees. As with other studies of migration that overlooked return migration at the time, the anthropological works that followed focused on the experiences of internally displaced people in camps and resettled refugees in countries of asylum (Gilad 1990; Habarad 1987; Hirshon 1989; Peteet 1995). Actually, a failure to focus on refugee return among resettled refugees aligns with research showing that numbers of refugee returnees are low among resettled refugees, even when socio-political conditions improve (Zetter 2021). Refugee return, when it did happen, was initially viewed by anthropologists as a type of 'ethnic return migration', or 'post-colonial return' (Stefansson 2004, p. 7), 'roots migration' (Wessendorf 2007), or 'ancestral return' (Teerling 2014). For example, anthropologists and others studied diasporic returns (returns of exile communities), exploring notions of homeland and 'right of return', or the 'myth of return' for displaced populations like Armenians, Palestinians, Middle Eastern Christians, and so on (Adelman and Barkan, 2011; Chatty, 2010; Al-Rasheed 1994; Baser and Toivanen, 2019).

As with other studies of returnees, researchers stressed the social, psychological, economic, and political complexities of return for refugees, even when the return itself was largely (or largely perceived to be) the free choice of the migrant (Barnes 2001; Black and Koser 1999; Hammond 2004; Muggeridge and Doná 2006; Long and Oxfeld 2004). Anthropologists joined other scholars, mainly sociologists and political scientists, in trying to understand structural incentives for return, such as access to services and employment opportunities in receiving countries, security, and possibilities of property restitution in origin countries (Rottmann and Kaya 2021), asset ownership, access to education (Al Husein and Wagner 2020) and living conditions, and legal status (Valenta et al. 2020). A few studies also looked at more emotional or 'affective' dimensions of return decisions (Perez Murcia, 2019).

The New Governance of Return Migration: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches

The last decade-and-a-half heralded a radical change in how the return migration of refugees, asylum seekers, and irregular migrants is conceived both within and beyond anthropology, as States have developed new concepts, tools, and methods focused on return. Rather than based mainly on seeking one's 'roots' or an 'ancestral home', the meaning of return migration is highly politicised. Return now meets an objective of receiving States that consider it the 'optimum durable solution' to refugee-hosting. In the EU, Member states (MSs) are frequently less focused on the successful integration of migrants than on swift returns, making return a main strategy pursued by UNHCR and other intergovernmental organisations as well as governments (Long 2013; Hammond 2014). Voluntary return and repatriation – 'the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit, or third country, based on the free will of the returnee'[6] – is prioritised in the EU's return policies. MSs must enable third-country nationals subject to a return decision to leave the EU territory voluntarily by granting them a voluntary departure period (Article 7 Return Directive). With this new 'regime of return' in the political and legal sphere, return is positioned as something natural for States (if not also for citizens) – a process that restores the Westphalian order of the State-citizen bond to a defined territory (Shacknove 1985).

Researchers – and especially anthropologists – have long criticised the common-sense link between peoples and territories (Clifford 1997; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1995; Parent 2022), and thus are highly critical of any policies that posit a naturalness to return of migrants. For example, writing about refugee repatriation to Ethiopia, Lorie Hammond (2004, p. 79) challenges the '*assumption* that place plays a particular, generalizable, and predictable kind of role in community construction and identity formation across cultures' [emphasis in the original]. Ethnographic work among Palestinian youth in a refugee camp in Beirut has shown disillusionment with the 'Right to Return' movement and 'identities rooted in a purely nationalist discourse' (Allan 2014). On the other hand, we cannot assume that refugees have no relation to places at all and are in a permanent state of liminality (Brun and Fábos 2015; Ramsay 2019). In fact, strong connections to places can be an important locus of migrant agency and identity. Dawn Chatty's (2010) ethnography of Armenian, Christian, Kurdish, and Palestinian migrants points to the central importance of place – and multiple identities – as part of constructing welcoming cosmopolitanism across the Middle East. Writing about 'the jungle' encampment at Calais, France, Michel Agier (2018) posits that it is a space of vibrant creativity for migrants – far from meaningless, even though it is a challenging home. Thus, we must guard against common-sense notions of an essential national belonging or a solidified place-based identity and allow fine-grained ethnographies to lead the way to understanding the meaning of places for migrants.

Voluntariness of return, deportation, and assisted voluntary return

Today, the borders between anthropology and related fields are nearly unrecognisable. Most social scientists are highly sceptical of the widely-used term 'voluntary return' and accompanying new regimes of border security and deportation (Andersson 2016; De Genova

[6] https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/voluntary-return_en

et al. 2022; Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2017). Research shows that although supposedly premised on the free will of the migrant, 'voluntary return' is in practice often dominated by State coercion, social destitution, structural violence, and abuse (De Genova et al. 2022, p. 856).

The contradictions between agency and governance emerge quite clearly in the classification of **'voluntary return migrants'** by governments or international organisations. Some migrants may only be 'willing' to return because they either have no access to social amenities and shelter or they risk imprisonment, violence, and other abuse (such as separation from their children) in destination countries (de Haas 2021). Thus, their return is not based on a real, intrinsic desire to do so. Under such situations of extreme distress and pressure, migrants who 'decide' to return can even be compelled to sign forms confirming consent to 'voluntary repatriation', even if this is against their own intrinsic preferences or desires (Cleton and Chauvin, 2020). Boersema et al. (2014) call this process a 'soft deportation' (Leerkes, et al. 2017). The latter term indicates 'that such return has deportation-like properties', while acknowledging that it depends less on force and deterrence than 'classic deportations. There are clearly very strong power dynamics involved, whose mechanisms are not sufficiently researched in the context of return migration. How power operates in voluntary return situations will be very interesting to examine in South-South return contexts studied by GAPs via individual trajectories. For example, is voluntary return in this context 'soft deportation'?

Addressing this question requires a close look at how return aspirations are formed and imagined in a context of protracted displacement. It is important to take into account refugees' broader life aspirations in interaction with individual characteristics and structural conditions. Time also plays a crucial role in how return is aspired and imagined (Müller-Funk and Fransen, 2022). These are all issues that we will explore in-depth in WP7.

