

WHY GO BACK?

ASSISTED RETURN FROM NORWAY

Jan-Paul Brekke

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Preface

This report discusses factors that influence voluntary assisted return of third-country nationals from Norway. It is based on statistical information and interviews with civil servants/NGO-representatives and employees at reception centers for asylum seekers.

The report shows that practical and financial support provided by the Norwegian government can be highly valuable to migrants in an irregular situation that want to return to their home country. However, other factors, such as the conditions in the home country or the adherence to the asylum project may hold others in similar situations from applying for assisted return. While return and reintegration programs may facilitate and increase the *quality* of assisted returns, this report finds no clear-cut link to the *quantity* of such returns.

I would like to thank the informants for sharing their highly valuable thoughts and experiences. I would also like to thank the excellent scholars who have provided helpful comments: Hilde Lidén, Arne Strand, Jørgen Carling, Richard Whitehead, Liza Reisel and Mari Teigen.

The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2014. The statistical analysis is based on data covering a 12 year period (2002–2014).

The study is a joint project by Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), PRIO (Peace Research Institute, Oslo) and Institute for Social Research. It is part of a broader evaluation of return and reintegration programs in Norway (2014 –2015). The main report from the project includes interviews with (voluntary) assisted returnees before and after they return to their home countries.

This study was financed by the Directorate of immigration (UDI).

Oslo, fall 2015

Jan-Paul Brekke

Executive summary

Who chooses to register for the Norwegian return and reintegration programs? What motivates them to do so? What role do the programs play in the migrants' decisions? What is the correlation between forced returns and (voluntary) assisted returns?

Today, (voluntary) assisted return programs constitute a core element of Norwegian and European asylum and immigration policies. These programs, where individuals residing irregularly in the host country are assisted in arranging their transition and sometimes their reintegration after return, are seen as a softer version of forced returns. The migrants are not free to stay, but still they “choose” to return.

Governments in reception countries embrace (voluntary) assisted returns for several reasons. Such returns are seen as more humane, less costly and they spark less controversy than forced returns. For the rejected migrants themselves, voluntary assisted return is often seen as one of several unappealing alternatives.

This study is based on two sources of data: interviews with employees at reception centers and key informants (NGOs, civil servants), and register data encompassing 105,000 third-country nationals. This material opens for a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Following the development of assisted (voluntary) returns from 2002 to (April) 2014 and focusing on returns to Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia, Ethiopia and Kosovo, the findings are as follows:

- The most common nationalities applying for voluntary assisted return from 2002 to 2014 were Iraqis (3,600), Russians (2,600), Serbians (1,800) and Afghans (1,200). There were 13 nationalities registered with more than 500 applications.
- Slightly over 50 percent of those that applied for (voluntary) assisted return with the International Organization for Migration

(IOM), returned via IOM in the end. Around 10 percent were returned by the police, while 40 percent were either rejected or did not return.

- Many applications for assisted return came from persons living outside reception centers. More than half of the applications from Iraqis came from outside the centers.
- The introduction of IRRANA, promoting assisted returns to Afghanistan, did not appear to have an impact on the number of assisted returns. Instead, numbers fell after the program was introduced in 2006. Fluctuations in returns appear to be caused by the numbers of Afghans that were rejected in the preceding years.
- The impact of the introduction of IRRINI, including organized assisted returns to Iraq, is more difficult to judge. The program was started at a time characterized by a high number of rejections of Iraqi nationals, providing a large pool of potential assisted returnees.
- The ARE program for Ethiopia did not seem to impact the number of assisted returns. The number of such returns remained low after the program's introduction in 2012 and decreased in 2013.
- The general return program (FSR) provided cash payments and no reintegration benefits in standard cases. Interviews with center staff revealed that while the cash incentive may not have elicited the decision to return (voluntarily, assisted), it seemed to influence the timing of registering for return. Since the amount of support depended on meeting deadlines, this seems to have speeded up the process.
- The programs' effect on individual motivation may have been noticeable, despite the lack of a linear correlation between the introduction of programs and assisted returns. Once the decision to return had been made, the cash and in-kind support and assistance were considered to be valuable by the returnees.

- During 2002–2014 more Afghans returned voluntarily to Afghanistan from Norway than were returned by the police (to Afghanistan).
- The role of cash and in-kind incentives in signing up for assisted return may be underreported due to stigma. Being motivated to give up the dream of asylum because of a cash incentive may appear stigmatizing to some.
- Using multivariate analysis, we found that the odds for a rejected asylum seeker to choose assisted return were lower for women, for unaccompanied minors and for persons from Afghanistan or Ethiopia.
- The odds of applying for voluntary return were higher if a person had a partner or family, or if she or he was from Russia, Kosovo, or Iraq.
- The odds of actually going back once a person had applied for assisted return were similar for women and men, and lower for unaccompanied minors, families and those that applied while residing in a reception center.
- The odds of going back for those who applied for assisted return were higher for those from Afghanistan, Russia, Ethiopia, Iraq and Kosovo.
- There was seemingly no direct correlation between forced return and assisted returns to Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo or Russia.
- Yet, center staff stressed the importance of visible forced returns for their work to motivate assisted returns. They called for more visible action by the police. At the same time, there appeared to be national differences in the response to forced return.
- A list of analytical concepts are identified that simultaneously highlight aspects of the management of, and the experience of assisted return: *predictability, expectations, loss aversion, motivation, models of action and the turnaround.*

1 Increased focus on return

This report identifies factors that influence the assisted return of third-country nationals from Norway. Since 2002, Norwegian authorities have encouraged failed asylum seekers and other third-country nationals without regular residency to return to their home countries. Assisted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a variety of support and incentive regimes have been implemented.

The Norwegian government has not been alone in its efforts to promote voluntary assisted return, or “assisted return” as it is currently labeled in Norway. In Europe, this type of return has been emphasized for the past decade. European ambitions to increase the use of this alternative to forced return were clearly formulated in the EU’s Return Directive.¹ Over the past ten years, Norwegian authorities have introduced programs that target specific nationalities or groups with particular needs. These are in addition to basic support programs that are provided to all qualifying third-country nationals without permanent residence in Norway.

All the assisted return programs include help with travel arrangements, producing travel documents and pocket money. Over the past thirteen years a variety of programs and support levels have been introduced.

In this report we study who chooses to register for the Norwegian return and reintegration programs. What motivates them? What role do the programs play in the migrants’ decisions? What is the correlation between forced returns and (voluntary) assisted returns?

Today, (voluntary) assisted return programs constitute a core element of Norwegian asylum and immigration policy. They are seen

¹ Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, December 16, 2008, on common standards and procedures in member states for returning illegally staying third-country nationals.

as the softer version of forced returns. Returning immigrants that lack permits is seen as necessary for securing the legitimacy of the asylum processing system; rejections have to be respected.

Governments in reception countries embrace (voluntary) assisted returns for several reasons. Such returns are seen as more humane, less costly, and they spark less controversy than forced returns.

For the rejected migrants themselves, voluntary assisted returns are often seen as one of several unappealing alternatives (Brekke 2008, Øien and Bendixen 2012).

This is one of two reports from a comprehensive evaluation of the Norwegian return and reintegration programs. In this study we combine two sets of data: statistical information from the Norwegian register of foreign nationals (*Utlendingsdatabasen*), and interviews with employees at reception centers in Norway. These key informants were either managers or personnel dedicated to promoting assisted return.

This report develops and discusses a set of empirically based analytical concepts. Among these are *predictability*, *expectation management*, *communication*, *motivation* and *loss aversion*. These concepts point to key mechanisms in the experience and management of assisted returns.

Both the interview data and the statistical analyses indicate that each nationality should be seen as a separate migration system (Haas 2010). The situation in the country of origin, national networks and individuals' investment in the asylum project result in a *country-specific sensibility* with regard to return incentives. At the same time, there are similarities that cut across nationalities.

In this report, the Norwegian return and reintegration programs are discussed from both perspectives; bilateral national migration systems are combined with cross-cutting patterns and comparative elements. Changing conditions in the migrants' home countries and the existence of transnational networks are pivotal for understanding all return movements. These elements are brought into the discussion.

The Norwegian data allow for discussions of what elicits voluntary assisted returns. The second report from the comprehensive evaluation study will focus on interviews with third-country nationals who are about to or who already have returned

voluntarily.² That study will analyze the return and reintegration process in home countries for returnees to Iraq, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Kosovo.

The remainder of this chapter presents research questions and the methodological approach. The history of voluntary assisted return has been described elsewhere and will not be repeated here (Brekke 2008, Strand et al. 2009, Valenta et al. 2010). Toward the end of the chapter we present a brief guide to the development and content of the programs. The chapter ends with a reader's guide.

Research questions

What makes asylum seekers and migrants in an irregular situation in Norway choose voluntary assisted return? Two subsets of questions will be discussed in this report, preparing the ground for more perspectives and empirical material to be added in the second report from the evaluation.

First, what has been the effect of the return programs on the volume of voluntary assisted returns from Norway? What other factors could be identified that have motivated third-country nationals to choose assisted return? What is the effect of forced returns on assisted returns? Statistical data will be used to answer these questions.

Second, what role do the return programs play in motivating migrants to choose voluntary assisted return? Based on statements from employees at the reception centers, how important were the programs in shaping rejected asylum seekers' decision to return?

Methodology

In this report, two distinctly different sets of methods were used to gather data on voluntary assisted return. Both methods carry a set of methodological challenges.

²The labels for voluntary assisted return have varied over the years. In this report, voluntary assisted return and assisted return are used interchangeably. Voluntary assisted return is the concept used by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the operating partner on behalf of the Norwegian immigration authorities. A brief explanation of the history of the concepts is provided toward the end of this chapter.

Register data

The statistical analysis is based on data provided by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). It was drawn from the database on foreign nationals (*Utlendingsdatabasen*) during the spring of 2014. The database is used in the day-to-day operations of the Norwegian immigration authorities. The database is not accessible to the public, and gaining access to the data requires both approval and assistance from UDI.

The data set compiled for this study included information on 105,000 individuals. The majority of these were persons who received a first negative decision after having applied for asylum in Norway between January 1, 2001 and the end of April 2014. Every applicant with a first negative from this period was included in the data set. To that group, we added all persons who applied for assisted return from January 1, 2002 through May 15, 2014.

Most of those who applied for assisted return were rejected asylum seekers, but not all. We made sure to include everyone who signed up for return with the IOM, regardless of background. In addition to these two groups, we added all third-country nationals who had been forcibly returned by the police during the same period. This was done in order to discuss the effect of forced returns on voluntary assisted returns.

Each row of data corresponded to one person. A total of 105,000 data rows contained individual characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, application outcome, place of residency, time of arrival, outcome of application for assisted return and final return date. The data were designed to facilitate the examination of what makes migrants choose assisted return. The data were analyzed using Excel and SPSS statistical programs.

Among the challenges associated with these data was isolating the effect of the return programs on voluntary return. There is a long list of other factors that could be expected to influence migrants' choice of voluntary assisted return. In particular, it was challenging to quantify the changes in the conditions in the home countries. By using two terror-scale indexes (from Amnesty International and the US State Department), these effects were only partly accounted for.³ Measuring "levels of state-sanctioned political violence," both scales

³ www.politicalterroryscale.org/ptsdata.php.

range from 1 (countries under secure rule of law) to 5 (terror expanded to the whole population). Several of the home countries of asylum seekers coming to Norway score high on the terror scales, leaving little room for variation and thus providing minimal explanatory power (e.g. Iraq scores from 4–5, Afghanistan from 4–5 and Ethiopia from 3–4). In addition to the terror scales, one could argue that social and economic changes in the home countries would potentially influence the urgency of leaving the country. However, the statistical analyses in this report do not include economic and social push factors in the home country. The terror scales are discussed qualitatively.

Another challenge was estimating the total number of migrants eligible for voluntary assisted return programs at a given point in time. These included both asylum seekers living in reception centers and other third-country nationals living outside the centers. Estimating the potential pool of applicants for assisted return is important for understanding the fluctuations in this return type.

An increase in the proportion that applied for assisted return from a particular nationality could indicate intensified efforts to promote return by the government. However, it could also reflect an increase in the number of qualified third-country nationals, i.e. an unchanged portion of that nationality registering for return. This report estimates the potential applicants for return by looking at the number of rejections from earlier years.

While estimating the potential number of applicants for return who were residing in reception centers was fairly straightforward (despite the challenges of variation in numbers in the centers during the year and in the number of returns relating to a calendar year), estimating the proportion of a nationality that returned from outside the centers (and without registered addresses) was more complicated.

The best, although imperfect solution to this challenge was to use the number of rejected asylum seekers over a certain period as an indicator of the potential population outside the centers. This method was used to estimate the potential number of individual applicants for assisted return.

IOM is the operational partner of UDI on matters of assisted return. As partners, IOM pre-screens applications for voluntary assisted returns before handing them over to UDI for processing. Once approved, the IOM handles all practicalities of the returns

before departure and after arrival to the home country. Throughout this process, IOM works in close collaboration with UDI. Both parties gather statistics on applicants, applications and actual returns. IOM also reports regularly to UDI, including statistics with a range of specifics. Due to different methods of registration, however, the numbers used by IOM and UDI are not identical. In particular, UDI's numbers on voluntary return during the first period of the programs' existence (2002–2003) diverge substantially from IOM's numbers.

Since the individual register data provided by UDI are more comprehensive, we base our analysis on their statistics. For reference to the IOM numbers, please see Table 1.

The UDI data material contain information that allows individuals to be identified indirectly. Before obtaining the data, the research team contacted the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD), which serves as an advisory body on issues involving statutory data privacy requirements. NSD found the project to be in accordance with the guidelines from the Norwegian Data Protection Agency (*Datatilsynet*). In February 2014, the addition of this set of variables was approved by NSD through a confidentiality waiver from the data owner, namely UDI.

Interview data

Two groups of informants were interviewed about the Norwegian voluntary assisted return programs: reception center employees, and key informants among civil servants and NGOs. The latter interviews provided background information, while information from the employees is analyzed in detail in Chapter 3.

The interviews with reception center employees were carried out by phone. Ten reception centers were selected based on the number of IOM returns they had registered during the 2012–2013 period. The centers with the highest numbers were invited to share their thoughts and experiences with returns and the specific programs.

Return was high on the agenda at these centers. The rationale for selecting these centers was the need to talk to employees that had experienced a certain volume of returns. The centers themselves were allowed to select the interviewees from among the staff. We were referred to either the person in charge of return (*returansvarlig*) or

the center manager (*daglig leder*). The interviews lasted one to one and a half hours and followed a semi-structured guide. The focus was on communication and motivation.

The second group of interviewees consisted of expert informants within NGOs and public institutions (IOM and UDI). This source of information was enhanced by repeated consultations following new ideas and findings stemming from the other data sources.

Relevant research

Several studies carried out in Norway over the past ten years are relevant to discussions on voluntary assisted return. There is no room to discuss these in detail in the current report. It will suffice to point to examples, such as studies of specific country programs for voluntary assisted return (Strand et al. 2008, Strand et al. 2011, Paasche and Strand 2012), reports on deprivation as motivation for such returns (Brekke and Søholt 2005, Valenta et al. 2010), on the development of voluntary assisted returns from Norway (Brekke 2009), on the statistics for assisted returns (Oslo Economics 2014), on information and motivational programs within the framework of the reception centers (Oxford Research 2014), and finally on motivations for choosing voluntary assisted return (Øien and Bendixen 2012).

The development of return programs in Norway

The first voluntary assisted return program (VARP) started in Norway in 2002. The concept of *voluntary return*, later changed by the Norwegian government (2014) to *assisted return*, is not to be confused with voluntary *repatriation*.⁴ The latter form of return takes place when persons who have permanent residency apply for a modest amount of cash and practical help to return home (Brekke 2014). At the other end of the spectrum, we find “forced returns”, where individuals without legal residence are forced to leave the country.

⁴ IOM, the operating partner of UDI, has been consistent in using the label “voluntary assisted return” since VARP started in 2002.

Assisted return covers third-country nationals who do not have legal residency in Norway. They are obliged to leave the country. If they do not leave, most of them risk being returned by the police. From the authorities' perspective, the alternatives for third-country nationals are to leave on their own, return (voluntarily) with the assistance of IOM, or face forced return. The individual may see this differently, however, and many see avoiding return altogether as a fourth alternative.

Persons who are in the process of applying for asylum, i.e. who are still in a regular situation, may also apply for assisted return. However, this is not common practice.

