

Abstract:

Return has become a cornerstone of European migration policy over recent decades, and significant legislative developments at the EU level are now taking place. While prevailing policy debates have centred on the effectiveness and sustainability of returns, this research project shifts focus to a comparatively underexplored dimension: the human rights monitoring of forced return.

Drawing on and extending the research undertaken in the FAiR project, this PhD project addresses two central questions: How is human rights monitoring of forced return currently implemented across Europe? And what role — or roles — does such monitoring play within the broader framework of European return policy?

To answer these questions, the project is structured around three interconnected lines of inquiry. The first examines the institutional landscape of human rights monitoring: its origins, evolution, and the functions it fulfils, with particular attention to how institutional architecture shapes monitoring roles in practice. The second situates forced return monitoring within a comparative perspective, drawing on the lessons and mechanisms of other established human rights monitoring regimes — notably prison conditions monitoring — to assess what forced return monitoring has adopted from these fields and where further convergence may be possible. The third strand turns to the EU level, examining how monitoring of various types of forced returns (including Joint Return Operations) came into being, how its practices relate to monitoring in EU Member States, and to what extent human rights monitoring has become an instrument of European integration through the harmonisation of return practices.

This PhD project offers a systematic and multi-layered analysis of human rights monitoring as both a safeguard and a policy tool within one of the most debated areas of contemporary European migration policy.