Deportation creates an ultimate line between members and non-members, which is 'constitutive of citizenship' for the dominant group and disposability for the other (De Genova and Peutz 2010). Deportation may be entirely unexpected and unwanted for migrants (Peutz 2006). For example, a recent ethnography of migrants with deportation orders from the UK showed that they felt more 'British' than connected to any other homeland, so 'return' was perceived as unjust as well as difficult (Hasselberg 2016). Nicholas De Genova (2002, p. 439) coined the term **deportability** to name a universal condition shared by non-citizens that implies 'the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation-state'. Although any unauthorised immigrant is theoretically subject to expulsion by the State, in practice not everyone can be forcibly relocated to their country of origin. Non-deportability often stems from the reluctance of origin States to cooperate on forced return. Indeed, deportation always requires the willingness of another State to accept the returnee (Gibney 2008). Variations in non-deportability shape the options available to government and NGO workers responsible for enforcing 'return'.

Anthropological and sociological work often shows that return policies and discourses about migrant return support State agendas far more than they reflect refugee desires or needs. For example, research on Europe's return discourses by Eleanor Paynter (2022) shows how they are based on 'paratexts' – political discourses produced in direct connection with policy or legal action (Brookey and Gray 2017). The discourse of

'deservingness' is used to justify racialised bordering practices that uphold a false refugee-economic migrant binary. This discourse then enables the deporting of economic migrants since they do not 'deserve' to be able to stay like supposed genuine refugees. Refugees can also become targets of discourses about social problems. In Germany, for instance, displaced people are blamed for economic and social difficulties and even for the creation of a crisis rather than being seen as themselves victims of crises (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). This lays the groundwork for deporting unruly individuals.

With the concept of **'assisted voluntary return'** (when a State or agency facilitates a return of a migrant by providing transportation, funding, or other support), the notion of 'voluntary' is taken one step further and certainly beyond its original meaning. These processes are ostensibly designed to provide dignity and limited rights in situations of constrained options. In fact, anthropologists argue that they are directly linked to forced returns, deportations, and expulsions. Writing about Norway, Synnove Bendixsen (2016, p. 548) explains that 'without assisted return, it becomes difficult to legitimise forced return, and without the latter, it becomes harder to implement the former'. She explains: 'The government frequently presents assisted return programmes as a humanitarian option compared to forced returns, while the latter is legitimised by the argument that if irregular migrants "fail" to opt for assisted return, a forced return is the only option available to the government' (ibid.). Thus 'assistance' seems to be quite forceful. Sharam Khosravi (2018, pp. 4-5) argues that deportees are part of a neoliberal moralising and 'responsibilising' project to make them believe that they have control over their lives before and after deportation. Rather than being subject to structural violence via deportation, deportation is positioned as the moral personal choice of migrants.

How do migrants feel about this situation? While researchers have attempted to understand the intentions and motivations of returnees and thereby to differentiate between voluntary and forced returns (Boehm 2016; Cassarino 2004), it is quite difficult to determine when a return is truly voluntarily (Akesson and Baaz 2015; Kuschminder 2017, p. 6). More ethnographic research is needed on the perspective of migrants themselves and how trajectories – onward movements and re-orientations as well as periods of rest and intermediate forms of settlement – develop for them (Schapendonk et al. 2021).

Amidst this burgeoning focus on return migration for refugees, asylum seekers, and irregular migrants, little research has focused on **returnees' lives after migration** (Khosravi 2018). Some experience 'double abandonment' (Lecadet 2013), rejected both abroad and also after they return. Most studies show that experiences after forced return are negative, with deportees feeling 'estranged citizenship' (Khosravi 2018, p. 7). Another topic that needs more research is reverse migration or re-migration – when a returnee leaves the country of origin and travels back to the host country. Although re-migration rates differ, some research shows that numbers of re-migrants are high. For example, up to 80 per cent of Afghans forcibly removed to Kabul attempt to remigrate (Gladwell and Elwyn 2012). Re-migration is sometimes defined as 'failed social reintegration' or 'failed remixing'' in today's dominant political discourses, but in fact, research shows that back and forth movement can be part of a migration strategy. Writing about Syrian refugees in Turkey, Biner and Biner (2021, p. 883) report that 'depending on the border policies of the Turkish state and the intensity and location of the fighting in Syria, many travel regularly to their home cities and towns in Syria to check on their property and family members and to discern what the future may bring'. While it is important to criticise forced return to unsafe places, it is also important

to remember that many refugees do want to return when conditions allow or – like any of us – they want to be able to freely move between homes, families, and live in more than one place, as return has more recently been portrayed as a life transition between separate geographic spaces and biographical times (Perez Murcia and Boccagni 2022). To explain the return orientations and practices of individuals, it is important to consider the meanings attributed to home by potential returnees and how these change over time (Boccagni 2022; Perez Murcia and Boccagni 2022).

Anthropological and Sociological Definitions Applied in GAPs

In this project, we are interested in how people affected by deportation regimes define return, assistance, and voluntariness. The deportation regime, in its many shapes (Leerkes and Van Houte 2020) is the State technology of control and exclusion that is used to deal with unwanted populations (Peutz and De Genova 2010). From this perspective, beyond a mere act (Peutz and De Genova, 2010), deportation is rather viewed as a practice that is 'constitutive of citizenship', reaffirming the boundaries of membership to countries (Anderson, Gibney and Paoletti 2011). It has a symbolic role as a 'spectacle' of State enforcement to make the State look powerful in front of the public (Mainwaring and Silverman 2016). Others have explained it as a disciplining apparatus shaped by the needs of the informal labour market (Karadağ and Sert 2023). In WP7, GAPs will try to understand how migrants perceive the deportation regime as governance apparatuses (border controls, laws, policies, officials, etc.) and how this affects their trajectories. These perceptions are often used to explain the gap between removal and rejected asylum applications (Gibney and Hansen 2003) and the limits of 'migration control' (Ellermann 2008).

