

# RAPPORT

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Jan-Paul Brekke and  
Monica Five Aarset

## Why Norway?

Understanding Asylum  
Destinations

Jan-Paul Brekke and Monica Five Aarset

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Understanding Asylum Destinations

Institute for Social Research

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Oslo 2009

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## Foreword

Why do asylum seekers end up in one particular country? In this study, our aim has been to shed light on this question using a number of sources. This has brought us in touch with asylum seekers living in reception centres who have shared their thoughts about why their often long journey had ended up in Norway: for this we would like to thank them. Other informants included civil servants and NGO personnel who were open to discussions of asylum seekers' motivations and policy development and practice within and outside Norway. They provided the study with essential material.

Oslo, December 2009

Jan-Paul Brekke and Monica Five Aarset





## The dynamics of asylum movements

Why do asylum seekers end up in one particular country? This question has long puzzled researchers, politicians and civil servants in receiving countries. In this report, we use the increase in asylum arrivals to Norway in 2008 as a starting point in searching for explanations.

The number of asylum arrivals varies from year to year and between receiving countries. At times of high influx, the question becomes particularly pertinent. During 2008, the number of asylum seekers coming to Norway more than doubled, and this deviated from the European trend. Politicians and bureaucrats thus asked: «Why Norway?»

Earlier studies of asylum arrivals have been based on interviews either with civil servants or with asylum seekers, or they have been based on statistical material. In this study, all three empirical sources are used to establish a broad understanding of the dynamics of the asylum field. Voices from both governmental actors and the asylum seekers themselves are presented and analysed. In addition, statistics on asylum are used extensively.

Although this study does not discuss the normative foundations of refugee and asylum policies, one should be aware of the underlying normative positions in this highly incendiary field. Some would argue that the rights of those who cross borders in search of protection should shape the policies of the receiving states. In contrast to this *idealistic* position, others would contend that the interests of the destination countries should be prioritised. They would thus possess what could be called a *realistic* position (Gibney 2004, Lavenex 2001). In practice, governments of receiving countries find ways to balance the two sets of interest. In Norway, as elsewhere in Europe, it has become more usual to mention state interests in discussions of issues such as control policies and the level of asylum arrivals.

In the Norwegian public debate, the term *asylum seeker* has to some extent come to overshadow the term *refugee* in the past fifteen years. With the exception of quota refugees and others that qualify according to the UN's Refugee Convention, «refugee» has been reserved for people who remain in a region of conflict.

An asylum seeker can be understood as a person «who requests refugee status in another state, normally on the grounds that they have a well founded fear of persecution in their country of origin or because their life and liberty is threatened by armed conflict and violence» (Van Hear and Crisp 1998). In the political discourse on asylum policies, the key part of this definition would be «normally». Recognition rates vary 30 to 70 percent in European countries. This could be seen as an indication that other immigrant groups end up applying for asylum. Their presence in the same queue as those in need of protection causes debate.

Although the empirical focus in this report is on Norway, we also aim to contribute to the broader international discussion of the dynamics of asylum migration. Reference is made to empirical studies, theories and discussions generated both within and outside Europe. All in all, an attempt to tease out the determinants of asylum movements is made.

Earlier studies have highlighted a range of possible explanations for arrival levels: such explanations pertain to conditions in the applicants' country of departure, transit and destination (Koser 2001, Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou 2008, Robinson and Segrott 2002, Brekke 2004b). In addition, many contributors have stressed the importance of historical and contemporary links between sending and receiving countries (EU Commission 1998, Havinga and Böcker 1999, Thielemann 2001). Each of these four categories of explanations includes a range of variables that may influence changing patterns of asylum arrivals. And there are more, such as regional elements or a country's policies relative to those of other countries. Finally, one has to allow for the possibility that individuals, groups and nationalities act differently from others and change their behaviour over time. The question is how all these different elements are linked and shape the patterns of asylum arrivals.

## Research questions

Three sets of questions will be used to improve the understanding of asylum seekers' choice of destination countries, patterns of asylum migration and governments' efforts to control and influence these patterns.

### A. The decision-making process

This study was originally entitled: «Why Do Asylum Seekers Choose Norway?» But whether asylum destinations are actively chosen by the individual soon emerged as one of the key questions of the study itself. We therefore replaced it with the more neutral question of «why do asylum seekers come to Norway», or in short: «Why Norway?»

Seeking to understand why asylum seekers end up in a particular country implies moving beyond a simplified model of action involving one actor deciding on one country of destination at one specific point in time. In the social sciences, there are various versions of the so-called «theory of action». This is a general discussion of why people act as they do, and one major dispute revolves around the degree of the rationality of people's actions.

