

Return migrants can play a crucial role in eliminating female genital mutilation

A new report published today on [IZA World of Labor](http://www.iza.org) provides evidence that return migrants might play a more effective part in eliminating FGM than national laws currently do

More than 100 million women and girls in the world have had their genitals cut for cultural, religious, or other non-medical reasons; 30 million girls are at risk of being cut in the next decade. Despite the efforts of international organizations and local governments the practice persists, raising questions about the effectiveness of international and national laws in reducing FGM.

A new report now published on IZA World of Labor by economist Sandrine Mesplé-Somps of the Université Paris-Dauphine seems to offer a new, possibly more successful route to eliminating FGM: return migrants. FGM is perceived in many societies, particularly in Africa, as being an important social identity marker. Returning migrants, as a vehicle for new social norms, could help shift this perspective.

Mesplé-Somps cites evidence from a number of countries, including a study conducted in Mali, which support the notion that migration can be a vehicle for transfers of new social norms: In Mali, girls living in villages with return migrants are less likely to be circumcised than others. This is particularly true for villages with return migrants from Côte d'Ivoire, the main African destination for Malians. In Côte d'Ivoire migrants are able to observe an African society that does not pressurize women to be cut and where uncircumcised girls do not suffer from social exclusion problems. Consequently, these migrants come to realize that FGM is not really important as an individual identity marker.

However, not all migration experiences generate social remittances. Host countries have to provide immigrants with an environment in which they can become aware of new ideas and opinions. This requires integration policies that encourage social and educational interactions with the host society.

Another important factor reported by qualitative studies on the effectiveness of social remittances is the ability of migrants to convince non-migrants to change their opinions and attitudes. This capacity is correlated with the social and economic status of the migrants in their community and the intensity of their interactions with non-migrants. Therefore, origin countries should actively encourage return migration, as this is crucial for the transfer of new ideas and social norms.

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Notes for editors:

- IZA World of Labor (<http://wol.iza.org>) is a global, freely available online resource that provides policy makers, academics, journalists, and researchers, with clear, concise and evidence-based knowledge on labor economics issues worldwide.
- The site offers relevant and succinct information on topics including diversity, migration, minimum wage, youth unemployment, employment protection, development, education, gender balance, labor mobility and flexibility among others.
- Established in 1998, the Institute for the Study of Labor (www.iza.org) is an independent economic research institute focused on the analysis of global labour markets. Based in Bonn, it operates an international network of about 1,300 economists and researchers spanning more than 45 countries.