With an anthropological approach, we also aim to bring the role of perceptions, experiences, and emotions (hope/despair, capacity to move on with life/resilience) to the forefront as a means of understanding what return means for people involved in it. We seek particularly to identify the different forms of agency in migrant lifeworlds, examining when and how agency becomes apparent with regards to mobility and, more specifically, return. We ultimately explore the characteristics of trajectories in different locations (with the goal of developing a typology) to show the precarity, plurality, and multi-directionality of mobility. In addition to governance and agency, WP7 explores the role of social networks and integration contexts in shaping trajectories. In this way, the precise definition of return is an open question and we expect multiple conceptions to emerge from the field research.

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4. Return and Related Concepts in International Law

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Introduction

Although the general literature on return migration studies has increased in recent years, there still needs to be more clarity regarding definitions, concepts, and terminology. The same ambiguity remains for the terminological definitions of and conceptual approaches to return-related matters, including the term 'return itself', particularly in international law. As stated in the International Commission of Jurists' (ICJ) Practitioner's Guide on migration and international human rights law (ICJ 2014, 39), one of the difficulties for any publication that aims to address problems of migration – in law or in practice – is the complexity and diversity of the migration experience. This difficulty, however, is not only related to the dynamic nature of the concept of return but also because of the general complexity of the system of international law, which is attracted both by State sovereignty and human rights (Wheatley 2019, p. 63; Reisman 1990, p. 876; Shen 2000, p. 419; Donnely 2004, p. 2; Henkin 1995, pp. 31-32), especially when it comes to the migration-related matters (Higgins 1973, p. 342; Dauvergne 2004 , pp. 589-591, Chetail 2014, p. 27).

As a principle in international law, based on the territorial sovereignty of States, each State has the discretion to regulate matters of entry into (admission), stay, and exit of foreigners. This discretion is also reflected in the States' 'right' to expel foreigners. Hence, the legal scope of each component of the return activity is mainly defined or crystalised or both by each relevant State, and a binding, uniform, and thorough body of rules that define and regulate return migration in its broad meaning does not exist in international law. Nevertheless, there are certain attempts to assert uniform conceptualisation of some essential components of return migration, such as expulsion. In 2014, International Law Commission (ILC) adopted 'Draft Articles on the Expulsion of Aliens' (Draft Articles). At present, Draft Articles does not have a binding effect on international law; but it serves as a significant demonstration that supports the claim that expulsion, which is one of the fundamental elements of return migration, is a phenomenon recognisable and codifiable by international law (Kanstroom 2017, p. 50). Draft Articles defines expulsion as 'a formal act or conduct attributable to a State by which an alien is compelled to leave the territory of that State; it does not include extradition to another State, surrender to an international criminal court or tribunal, or the non-admission of an alien to a State' (Art. 2). Draft Articles, on the other hand, reiterates the 'right of expulsion' being a 'right of a State' (Art. 3) and therefore confirms the sovereignty-based State discretion on the matter. However, it should be noted that this discretion, not only for regulating the expulsion but also for regulating the other components of return migration such as entry-into (admission), exit, and stay of a foreigner is not of an absolute character. Apart from the mere domestic constitutional necessities of the rule of law, it is framed on two grounds that bear international character (Goodwin-Gill, 1976), as confirmed by the ILC under the Draft Articles, particularly in relation to expulsion. These are the principles in international law that apply to inter-State relations together with the obligations thereof and the principles of international human rights law, while from a

positivist view, the functional bindingness of both being subject to legitimacy through either existing rules under international conventions or within customary law.

Hence, there is a polarising nature of the concept of return that can be seen through the perspective of international law from two dimensions: namely, from the State-to-State interaction and from the State-to-individual interaction. This so-called polarisation in the first dimension appears to be between the sovereignty rights of each State and their obligations towards each other, whereas, in the second dimension, it is viewed in two forms: (1) between the inter-State obligations of the States and the obligations of the States to respect and protect individual rights; and (2) between the sovereignty rights of the States and the States' obligation to respect and protect individual rights. The debates regarding return-related matters in the legal literature are mostly derived from this backdrop, which is also one of the most significant demonstrations of the complexity of the international legal system itself. Consequently, the relevant literature in international law either focuses on clarification of the rights and obligations of the States not only towards each other but also towards the individual or, sometimes to seek for an equilibrium point, question and weigh the level of influence of the two attractors of the system, namely, sovereignty and human rights, which pull it in different directions at a time (Wheatley 2019, p. 63).

Return as a Matter of the Individual's Action: The Scope of Right to Leave and Right to Return (Enter) as a Fundamental Human Right

Direct mention of return in the binding instruments of international law can be seen in '**the right to return to one's own country**' provided under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Art. 13) and adopted by international human rights conventions. However, this statement does not define return but provides the scope of a guarantee attributed to individuals. This could be taken as one of the legal norms that function, as Aleinikoff (2002, p. 11) states, to constrain and channel State authority over migration. The reflection of this right can be seen in other international instruments,[1] albeit with a different wording: 'right to enter'. This difference in the wording has not been much of an interest of the literature as generally two terms are being used interchangeably. Goodwin-Gill (1995) states that the usage of the term 'return' *is used for convenience but should also be interpreted sufficiently broadly to include the admission of a national who, for whatever reason, may be making a first-time entry*.[2] Agterhuis (2004, p. 2) also has similar considerations for using the term in a broad sense. Bantekas (1998, p. 60) seems to have the only distinct opinion on the matter distinguishing right to return from right to enter.

Right to return (or right to enter) in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is regulated under freedom of movement, which is seen as one of the most significant connecting factors of extraterritorial human mobility to the area of international (human rights) law and a subject of interest among legal scholars (Juss 2006; McAdam 2011; Kochenov 2015; Goodwin-Gill 1995; De Vittor 2013; Paz 2018; Ramji-Nogales & Goldner Lang 2020). Hence, the legal scholarship indicates that the extraterritorial freedom of movement is uniquely expressed and channelled through a duo of proclaimed rights: the right to leave any country, including one's own, and the right to return to one's own country (Kochenov 2015, p. 149; McAdam 2011, pp. 5, 6; Harvey and Barnidge 2005, p. 3; Chetail 2014, p. 26).