The uncertainty to do with the selection process also touches on who decides to which country the person is to go. It may be the individual herself or himself, but it may also be people in the person's family, a local network, agents, and co-travellers along the route or others. Against this background, three sub-questions have taken form:

1. What sort of decision process makes Norway the end of the journey?
2. When is the decision taken and by whom?
3. What type of information influenced the decision and where did it come from?

#### B. Patterns of asylum migration

The number of asylum seekers that come to one country varies from year to year. At the same time, the nationalities that seek refuge also vary between destination countries. Against this background, two questions can be asked:

4. How are we to understand the links between arrivals to Europe, to neighbouring countries and to Norway?
5. What factors can explain the variations in asylum arrivals to Norway 2007-2008?

#### C. The effect of national asylum policy on arrivals

National governments seek to influence the influx of asylum seekers. The relative importance of national policies has, however, not been established by the international literature (EU Commission 2002). An earlier study in Norway found that government interventions in the asylum system may have different effects on different groups (Brekke 2004a). In the late summer of 2008, the Norwegian Government was faced with an increasing number of asylum arrivals and responded by issuing a list of thirteen restrictive measures designed to limit the number of asylum applications. The effect of these measures to regain control over the asylum field will be analysed in this report. Two questions will be highlighted:

6. How do national asylum policies influence the number of asylum arrivals?
7. Is there a strong or weak link between government interventions and the arrival of asylum seekers?

## Empirical material

Five types of material have been used to answer the research questions. The first type consists of qualitative interviews with asylum applicants with backgrounds from Eritrea, Russia and Iraq. Second, qualitative interviews were conducted with key informants in the asylum field such as civil servants, NGO staff and police officers.

A third source is statistical material supplied by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration and sources outside Norway. A fourth source consists of different types of written material, with newspaper articles about the implementation of Norway's restrictive measures in 2008 playing a key role; earlier international studies on the topic of asylum dynamics are also used as an inspiration and reference in both the theoretical discussion and in the actual fieldwork. A fifth source was a selection of case files from the Directorate of Immigration in Norway where we gained access to 45 cases, involving more than 50 applicants. The cases were distributed evenly between Russia, Eritrea and Iraq.

Earlier, when the Norwegian authorities interviewed asylum seekers, they used to ask: «Why did you come to Norway». The applicants understood the question in at least three different ways and responded accordingly. One group regarded the question as asking why people had to leave the country they had just left. Others were preoccupied with their personal request for asylum and why they themselves had had to leave. A third group answered the question as it was intended by the authorities: why had they ended up in *Norway* and not some other country?

It is this meaning of the question that we will pursue in this report. Why do asylum seekers come to a particular destination country? This does not, however, mean that the other interpretations are irrelevant. The general situation in the home country and the individual's reasons for fleeing are important. In terms of this study, however, they are relevant only insofar as they influence the choice of destination.

Three groups of asylum seekers in Norway were chosen for interviews. People coming from Eritrea, Iraq and Russia (Chechnya) explained their routes and the decisions that led them to their destination. The reasons for choosing these groups and not others will be given in the discussion on methodology (chapter 2).

When the request for asylum is submitted to the Norwegian police, this marks the end of the scope of this study. Case handling and the experiences of the asylum seekers while in Norway lie outside its scope (see Norström 2004, Brekke 2004b).

## A reader's guide

In the next chapter, the ethical and methodological challenges of the study are discussed. Asylum seekers may constitute a vulnerable group requiring special consideration. Ensuring informed consent and avoiding negative repercussions for the group due to their participation in the project are among the topics discussed.

Chapter 3 relates to the international discussion of asylum arrivals. The topics here include a critical listing of the variables that regularly appear in the explanation of forced migration. It ends with a dynamic model of asylum migration behaviour.

In chapter 4, statistical material from Norway and a selection of EU countries is scrutinised to search for explanations. What may explain the variations in asylum arrivals within and across countries?

The second chapter presenting the empirical material is Chapter 5 in which effects of government intervention within the field of asylum arrivals are discussed. Is there a strong or weak relationship between such interventions and the number of arrivals?

This discussion is continued when the next source of empirical material is presented in chapter 6. Here, the voices of asylum seekers from three countries are heard on the issue of destination selection. Why Norway?

The final chapter (7) presents a set of conclusions and findings. These are formulated to improve the understanding of the different actors involved in asylum arrivals, both the government and the asylum seekers themselves.