The dispute over the labeling of (voluntary) assisted return stems from a debate over how voluntary such returns actually are. If the alternative is to be forcibly returned, one could argue whether it is really voluntary. In Norway, this critique was picked up by the co-governing Progress Party in 2014, who argued that return *should* not be voluntary for people without permits. On the other hand, one could argue that the inclusion of “voluntary” highlights the need for some sort of initiative from the individual to choose this option instead of other poorer alternatives. For immigration authorities trying to motivate more third-country nationals to register for (voluntary) assisted return, triggering the “voluntary” component is key.⁵

The development of assisted return and earlier similar return programs, like the return operation to Kosovo in 2000–2001 is described and analyzed in a study from 2010 (Brekke 2010). Originally the program only covered travel expenses and practical aid for those that chose to return. The first nationality-specific program, the IRRANA program for Afghans, was established in

⁵ This is why both “voluntary assisted return” and “assisted return” are used in this report. Historical labels are also used, ranging from repatriation and voluntary repatriation to voluntary return, voluntary assisted return and assisted return. The range of labels tells an interesting story of the development of the emphasis in the immigration authorities' efforts to promote return.

2006. Afghans choosing to return were given a cash allowance and other incentives.⁶

Two years later, in 2008, IRRANA was supplemented by a return program for Iraqi nationals (IRRINI). In 2012 the Financial Support for Return (FSR) program was added to the list of programs with cash incentives. Other country-specific programs have not been established or have reached smaller numbers of returnees and have been discontinued (e.g. in the cases of Burundi and Somalia). A return and reintegration program for Ethiopia had still not gathered pace in 2014 after two years of operation. In addition to these programs, Norwegian authorities established specialized programs aimed at supporting return for vulnerable groups, such as children and victims of trafficking. Those that return with assistance to countries that have a reintegration component can also apply for housing support.

Reader's guide

In the next chapter we present return data from the Norwegian register of foreign nationals (*Utlendingsdatabasen*). The argument is built starting with basic numbers on arrivals and rejections, moving on to a more detailed analysis of specific countries. Chapter 2 ends with two regression models looking at what causes people to first choose assisted return and then subsequently return.

Chapter 3 presents material from the interviews with return experts at the reception centers. In addition to letting their voices be heard, the presentation focuses on issues such as communication, motivation and the role of return and reintegration programs.

In the final chapter this discussion is continued, bringing in analytical concepts such as predictability, expectations, *loss aversion*, *models of action* and *the turnaround*. The chapter also includes a comprehensive list of findings.

⁶ A short description of the elements of the country-specific programs is given in Chapter 2.

2 Voluntary assisted return: What the numbers tell us

What causes rejected asylum seekers and other third-country nationals to choose assisted return from Norway? In this chapter we search for answers to this question by using UDI's main register. We focus on two sets of countries: countries that have specific return and reintegration programs (such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Ethiopia) and a group of countries that have a high number of returnees (Kosovo and Russia).

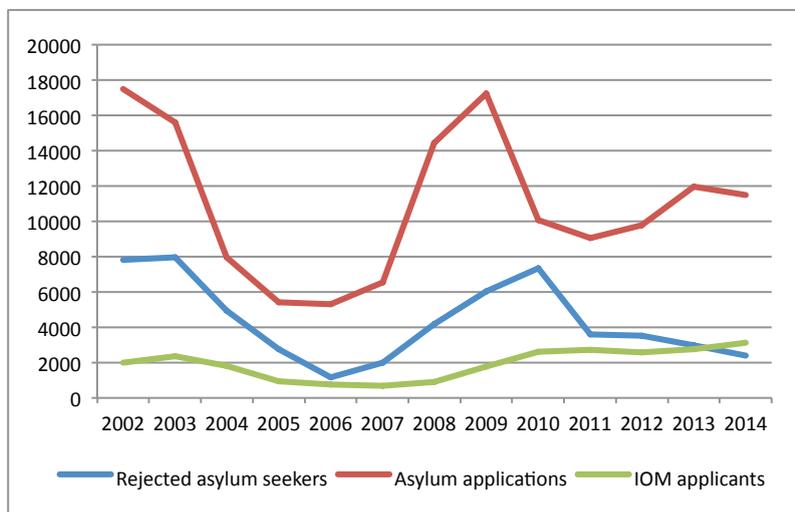
Three modes of statistical analysis are used. First, we look at descriptive data on voluntary assisted returns (who, how many, when, where). Second, we look at co-variation between these and other variables. Changes in the home country situations are included in this analysis, measured by two terror scales – one from the US State Department and one from Amnesty International. Third, a multivariate logistic regression model is used to drill further into co-variation. A distinction is drawn between the variation in IOM *applications* and *actual returns*. As we will see from the descriptive data, there is a gap between the number of applications and the number of people that return.

Returns from Norway

Most of the individuals that apply for assisted return from Norway have previously applied for asylum. When we look for the causes of fluctuations in the number of applications for assisted return, we need to take the number of rejected asylum applications into consideration. The number of rejected asylum seekers impacts the potential for return. The number of asylum rejections is again correlated with the number of arrivals each year. In other words, the more asylum seekers that arrive in a given year, the higher the number of rejections that follow and the larger the pool of potential applicants for voluntary assisted return.

Looking back at the past twelve years, the number of asylum seekers coming to Norway has varied greatly. In Figure 1 we see a steep fall in the top curve from 2003 to 2004, when the number of arrivals was reduced by 50 percent, plummeting from 16,000 to 8,000. We also find a steep rise in arrivals a few years later, from 2007–2009 (from 6,000–17,000) before another sharp decline in 2010 and 2011. From 2012 the number of applications again rose before leveling out.

Figure 1 Number of asylum applications to Norway per year and the number of rejected asylum seekers



Rejections 1st instance (UDI) not including Dublin cases. Source *Utlendingsdatabasen* (UDI). 2014. Number for IOM applicants for the year 2014 is estimated based on data for the 1st trimester (multiplied by 3).

The second line in Figure 1 refers to the number of persons whose first rejection was received that year. These rejected persons make up an important part of the potential for later applications for assisted return. This is not a precise estimation of the potential, but it gives an impression of a variable that will be further developed below.⁷ As we see in Figure 1, the curve for the first rejections shows the same

⁷ As referred to in Chapter 1, a person does not have to be a former asylum seeker in order to qualify for voluntary assisted return from Norway. It suffices to be a third-country national.

pattern as the applications but with a short delay caused by processing time. This pattern is seen when the application and rejection numbers hit low points in 2005 and 2006, respectively. The applications peaked in 2009, and the rejections peaked in 2010.

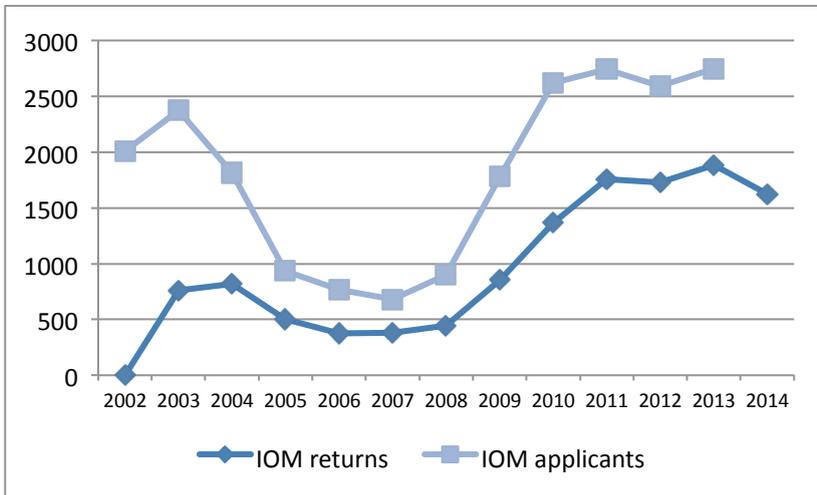
While variation in asylum rejections correlates with the number of asylum applications, variations in rejections should also be seen as a function of the composition of nationalities that apply. Conflicts in the applicants' home regions and the need for individual protection will vary, thus influencing the rejection rate. In Figure 1 this is illustrated by the shifting gap between applications and rejected persons. The widening gap between the top two curves since 2011 may be interpreted as a result of an increase in arrivals of nationalities with an established need for protection, such as Eritreans, Syrians and Somalis.

The third curve in Figure 1 shows the number of applicants for the IOM or VARP program per year. Interestingly, we can see that for 2014 the number of applicants for assisted return via IOM was estimated to exceed the number of rejected persons. One reason for this is that the Dublin cases are not included in the number of rejections. Following a change in 2012, however, persons with Dublin cases are also allowed to apply to the IOM for assistance in returning directly to their home country (rather than the first asylum country that is also a signatory of the Dublin Regulation). The number of Dublin cases rose sharply in 2013 and 2014, equaling the number of rejections in the first instance. We will look closer at the Dublin applicants for assisted return later in this chapter.

The main take away from Figure 1 is that the number of IOM applicants per year and the actual assisted returns must be understood on the background of *substantial variations* in asylum arrivals and in the number of rejections per year. Together, they provide the pool of potential applicants for assisted return. More arrivals lead to more rejections, which again may lead to more applications for assisted return, etc.

If we look closer at the number of applicants for assisted return and the actual returns, we obtain the pattern presented in Figure 2, which illustrates the substantial variation in third-country nationals applying for return via IOM as well as in the number actually leaving the country with assisted return.

Figure 2 Number of applicants each year and number of people returned via IOM



Data on returns via IOM for 2014 are derived from IOM statistics. Numbers for applications to IOM for 2014 not available. Number of applicants, not applications. Where individuals have multiple applications, only the most recent is registered.

Again we acknowledge the lower numbers during the 2006–2007 stretch, with higher numbers being registered both in 2003–2004 and from 2009 onward. In 2014, the number of assisted returns showed a downward trend.

The reduction in applicants from 2004 to 2005 is noticeable, as is the strong upward trend at the end of that decade, rising steeply from 2008 to 2010 before leveling out.

The gap between the trend lines is interesting. Since the data refer to persons applying (and only the last application is registered) and persons who returned (not applications), the gap should not indicate variation in multiple applications. Instead, it may indicate the variation in probability that an individual who has applied for assisted return actually returns.

We will revisit the question of reliability of the return figures, as well as interpretations of the gap between applications and returns as we dig deeper into the data. What does the gap tell us about return behavior?

If we focus on the overall trend in Figure 2, we see that applicants and returns follow each other despite the variation in the gap between the two.

A total of 23,015 persons applied for VARP from its initiation in 2002 until the end of the first trimester of 2014. Of this total, 13,788 (60 percent) were registered as having left the country at the end of the period, according to UDI data. Another 10 percent of the total applicants were returned by the police, leaving a total of 11,561 (50 percent) returning via IOM (Table 1).

Table 1 Total IOM applicants and returnees 2002–June 2014

	UDI numbers	IOM numbers
Total number of IOM applicants	23,015	26,898 (applications)
Persons with no registered return	9,227	10,368*
IOM applicants/persons returned by/via police	2,227	2,227 (UDI figure)
Registered returnees via IOM	11,561	14,303 (incl. multiple)

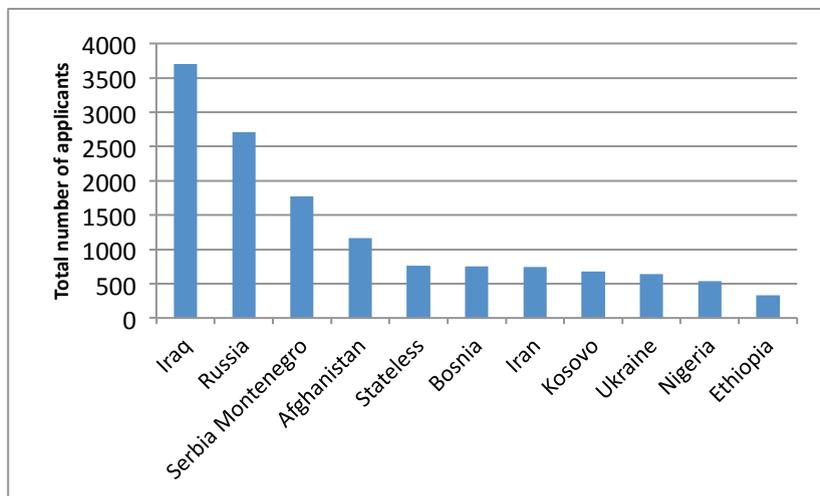
Not registered by IOM, calculated by subtracting IOM returnees and returned by police from the total number of IOM applicants. Sources: UDI and IOM. IOM numbers refer to applications, not applicants, and may include multiple returns for the same person.

There are several aspects of these numbers that could be discussed in depth, but the overall finding still stands: About half of those who applied for assisted return via IOM actually returned via IOM in the end. One immediate minor correction would be that a small number of applications would still be in the pipeline at the time of observation. The 50 percent estimate may therefore be somewhat higher. The reasons for the gap between applications and returns will be discussed later in the report.

Nationalities applying for return

Where did the applicants come from? In Figure 3 we see four nationalities stand out as frequent users of return support: Iraqis (3,700), Russians (mainly from Chechenia) (2,700), Serbia Montenegrins (1,800 total) and Afghans (1,200). These countries all had 1,000 returnees or more during the period.

Figure 3 Major nationalities applying for assisted return via IOM. Total number of applicants during 2002–2013



Source: *Utlendingsdatabasen (UDI)*

They were followed by a few nationalities with between 500 and 1000 returnees (Bosnians, Iranian, Kosovars, Ukrainians, Nigerians, stateless persons (largely Palestinians)). Ethiopians are included in Figure 3 for later analysis. Out of the 331 total assisted returns to Ethiopia over the entire period, the majority left Norway between 2010 and 2013 (250 returns).

Some countries with a high number of asylum seekers during the past ten years, such as Somalia and Eritrea, have had few assisted returns, with 170 and 107 respectively. These countries were two of the major sources of asylum seekers coming to Norway in 2014. Norwegian authorities tested a voluntary return program for Somalia from 2012–2013, and started negotiating the terms of a return agreement with the Eritrean government during that same year.

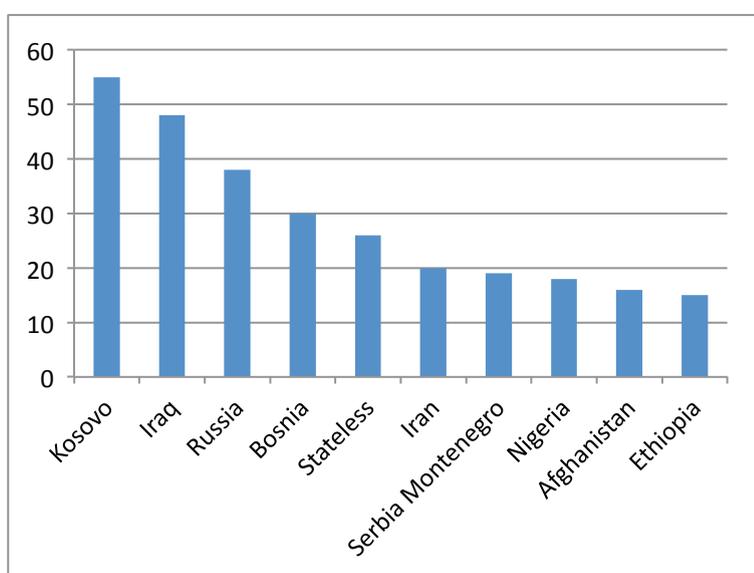
Civil servants from the immigration authorities doubted the validity of the number of assisted returns to Eritrea. According to them, these numbers probably referred to persons registered as Eritreans but who were in fact from Ethiopia, and that in the end returned to Ethiopia.

From Figure 3 we see that the two countries with longest running national return programs (Iraq and Afghanistan) figure among the top four in the ranking. Ethiopia, the third program, is

located a bit further down the list. These three nationalities will be given special attention in the pages that follow.

Figure 4 illustrates national ranking according to the percentage of rejected asylum seekers from 2002 through 2014 (April) that applied for assisted return via IOM. A few of those included in the figure are persons that had not yet received a negative decision but still applied for assistance.

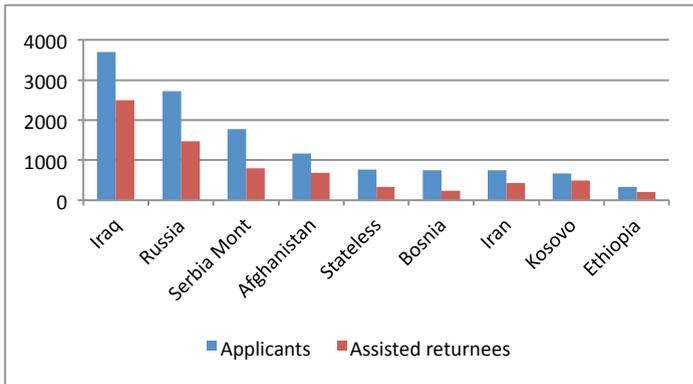
Figure 4 Percentage of rejected asylum seekers applying for assisted return. 2002–April 2014



The countries in Figure 4 are the top eight nationalities from Figure 3 in addition to Ethiopia and Nigeria. Kosovo had the highest rate of rejected persons later applying for assisted return. Later, we will discuss a set of circumstances that may help explain the numbers for Kosovo. It is interesting to note that the country programs and the major return countries scored very differently in this ranking. The number for Iraqis, 47 percent, is high. Almost one in two of rejected Iraqi asylum seekers chose to apply for voluntary assisted return. The share for Russians was lower, but still one in three rejected asylum seekers applied. At the lower end we find the Afghans with a one to six ratio between rejected persons and IOM applicants.