One of the debates in the legal literature that is related to return-migration can be seen in the asymmetrical relation between the right to leave and the right

to return. Based on the scope of these rights enshrined under international law, scholars point out that the right to leave does not automatically secure the right to return (enter)[3] (Juss 2006, p. 294; Harvey and Barnidge 2005, p. 1; Higgins 1973), although it is also asserted that the rights of entry, stay, and exit are inseparable: the denial of any one of these rights renders the exercise of the others illusory rather than tangible (Higgins 1973). The main reason for this is shown as the State's right to expel and duty to readmit their own nationals (Goodwin-Gill 1978, p. 21; McAdam 2011, p. 2; Coleman 2009, p. 28). This is why some scholars refer to freedom of movement of foreigners as a right that has remained 'incomplete' (Juss 2006, p. 294; McAdam 2011, p. 2; Paz 2018). Hence, the scholars tend to clarify each right in their own terms, especially considering their context in the instruments of international law (Agterhuis 2004; Goodwin-Gill 1995; Harvey and Barnidge 2005; Hannum 1987; Jagerskiold 1981; Whelan 1981; Chetail 2014).

Among the various international organisations of a universal character, created within their respective treaty systems, only the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) has thoroughly investigated these rights within the framework of the ICCPR. In this setting, the General Comments (GC) and Communications of the HRC hold significance as they serve as the foundation for comprehending this entitlement. General Comments encompass fundamental principles that offer guidance on the practical implementation of the right. Communications exemplify how the right has been interpreted in cases where States are accused of violating their legal commitments under the ICCPR. On the other hand, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) also constitutes a significant source for understanding the scope of these rights in international law, albeit a regional one.

Right to leave in the codified international law refers to 'the right to leave any country, including one's own country' whereas UDHR secures the **right to return** stating that 'everyone has the right to return his country'. However, both ICCPR and the P.4, Art. 3 (2) of the ECHR regulate the latter right with different wordings. While ICCPR stipulates that 'no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country', P.4, Art. 3(2) of the ECHR provides that no one shall be deprived of the right to enter the territory of the State of which he is a national.

Right to leave is not a non-derogable right and may be restricted on grounds of national security, public order, public health, or morals, or for the protection of rights and freedoms of others provided that such restrictions are in accordance with law and are necessary in a democratic society.[4] Scholars have discussed that the majority of problems concerning the implementation of the right to leave, including one's own country, primarily may arise when States impose what they consider to be acceptable restrictions on this right due to the fact that certain restrictions require concretisation (Kochenov 2015, 168-172; Hannum 1987, 45; Goodwin-Gill 1995).

Right to return, on the other hand, is not subjected to the same restriction provision in the UDHR. However, the possible impact of the differentiation of the wording related to this right in international law is discussed among legal scholars on two inter-related matters: (1) the possible deprivation from entry (Agterhuis 2004, pp. 6, 7; Hailbronner 1997, pp. 5, 6; Coleman 2009, pp. 31, 32; Hannum 1987, p. 45); and (2) whether the personal scope of the right involves solely the citizens (Agterhuis 2004, pp. 7, 8; Hailbronner 1997, pp. 3-5; Coleman 2009, pp. 29, 30; Hannum 1987, pp. 56-63) .

For the personal scope of the right to leave, however, there is not much of a discussion because the 'legality' of the person's situation in the departure country does not affect the enforceability of the right to leave. As further confirmed by the HRC, the right is not restricted to **persons lawfully within the territory of a state.**[5] There are two consequences of this situation. First, considering that citizens of a State are in principle always lawfully within the territory of that State,[6] the right should be applicable to foreigners as well as the citizens[7] without a need for further clarification of the term 'own country'. This is why there has been no interest in the legal literature to explain the term within that context, as opposed to the interest in defining the same term in relation to right to return. Second, a foreigner who is lawfully subjected to expulsion should also enjoy the guarantees secured by this right.[8] The right is considered to secure the freedom to choose the State of destination (**choice of destination**) subject to that State's agreement.[9] Hence, a foreigner who is lawfully being expelled from a State also has the right to choose the specific country they wish to relocate to, provided that the receiving State agrees. As a result, it is asserted that if such a destination State exists, the exit State should not be able to forcibly remove the individual to another State[10] (Gürakar-Skribeland 2022; Taylor 2020, p. 336).

Facilitating the right to leave a country does not preclude the provision of a passport or a substitute travel document as a standard requirement for international travel.[11] In this context, the HRC underlines that the right imposes obligations not only on the State of residence but also on the State of nationality, given that the **right to obtain necessary documents to travel** is included within the right to leave and that refusal by a State to issue a passport or prolong its validity for a national residing abroad may deprive this person of the right to leave the country of residence and to travel elsewhere.[12]

When considering the connection between the right to leave and the act of returning, particularly when it pertains to foreigners leaving a country, the requirement for travel documents, on some occasions, has been seen by some scholars to potentially restrict the exercise of this right (Kochenov 2015, p. 162) and by some to directly affect the practical exercise of the right (Hannum 1987, p. 21). Hailbronner (1997, p. 6), on the other hand, approaches the matter from the perspective of the right to return of the individual and the obligation of the State to readmit its nationals and concludes that, specifically, individuals who have left their home country without the required travel documents in order to seek asylum or those who have intentionally destroyed their travel documents, often face difficulties in obtaining the necessary papers to facilitate their return to their country of origin. It should be noted that the possible effect of the claimed restriction or the effect on the choice of destination and its impact on transforming a voluntary departure into a forced removal together with **detention** practices – indicated to be used increasingly in State practices for (forced) return activities (Majcher and Strik 2021, p. 126) – have not been comprehensively evaluated in the literature of international (human rights) law. Hence, McDonnell (2021) and Gürakar-Skribeland (2022) observe that the right to leave remains underexplored and often overlooked.