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## Methodology and research ethics

This project highlights a set of methodological and ethical challenges. In most research into forced migration, the focus is on how to improve access and reception conditions for refugees and asylum seekers. Ethically, this is the normal case in migration research. In an indirect sense, this is also the case here. However, the manifest function of the study is to map and explain variations in asylum arrivals, something that seems to serve the purpose of increased control by governments. How can one defend producing knowledge that may have a negative impact on people from the same group as those that provide the information? Another ethical question relates to the concept of informed consent. How can the researcher be sure that the informant truly understands the context in which the study is being performed?

Methodological challenges included gaining access to the asylum seekers as informants. Why would they want to participate in a study that asks them for their choice of destination, routes and helpers along the way?

In this chapter we will briefly discuss some of the methodological and ethical issues that had to be dealt with in preparing and performing the study.

### Design, informants and sources of data

To answer the research questions concerning motivation, patterns of asylum migration and the effects of national policy measures, five different sources of data were gathered. By combining quantitative data (statistics) and qualitative data (interviews with key informants and asylum seekers, case files and written material), it was possible to strengthen the overall analysis. As mentioned in chapter 1, research into asylum arrivals is normally based on one of these data sources. Using both produced several advantages. One was that the statistics supplied us with a framework for the interviews. For example, the rises and falls in arrival numbers and cross-country differences were transformed into questions concerning timing and motivation that were then put to both civil servants and the asylum seekers themselves.



In addition to these two groups of informants, the data sources included case files, statistical material and previous studies. Operating in the space between the personal vulnerability of the applicants and the sensitivity of government strategy produced a special set of challenges during the fieldwork.

## Asylum seekers as informants

Asylum seekers often require special attention as informants. In most cases, their situation is vulnerable. During the application period, the uncertainty of the outcome of their cases may be exacerbated by temporary living conditions and their stressful experiences during flight and transit.

A fundamental principle in social-science ethics is protecting informants. Participating in research projects should not be to their detriment. In other words, «the overriding concern of research ethics is to protect the interests of those people who are the subjects of the information» (Goldsmith College 2005). This was highly relevant when preparing and conducting the current project, as we will discuss later.

A second, but no less important principle of research ethics, is that the group the informants belong to should not be harmed as a result of their participation. An explicit formulation of this principle is difficult to find, but the American Anthropological Association comes close in stating: «There is an obligation to reflect on the foreseeable repercussions of research and publication on the general population being studied.»(Statement on Ethics, May 1971).

A third principle was also challenged in the current study. The Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) states that projects that may increase the control and manipulation of individuals are ethically sensitive (NENT 1992). In our study, one of the sponsors's (the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion) ambitions was to gather information that might become useful for the future management of asylum migration.

A fourth principle that will be discussed in the next section is that of consent. Informants should be made aware of what the study pertains to what its ambitions are, as well as the possible repercussions stemming from their participation. One challenge here is to make sure that the information is fully understood, i.e. that the consent given is qualified. Another is that the informant's situation may place him or her in a position of dependency on the researcher (NENT 1992). Informants may for example experience that they may risk losing privileges by not participating. In our case, we had to consider whether the asylum seekers might volunteer to participate in the belief that this would strengthen their case.

Such ethical considerations applied when selecting how to gain access to the asylum seekers, who we should contact, and when the interviews were to be conducted. Should people still uncertain of the outcome of their cases be approached, or should we wait until they had received the final decision? Here, methodological and ethical interests crossed.

### Timing

From a purely methodological standpoint, one could argue that the best solution would be to interview the asylum seekers as early as possible after their arrival. At that point, their flight and journey would still be fresh in their minds, and their stories would be largely untainted by their experiences in exile. However, the great uncertainty at that stage may make them reluctant to answer questions freely.

Respect for the informants' situation at the initial phase would be a factor in the ethical considerations regarding the timing of interviews. Newly arrived asylum seekers should perhaps not be put under extra strain. Another argument for waiting before interviewing would be that this might interfere with the formal procedures on arrival. In Norway, an initial brief interview on arrival is followed by a broader «asylum interview» conducted by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Both of these would normally be held during the first two to three weeks.

In most fieldwork, ethical and methodological issues are mixed with practical considerations. What is the optimal solution with regard to these three factors? In our case, the possibility of gaining access to asylum seekers through the reception centres was appealing.

After having considered interviewing persons at a very early stage, we ended up talking to people whose cases were well into the process. It would have been more comfortable for everyone if we had chosen only persons who had already been given a positive decision. This was the choice of the British researchers Robinson and Segrott in their study of Britain as an asylum destination in 2002. What they may have lost by making that choice, however, was the stories of people that had come without being granted asylum. These may have had other characteristics regarding destination behaviour. The aim of this study is to understand the dynamics behind *all* asylum arrivals. In that context, those that risk being rejected are as important as those that are allowed to stay.