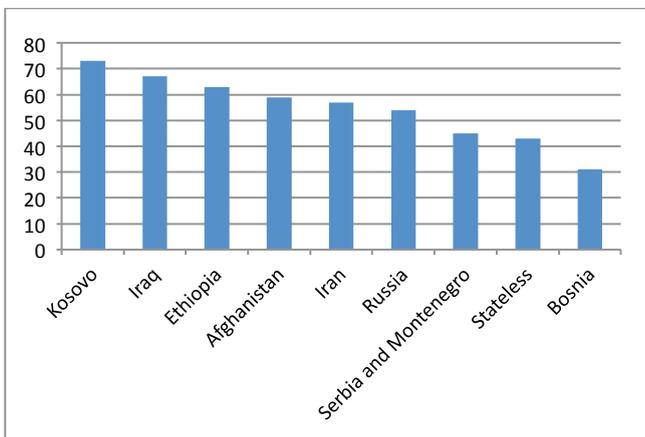
In Figure 5 we see the top eight nationalities among IOM applicants. Again, Ethiopia was added. The figure also displays the variation in registered returns according to the UDI database.

Figure 5 Ranking according to nationality: IOM applicants and returnees. 2002–April 2014



In Figure 6, the nationality ranking is displayed according to the percentage of IOM applicants that in the end were registered as returned via IOM. The figure points to substantial differences in return percentages among the nationalities.

Figure 6 Percentage of IOM applicants registered as returned via IOM, ranked nationalities. 2002–April 2014



Within the group of eight (highest number of applicants) plus one (Ethiopia), Kosovo came out on top with a 73 percent applicant-to-returned ratio. Interestingly, the three program countries (Iraq, Ethiopia and Afghanistan) were ranked consecutively. A possible link between this number and the programs will be discussed later. While close to three out of four Kosovar applicants ended up returning, two out of three Iraqis and Ethiopians did so. Could it be that the country programs for Iraq, Afghanistan and Ethiopia contributed to this ratio? If so, one should expect a surge after the introduction of the programs. The second largest group of applicants, Russians, showed return numbers closer to one out of two.

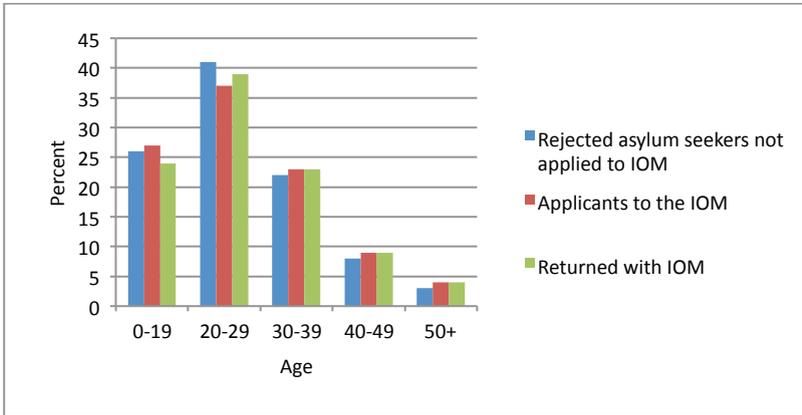
Before digging deeper into the national differences, we need to look at what distinguished those that applied from the rest of the rejected asylum seekers.

IOM applicants vs. other rejected asylum seekers

All asylum seekers that came to Norway between 2002 and 2014 (through April) whose cases were rejected in the first instance (UDI), are among those included in our material. The data show that after their first rejection, the majority appealed, and a substantial number ended up with permission to stay. Out of the 66,000 asylum seekers that were rejected in the first instance and had not applied for assisted return, more than 9,000 received a positive outcome in their appeals.

Several common characteristics appear when comparing rejected asylum seekers (first instance) who did not apply for assisted return with those that applied for return, and then adding those that both applied for assisted return and actually returned. First, in all three groups, more than seven out of ten were men. Age-wise they were also very similar (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 Age profiles for three groups: Rejected asylum seekers that had not applied for assisted return, IOM applicants and returned via IOM. 2002–April 2014

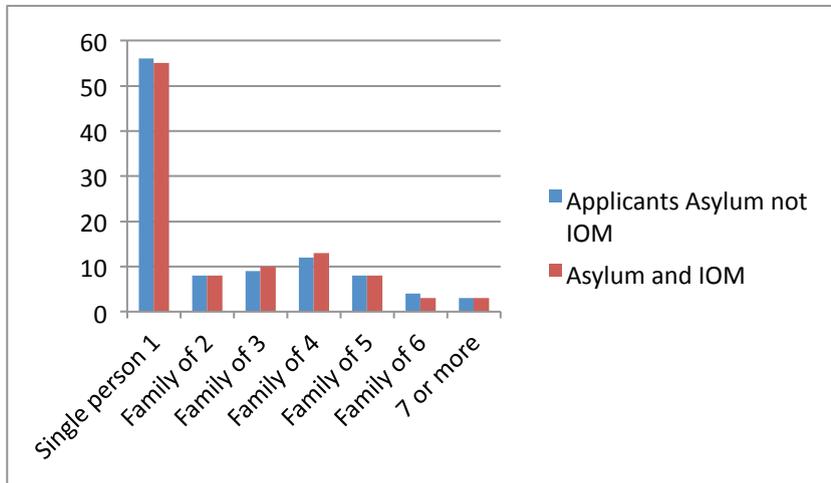


In Figure 7 we see a substantial number of children and youth within all three groups, about one in four that were rejected and among those that applied to the IOM. Slightly fewer were below the age of 19 in the group that ended up leaving.

Interestingly, 650 of the total of 23,015 asylum seekers stating their status as unaccompanied minors (aged 17 or younger) applied for return via IOM during the 2002–2014 period. According to UDI data, 421 of these left the country as part of the assisted return program.

Family attachment is another factor that may influence decisions to sign up for assisted return. In Figure 8 we see the variation in family size between rejected asylum seekers that did not apply for assisted return and those that did apply for assisted return, again finding very little difference between the groups.

Figure 8 Family size of rejected asylum seekers: Non-IOM applicants vs. IOM applicants. 2002–April 2014



Again, there is little difference between the group of rejected asylum seekers that do not apply for assisted return and those that do. More than half in both groups arrived without spouses or children. The other family sizes were nearly identical, with the family of four being the most common.

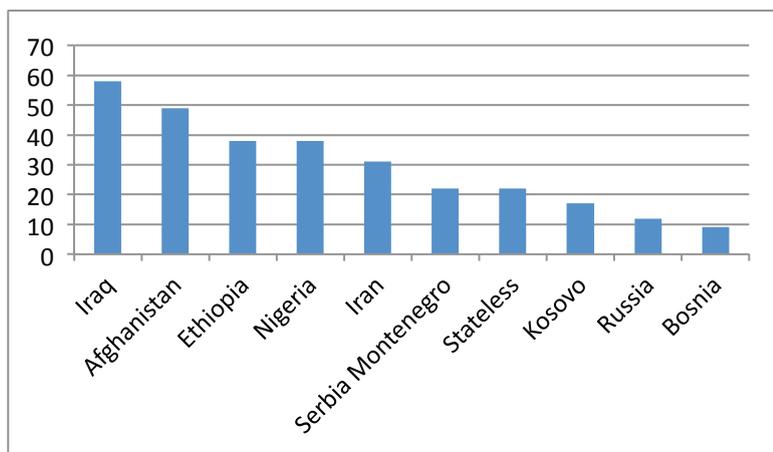
The numbers at this aggregated level may disguise substantial differences for subgroups. In the next section we will split the group that did apply to IOM into different subgroups. Taking a closer look at the individual nationalities is key to understanding the dynamics in the uses of the return programs for various countries. We will also pay special attention to possible differences between those that applied while in a reception center and those that applied while living outside at a private address or with no registered address.

Residence when applying for assisted return

Previous evaluations of the Norwegian return programs have not examined the possible difference between those that apply from inside and outside reception centers (Brekke 2008, Oslo Economics 2014). Of the 23,015 registered applications for voluntary assisted return between 2002 and April 2014, 7,785 applied from outside the centers (34 percent), i.e. one in three applicants. Some nationalities

had a considerably higher than average share of outside applicants. In Figure 9, ten countries are listed (top eight plus Russia and Bosnia) according to the percentage of persons outside the reception centers at the time of application.

Figure 9 Percentage of persons that were not in reception centers when applying for assisted return. Nationalities, ranked. 2002–April 2014

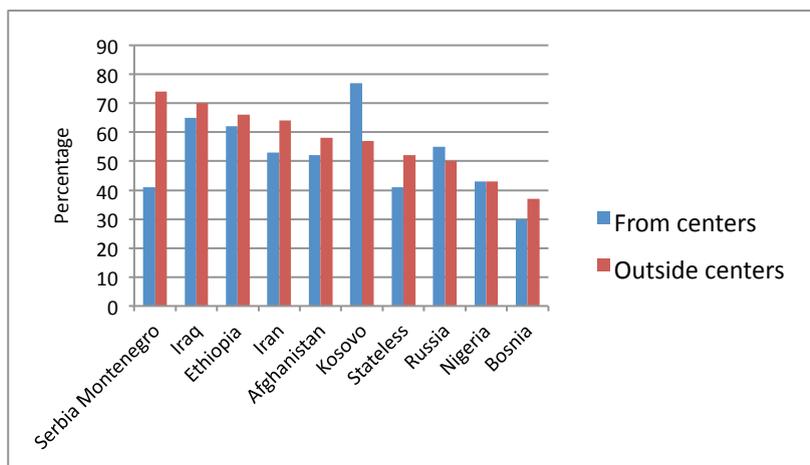


Several of those nationalities with the most applicants are also on top of the ranking in Figure 9. Of the 3,701 Iraqis that applied for assisted return between 2002 and 2014, 2,154 (58 percent) were not living in reception centers at the time. Afghans also ranked high, where close to half applied from outside the centers (49 percent). Among the larger return nations, the second in the ranking for total return applications, Russia, had very few applicants living outside the centers when applying (335 of 2,713, 12 percent). There was significant variation among the major return countries, from close to sixty percent for the Iraqis to close to ten percent for the Russians.

There are several plausible explanations for this pattern. Below, we will revisit the characteristics of the individual national groups and the national return programs. One interesting hypothesis to highlight and save for later discussions would be that the incentives for Russians to apply as soon as possible after rejection would be higher, given the reduction in support as time passes.

Was there a difference in return rates among those that applied from inside and outside the centers? In Figure 10 we again look at the same countries as above and estimate the return percentage among those that applied from outside and inside the centers.

Figure 10 Return percentages for applicants from inside and outside reception centers. Selected countries. 2002–April 2014



In Figure 10 the nationalities are ranked according to the percentage of IOM applicants that ended up returning via IOM. Of this group, Serbia and Montenegro came out on top. More than 70 percent of the Serbian IOM applicants that applied from outside reception centers ended up leaving the country. Interestingly, only 40 percent of the Serbs and Montenegrins that applied while in centers followed through with assisted return. Of the countries with higher return numbers, Iraqis also returned at a somewhat higher rate when applying from outside the centers (70 vs. 65 percent). The same was the case for the Afghans (58 vs. 52 percent) and for most other nationalities. Two nationalities diverged from the others: Kosovars and Russians. Within these groups, those that applied from the centers returned at a higher rate than those living outside. The applicants from Kosovo applying from the reception centers had the highest return rate of any group listed in Figure 10, with 77 percent returns.

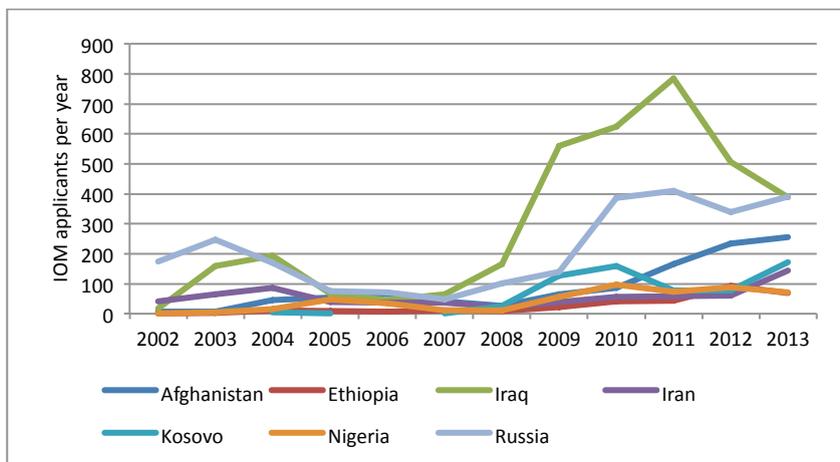
Returns for selected nationalities

The statistics presented so far establish a solid basis for analyzing the role of the national return and reintegration programs. Moving forward, we focus on the three country programs: Iraq (IRRINI), Afghanistan (IRRANA) and Ethiopia (ARE). In addition, we include the second largest country with regard to assisted return, namely Russia. We likewise include Kosovo, which is one of the case countries in the broader evaluation of the return programs. Both latter countries are also interesting because they are (or have been) parts of the FSR program. FSR supplements and boosts certain aspects of the basic VARP run by IOM.

The effects that the return programs have on applications and returns are particularly interesting. Supplementing the basic VARP (2002), IRRANA (Afghanistan) was introduced in 2006, IRRINI (Iraq) in 2008, ARE (Ethiopia) in 2012, and the general voluntary assisted return program (AVR) and the booster support program/FSR in various stages since 2009 (stepwise incentives from 2012).

Figure 11 illustrates the development in applications for the selected countries, where the variations in applications according to nationality form a striking pattern.

Figure 11 Number of applicants for voluntary assisted return per year. Selected nationalities. 2002–2013



Again we see low numbers during the mid-2000s. All the major nationalities had fewer than 75 applications for assisted returns per year during that period. This changed in 2008 when Iraqis and Russians in particular applied. The surge continued over the following four years. Iraqi applications peaked in 2011, posting 784 applications that year alone.

If we turn to the actual returns coming from these applications, we obtain a similar pattern (Figure 12). Again we see the sharp increase in returns from Iraq in 2008 and the peak in 2011, when more than 500 Iraqis were registered by UDI as returned via IOM.

Figure 12 Assisted returns per year. Selected nationalities. 2002–2013

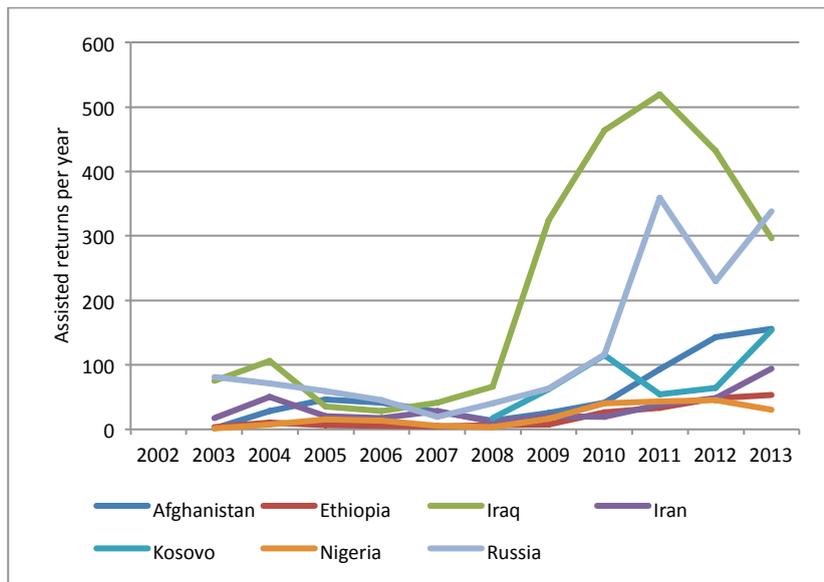


Figure 12 also shows that Russians surpassed the Iraqis in returns in 2013 (328 to 296, respectively), according to UDI. Let us take a closer look at the individual countries and the related return programs.