Return as a Matter of (Inter-) State Action: The Scope of the State's Right to Expel and the Obligation to Readmit

The research on States' right to expel and the duty to readmit in the international law literature mostly focuses on the clarification of the scope and legitimacy of these notions and their

position against or with the relevant rights of the individual (Hailbronner 1997; Coleman 2009; Goodwin-Gill 1976; Kochenov 2015; Opeskin 2009; Agterhuis 2004; Noll 1997). There is not much of a dispute among scholars regarding **the duty of a State to readmit its own nationals** and a **State's right to expel foreigners** being principles of international law (Aleinikoff 2002, p. 15; Noll 1997, p. 25; Hailbronner 1997, p. 7; Kochenov 2015, p. 145). Scholars tend to explain the inter-relation between these two notions by stating that the obligation to readmit a State's own national is the inherent counterpart of the right to expel foreigners (Hailbronner 1997, p. 7; Noll 1997, p. 30; Goodwin-Gill 1976, p. 58; Giuffre 2015). The scope of the restrictions of the right to expel emerged from this inter-relation in international law therefore has been a debatable topic (Goodwin-Gill 1976; Coleman 2009, p. 30, Hailbronner 1997, pp. 15-37).

Another point in this regard is the restrictive effect of human rights law on the dominancy of the State in migration control. Costello (2016, p. 316) criticises the State's sovereign prerogatives especially in a legal environment like the EU, where migration control and status are increasingly regulated by the EU law in a shared manner and the interaction across different human rights regimes is encouraged. In this context, the statist migration control assumption, which veils the human rights impacts of migration status and migration control measures, is unsettled (ibid.).

As a requirement of the principle of proportionality, the State's interest(s) in expelling a foreigner needs to be balanced with the effect of expulsion on the individual's fundamental rights. In that context, interference of family and private life with the State's right to expel has been a matter of discussion among scholars (Majcher 2020, pp. 124-146; Cholewinski 1994). However, as the strongest restriction on the right to expel derives from international human rights law, the effect of the **non-refoulement** principle has been widely researched in the literature. More recent debates on the matter are focused mostly on questioning the protectional scope provided by either ECtHR or United Nations Treaty Bodies (Simeon 2019; Çalı, Costello and Cunnigham 2020; Blöndal and Arnadottir 2019; Stoyanova 2018), the relationship between non-refoulement and climate change (Scott 2014; De Coninck and Soete 2022; Herrault 2021), extraterritorial application of the principle and border checks (Trevisanut 2014; Kim 2017; Goldner Lang and Nagy 2021; Özturanlı and Ergüven 2020), and the need for strengthening the protection level against restrictive interpretations of non-refoulement (Gil-Bazo 2015; Moran 2020).

Particular restrictions on expulsion have also been of interest in the literature, such as **prohibition of collective expulsion,** including **pushback** activities (Ciliberto 2021; Di Filippo 2022; Riemer 2020; Carlier and Leboeuf, 2020; Henckaerts 1995). Based on the ECtHR's case law derived from the P.4, Art. 4 of the ECHR where it is stated that the 'collective expulsion of the aliens is prohibited', the prohibition of collective expulsion prevents the expulsion of foreigners without an objective and reasonable examination of their concrete and individual circumstances.[13] This type of expulsion is also prohibited under other regional international law instruments, such as American Convention on Human Rights (Art. 22/9), 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights (Art. 26/2) and African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights (Art. 12/5). Collective expulsion is also contrary to the procedural safeguards to which foreigners are entitled in the context of expulsion, for instance, provided under P.7, Art.1 of the ECHR and Art. 13 of the ICCPR.

Unlike the ECHR and the above-mentioned conventions, there is no explicit provision in the ICCPR on the prohibition of collective expulsion. However, the incompatibility of the safeguards secured under Art. 13 with collective expulsions has been emphasised by HRC, which has repeatedly condemned such expulsions and underlined that these practices are incompatible with the Covenant's provisions.[14] In this respect, the prohibition does not prevent expulsion but rather group expulsion without such safeguards and without an individualised assessment (Wouters 2019, p. 952). Reimer (2020, pp. 17-22) highlights the use of two distinct terminologies in literature and conventional provisions regarding the prohibition of expelling a group of foreigners. For instance, while ECHR (P.4, Art. 4), American Convention, and Arab Charter use the term 'collective expulsion', African Charter refers to 'mass expulsion'. This differentiation is also seen in the literature. Reimer (2020, p. 14) questions whether these two terms are used for the same phenomenon and concludes that an analysis of the literature on these issues and of judgments and other legal documents reveals that there is no clear, universally applicable answer. Nevertheless, she concludes that 'mass' and 'collective' expulsion are legally indistinguishable and refer to the same group size (ibid., p. 21). Indeed, Henckaerts (1995, pp. 18, 19), as an author who uses the terms interchangeably, also strongly opposes the distinction between collective and mass expulsion as this would create unacceptable differences in protection standards and harm human rights. Collective expulsions, in some cases, may be initiated with pushback activities. In the case of *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy*, the ECtHR conducted a comprehensive analysis and defined 'expulsion' as the act of 'driving someone away from a place' in a general sense.[15] The Court further concluded that when a State's authorities remove foreigners during interceptions on the high seas as part of their sovereign authority with the intention of preventing them from reaching the State's borders or 'pushing them back to another State', it is considered an exercise of jurisdiction under Article 1 of the Convention. This action makes the State accountable for violating the prohibition of collective expulsion as stated in P.4, Art. 4 of the ECHR.[16] According to Den Heijer (2013, p. 290) the approach taken by the ECtHR in the Hirsi case highlights the need to first establish adequate reception systems and safeguards in transit countries before allowing any form of readmission, transfer, or return.

In certain situations, expulsion may not be possible, leading to individuals who cannot be deported – known as '**non-returnable**' or '**non-deportable**' people – becoming a cause for concern. This is highlighted by Mann (2021) and Majcher and Strik (2021), as well as Majcher (2020). Majcher points out that the situation of these individuals may be seen as a 'legal limbo' (2020, pp. 229, 234, 235). She asserts that individuals who cannot be deported and find themselves in a partially legal state of uncertainty (a semi-legal limbo) are at risk of being subjected to abuses and exploitation (ibid., p. 235). How this matter should be approached in terms of **regularisation** of these individuals in international (human rights) law, however, is somewhat underexplored. Majcher (ibid., p. 138) argues that the ECtHR case law on positive obligations under Article 8 (family and private life) can be applied by analogy to the situation of non-deportable people. On the other hand, although regularisation of the status of foreigners is mainly considered to be a matter that falls within State power (Aleinikoff 2002, p. 15), Costello (2016, pp. 82, 83) also argues that ECtHR case law reflects a recognition that time and ties matter and attachment to the host community continues over time. She asserts that in this recognition, ECtHR paves the way for other courts, particularly national ones, to conduct the regularisation role (ibid.). Concerning the return activities, **detention** practices have also been a point of focus among legal scholars in terms of their compatibility with international (human rights) law, especially regarding their length, proportionality,

necessity, and applicability for vulnerable individuals such as children (Majcher 2020; Cole 2002; Cornelisse 2010; Wilsher 2012; Guild 2016, pp. 141-155; Lyon 2014).

