

# Research debunks myths about migration and return

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"Even if I am going to die, I must go." Omar Cham aims to understand the influence of predestination thinking on migration decision-making in the Gambia. Credit: Omar Cham

Since the 1990s, the European Union has worked intensively with non-

EU countries to discourage irregular migration and promote the return of irregular migrants. Despite years of efforts, recent research shows that migrant deterrent campaigns have little effect, and that deportations of irregular migrants are not as easy to drive up as politicians may suggest.

Free University of Brussels (VUB) researcher Omar Cham has examined the reactions of Gambian actors to EU migration policies and revealed the inefficiencies of these policies. The Gambia, a priority partner for the EU, is often the target of migration deterrent communications and pressure to cooperate in deportations of irregular migrants. Cham investigated the reactions of both politicians and ordinary citizens in the Gambia.

The work is [published](#) in the journal *International Migration*.

"From my survey, it is clear that cooperation in deportations is very unpopular in non-European countries. Indeed, many families depend on financial transfers and have often tied their hopes and financial investments to migration," says Cham. "Policymakers in the EU and its member states often promise to deport more undocumented migrants, but in doing so they ignore the sovereignty of non-EU countries."

Deportation cannot take place without the cooperation of sovereign non-EU countries, which must grant landing rights and identify their citizens. Return rates have been around 30% for years, so promising to significantly increase these numbers is unrealistic.

"It is also notable that the EU's deterrent campaigns, which focus on informing potential migrants about, among other things, the dangers of the migration route, are not having the desired effect," says Cham. "Gambians recognize the dangers of the migration route, but this information barely influences their decisions. Factors such as the benefits of migration, desire for a better quality of life and family

pressure play a bigger role."

The findings contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of decisions about migration, the very limited influence of deterrent campaigns and the unjustified assumption that non-EU countries will willingly cooperate with a deportation policy of the EU or its member states.

"This research highlights that the EU as well as policymakers in member states such as Belgium should rethink their approach and it would be better to focus on the causes of [migration](#) rather than just deterrence and [deportation](#)," says Cham.

**More information:** Omar N. Cham, "Even if I am going to die, I must go": Understanding the influence of predestination thinking on migration decision-making in the Gambia, *International Migration* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/imig.13317](#)

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