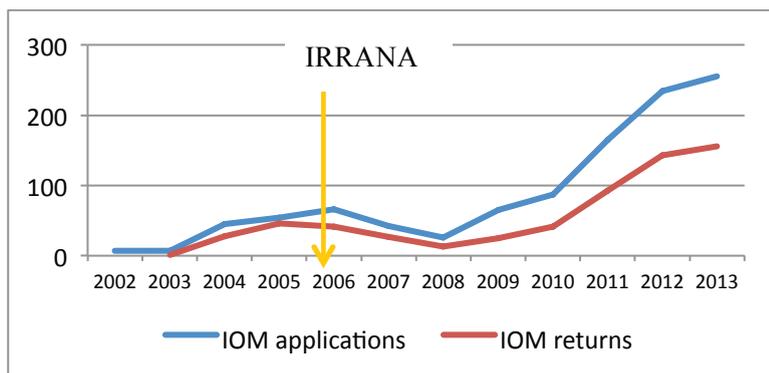
Afghanistan: The IRRANA program

The IRRANA program was launched by Norwegian authorities in April 2006 as the first country-specific return program.⁸ The program followed from a three-party agreement between Norwegian and Afghan Authorities and the UNCHR, which also included an acceptance of forced returns of Afghan nationals.⁹

If we isolate the trend in applications for assisted return and actual returns for Afghan nationals, we can look for IRRANA's effects. We will gradually introduce variables believed to influence the application and return rate and discuss these at a descriptive and bivariate level.

In Figure 13, we see the development in applications and returns for the Afghan group. Also displayed is a vertical line indicating the timing of IRRANA's inception. Two phases can be identified in the fluctuations in assisted returns from Norway to Afghanistan. The first phase was between 2004 and 2007, where applications and returns lingered around 50 per year. This period was also characterized by little spread between applications and returns; typically around 70 percent of those that applied later returned.

Figure 13 Number of Afghan applicants for assisted return and actual assisted returns per year. 2002–2013



⁸ Later, the cash grant of 15,000 NOK was supplemented by a reintegration component of 30,000 NOK. Travel expenses and periodically extensive counselling and information (Brekke 2008) made IRRANA an important first effort to promote voluntary assisted return to a country in a challenging situation.

⁹ The content and development of the IRRANA program has been discussed in previous research (Brekke 2008, 2010, Strand et al. 2008).

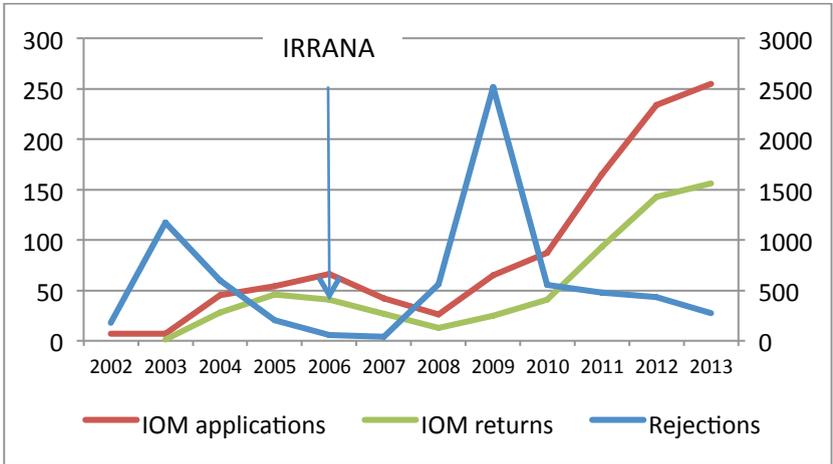
After an all-time low in 2008 (26 applications and 13 assisted returns), the numbers rose significantly toward the end of the decade. The numbers in 2013 (255 and 156) were ten times higher than five years earlier. As conveyed in Figure 13, the introduction of IRRANA seems to have had little or no immediate or direct effect on applications or returns.¹⁰ Two years after the upstart of the program, the numbers had dropped by 50 percent.

Did IRRANA have any overall effect on the applications and returns to Afghanistan? The most recent Norwegian study on the topic was inconclusive (Oslo Economics 2014). But perhaps some answers will come from introducing a few key factors believed to be crucial for the willingness to sign up for assisted return: the number of rejected asylum seekers from the same country, the conditions in the home country (terror scales) and the number of forced returns of Afghan nationals.

Figure 14 includes a trend line for the potential for return, i.e. the number of asylum applicants that were rejected by UDI in the first round of processing. From the figure, we see that IRRANA was initiated when the potential for return applications was at a low point. The fifty or so applications per year during the 2004–2007 stretch appear to be associated with the aftermath of the close to 1,200 rejections in 2003 and 600 in 2004. The surge in rejections from 2008 to 2009 (when 2,500 Afghan asylum seekers were rejected in 2009) seems to have provided the potential for the later increase in applications for return and assisted returns from 2010 onward.

¹⁰ The question of causality is of course challenging in social science. In this case one could, for example, discuss what would have been the return situation during the second half of the 2000s without the IRRANA program.

Figure 14 Number of Afghans applying for assisted return and returns (left-hand scale), and trend for number of rejected Afghan asylum seekers (right-hand scale)



The terror scales (US State Department and Amnesty International) may not be detailed enough to be helpful in explaining the variations in return applications from Afghans.¹¹ But looking at Figure 14, the number of Afghan arrivals to Norway increased following the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and the ensuing war. The number of returns, albeit at a modest level, did increase after 2004 and 2005, the years when both Amnesty and the US State Department increased their index score from 4 to 5. The number of applications rose again at the end of the decade. Despite a slight variation during 2010–2012, the indexes do not seem capable of explaining the increase in both applications and returns from 2012 onward.¹²

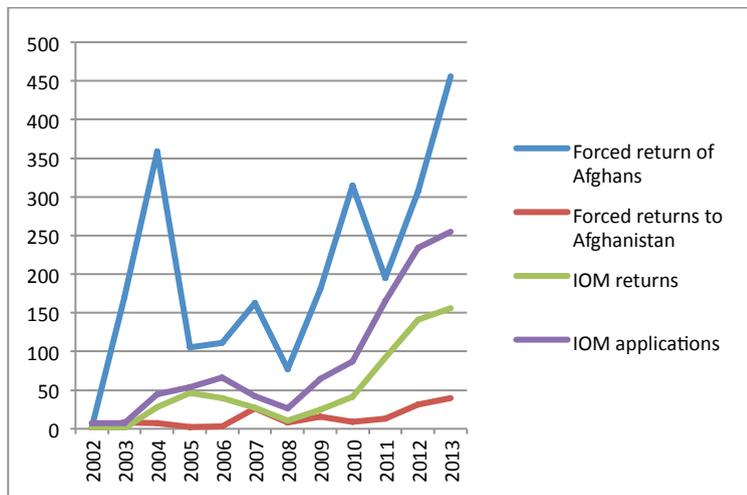
¹¹ Both scales span from 1 to 5, 5 being the most dangerous level (see Appendix 2). During the period in question, 2002–2014, both institutions used only 4s and 5s to describe the situation in Afghanistan. Amnesty held that the conditions deteriorated in 2005 and stayed at the maximum level 5 throughout the decade before posting a 4 for 2012. The State Department held that conditions deteriorated from 2004 onward, raising the index score from 4 to 5 before taking it back to 4 in 2010, and then back to 5 for 2011 and a 4 in 2012 (there are no numbers available after 2012, www.politicalterrorscale.org).

¹² The security situation in Afghanistan appeared to have deteriorated in 2013 and 2014 while the country prepared for the pull-out of the international and American troops and later for the election in 2014. Again, this does not seem to be reflected in the number of applications and returns.

A third major motivating factor that has been suggested by Norwegian governments is the presence of forced returns. Let us look at the development in forced returns of Afghan nationals to Afghanistan. As discussed elsewhere (Brekke 2008), many third-country nationals that are forcibly returned from Norway are Dublin cases and are returned to regions other than their country of origin.

Out of the 7,600 Afghans having their asylum applications rejected in Norway during the 2002–April 2014 period, 1,100 applied for assisted return and 700 left the country with assistance from IOM. During the same period, 2,400 Afghan nationals were removed from the country by the Police (National Police Immigration Service). Not all of these were sent back to their home country. Out of the 2,400 removed, a mere 177 were returned to Afghanistan. The others were returned to other European countries within the Schengen area.

Figure 15 Number of Afghans returned: Forced return of all Afghan nationals, forced return to Afghanistan, returns via IOM to Afghanistan, applications to the IOM. 2003–2013



In Figure 15 we find two series of numbers we know from earlier: IOM applications by Afghan nationals and the resulting IOM returns. In addition, we find the forced return of Afghans from Norway and forced returns to Afghanistan. Again, we see the small number of

Afghans that were forced to return to their home country by the police (Brekke 2010). Most of them were forced to return to transit countries, such as Italy, Germany and Sweden.

By looking simultaneously at the numbers for IOM returns (all going to Afghanistan) and forced returns to that country, we see that for most of the period there were more voluntary assisted returns to that country than forced returns.

Do these aggregated numbers indicate a causal relationship between the number of forced returns and applications for assisted return? If we argue that only the forced returns to Afghanistan could influence the voluntary returns, there appears to be no such causality. If we include all forced returns of Afghan nationals, the trend line for IOM applications and all forced returns both show an upward tendency at the end of the period. The interview data presented in the next chapter would, however, not support putting both returns to the home countries and Schengen countries in the same group. The rejected asylum seekers would know where their fellow countrymen and women are being returned to. If they themselves do not have a Dublin case, their chances of a forced return to Afghanistan should not be affected¹³

With the latest regulatory changes to the IRRANA/VARP IOM program, those with a Dublin case may apply for assisted return. However, the data show that these latest changes did not have an impact on the number of voluntary assisted returns to Afghanistan.

When discussing the effects of forced returns on applications for voluntary assisted return, one should be aware that the relationship between the two is not necessarily linear. The mere fact that the police follow through on forced returns may be enough to elicit returns. One could argue that the number of forced returns may be less important as a motivator and that the actual communication and exposure of the returns may be just as important. This discussion will be continued in the next chapter.

Where were the Afghans when they applied for return? The short answer is that half of them were either living at a private address or registered as “missing” by the reception centers (552 out

¹³ An interesting topic for further research is whether the substantial number of unaccompanied minors within the Afghan group influenced the group's return pattern.

of 1164). The others were spread out across a large number of reception centers, with fifteen centers registering ten applicants or more during the period.

We will leave the discussion on causality until we have had a closer look at four more nationalities: Iraqis, Ethiopians, Kosovars and Russians.

Iraq: The IRRINI program

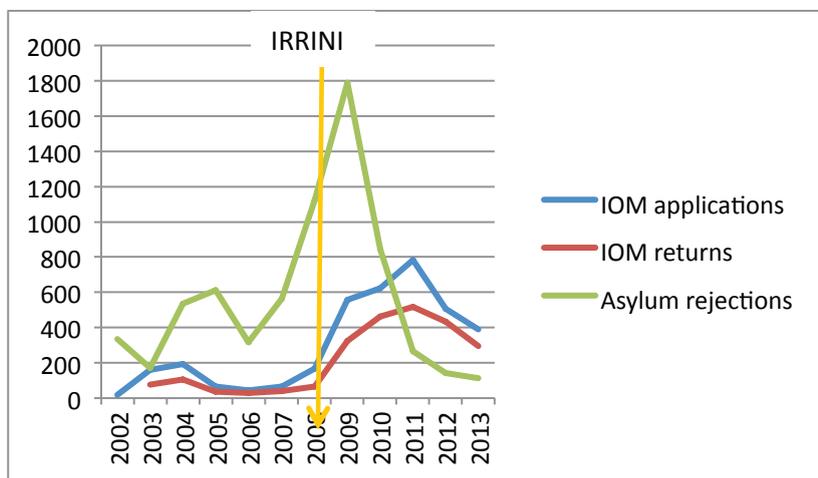
The IRRINI program was established in March 2008 and evaluated in 2010/2011 (Strand et al. 2011). Iraqi nationals have been the most numerous group of applicants and returnees. The IRRANA program includes a number of financial support instruments. In addition to organizing and paying transportation costs, as well as providing information about reintegration in Iraq and supplying practical support in Iraq, the Norwegian authorities provide a cash allowance, reintegration support in kind, a subsidy for housing costs and support earmarked for children and young adults.¹⁴

Yet few of the returnees interviewed in the 2011 program evaluation found these financial incentives to be the decisive factor when deciding to return (Strand et al. 2011). Instead, the support was viewed as the core of the program and very useful once they decided to return.

In contrast to more recent arrivals of asylum seekers to Norway, such as Somalis and Eritreans, Iraqis have a long history within the Norwegian reception system. One earlier peak in asylum arrivals from Iraq was in 1998 and 1999. That group was given temporary protection and later pushed toward choosing voluntary assisted return. In Figure 16 we see the presence of these early Iraqi arrivals reflected in the increase in applications for return and actual returns in the early 2000s.

¹⁴ Each assisted returnee is provided with 10,000 NOK (1,600 USD) upon arrival to Iraq. Further reintegration support at a of maximum 25,000 (4,000 USD) NOK is paid in kind (courses, salary augmentation, etc.), along with 20,000 NOK (3,200 USD) that is paid, when needed, as support for housing costs (e.g. for families with children). Young adults can in addition obtain support for education and vocational training. An additional 10,000 NOK is provided per child for families. In other words, the potential financial support for a family choosing assisted return to Iraq is substantial.

Figure 16 Iraqi nationals: Number of IOM applications, IOM returns, rejections of asylum seekers (UDI). 2002–2013



In Figure 16 we recognize the surge in Iraqi rejections in 2008 and 2009. This was a period with a strong increase in the number of Iraqi asylum seekers coming to Norway, and also a period where Norwegian policy and practice changed toward this group (Brekke and Aarset 2009). The number of rejections then fell drastically as fewer Iraqis came to Norway in the years that followed. Iraqis with rejected applications were left with few options. One of these was to apply for assisted return. Many did so, and the number of applicants increased from 550 in 2009 to almost 800 two years later. The returns followed the same pattern, peaking above 500 in 2011.

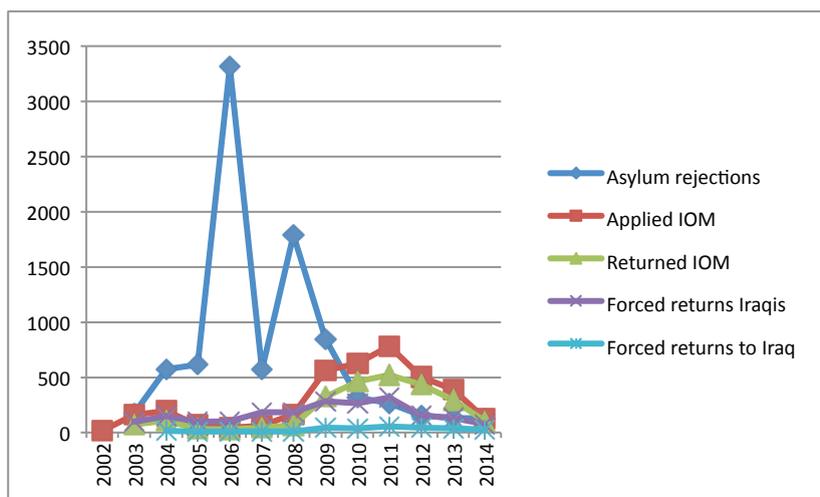
Figure 16 also indicates the 2008 introduction of IRRINI. The program coincided with the surge in Iraqi arrivals in the spring of 2008. The number of rejected asylum seekers from Iraq was also on the rise when the program was introduced. There was also media coverage about a possible positive outlook for Iraq in general and in particular for the northern region, where many of the asylum seekers originated (Strand et al. 2011). The launch of IRRINI was well timed by the Norwegian authorities, given that the goal was to have as many people as possible sign up for the voluntary assisted return program.

What about the forced returns to Iraq during this period? The agreement with Iraqi authorities that was part of IRRINI opened up

for easier processing of forced returns from Norway to Iraq. Of the 8,200 rejected asylum seekers from Iraq during the period (2002–2013), 2,000 were forced to return by the police. Of these, most were returned to Dublin countries, while 300 were returned to Iraq.

Figure 17 includes forced returns of all Iraqi nationals and returns of Iraqi nationals to Iraq. Interestingly, the voluntary assisted returns outnumbered the forced returns of all Iraqi nationals for most of the years, and of Iraqi nationals to Iraq for every year between 2002 and 2013.

Figure 17 Iraqi nationals: Number of rejected asylum seekers, IOM applications, IOM returns, forced returns of Iraqis, forced returns to Iraq



There is little trace of causality in the forced returns and voluntary returns in Figure 17. From these bivariate analyses, we cannot conclude one way or the other, apart from pointing to the obvious: that an increase in the number of rejections increases the pool of people that may choose assisted return.

Without opening a discussion on the wider dynamics of asylum policies and flows (Brekke, Røed and Schöne 2015), it should be mentioned that restrictive measures, such as forced returns, may also have an effect on the number of arrivals. The IRRINI agreement may have had an impact that stems the sharp increase in Iraqi arrivals in

2008. There were, however, several other factors that may have caused the decrease in arrivals that followed (Brekke and Aarset 2009).