Another point scholars question in the context of the right to return and the personal scope of the duty of the States to readmit is whether permanent residents and former nationals fall under the scope of the State's duty to readmit (Hailbronner 1997; Coleman 2009; Bantekas 1998). Hailbronner asserts that given the absence of a consistent State practice and widespread acceptance, it is debatable whether there is a general customary international law obligation to readmit former nationals in cases where their status changes before entering a third country (1997, p. 24). On the other hand, the obligation to readmit permanent residents and other individuals with special ties with the given country is seen as a conventional obligation derived from ICCPR (Art. 12/4) towards the individual (Taylor 2020, pp. 346-349; Hannum 1987, pp. 56-63; Coleman 2009, pp. 29, 30).

While it is an obligation of international law to readmit a State's own national, there are instances where countries of origin do not comply with this obligation. Moreover, differently than the situation of readmission of a State's own national, there is no explicit binding rule either in a convention or in a form of customary norm in international law that obliges a State to readmit a third-country national. According to Hailbronner (1997, p. 31), the obligation contained in modern **readmission agreements** to readmit nationals of third States having entered unlawfully to a neighbouring State or staying illegally in the State of residence stems from the principle of (good) neighbourliness and the responsibility of a State for those impairments to other States emanating from its territory. However, he concludes that simply acknowledging this fact does not automatically establish a State practice and *opinio juris* (ibid., p. 34) – the two factors necessary for the emergence of a customary norm that would obligate States to readmit these individuals without requiring a readmission agreement. Yet, Hailbronner (ibid., p. 35) implies that there is an open door for the development of an obligation to readmit third-country nationals between neighbouring States. Against that backdrop, bilateral readmission agreements serve as a facilitator and an expeditor for the return of the nationals (Strik 2017, p. 313; Coleman 2009, p. 36) and as a compelling tool for the readmission of the third-country nationals (Hailbronner 1997, p. 37) based on the mutual consent of the sending and re-admitting State.

As a rule, readmission agreements do not cover asylum seekers or refugees directly but mainly focus on (irregular) migrants who are subjected to expulsion. However, safe third-country practice allows the State to reject the asylum application because the applicant could have requested or been granted protection elsewhere. As a result of the application's rejection (usually on inadmissibility grounds), the status of an individual is converted from being an asylum seeker (or applicant for international protection) to a foreigner who does not have a legal basis to stay in the country and, therefore, is subjected to expulsion. Against this background, (former) asylum seeker falls under the scope of the readmission agreement. Given that safe third-country practices are not regulated in a binding international law instrument that enables a uniform implementation but regulated under domestic laws, as stated by Coleman (2009, p. 67), it seems contradictory since the success of these policies relies on the involvement of related third countries. A country can label a third country as 'safe' according to its own laws and consequently refuse to provide refuge to those who passed through that country. But, if the third country doesn't agree to receive those individuals on its territory, this policy won't work. Hence readmission agreements also serve as a facilitator for,

and a complementary of, the practice of the **safe third-country concept** in the context of asylum (Abell 1999, p. 64; Coleman 2009, p. 67). Nevertheless, the lack of a binding instrument comprehensively regulating the safe third-country practice in international law and the function of readmission agreements for securing admission of rejected asylum seekers by a third country without a further requirement raise concerns regarding the compatibility with the non-refoulement principle (Suller 2022; Shamatava 2020; McDuff 2019) and with access to international protection (Abell 1999, 66; Alpes *et al.* 2017; Giuffre 2015). Recently, the functions and scope of these agreements, together with their effect on safe third-country practices, have been studied in the literature (Coleman 2009, p. 36; Hailbronner 1997; Majcher 2020, pp. 622-652), focusing especially on informal readmission arrangements (deals) as in the case of EU-Turkiye Deal of 18 March 2016. The literature mainly questions these arrangements' position towards the compatibility with international (human rights) law and refugee law, access to justice, transparency, and rule of law (Kassoti and Idriz 2022, p. 4; Peers 2016; Den Heijer and Spijkerboer 2016; Gatti 2016; Matuşescu 2016; Carrera et al. 2017; Öztürk 2020; Thym 2016; Kaya 2020).

The interplay between the individual's right to leave and return and the State's right to expel and readmit has also been subject to debate in literature, particularly the effect of '**voluntariness**.' The literature approaches this matter from three main aspects. The first weighs the competing impacts of two notions, namely, voluntariness as a requirement of an individual's right, on the one hand, and the State's right to force derived from its duties, on the other. Hailbronner (1997) argues that if the obligation to readmit its own nationals can be derived from both the authority to regulate the entry and residence of foreigners, as established by international law, as well as from territorial sovereignty, it logically follows that this obligation exists independently of any individual's claim to a right of return. Referring to the inter-state character of the obligation to readmit, he concludes that the power of a State to terminate someone's residency generally implies an involuntary nature (ibid., p. 5). On the other hand, Noll (1997) points out that the relationship between the inter-State obligation to readmit individuals and the individual's right to leave their own country is not clearly defined in international law. He concludes that if such an obligation includes citizens who are unwilling to return, it could potentially hinder the exercise of the right to leave one's country (ibid., p. 417, fn.7).

The second aspect is in relation to certain practices, such as **voluntary departure** and (**assisted**) **voluntary return** and their qualification. If the action of relocation based on these practices is considered 'voluntary', they can potentially be qualified as exercises of an individual's right rather than a forced movement imposed by the State's right to expel. From this point of view, indicating that the element of voluntariness is often constrained and mixed with coercion in practice (Dünnwald 2013, p. 228; Cleton and Chauvin 2019), the question of 'to what extent these practices can be considered voluntary' is examined by the literature. Webber (2011) points out that voluntary return is presented as a less burdensome option instead of subjecting individuals to ongoing destitution and inevitable forced return. However, it is often challenging for the returnee to make an Informed decision regarding the specific country they will return to (ibid., p. 103). Similarly, Majcher (2020) argues the level of voluntariness in voluntary departure practices[17] and states that the individual's 'consent' in this context only indicates that the person has agreed to comply with the decision to return rather than implying an informed decision to return to their country of origin. The author concludes that as a result, such practice of the concept of voluntary departure should be seen as a euphemism (ibid., p. 547).[18] It should also be noted that scholars have raised another

matter in relation to voluntary departure practices: limiting the opportunities for voluntary departure and implementing (re-)**entry bans** upon exit may have the unintended consequence of reducing cooperation with the return process as fewer individuals would be inclined to participate willingly (Majcher and Strik 2021, p. 126). Scholars have also discussed entry bans in a wider context, including but not limited to non-refoulement and other requirements of international human rights law (Baldaccini 2009; Majcher 2020).

The third aspect is related to the second but focuses on **voluntary repatriation**. The term is not defined in a binding instrument as it is presented as one of the durable solutions by UNHCR in soft law instruments.[19] UNHCR defines voluntary repatriation as the free and informed **return of refugees to their country of origin in safety and dignity.**[20] It also includes in the definition that the voluntary repatriation may be organised or spontaneous.[21] Compared to the other notions researched in international law, repatriation is one of the most comprehensive matters that fall within the scope of return-migration in conjunction with international refugee law and human rights law (Chetail 2004, p. 30). The subject is covered by a range of studies; most of the discourse highlights the 'voluntariness' requirement of the term and argues how this could be maintained in practice (Selim 2021, pp. 562, 567; Hathaway 1997, p. 553; Mathew 2008, p. 161; Vedsted-Hansen 1997, p. 560; Fouda 2007; Cantor 2018).

Lastly, as a point of debate, scholars (Majcher 2020, p. 661; Alpes and Nyberg Sorensen 2016) indicate the risks of the human rights violations returnees may face upon return and emphasise the significance of **post-return monitoring** (Majcher 2020, p. 661).

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5. Unlocking the Economic Contribution of Returning Refugees to Their Home Countries

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Introduction

The economic perspective on the return of asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants is an important aspect to consider in the overall debate. According to Wahba (2022) between 2010 and 2015, return migration accounted for a substantial 26 per cent to 31 per cent of all global migration movements, bringing to light its profound significance. Returnees may contribute to the economic progress of their countries of origin through various avenues (ibid.), such as in the reconstruction and development efforts of their home countries, nurturing entrepreneurship, accumulating human capital, facilitating the dissemination of knowledge, promoting aid and remittances, and transferring cultural norms back to the homeland. Returnees can bring back financial resources, whether through savings accumulated abroad or through remittances sent to their families during their stay in host countries (Beaman et al. 2022). These financial inflows can provide a boost to local economies, stimulate investment, and support small businesses and entrepreneurial activities. While the impact may be modest, it can still be significant in certain circumstances. The return of refugees may also alleviate the burden on host countries' economies and resources, which often face challenges in providing adequate support and services to large returnee populations. By going back to their country of origin, returnees can reduce the strain on public infrastructure, social services, and job markets in host countries, allowing these resources to be redirected towards the development and well-being of their own communities. Below, I elaborate on some of the impact mechanisms.

Human Capital and Brain Gain

According to Mottaghi (2018), when migrants – including refugees – decide to return to their home countries, they bring with them a wealth of education, skills, knowledge, experience, social capital, and networks. These valuable assets can be regarded as a form of human capital, capable of driving the social and economic development of their nations. Moreover, the social capital and networks they have cultivated within their host communities and among fellow migrants can foster collaboration, resource-sharing, and collective efforts towards rebuilding and contributing to the progress of their home countries. Effectively recognising this human capital is vital in order to maximise the potential impact of returning refugees on the overall development of their nations. By capitalising on their diverse expertise and networks, returnees can play a pivotal role in driving positive change, revitalising key sectors, and fostering sustainable development in their home countries (Dadush 2017).

Hagan and Wassink (2020) highlight discernible patterns in developing human capital and resource utilisation among international migrants. They note that upon their return, migrants harness the resources they have acquired abroad, including human and financial capital, to pursue economic advancement. These efforts are tailored to address the specific social, economic, and geographic characteristics of their communities of origin. As stated by Wahba (2022), migration offers another significant advantage: the acquisition of new skills

and human capital. In the context of return migration studies, there is a particular focus on examining how overseas migration affects the wages of returning migrants and making efforts to measure the economic benefits they gain from their experience working abroad.

Stark and Simon (2007) expand upon both the 'harmful brain drain' and 'beneficial brain gain' discussions. They delve into the notion that the expenses associated with 'educated unemployment' and overeducation can result in substantial setbacks for the affected individuals. These individuals often make up a significant portion of the educated workforce.

Remittances and Investment in Relation to the Local Market Dynamics

Olesen (2002) highlights that returning refugees/migrants have the potential to contribute to their home countries by remittances sent to their home countries while they were living abroad. These financial transfers can provide much needed support to families and communities, contributing to local economies and helping to alleviate poverty and improve living conditions. Additionally, returning refugees often play a role in complementing precarious work in the informal sector and humanitarian assistance. Their economic agency can extend beyond their immediate families and encompass assisting loved ones in both the places of origin and refuge in the Global South (Zuntz, 2021). This assistance can take various forms, including financial support, investment in small businesses, and knowledge-sharing.

As indicated by Kunuroglu et al. (2016), remittances play a significant role in influencing the decision to return to one's home country. In addition, the repercussions of migration on poverty, inequality, and societal consequences become evident upon individuals' return to their home countries. This is because the degree of inequality tends to either rise or decline due to migration, and the effects of remittances seem to fluctuate when examining different countries in case studies (Lucas 2005). In Zuntz (2021), remittances sent by returning refugees/migrants in present times serve as a vital emergency lifeline and are frequently used to meet immediate needs such as food and medical treatment. These remittances play a crucial role in providing essential support to refugees and their families, particularly in challenging circumstances where access to basic necessities is limited. By directing these funds towards essential goods and services, returning refugees contribute to improving their own well-being and that of their loved ones in both the country of origin and the host country.