Of the 8,200 total rejected asylum seekers from Iraq during the 2002–2013 period, 3,600 applied for voluntary assisted return. Of those that applied for return, 2,100 did so from outside the centers (58 percent), of which 1,000 were registered as “not staying in centers”, 800 were registered as living at private addresses and 300 were registered as “missing.”

Ethiopia: The ARE program

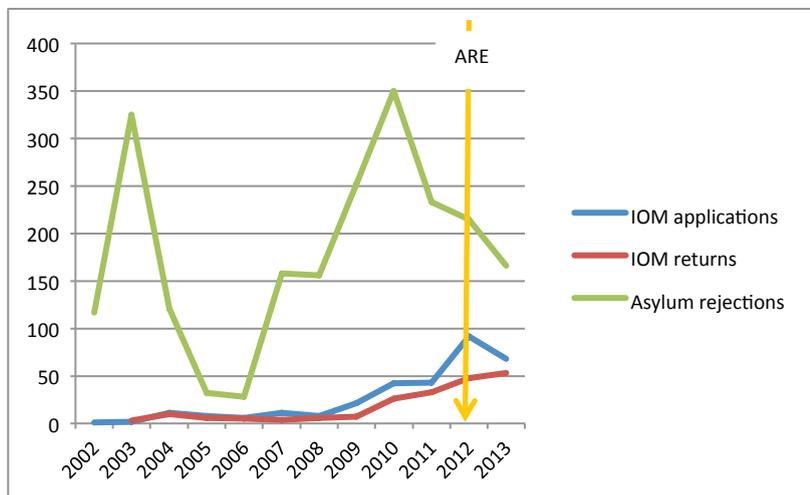
The Assisted Return to Ethiopia (ARE) program was established in 2012. Under the program, adults signing up for voluntary assisted return receive a cash payment and support for education or business start-ups.¹⁵

Critical voices have been raised against the agreement, as some have argued that the agreement, which has several components, was primarily formulated to force returns to Ethiopia rather than facilitate assisted returns (Janmyr 2014, Talleraas 2014). Regardless, there have been few forced returns to Ethiopia, as we shall see.

First, however, we will look at the general trend in applications for assisted returns and actual returns of Ethiopian nationals from Norway. In Figure 18 the first impression is the low level for applications and returns but with a clear increase in both toward the end of the period.

¹⁵ A cash payment of 15,000 NOK (2,500 USD) is provided upon arrival. Returnees can also apply for a further 30,000 NOK (5,000 USD) given as support for educational purposes or to start a business, or as a top-up grant for those with low paying jobs. For families with children under 18, the numbers are somewhat higher. The adults still get 15,000 NOK upon arrival, while the children each get 25,000 NOK (4,150 USD). There is an additional 30,000 NOK available for educational/school expenses. According to the bilateral agreement between the Norwegian and the Ethiopian government, the Administration for Refugees and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) in Addis Ababa shall play a role in the reintegration of returnees from Norway.

Figure 18 Ethiopian nationals: Number of IOM applications, IOM returns, rejections of asylum seekers (UDI). 2002–2013



As we see in Figure 18, the number of Ethiopians in Norway with rejected asylum claims followed the general arrival pattern for asylum seekers (see Figure 1), peaking in 2003 and 2009/2010. There was an increase in IOM applications and returns from 2009 through the spring of 2012, when ARE was introduced. The upward trend in assisted returns continued seemingly undisturbed, while the number of applications fell somewhat. During the first trimester of 2014 the level of applications stabilized at around 50 per year but then increased during the summer of 2014.

Of the 2,400 Ethiopians that were rejected in the first instance during the twelve-year period, a total of 300 applied for voluntary assisted return (2002 through April 2014). Of these, 217 returned with IOM assistance (approximately 85 of these left after the introduction of ARE).

ARE's impact is difficult to estimate from these numbers alone. It was introduced at a time when the number of rejections was declining and IOM returns were rising. Both trends continued.

Could forced returns have influenced the number of IOM applicants? This seems unlikely, based on the numbers. There have only been a few forced returns to Ethiopia. Asylum seekers from this country are only rarely registered as Dublin cases. Together, the total of forced returns of Ethiopians (including to Dublin countries) and

forced returns to Ethiopia were miniscule. Only seven people were forced back to Ethiopia with the assistance of the Norwegian police during 2002–April 2014.

Again, it is important to note that the country-specific return and reintegration agreements may have effects other than boosting the number of applications for voluntary return. They may influence the number of asylum seekers from that country. In a landscape with many similar destination countries, such elements may tip the balance toward another alternative (Brekke and Aarset 2009).

Russia: The second largest group

Asylum seekers from Russia have come to Norway in varying numbers since the 1990s. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, local and regional conflicts have sent people fleeing to Europe. In particular, the conflict in Chechnya has led many people to apply for asylum in Norway. After years of being accepted as having the right to protection, Norwegian authorities decided in 2006 to reject the majority of claims, pointing to safe internal flight alternatives in Russia (Brekke and Aarset 2009), thus increasing the potential for voluntary assisted returns. Although there is no designated country program for Russian citizens, those that choose to return, receive support in accordance with FSR.¹⁶

FSR provides for additional funds to groups defined as vulnerable, such as single elderly, those with special medical needs, victims of violence or exploitation, current or former unaccompanied minors and possible victims of human trafficking (UDI.no). For these an additional 45,000 NOK (7,800 USD) available to cover housing, training, education, business, food and clothes.

¹⁶ This includes financial support, information and assistance with travel arrangements. The cash support is dependent on when the individual or family applies for assisted return. If the application is registered before the deadline to leave the country, the full amount is paid (20,000 NOK for adults and 30,000 NOK for children under 18). Within the following two months the amounts are lowered (15,000 and 25,000 NOK), before reaching their lowest level (10,000 and 20,000 NOK). At any of these stages, a family, including adults and children, can receive a substantial amount, even from the general FSR program.

Any third-country national that falls under the FSR program and has been defined as a Dublin case can still qualify for financial support. The prerequisite is that they return to their home country and not to the European country where their case was first registered. They can then receive assistance with travel arrangements, travel costs and a 10,000 NOK cash payment.

The number of Russians that registered for the general voluntary return program surged from 2009 to 2011. In Figure 19, we see that around 400 applicants have applied each year since 2010.

Figure 19 Russian nationals: Number of IOM applicants, IOM returns, rejected asylum seekers (UDI). 2002–2013

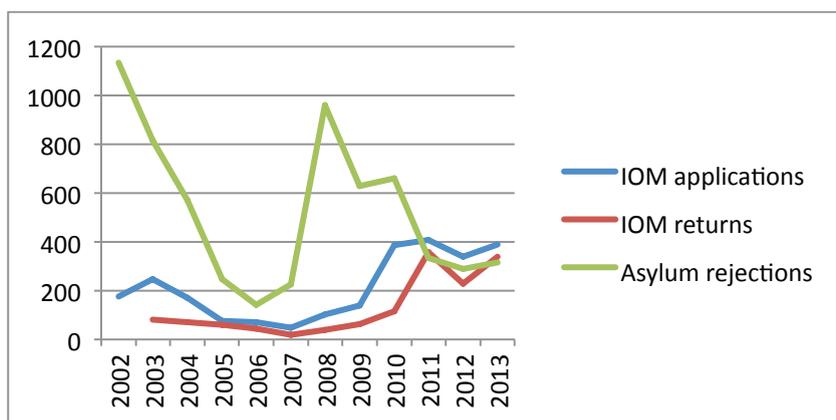


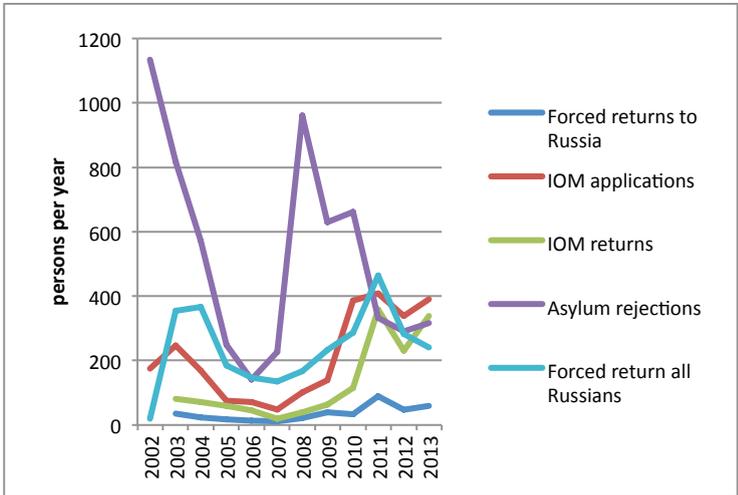
Figure 19 likewise shows the high number of Russian nationals actually returning via IOM. The potential for high numbers in applications and returns from 2009 onward was created by the substantial number of asylum seekers being rejected during the 2008–2010 period. As we saw earlier (in Figure 11), Russians were the largest group of return applicants and returnees in 2013. Figure 1 illustrated the general arrival pattern for asylum seekers to Norway. The peaks in that curve (in 2002 and 2008) coincide with the peaks in number of rejected Russian asylum seekers.

It is appropriate to ask whether the increase in IOM applications and returns is linked to the increased incentives in FSR.

During the same period, there was a substantial number of forced returns of Russian nationals, and many of these were returned

to the Russian Federation. In Figure 20, these are linked to the development of voluntary applications and returns.

Figure 20 Russian nationals: Number of rejected asylum seekers, IOM returns, forced returns, forced returns to Russia



By including in Figure 20 the forced returns of Russians and those being sent to Russia, we see that the number of Russians being registered as sent to their home country was insignificant. The primary reason for this was that there were many Dublin cases among those returned out of the country. In some years the total number of forced returns of Russian nationals exceeded the number of rejections. It is also worth noting that the number of voluntary assisted returns for Russians in 2013 was higher than those of rejected asylum seekers and forced returns of Russian nationals.

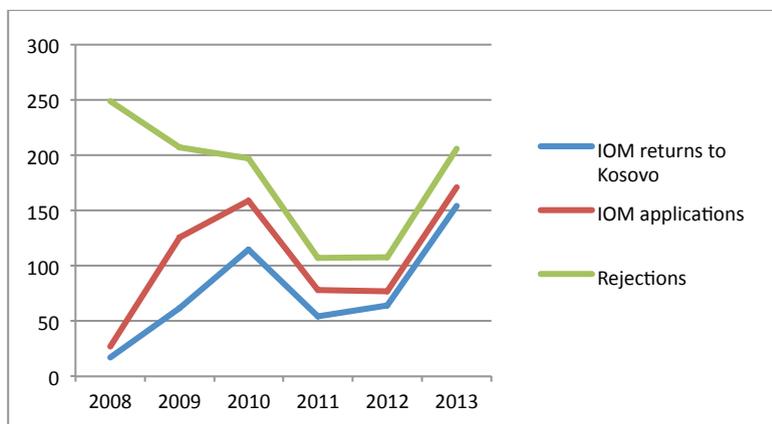
In total, 8,000 Russian nationals were rejected in first instance (UDI) during 2002–April 2014. Three thousand of these were forced to leave the country, according to police data, 1,200 of which were Dublin cases, being returned primarily to countries other than Russia. In total there were 2,200 Dublin cases among the 8,000 rejected applicants, accounting for 28 percent. Nine hundred of the 3,000 that had to leave the country never filed an application for asylum nor an application for assisted return. These were in other words only in touch with the police.

Kosovo: A group excluded from financial support for return

Refugees and asylum seekers have come from Kosovo to Norway in varying numbers since the mid-1990s. During the crisis in 1999 the Norwegian government evacuated 6,000 Kosovo refugees from camps in the neighboring countries. Most of these returned during the following two years (Brekke 2002). Since that effort, there has been a link between the two countries. Toward the end of the 2000s, Kosovars again came to Norway to apply for asylum. Recognition rates have been very low since the war in 1999, and in 2013 Norwegian authorities suspended the group's access to FSR. It was assumed that the system was being exploited and that people came only to elicit the financial support and free transportation back to Kosovo.

In Figure 21, we see the development in rejections for Kosovars, applications for assisted return and actual returns. The figure reveals the surge from 2012 to 2013 that made the Norwegian immigration authorities react. There was also an increase in 2010 in IOM applications and returns. The parallel lines during the period 2010–2013 illustrate the close connection between the number of asylum arrivals/rejections and the number of IOM applications.

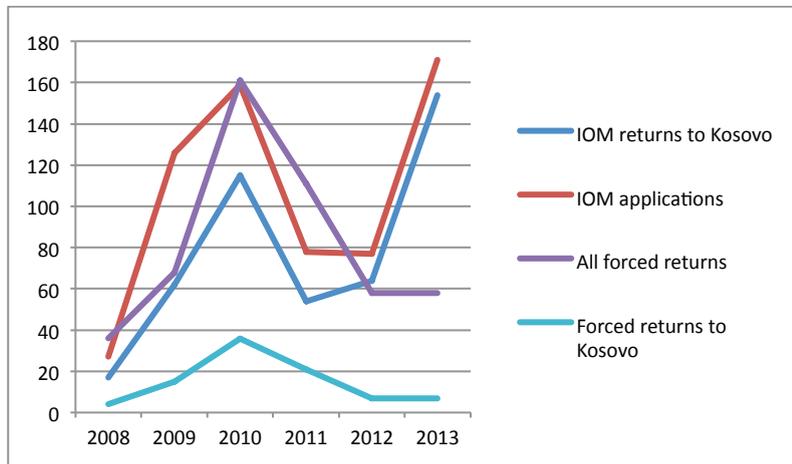
Figure 21 Kosovo nationals: Number of rejected asylum seekers, IOM applications and IOM returns. 2008–2013 (registration before 2008 mixed with Serbia)



In total 1,350 Kosovo nationals had their applications rejected during 2002–April 2014. Of these, 550 were forced to leave the country. Almost 700 of the remaining 800 applied for voluntary assisted return. Five hundred of these returned.

As we see in Figure 22, most of those that were forcibly returned were sent to countries other than Kosovo.

Figure 22 Kosovo nationals: Number of IOM applications and IOM returns, forced returns total and forced returns to Kosovo



Since all the assisted returnees left for their home country, the number of voluntary returns far outnumbered the forced returns to Kosovo. In fact, 500 out of the 600 that returned to Kosovo during 2002–2013 were voluntary assisted returnees. The majority of the forced returns of Kosovars from Norway ended in other Dublin countries. The majority of Kosovar forced returnees already had their cases registered elsewhere in the Dublin area.

The question of causality

In this report we have looked at different factors that may influence whether a rejected asylum seeker in Norway will choose voluntary assisted return and ultimately leave the country with IOM assistance.

Above we have analyzed two or three variables at the same time. Some, like the terror scales, have been discussed qualitatively.

Multivariate analysis allows us to study several variables simultaneously. In our case, a befitting multivariate method is a binary logistic regression analysis. The regression analysis allows us to isolate the effect of one independent variable on the dependent variable, while controlling for the other variables by holding them constant. Even with this effort, however, there may be other variables not included in the equation that could account for some of the estimated relationship between one or more of the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Causality in social science is not straightforward. It can be challenging to interpret the results once we introduce multiple variables into an equation. In this type of analysis, researchers are primarily concerned with correlation between variables.

In the current study, we will estimate the effect of each variable separately on the odds for signing up for voluntary assisted return and on the odds for actually returning once a person has signed up. The numbers should be interpreted as relative odds (odds ratios). A person with a certain trait, e.g. a man as compared to a woman, will have higher or lower odds of choosing assisted return.

In Table 2, we look at the odds ratio for applying for assisted return via IOM among all asylum seekers that received their first negative decision between 2002–April 2014.

Table 2 Odds ratio for applying for voluntary assisted return (23,015) among the 90,000 rejected asylum seekers in Norway, 2002–2014¹⁷

	Odds ratio	Standard error
Gender (woman=1)	0.809***	0.019
Unaccompanied minor	0.901**	0.047
Partner/ part of family, two or more persons	1.541***	0.018

¹⁷ Nagelkerke R²=0.06. Stepwise entry. Gender: man=0, woman=1. ***=Significance>99% level. **>95% level.

Age, one year intervals	1.007***	0.001
Iraq	3.312***	0.025
Russia	1.987***	0.027
Afghanistan	0.686***	0.034
Kosovo	3.961***	0.058
Ethiopia	0.636***	0.061
Constant	0.207***	0.023

In the first column in Table 2, we find the odds ratio (ExpB). Some variables score below 1 (i.e. less than equal odds), while others score above that level. For example, the gender variable (man=0 and woman=1) scores below 1, meaning that the odds of signing up for return are lower for women than for men, all other things being equal.

The point of reference in Table 2 is a person who does not have any of these characteristics: i.e. a man (man=0) who is not an unaccompanied minor, has no partner or family applying with him, and is not from any of the listed countries. Each characteristic is then entered into the regression, causing the odds ratios to change.

While being a female asylum seeker with a negative first decision lowered the odds relative to men, being part of a family gave higher odds compared to being single. For those with a partner or family the odds ratio was higher than 1 (1.541). Unaccompanied minors gave marginally lower odds than those not in that category.¹⁸

When the countries we focus on are entered into the regression, we see that the findings from earlier in this chapter are confirmed: Coming from Kosovo, Iraq and Russia increases the odds for applying via IOM. The reference point is persons with other nationalities than the countries listed. Asylum seekers from Ethiopia and Afghanistan have odds below 1, meaning that coming from these

¹⁸ The odds ratios can be converted into relative percentage. By (odds ratio – 1 x 100), we find a 54% higher odds for signing up for those with a partner or family. Unaccompanied minors have 10% lower odds for registering for voluntary return.

countries gives lower odds of applying for assisted return than being from the countries not listed.

This is not trivial, despite being a repetition of findings from the cross-tabulations. Using the multivariate regression analysis, we look at the odds for the individual to choose voluntary return. The effect of variations in the number of potential returnees from the same nationality does not disturb the result, nor do the other constants in the equation.

In Table 3 we use many of the same input variables as in Table 2 in order to explain what influences the actual return among those that applied to the IOM. We have increased the scope of the family variable to being in a family of three persons or more. We have also entered a dummy variable indicating whether the applicants for assisted returns were living in a reception center at the time of application. Age has been removed from the equation.

Table 3 Odds ratios for returning via IOM after having applied. Rejected asylum seekers to Norway. 2002–2014¹⁹

	Odds ratio	Standard error
Gender (woman=1)	1.049	0.032
Unaccompanied minor	0.899	0.084
Family of three or more persons	0.762***	0.030
Applied from reception center	0.785***	0.032
Iraq	2.475***	0.040
Russia	1.725***	0.043
Afghanistan	1.751***	0.063
Kosovo	3.957***	0.089
Ethiopia	2.122***	0.116
Constant	1.011***	0.029

¹⁹ Nagelkerke R2=0.07. Stepwise entry. Gender: man=0, woman=1. ***=Significance>99% level. **>95% level.

In this second model, the reference group (constant) consisted of those who applied for (voluntary) assisted return with IOM from Norway during the 2002–June 2014 period and who were men (gender=0), were not unaccompanied minors, were not in a family of three or more, did not apply from a reception center, and were from another country than the five listed in the model.

In Table 3, we see a somewhat different pattern than in Table 2. The gender variable shows a low level of significance. The lower odds for women reported in Table 2 are no longer present. This can be interpreted as gender not playing a role in whether a person who has applied to IOM ends up returning. Nor being unaccompanied minor (stated at the time of applying for asylum), had a significant effect.

Those in families of three or more had lower odds of returning than singles once they had applied for assisted return. Though not directly comparable with Table 2, the role of family appears to work in the opposite direction in this model. While couples and families among all those eligible for return had higher odds of applying for assisted return than the reference group in Table 2, families of three or more had lower odds of actually returning among those who had already applied to IOM.

Our selected countries yielded more similar odds in this model than in Table 2. They all point in the same direction. Compared to the reference group, being from one of these countries, even from Afghanistan and Ethiopia, gave higher odds of actually returning once they had applied.

Interestingly, those applying from centers had lower odds of actually returning voluntarily than those that applied from the outside, when comparing people who are otherwise similar in terms of country of origin, family structure, gender and unaccompanied minor status.

These findings raise several questions. For example, how should one interpret the finding in Table 2, that being a part of a couple or a larger family increased the odds of applying to IOM? Does being a solo individual make the third-country national more resilient when faced with a rejection or possible forced return? And how about the finding in Table 3 showing that once they had applied for assisted return, individuals who were part of a family of three or more had lower odds than the reference group of actually returning? How

should this finding be interpreted? Did they run a higher risk of having their IOM application rejected? Did they pull out in the last moment because of a more complicated return situation for their children?

Further questions could be raised on the basis of the findings. For example, why would people that were living in centers when they applied to IOM have lower odds of going through with their assisted returns? Was their motivation lower than those applying from outside the centers? Were the rejection rates higher? Was there a higher rate of tactically stalling applications for assisted return from centers?

To these questions raised by the findings, we could add the following: Why did the direction of the odds change in the second model (Table 3) for persons from Ethiopia and Afghanistan? While coming from these countries lowered the odds of applying for assisted return compared to the reference group in Table 2, the same two countries had odds ratios greater than 1 in Table 3. Among the Afghan and Ethiopian nationals, the ones that had applied to IOM had higher odds of actually returning than the reference group. Why?

The multivariate analyses have left us with more questions than we started with. At the same time, we have learned several important things about the net influence of nationality, family size, gender and other variables on the behavior toward applying for assisted return and actually returning.

These analyses are also important because they eliminate the effect of fluctuating groups of potential returnees. As we have seen in this chapter, the pool of people eligible to apply for assisted return varies from one year to the next. In these multivariate logistic models, the odds for one individual with the limited set of characteristics of applying/returning are compared to those that do not have these characteristics. It allows us to study the odds for the individual third-country national to apply or return, regardless of that year's pool of potential third-country nationals.

3 Center staff promoting assisted return

Why do rejected asylum seekers and other foreigners without a permit choose (voluntary) assisted return? And why do nearly half of those not leave in the end? What role do the return programs play? Having seen the statistical evidence in the last chapter, we will now move on to the interviews with reception center employees. In this chapter the voices of these professionals are presented. Information from IOM staff members and UDI civil servants provide background information.

Reception center informants were either center leaders or persons responsible for promoting assisted return. These informants pointed to a list of relevant phenomena for understanding the mechanisms behind assisted returns and the role of return and reintegration programs.

The interview data are organized under the following headings: case processing and the role of return, first rejection, second rejection, communication, the turnaround, the alternative to assisted return, and the return programs. In the final chapter we revisit points made earlier by using analytical concepts such as “predictability,” “expectation,” “loss aversion,” and “motivation.”

During the interviews, informants often talked about the challenges of promoting return while not being involved in case processing.²⁰ Case processing is done outside the reception facilities in the main offices of UDI and the Norwegian Appeals Board (UNE) in Oslo. Throughout the chapter, we will refer to the comments from the center staff that followed from the division of roles between the reception and case processing systems.

²⁰ The interview guide is included in Appendix 3.

Case processing and the role of return

Norwegian immigration authorities want all asylum seekers to know about the possibility of having to return to their home countries. Asylum seekers are to be informed about this possible outcome from the day they are transferred from transit to ordinary reception centers. In practice it varies when the topic of return enters into the program presented to the newly arrived, according to center staff. They remain there for the duration of their case processing. The very first day they arrive they are informed about the practicalities of living in the new environment. Some informants during this first meeting explained the case processing, the possibility of a negative outcome and subsequent return.

In the first conversation we have with the newly arrived applicants, we talk about the asylum process and the two possible outcomes: approval or rejection. We talk about assisted return via IOM and forced return. We want them to hear about this from day one. (Center leader, interview 17.03.2014).

From the interviews with the employees, however, it appears that most centers introduce the topic of return at a later stage. It is part of the mandatory information program that all residents at the centers are offered (and have to attend). There are sanctions involved for those that do not attend the information meetings.

Some center employees are skeptical to the information packages they have to present twice a year. In particular they find it hard to repeat the presentations for applicants and rejected asylum seekers that have lived at the centers for more than six months.

They hear the same information over and over. In January we talk about health issues, in February about schools and education, in March laws and regulations, in May about return and then we start over. That is how the program works: twice a year, the same information to a group of 20 to 30 persons. (Center leader, interview 17.03.2014).

Some employees see a need to balance talk about rejections and return against the need for stability:

We do mention return quite frequently in informal conversations with the residents. At the same time, we want a stable environment. If we constantly bring up return as a topic, it can make the residents uneasy. (Center leader, interview 10.03.2014).

The first rejection

As the months pass for the newly arrived, the center staff members pay close attention to when a possible first rejection comes from UDI. The employees are not expected to play a role in case processing, but neither are they a part of the communication about the process. Case-related communications are a matter for the national immigration authorities (UDE and UNE), the applicant and a designated lawyer.

In reality, however, the reception centers and their staff are automatically involved in the process and its consequences. Formally, they are also expected to communicate on one issue, that of return. Their involvement is a near automatic result of working at the centers where the asylum seekers live. They play a key role as the front-end contact points of both the authorities' reception system and in practice as primary contact points for the case-processing system.

It is the centers' employees who communicate with the residents on a day-to-day basis. They are responsible for the well-being of the applicants. As a consequence, the center employees are the ones that have to handle the reactions that follow when a resident receives a negative decision. This makes it imperative to be prepared when a negative decision came. Since the reception centers were not notified by UDI before making the decisions in first instance, at least until recently, the need to know resulted in an informal and somewhat peculiar practice at several centers: browsing the residents' mail. "Thick" letters from UDI were reported among the staff. These letters were taken to possibly contain rejection letters.

We try to spot the letters coming in. Timing is important. We need to be prepared. The letter usually comes four or five days before we get an email or a fax from the lawyer. (Center leader, interview 06.03.2014).

In addition to the timing, the center staff found it challenging to handle the content of the letters. The rejection letters contain a copy of a letter sent from UDI to a lawyer informing her/him that she/he has been designated to represent the applicant. This would normally mean a rejection. The letter is in Norwegian, and the style is formal. The decision is to be proclaimed to the applicant by the lawyer.

In practice, however, the asylum seekers often approach the center staff and ask what the letter means. This happens before hearing from their lawyers.

They get the letter in Norwegian. They don't understand the content. And then they come to one of us. We are the people they know the best. And then we have to translate and explain the decision... something we are not supposed to do. (Center leader, interview 17.03.2014).

There are several sides to the ambivalent role of the staff at the reception centers. On the one hand, one could argue that they should be informed at an early stage about the development in the asylum seekers' cases. That would enable them to prepare for reactions following rejections, create an understanding for the process and outcome, as well as provide support throughout the difficult times. On the other hand, stepping away from their primary role of supplying the asylum seekers with a supportive and safe waiting environment could also be challenging. Being informed about the case processing may compromise the integrity and neutrality that follows from not being part of "the system" that produces rejections. A lack of distance to the processing could potentially undermine the staffs' main mandate of creating a supportive environment.

At the end of this report, we suggest measures toward greater *predictability* for both applicants and staff. The asylum seekers should be able to follow the case processing through the successive stages via an online portal. With permission from the individual asylum seeker, center staff should be allowed to have partial access to dates and deadlines. Deadlines should be set by the immigration officers, committing the system to "waypoints". This would structure the waiting period and provide the predictability that appears to be

lacking in today's system. We will return to this discussion toward the end of the report.

The asylum seekers receive the copy of the rejection letter at the same time as the lawyers. Often several days pass by before the lawyers contact their clients. The staff handles this situation in various ways.

Some informants pointed to the regulations and the main rule—they are “not supposed to know anything about this”—and they try to let the lawyers handle the process. Formally, the staffs' only role is to have a semi-scripted meeting with the rejected applicant to discuss return after the decision has been proclaimed. Yet, faced with the reality of the situation the employees become involved in the process at an earlier stage, regardless of the stated principles.

It is not our role to inform them about the decision. Our center is supposed to only be a place where they stay while they wait. But we have close contact with the people living here....and it is a hard conversation to have. It is tough for individuals who have been waiting for a positive outcome (Center employee responsible for return, interview 10.03.2014).

Others see it as their obligation to prepare the applicants for the letter and help them once they receive the negative decision.

People come to us with the letter. It is in Norwegian! I or my colleagues have to translate it for them. That's why we want to be prepared. We try to avoid handing out these letters on a Friday. It is difficult for us to tackle the reactions over the weekend (Center leader, interview 06.03.2014).

One would expect that this is an important occasion for the center staff to talk to the applicants about return. However, with center employees becoming involved in reading, translating and often explaining the letters, the focus seems to be drawn away from talking about return.

Shortly after receiving the letter, a message appears on UDI's online communication system (SESAM) connecting the centers with the head office in Oslo. A staff member is asked to hold the first

mandatory conversation on return following the rejection (*retursamtale*).

The main part of the semi-scripted meeting is to discuss the rejection and the remaining options.

We make sure they have understood the decision, we talk about their contact with the lawyer and we tell them about their options: appeal or assisted return (Center leader, interview 05.03.2014).

These conversations are often dominated by a near-instant decision to appeal.

It is boring for them to talk about return when they have already decided to appeal. They are focused on the communication with their lawyer. But we need them to understand what will happen if they are rejected by UNE in the next round (Center leader, interview 05.03.2014).

This makes some center leaders and designated return specialists emphasize the reality of the asylum seekers' situation, namely the limited chances of a successful appeal.

Few asylum seekers are motivated to talk about return at this stage. They should be, since their chances are diminishing. We show them statistics and approval rates for former applicants from their own country (Center leader, interview 10.03.2014).

Some center leaders continue to meet with asylum seekers in the period that follows. They did not report any particular attention being paid to applicants from countries with return and reintegration programs.

The second rejection

The second rejection makes return the number one topic for applicants and center staff. However, the communication between the central immigration authorities and the asylum seekers is still a challenge.

The letter with the rejection of the appeal is sent from the Immigration Appeals Board to the lawyers, who in turn send a letter to the applicants residing here. The lawyers do not translate the letter! In practice it is me or my colleagues who read and translate every single decision. It is not our job to do so, but we do this as well as we can. However, we do not read anything from the interview, only the decision (Return consultant, interview 17.03.2014).

The reactions to the second rejection vary. One center leader put it this way:

Some people disappear, some sign up with IOM, while others remain in the center, keeping their heads down (Center leader, interview 05.03.2014).

UDI demands that the center staff hold a second formal conversation with the rejected asylum seekers about return. In these conversations the employees point out the alternatives and look for factors that could help motivate the individual to return.

We try to find what we call “golden nuggets” such as family living in the home country or a sick mother. We ask them how they are doing in their current situation and have them compare that to how they want to live. We focus on the low probability of reaching their goal in Norway (Center leader, interview 06.03.2014).

The center leaders gave the general impression that it is more difficult to talk about return to people that have been in Norway for a long time. As time passes, they adapt to the life in the centers while things change in their home countries, according to the employees.

Besides, sometimes long-stayers do get their decisions reversed and are allowed to stay. These cases are quickly communicated among the residents. There can be a lot of different reasons, and the cases may be completely irrelevant; still they give hope to other residents (Return consultant, interview 06.03.2014).

As time passes, some center leaders contact long-stayers routinely to talk about their situation and to try to motivate them to register for assisted return. One informant suggested that UDI should write an individual letter every second month to each rejected asylum seeker that remains in reception centers: “We see that you are still in the country. You should have returned to your home country by now. What do you plan to do?” Others see them as fully informed and point to the lack of sanctions toward this group. For those that have had their cash allowance reduced to a minimum, there is little more that can be taken away from them.

They receive 1,800 NOK a month. It is possible to survive on that, but it is not a good life. Yet, if they find their situation to be ok, there is little we can do to motivate. Those that do not have an established ID are also hard to motivate. They know that they have nothing to fear (Center leader, interview 05.03.2014).

During 2013 and 2014, UDI sent teams of specialists to visit rejected long-staying asylum seekers living in a selection of Norwegian reception centers. Their goal was to motivate these long-stayers and those with “difficult cases” to choose voluntary return.²¹ According to the center staff, the specialists had a difficult task. One center leader mentioned that the cases they chose at his facility were “bullet proof” to arguments about return. “These people weren’t going anywhere,” as he put it. The motivational meeting aimed at making sure the person was aware of his/her (lack of) residence status, that the case was closed and what that entailed with regard to his/her options. The experts visiting the reception centers had access to detailed case information.

The informants also commented on the initiative “Moving on?” (*Veien videre*) organized by UDI. Here the structured meetings on return were led by center staff and without prior access to case-specific information. This initiative was evaluated in 2014. The results showed no significant effect on voluntary assisted return (Deloitte 2014:42). Still, interviews indicated a positive effect on the

²¹ This refers to the “Backlog of returns” project (*Returrestansesprosjektet*). According to UDI, “difficult cases” pertain to persons whose continued stay in the centers incurs high costs. The main target group was, however, long-stayers.

mental well-being of the third-country nationals with an irregular status.

In the current study, the center staff conveyed mixed experiences with these repeated conversations on return. They could not always provide answers when the asylum seekers asked, “What happens if I don’t return voluntarily?” Often the subjects to be motivated are in a situation that makes assisted return a remote option.

We have one staff member dedicated to the “Veien videre” project. He has continuous contact with the rejected asylum seekers. For example, he is currently working with a mother of five children who are all born in Norway. The mother has been in the country for twelve years. Others have been at this center for five, six years (Center leader, interview 17.03.2014).

The informants all stressed the need to have the rejected asylum seekers face the reality of their situation (*realitetsorientering*). This included using statistics to show rejection rates, using new information to discuss developments in the home region or discussing the downsides to a prolonged waiting period. However, some center staff members are conscious of not shying away from talking about all the options available to the applicant.