Bahar (2023) highlights the significant potential of returning migration/refugees in transferring ideas and technology to their home countries thereby making valuable contributions to post-conflict reconstruction and the development of specific sectors. The process of knowledge and technology transfer can have a profound impact on the economic growth and progress and even a small number of returning refugees can generate substantial economic gains. Rapoport (2023), in his study, further highlights the potential for a notable increase in consumption and investment with the restoration of stability and the return of refugees. As people regain trust in the future of their country, they become more inclined to engage in economic activities, leading to a boost in overall economic growth. This renewed confidence can also attract foreign investors who recognise the potential opportunities in various sectors of the economy, including infrastructure development, manufacturing, services, tourism, and exports. The influx of foreign investment can further stimulate economic development, create employment opportunities, and contribute to the overall recovery and prosperity of the country. Returnees repatriate savings earned overseas that they

often utilise to establish businesses. Furthermore, returnees bring back fresh ideas and innovative perspectives (Wahba 2022). There is a valid correlation between return migration and entrepreneurial initiatives.

Dadush (2017) argues that when considering the contribution of a returning refugee or asylum seeker to their country of origin, particularly those who have not had sufficient time to build capital or acquire skills and who return under insecure conditions, there is limited evidence to suggest that their impact will be significantly better. This highlights the challenges faced by returning refugees as they may encounter difficulties in reintegrating into their home countries and making meaningful economic and social contributions.

The return of refugees to their home countries can have multifaceted effects on local labour markets, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, their return can address labour shortages by providing a new pool of workers to fill vacant positions, contributing to increased productivity and economic growth. This influx of skilled and motivated individuals can bring diverse perspectives, expertise, and entrepreneurial initiatives, thus fostering innovation and development in various sectors.

Although the current body of literature addressing the effects of return migration on upward mobility is notably limited (Wahba 2022), there are some hypotheses about the potential negative implications of return migration on labour market dynamics. The return of migrants can create heightened competition in the job market, leading to increased pressure on employment opportunities. This increased competition may result in downward pressure on wages, as employers may have more options to choose from, potentially impacting the earning potential of both returning refugees and native workers.

Transfer of Social, Institutional, and Political Norms

As individuals emigrate, they encounter diverse cultures, norms, and political ideologies that they may assimilate and subsequently bring back to their home country. In fact, in numerous instances, diaspora members and returning migrants act as conduits for transmitting these fresh ideas and norms to their country of origin. The transfer of ideas and technology from returning migrants can have a transformative effect on sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship. By introducing new methods, techniques, and approaches, migrants can help enhance productivity, streamline operations, and improve the quality of products and services. Notably, even a relatively small number of returning migrants can have a significant impact due to their unique expertise and the multiplier effect of knowledge diffusion. Their contributions extend beyond direct involvement and can inspire and benefit local communities, businesses, and institutions. By leveraging their acquired knowledge, returnees become agents of change, promoting progress and driving economic advancement within their home countries.

While the economic literature has extensively explored the effects of international migration on international trade and foreign direct investment (FDI), it is worth noting that many of these critical dimensions also experience growth due to return migration. Returnees, having established connections in their destination countries, play a significant role in promoting trade, foreign direct investment, and innovation upon their return. The available

evidence strongly indicates that return migration acts as a catalyst for the global diffusion of knowledge and substantially contributes to enhanced productivity (Wahba 2022).

Conclusion

The existing literature on the utilisation of the experiences of returning migrants and refugees yields mixed findings. It is essential to recognise the need for a distinct and comprehensive body of literature that focuses on the economic ramifications of returning refugees for their home countries. By delving specifically into the economic aspect, this dedicated literature can provide valuable insights into the potential contributions, challenges, and dynamics that arise when individuals re-enter their home countries after a period of migration or displacement. This specialised focus can offer a more nuanced understanding of how returning refugees impact their home economies. It can further serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners seeking to address the complex issues surrounding refugee return and economic development.

The economic development potential of returnees relies on their skills being put to productive use. However, there are challenges and opportunities in addressing the legal and administrative barriers that returning refugees and migrants may encounter, including issues related to property rights, documentation, and access to public services. A crucial aspect to consider is skills-matching and recognition, which emphasises the significance of acknowledging and leveraging the skills and qualifications of returning refugees. It is essential to facilitate the effective matching of their skills with suitable employment opportunities and to ensure their seamless integration into the labour market. By removing barriers and creating an enabling environment that recognises and utilises the talents of returning migrants, their full potential can be unlocked and foster their positive contribution to economic growth and development.

When focusing solely on economic perspectives, the impacts of returns or non-returns to the economy of the country of origin are multifaceted. The return of migrants can infuse the origin country's economy with various benefits, including increased labour force participation, the potential for entrepreneurial activities, and the transfer of financial remittances. These contributions can stimulate economic growth and development. Conversely, non-returns may lead to labour shortages in certain sectors, affecting productivity and economic stability. At the household level, returnees often bring with them savings and enhanced skills, positively impacting their families' economic well-being. Communities left behind may also experience economic benefits through remittances sent by migrants that can boost local consumption and investment. Additionally, the concept of economic and social remittances emphasises the transfer not only of money but also of knowledge, practices, and ideas that can have a transformative effect on both individual households and broader societal structures within the country of origin. Therefore, examining returns or non-returns from an economic perspective sheds light on a complex web of influences that shape the economic fortunes of origin countries, households, and communities.

The inflow of remittances and the economic agency of returning refugees can have positive effects on the local economies of their home countries. These financial resources can contribute to job creation, entrepreneurship, and the overall development of key sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. It is important to recognise the significance of these contributions and to create an enabling environment that supports and facilitates the

potential of returning refugees. This includes policies and programmes that facilitate the reintegration of returning refugees, promote entrepreneurship and economic opportunities, and strengthen social and economic networks.

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