I talk to our residents after their final rejection about five different ways forward: applying for assisted return, staying at the center risking being picked up by the police, disappearing in Norway, traveling to another country (EU/Canada/US), or going home on their own (Center leader, interview 10.03.2014).

This center leader emphasized the importance of being open and honest in order to communicate efficiently about return. Seeing all the options that the asylum seekers are considering is part of this strategy. Other staff members kept repeating the two official options for the rejected applicants: assisted or forced return.

Some long-stayers end up in a situation marked by apathy. These persons are indifferent to whether they should stay or return. Center leaders find motivating particularly hard when conditions in the home country or lack of identity make forced return improbable.

If, for example, they do not have an established identity, then nothing will happen to them. Then it is difficult to explain why they should change their situation. They have nothing to fear and nothing to hope for. They end up in a psychological limbo (Center leader, interview 05.03.2014).

Communication

Communication was reported as key to promoting assisted return. The center staff noted the importance of *timing* and the importance of being *clear* about what is expected when talking to the asylum seekers. The circumstances surrounding the first and second rejection are not ideal, according to the staff.

The employees pointed to the need for applicants to accept the rejections in order to start thinking about return, and the first step to this acceptance is to understand the process and reason for the decision.

No one understands those rejection letters, not the asylum seekers and not even the Norwegian employees. The Directorate of Immigration must write directly to the asylum seeker and explain the rejection. As it is now, it is really bizarre! (Center leader, interview 05.03.2014).

UDI is aware of these challenges. Over the last few years, they have also initiated evaluations of different aspects of the information/communication work being done within the reception system.

Some center leaders pointed to the positive effects of direct communication via Skype between Afghan residents in the centers and the IOM in Kabul. As one leader put it, “They behave completely differently when they talk to someone that knows their country and is there at the time.” That makes it harder to argue about what the conditions are in the home country. The center leaders are, however, not sure whether this information initiative leads to more assisted returns.

The turnaround

Reflecting on how to relate to the rejected asylum seekers, the informants referred to differences among the wider group of nationalities and types of applicants. One center leader (interview 28.02.2014) defined three types of rejected asylum seekers:

1. Those that wish to return, and do so
2. Those that are determined not to go back (We cannot change these people's minds)
3. Those that are unsure what to do (These are the ones we should try to influence. If we get a good process going, we have a 50-50 chance of them choosing voluntary assisted return)

This typology, which divides the asylum seekers into *leavers*, *stayers* and *potential returnees*, provides a background for discussing the *mental turnaround* needed if authorities are to boost assisted returns. The statistical data available to this study do not allow us to comment on the prevalence of the three types. The interviews indicate that some center staff members experience a less clear-cut division between the *potential returnees* and the *stayers*.

One leader likened the turnaround to a switch that was suddenly turned from negative to positive. "We need to give the person hope that they can be successful if they return," he stated.

And then suddenly they say, "Ok, let's drop it. We are going home". When they face the reality of their situation, when they see clearly what the alternatives are, then they sign up for return (Center leader, interview 05.03.2014).

As we have seen, this type of decision may be hard to manipulate and predict. And using the typology mentioned above, this process would apply to the type 3 applicant, the *ambivalent*.

When do they realize that the "train has left the station?" That is probably when the lawyer says "now it is over." But some never

stop hoping. They may still change their minds, even after a long time, but that almost never happens (Center leader, interview 10.03.2014).

Forced versus assisted return

The statistical analyses in Chapter 2 did not establish a correlation between forced and assisted returns. More forced returns did not automatically lead to an increase in voluntary assisted returns. However, the visibility and presence of such returns may have contributed to the individuals' perception of their options. Although there is no linearity in the relationship between forced and assisted return, the presence of the first defines the boundary of the second. Knowing that a considerable portion of the forced returns go to the Dublin area, a distinction could be drawn between *relevant* and *not relevant* forced returns. If a fellow countryman is returned by the police to Italy, Sweden or Germany, and I do not have a Dublin case, the forced return could be considered *not relevant*. If he or she instead is returned by force to my country of origin, where I also risk being returned to, the return may be perceived as *relevant*.

The center staff could not agree on how important forced returns are in motivating rejected asylum seekers to choose assisted return. However, they all thought that visible forced returns, especially for fellow countrymen, could have some effect. Many of them argued that more frequent police visits to their reception center would make it easier to convince the asylum seekers to at least consider the option of assisted return. Some staff members mentioned visible forced returns as an absolute premise for them to succeed in their work.

We have had forced returns from our center, but we wish they would happen more often. It creates a dynamic among the residents, and some long-stayers apply for assisted return as a consequence (Center leader, interview 10.03.2014).

Not all the informants were as clear-cut with regard to the effect of forced returns.

The police came a few weeks back and picked up a person. That had an effect. A few residents applied as a result of that visit.

However, they later withdrew their applications. The residents from countries like Somalia and Eritrea know that the police will not pick them up (Center leader, interview 10.03.2014).

Other employees pointed out that forced returns had different effects on residents from different countries.

Recently the police returned a group of residents to Chechnya. That resulted in applications from several others from Chechnya. They realized that, OK, there is a real chance of being sent back. And that was one of the more difficult groups to talk to about return. The effect was different when Afghans were returned. Then other residents from the same country disappeared from the reception center (Center leader, interview 05.03.2014).

Some leaders mentioned that the low frequency of visits by the police reduces their credibility when informing the rejected asylum seekers about their options. They find that talking tough about forced return when this almost never happens, creates unnecessary stress and fear among the residents.

The return and reintegration programs

Do the return and reintegration programs motivate the rejected asylum seekers to choose assisted return? Again, center staff members are divided.

When talking in general, about all groups – the employees stated that benefits of the programs – the cash payment and reintegration support, did not motivate people to choose assisted return. That does not mean, however, that the incentives do not have an effect. When discussing the matter in more detail, there were several indications that the money still played a part.

For most people it is definitely not decisive for their decision to register with the IOM.... it is more like a bonus. It is more important that someone helps you out with the travel arrangements (Center leader, interview 10.03.2014).

Despite this initial reaction, the informants realized that the cash incentives may have effects without being mentioned. As one center leader put it, “It may produce a loss of social standing to admit that the money influenced their decision.” And, despite what the individual asylum seekers tell others, it may have helped them along the way.

People are not motivated by the money. Other things are decisive, but when they start leaning towards assisted return, it may influence their decision (Center leader, interview 06.03.2014).

The cash incentives may be important at different points in the process. Is it important for getting them to register for assisted return, or is it important later on in the process?

When they come to us and apply for assisted return, they are also interested in the cash allowance. They want to know how much, when they get paid, etc. But I do not know how important it is before they make the decision (Center employee, interview 10.03.2014).

Those who qualify for the general return program (FSR) have to choose cash. Those registering for FSR want to make sure that the application was registered as early as possible in order not to exceed the deadlines and thereby losing out on financial support. Using the previously mentioned typology suggested by the center staff member, one could ask whether those adhering to the FSR deadlines are already *leavers*. If so, the cash incentives and the deadline do not elicit *turnarounds*, rather they provide a mere confirmation of a motivation that is already present.

However, putting a time limit on the cash incentive appears to be an effective means for speeding up the process. Whether it make them sign up or simply increases the speed of the process once the

decision had been made, is not clear.²² Also, country of origin seems to matter for the effect of the cash incentive.

The cash incentive included in the FSR program is important. The nationalities that sign up for assisted return at our center, people from Sri Lanka, Guatemala, etc., emphasize this incentive. For those that come from home countries with heavier conflicts, such as Afghanistan or Iraq, the cash does not play the same role (Return consultant, interview 17.03.2014).

Some staff members stated that the other parts of the return and reintegration programs are more important than the cash allowance. These informants found that the cash was nice to have but was only relevant once the decision had been made.

However, staff members also said that the cash and in-kind reintegration support through programs like IRRANA and IRRINI make it possible for some people to start a new life in their home country. The cash means they are even capable of establishing themselves in other parts of their home countries than where they originally came from. Most of them confirmed the challenges in motivating some nationalities, like Afghans for example, to choose assisted return.

The informants are aware that returning voluntarily is interpreted differently in different home countries. In some countries it is seen as shameful to return voluntarily with a bit of money in their pockets. Here, rejected asylum seekers coming home without police by their side are seen as “quitters”. One center leader argued that a larger cash payment may motivate more people to choose assisted return but would not necessarily increase the reintegration in the home country:

²² Relating to a discussion in the next chapter on the degree of rationality of the actors choosing or not choosing assisted return, one perspective would be to state that both emotional factors (such as blame avoidance, hope, loss aversion) and rational factors (cost benefit analysis) The choice to use the FSR program may stem from mixed motivations. Once the choice has been made, however, the timing may be fully rational.

If they come home with their pockets full of cash, they will be drawn in all directions by family, networks and others (Center leader, interview 28.02.2014).

The center leaders reflected on which parts of the IRRANA and IRRINI programs are popular among the rejected asylum seekers. Support for housing is one of the most popular, although this benefit is not a component in all programs. It is still considered to be a key element for making return a realistic option for many returnees. In particular, housing support is seen as important for families with children and for those returning to other places in their home countries than where they originally came from.

The in-kind reintegration support in Iraq and Afghanistan for education, business upstart or similar receives the most critical comments from the asylum seekers. That some returnees look for quick ways to convert this support into cash, has been noted in previous research (Strand et al. 2011). None of the selected informants had any direct experience from the ARE program for Ethiopian citizens.

Center staff quickly moved on to (de)motivating factors outside the return programs: *Group pressure* is one such factor. Among Ethiopians, this seems to be a key phenomenon at centers with a critical mass from the same nationality. Registering with the IOM might mean being seen as a traitor to the common cause of getting to stay in Norway. *Role model* is another. Spreading the news of people from the same country who had returned and successfully reintegrated could make more people sign up.

The overall impression from the interviews with center staff about assisted returns is that they believe that other factors are just as decisive compared to return and reintegration programs. This would be in line with recent findings in an IOM evaluation of European return and reintegration programs (Koser and Kuschminder 2015). Here, the researchers found that conditions in destination countries (such as Norway), individual factors (e.g. mental well-being) and social factors (such as family ties) are all more important than the incentives provided within the return programs (Koser and Kuschminder 2015:40).

If you increase the cash payment substantially, more people would certainly leave. However, the keys to more assisted returns are to be found elsewhere: Better contact and communication during the asylum process, maintaining realistic expectations during the process, informing about the asylum practice and about typical rejections, communication between lawyer and applicant and demonstrating to the asylum seekers that their cases are treated seriously (Center leader, interview 10.03.2014).

There is an important distinction between factors that have an *effect on variations in numbers* of assisted returns, and those that have an *effect on the individual motivation* to return. For example, as we saw in Chapter 2, the number of applications for assisted return in a given year will be affected by the number of rejected asylum seekers in previous years. This factor is beyond the individual. On the other hand, motivational programs like “Moving on” (*Veien videre*) will possibly have a positive effect on the individual’s mental well-being while not necessarily leading to more assisted returns.

4 Why return? Concepts and conclusions

We are now in a better position to revisit the key questions in this report: Why do some third-country nationals choose assisted return while others do not? What is the effect of return and reintegration programs? What effects do forced returns have on assisted returns?

In this chapter we summarize the findings from the analysis of both the register data and interview data. We also revisit and develop the key concepts that have been identified in this report: *predictability, expectations, loss aversion, motivation, models of action and the turnaround.*

Why go back?

Four major factors that influence asylum seekers' decisions to choose assisted return are as follows:

- a. Changing *conditions in the home country* (safety, human rights, political, economic and social), personal relationships and personal resources in the home country (family, housing, job opportunities, networks, ties, links, debt)
- b. Changing *conditions in the host country*, in this case Norway (prospects for a future in the country, asylum policies and practices, everyday life for persons without permissions to stay, chances of forced return and more)
- c. *Alternatives in other countries* and in Norway, and finally
- d. *Return and reintegration assistance*

Each individual will experience and react differently when faced with these structural elements (A–D). The 2015 IOM report cited above ranked conditions in the destination countries as the more decisive for choosing assisted return (Koser and Kuschenminder 2015:41). In the IOM study, conditions in the country of origin did not rank high. However, in their study, they asked migrants that had already returned. In the current study we asked center staff about

migrants still in Norwegian centers: Why do people not choose assisted return? In their answers, conditions in the home country were frequently mentioned.

The statistical data on (voluntary) assisted return (2002–2014 (April)), show great variation in the number of people and nationalities applying and later returning to their home country:

1. The number of applicants for (voluntary) assisted return from Norway per year quadrupled from 2008 to 2011 (approx. 670 to 2,700), and then leveled off.
2. The number of persons applying for assisted return in 2013 equaled the total number of persons having their asylum applications rejected in the first instance (UDI) that year.
3. The number of assisted returns in a given year was influenced by the number of rejected asylum seekers in the previous years.
4. Slightly more than 50 percent of those that applied for assisted return via IOM, returned via IOM in the end. Around 10 percent were returned by the police, and 40 percent were either rejected or did not return.
5. The most numerous nationalities applying for assisted return from 2002 to (April) 2014 were Iraqis (3,600), Russians (2,600), Serbians (1,800) and Afghans (1,200). There were 13 nationalities registered with more than 500 applications.
6. Most applicants for assisted return were rejected asylum seekers. Some nationalities had a high percentage of the rejected asylum seekers later applying for assisted return. The top-ranked nationality were Kosovars, of whom 55 percent of those rejected in the first instance (UDI) later applied for voluntary assisted return. Other high-ranking nationalities were Iraqis (48 percent), Russians (38 percent) and Bosnians (30 percent).
7. Kosovars also ranked highest with regard to the rate of application for assisted return to the number of actual returns. Of those that applied for assisted return, more than 7 out of 10 later returned via IOM. Both Iraqis and Ethiopians registered more than 60 percent return rates among the applicants.

8. Many applications for assisted return came from persons living outside reception centers. More than half of the applications from Iraqis came from outside the centers.

The effects of return and reintegration programs

In this report, two aspects of the return and reintegration programs have been studied, starting with the impact of the country-specific programs for Afghanistan (IRRANA), Iraq (IRRINI) and Ethiopia (ARE). Moreover, we looked at the programs' impact on the individual motivation to return (with assistance from IOM).

The introduction of IRRANA, promoting assisted returns to Afghanistan, did not appear to have an impact on the number of assisted returns. Instead, numbers fell after the program was introduced in 2006.

The impact of IRRINI, including organized assisted returns to Iraq, is more difficult to evaluate. The program began at a time with a high number of rejections of Iraqi nationals, providing a large pool of potential assisted returnees.

The ARE program for Ethiopia did not seem to impact the number of assisted returns. The number of such returns remained low after its introduction in 2012 and decreased in 2013.

The general return program (FSR) provided cash payments and in the standard case, no reintegration benefits. Interviews with center staff revealed that while the cash may not have elicited the decision to return (voluntarily, assisted), it seemed to influence the timing of registering for return. Since the amount of support depended on meeting deadlines, this seems to have accelerated the process.

The programs' effects on individual motivation may have been considerable, despite the lack of a linear correlation between the introduction of programs and assisted returns. Once the decision had been made, the cash and in-kind support and assistance were considered to be valuable by the returnees.

Both the statistical data and the interviews with center staff provided valuable information on the effects of the return and reintegration programs:

9. The return program for Afghanistan (IRRANA) had no immediate effect on the number of voluntary returns.

Fluctuations in returns appear to be caused by the number of Afghans that were rejected in the preceding years.

10. During 2002–2014 more Afghans returned voluntarily to Afghanistan from Norway than were returned by the police (to Afghanistan).
11. Variations in terror scales are not detailed enough to study how changing conditions in the home country impact voluntary assisted returns from Norway.
12. IRRINI was established at a time of high influx and many rejections of Iraqis. It is therefore difficult to establish whether a high number of applications for assisted return after 2008 was a result of IRRANA or the increased number of rejected Iraqis.
13. Voluntary assisted returns to Ethiopia increased in 2012 and 2013. The level remained low, and the number of IOM applications from Ethiopians decreased in 2013.
14. The ARE country program for voluntary return to Ethiopia did not appear to influence these trends.
15. In 2013, there were more voluntary assisted returns to Russia than there were rejections of Russian asylum seekers.
16. During 2002–2013, 1,350 asylum seekers from Kosovo were rejected. Of these, 550 were forced to leave the country. Almost 700 of the remaining 800 applied for voluntary assisted return, of which 500 returned in the end.
17. The rejected asylum seekers' decision to register for assisted return depended on the following: changing outlooks and their everyday conditions in Norway, changing conditions and prospects in the home country, alternatives in third countries, and probability of forced return. Compared to these factors, the return and reintegration programs played a minor role.
18. Cash incentives played a secondary role in motivating rejected asylum seekers to sign up for voluntary assisted return. The incentives were, however, seen as useful once the decision had been made.

19. The role of cash and in-kind incentives for signing up for assisted return may be underreported due to stigma. Being moved to give up the dream of asylum because of cash may appear stigmatizing to some.
20. IRRANA, IRRINI and ARE did not push rejected asylum seekers to sign up for return, according to center staff. The general support program for other countries (FSR) may have had some effect for making the decision easier and speedier for certain groups.
21. Using multivariate analysis, we found that the odds for a rejected asylum seeker to choose assisted return were lower for women, for unaccompanied minors and for persons from Afghanistan or Ethiopia.
22. The odds for applying for voluntary return were higher if a person had a partner or family, and if she or he was from Russia, Kosovo or Iraq.
23. The odds of actually going back once a person had applied for assisted return were similar for women and men, lower for unaccompanied minors, families and those that applied while residing in a reception center.
24. The odds of going back for those that applied for assisted return were higher for those from Afghanistan, Russia, Ethiopia, Iraq and Kosovo.

The impact of forced returns

Two aspects of forced returns are central in this report. First, there is a need to look for the effect of forced returns on the number of assisted returns. Second, we need to understand the effect of *relevant* forced returns on the individual's motivation to choose assisted return.²³

²³ Highly visible forced returns of same nationality to same country of origin, or with regard to Dublin cases, to the same Dublin country.

Center staff stressed the importance of visible forced returns for their work to motivate assisted returns. They called for more visible action by the police. At the same time, there appeared to be national differences in the response to forced return.

The quantitative data suggest a lack of correlation between forced returns and applications for assisted returns. The qualitative interviews with center staff, however, indicates a connection between the two types of return.

25. Forced returns from reception centers by the police had different effects on different nationalities, according to the staff. Some operations produced new applications for return at the centers. Others made people leave the centers and go “missing”. Most leaders want the police to increase their presence at the centers.
26. There was seemingly no direct correlation between the number of forced returns and assisted returns to Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo or Russia.
27. Between 2002 and 2014, there were more voluntary assisted returns to Iraq than there were forced police returns.
28. Forced returns of Iraqis to Iraq do not appear to cause the increase in voluntary assisted returns that peaked during the 2010–2012 period.

The analysis of assisted return in this report revealed a list of key concepts that may help develop the understanding of the phenomenon. They are useful concepts because they simultaneously highlight aspects of the management of, and the experience of assisted return.

Predictability

The topic of *predictability* was an underlying premise in the interviews with center staff. The case processing was characterized by being *unpredictable*, both to the asylum seekers and to the center staff. The outcome of asylum cases appeared as truly unpredictable, both for the applicants and for everyone else in contact with the process. As the process is currently organized, it is difficult to know

when the next step will be taken. This hurts the communication on return.

The center staff did discuss return in the standardized meetings and conversations, both in group sessions and in one-on-one conversations. Here, the process was explained along with important steps in the process. Yet, the unpredictability works against this effort to inform and motivate. In earlier research we have suggested the introduction of waypoints, where fixed points in time for the next step in the processing of cases would obligate both parties and increase predictability (Brekke 2004). Such a reform would strengthen the applicants' understanding of the process, give them a sense of ownership, and increase their acceptance of voluntary assisted return. According to center staff, applicants do not experience any ownership of the process, and they see the result of the process as random.

The connection between set time frames and return was reflected in the comments from one of the center leaders:

The dates mentioned in the decisions must reflect the reality. As it is now, there are no firm points in time that the individual feels obliged to adhere to. There is a need for a common strategy among all the involved institutions on this point, along with a real "end date". If there was a real end date, then all the rejected asylum seekers would have chosen voluntary assisted return (Center leader, interview 28.02.2014).

Expectations

Expectations is a key concept for understanding the process leading up to the asylum seekers making a decision on return. Their expectations regarding the consequences of having their applications rejected by Norwegian authorities appear to be set before they arrive to Norway. They expect to be accepted. Managing these expectations is a task for UDI and the staff at the centers. The staff members interviewed for this study pointed to the need to instill among the applicants realistic expectations as early in the process as possible. One center staff did this by using statistics on acceptance rates, etc., when talking about return. Another example was having persons

from the country of origin provide country-specific information, in some cases even direct link from the country of origin.

The communication between the case processing system, the reception system and the applicants themselves showed several weaknesses. These made it more difficult for center staff to manage the asylum seekers' expectations with regard to return.

The data also revealed that many asylum seekers do not understand how their cases are processed. The processing is experienced as opaque and the outcomes as unpredictable. One consequence is that applicants do not know when the application process really is over and return is the only option. The result is a lack of ownership of the process and the outcome.

The introduction of *way-points* and *deadlines* are suggested to improve predictability for authorities and applicants alike. This would improve the applicants' understanding and ownership of the process. Waypoints/deadlines should be set for each step in the case processing.

It is also suggested that an overview of the processing of the individual case is displayed on a personal webpage administered by UDI. Protected by a personal login exclusive to the applicant, center personnel can be given access to the timeline by the asylum seekers, if not to the substance of the cases. This would increase the individual's understanding, the ownership of the progression, the sense of predictability. Being able to follow each step of the processing could also lead to an increased acceptance of negative outcomes and in the end; (voluntary) assisted returns.

Loss aversion

This study found that rejected asylum seekers that qualified for the general return program (FSR) were eager to not lose out on the financial support. Those that made the decision to return wanted to apply for assisted return and leave Norway as soon as possible. This eagerness shows the power of *loss aversion* a human tendency to not want to lose something one already is in possession of or entitled to.

The concept can also be used to describe the reluctance of rejected asylum seekers to give up hope of one day getting permission to stay in Norway. They cling to the hope and their project of seeking asylum. They have an aversion against realizing that all hope may be

gone and difficulty in accepting that a “loss” of the dream of asylum is all that is left.

Motivation

The informants pointed to a list of elements that contribute to moving or not moving the rejected asylum seekers toward return. One main distinction was drawn between conditions outside the individual (external) and the internal process of decision-making. Another was to distinguish between factors in Norway on the one hand (reception conditions, chances of obtaining residency, future), and conditions in their home country on the other (family, security, future). They also discussed the impact of the return and reintegration programs.

According to the center leaders and return specialists, those that do not choose assisted return point to the conditions in their home country: “We can’t go back.” Those that apply for assisted return point to the conditions in Norway: “We can’t stay here.” This would explain the difference in the findings in this report compared to the 2015 IOM report (Koser and Kuschenminder 2015). Their main focus was on why people return and on highlighting the importance of the conditions in the destination countries. We have in addition focused on why people do not return. According to center staff, the conditions in the home country plays an important role in their discussions with the potential returnees.

Models of individual action

Underneath the presentation of data lies a fundamental question: Which model of individual action fits the situation of rejected asylum seekers who are considering assisted return? Should these individuals be seen as cost-benefit calculating, rational individuals, or as influenced by other factors such as group norms (for example to remain in Norway as in the case of the Ethiopians) or emotional elements such as *hope* and *loss aversion*?

Which aspects should be emphasized? How they are viewed as agents is crucial to understanding the underlying mechanisms behind the decision to register for assisted return. The fine-tuning of incentives in the return and reintegration programs plays to the first

model, the rational actor. Increase the incentives by X amount, and Y more people will choose assisted return. As we have seen in the interviews with the center staff, however, the picture is clearly more complicated than the simple rational actor model. But still, there appears to be an element of sensitivity to incentives, so there is no ready-made answer for what motivates rejected asylum seekers to choose voluntary assisted return.

As in any discussion on models of individual action, the concept of rationality is a matter of debate. It is not clear cut what is the rational path to follow for the migrants considering assisted return. Lack of information and uncertainty about the consequences of choosing to stay or go will necessarily challenge the level of rationality. Many of the factors that enter into the individual decision equation will have an unclear component of rationality, such as blame avoidance, adherence to the asylum project and path dependency.

The turnaround

Center staff described events where a negative attitude to assisted return was suddenly changed to a positive one. Working to promote such returns, they strive to achieve this sudden shift in individual focus from “we’re staying” to “we’re returning”. In order to understand this turnaround, more detail has to be added to the range of factors influencing the individual decision, such as the importance of conditions in the home country (local, regional, national, economic, social, safety), conditions in Norway (status, economics, prospects, role models from same nationality, services, alternative existence in Norway), individual factors (mental well-being, hopes, identity, capabilities, aspirations, loss aversion) and social resources and networks (including family in Norway, home country and third countries).

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Appendix 1 IOM numbers

Number of VARP applications and departures registered by the IOM, per year.

	Applications	Departures
2014 (Jan–Jun)	1,458	905
2013	3,000	1,891
2012	2,995	1,742
2011	3,371	1,813
2010	3,310	1,446
2009	2,196	1,019
2008	1,123	568
2007	840	443
2006	887	434
2005	1,124	558
2004	1,974	1,072
2003	2,548	1,458
2002	2,072	954
Total	26,898	14,303

Provided by the IOM, August 2014.

Appendix 2 Political Terror Scale Levels

5 : Terror has expanded to the whole population. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.

4 : Civil and political rights violations have expanded to large numbers of the population. Murders, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. In spite of its generality, on this level terror affects those who interest themselves in politics or ideas.

3 : There is extensive political imprisonment, or a recent history of such imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted.

2 : There is a limited amount of imprisonment for nonviolent political activity. However, few persons are affected, torture and beatings are exceptional. Political murder is rare.

1 : Countries under a secure rule of law, people are not imprisoned for their view, and torture is rare or exceptional. Political murders are extremely rare.

Source:

<http://www.politicalterror scale.org/countries.php?region=Eurasia&country=Afghanistan>

Appendix 3 Interview guide

Guide intervjuer med mottaksledere/ returansvarlige i mottak

Evaluering retur- og re-integreringsprogrammer, Christian Michelsen, ISF, PRIO. Periode mars, april 2014. Utvalg: 10 mottak. Informanter: Mottaksledere/returansvarlige

Intro, informer om tema: Returaktiviteter på mottak de siste årene, vurdering informasjonsarbeid, formidling av vedtak mv., erfaring retur og landgrupper/de ulike programmene, vurdering av elementene i ordningene, motivasjon, aktørene (UDI, IOM, PU mfl).

1. Hvilke returrettede aktiviteter, rutiner, samtaler og særtiltak har man hatt på mottaket de siste årene? Vurdering, hva har fungert og hva ikke?
2. Kunne du beskrive informasjonsarbeidet som er gjort av andre på mottaket? Vurdering.
3. Hvordan ser beboerne på returinformasjonen de får, og hva med samtalen?
4. Hvordan formidles avslag og snakk om retur i den forbindelse?
5. Når er beboerne mottagelige for snakk om retur?
6. Kunne du beskrive forskjellene på de ulike landgruppene på mottaket når det gjelder retur? Hvorfor er det forskjeller?
7. Hva betyr innholdet i landprogrammene for de ulike landgruppene?
8. Hvilke elementer er viktigst?
9. Tvangsreturer, har de en skremseffekt? Merker dere når det skjer, snakkes om på mottaket? Øker det oppmerksomheten om retur, endres vurderingene? Melder flere seg til AVR da?
10. Hvordan vurderer de alternativene når de har endelig avslag?
11. Hva betyr assistansen til reisen, etter din mening? Hva med den økonomiske støtten? Hva med re-integreringsstøtten for IRRANA og IRRINI og de andre programmene?

12. Hvor viktig er forholdene i hjemlandet (arbeid, barnas fremtid, sikkerhet, sosialt, familie, identitet, språk, økonomi mv.)?
13. Hva motiverer asylsøkerne til å melde seg til IOM? Hva holder dem fra å melde seg, etter din erfaring?
14. Er retur- og re-integreringsprogrammene effektive? Er det de som gjør at folk drar? Hvilket er mest effektivt, hvorfor?
15. Hvordan er forholdet mellom UDI, mottakene og PU i returarbeidet? Passer initiativene fra UDI med virkeligheten i mottakene?

Appendix 4 Regression tables

Odds ratios for applying for assisted return with IOM						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender	-.212	.019	121.386	1	.000	.809
Unaccompanied Minor	-.105	.047	4.857	1	.028	.901
Partner/Family of 2 or more	.432	.018	568.750	1	.000	1.541
Age	.007	.001	137.737	1	.000	1.007
Iraq	1.198	.025	2,285.576	1	.000	3.312
Russia	.687	.027	663.439	1	.000	1.987
Afghani	-.376	.034	123.895	1	.000	.686
Kosovo	1.377	.058	554.963	1	.000	3.961
Ethiopia	-.452	.061	55.665	1	.000	.636
Constant	-1.577	.023	4,798.687	1	.000	.207

Variable(s) entered on step 1: gender (man=0, woman=1), unaccompanied, partner/family of two or more, age, nationality (Iraqi, Russian, Afghan, Kosovar, Ethiopian). Nagelkerke R Square=0.07

Variables in the equation						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender (man=0)	.048	.032	2.158	1	.142	1.049
Unaccompanied	-.106	.084	1.596	1	.206	.899
Fam3ormore	-.272	.030	82.218	1	.000	.762
Applied from Center	-.243	.032	59.273	1	.000	.785
Iraq	.906	.040	506.217	1	.000	2.475
Russia	.545	.043	161.327	1	.000	1.725
Afghani	.560	.063	77.933	1	.000	1.751
Kosovo	1.376	.089	238.633	1	.000	3.957
Ethiopia	.752	.116	41.987	1	.000	2.122
Constant	.011	.029	.137	1	.711	1.011

Variable(s) entered on step 1: gender (man=0, woman=1), unaccompanied minors, fam 3 or more, applied from center, nationality (Iraqi, Russian, Afghan, Kosovar, Ethiopian). Nagelkerke R Square=0.06.

Institutt for samfunnsforskning

2015:08

Forfatter/ Author	Jan-Paul Brekke
Tittel/Title	Why go back? Assisted return from Norway
Sammendrag	<p>Hvem er det som velger å returnere frivillig, eller assistert fra Norge? Dette er en ordning der norske myndigheter gir asylsøkere med avslag og andre migranter tilbud om praktisk og økonomisk hjelp hvis de returnerer til hjemlandet. Til enkelte land gis det utvidet støtte til retur og reintegrering. Disse landprogrammene blir evaluert i 2014 og 2015, et arbeid som munnet ut to rapporter, hvorav denne er den ene.</p> <p>Her søkes det etter hva som påvirker migrantenes avgjørelse om å melde seg på ordningen med (frivillig) assistert retur. Hva betyr pengestøtten? Og hva betyr muligheten for å bli returnert med tvang?</p> <p>To typer data kombineres i denne studien: Intervjuer med ansatte på asylmottak og nøkkelinformanter blant offentlig ansatte, sees i sammenheng med et bredt kvantitativt registermateriale.</p> <p>Studien finner ikke noen klar sammenheng mellom økningen i støtte gjennom landprogrammene og assisterte returer til disse landene. I rapporten diskuteres en lang rekke faktorer som kan påvirke returviljen blant asylsøkerne med avslag og andre migranter. Nasjonale forskjeller avdekkes. Et annet sentralt punkt som vies oppmerksomhet er sammenhengen mellom tvangsreturer og (frivillige) assisterte returer.</p>
Summary	<p>Who chooses to register for the Norwegian return and reintegration programs? What motivates them to do so? What role do the programs play in the migrants' decisions? What is the correlation between forced returns and (voluntary) assisted returns?</p> <p>This report discusses the questions surrounding (voluntary) assisted return of third country nationals from Norway. Today, (voluntary) assisted return programs constitute a core element of Norwegian and European asylum and immigration policies. These programs, where individuals residing irregularly in the host country are assisted in arranging their transition and sometimes their reintegration after return, are seen as a softer</p>

	<p>version of forced returns. The migrants are not free to stay, but still they “choose” to return.</p> <p>This study is based on two sources of data: interviews with employees at reception centers and key informants (NGOs, civil servants), and register data encompassing 105,000 third-country nationals. This material opens for a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis.</p> <p>The report discusses the lack of a clear cut relation between the national return- and reintegration programs and actual assisted returns. While the qualitative data establishes the importance of forced returns as motivation for (voluntary) assisted returns, the report does not find a correlation between increases in forced returns and assisted returns. The register data also revealed substantial national variations with regard to assisted returns.</p>
Emneord	Flyktninger, migranter, retur, immigrasjon, integrasjon, asylsøkere, asylpolitikk
Index terms	refugees, migrants, return, immigration, integration, asylum, policies, reception

WHY GO BACK?

This report identifies factors that influence the (voluntary) assisted return of third-country nationals from Norway. Since 2002, Norwegian authorities have encouraged failed asylum seekers and other third-country nationals without regular residency to return to their home countries. Over the years a variety of support and incentive regimes have been implemented.

The report looks at who registers for the Norwegian return and reintegration programs. What motivates them? What role do the programs play in the migrants' decisions? What is the correlation between forced returns and (voluntary) assisted returns?

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