### Access

Having established the timing of the interviews, we approached two reception centres with about 150 residents. Both hosted asylum seekers from our three

focus countries. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) assisted us in choosing the two centres, but then left it to us and the centres' staff to contact potential informants. In Norway, operators of the centres include non-governmental organisations, commercial companies and municipalities.

After a brief meeting with the employees of the centres, posters invited residents from Iraq, Eritrea and Russia to volunteer for interviews. The invitation stressed that the study was independent of the UDI and that participation was strictly voluntary (see text in appendix 1). It also stated the topic of the study: why asylum seekers come to Norway.

The informants were asked by the poster to contact either us or the staff at the centre. They chose the latter.

This set-up, getting the staff involved in the recruitment of informants, gave rise to further research-ethical considerations. Was the principle of voluntary participation ensured at all times?

Our solution to this challenge was two-fold: first, we kept in close contact with the staff at the reception centres. They were already known to the informants and had their trust. Despite this, we could not be entirely certain that the people that had signed up had not been actively «encouraged» by the local recruiters, thereby possibly violating the principle of voluntary participation.

Second, we started all the interviews by repeating the information about the study and stressed the possibility of withdrawing from it at any point. We wanted to make sure that the principle of consent was fulfilled. But could we be sure that the people we talked to really knew what they were participating in?

## Consent

The question of consent is particularly pertinent in studies in which the informants are from another country than the scientists. The challenge is to make the context, usefulness and consequences of the participation known to the persons involved.

We started our interviews by talking about this, trying to explain the desire of the Norwegian government to know more about the asylum seekers' motivation for coming to this country. Sometimes we went into detail about anonymity and how the information would be processed.

Despite these efforts, there were a few interviews when we remained uncertain of how «informed» the consent really was. In one case, a woman from Iraq ended the interview by asking: «What is this interview all about?» This remark came after we had repeatedly told the informant about the context and purpose of the study.

We think the difficulty in ensuring truly informed consent had one major cause: a lack of knowledge of Norwegian society. In addition, language was a challenge. Our interviews, with one or two exceptions, were conducted using

an interpreter. This introduced a distance between interviewer and informer that made it more difficult to build trust and ensure that the information going back and forth was fully understood.

For example, the lack of knowledge of the nature of the relationship between social research and government institutions played a more important role. When the Iraqi informant asked her question at the end of the interview, she revealed that the details we had provided about our study's independence had not been understood. She could not see the difference between our questions and the institutional setting we were in at that moment, and previous, formal interviews with employees of the Directorate of Immigration. Fortunately, it appeared that we were more successful with the other informants. Whenever we were in doubt during the interviews, we repeated the setting, our roles and the voluntary premise. Yet one can never be absolutely certain that consent is fully informed.

### Strategies

It was important to make our roles clear for one additional reason. If the informants believed that we could somehow influence the outcome of their cases, this would colour their presentation. Their answers could then be strategic and less truthful than we were hoping for.

Reviewing case files helped us counter this effect. We had read the stories that people from the same home countries had told to UDI officials before we started our fieldwork. Accordingly, we already knew a range of stories about motivation, networks, and travel routes, etc. when we met the informants, something that allowed us to ask more detailed and relevant questions.

In the best interviews, we believe we managed to penetrate the official stories and gain access to new information. In other conversations the stories were somewhat more polished. However, the question «Why Norway?» had not been asked directly in earlier interviews and the informants wanted to let us know their stories.

### Was anyone harmed by the study?

No one, nor the group they belonged to, should be harmed by participating in this study. But was this the case?

Before, during and after the fieldwork, this was the question we were most uncertain about. In addition to the difference between the repercussions for the individual and the group, let us also distinguish between harm in the short and longer term. The range of the potentially adverse effects of participation is presented in table 1.

*Table 1. Potentially adverse consequences of participating as an informant*

	Short term	Longer term
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct sanctions from group</li> <li>- Negative for individual's case</li> <li>- Put friends/family in danger</li> <li>- Sanctions from helpers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stigma, traitor</li> <li>- Further sanctions</li> <li>- Financial difficulty in paying debt to smugglers</li> </ul>
Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Travel routes blocked</li> <li>- More precise preventative measures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Travel routes closed</li> <li>- Difficult for new arrivals, info spread to international cooperating officials.</li> <li>- More finely tuned preventative system</li> <li>- Less chance for fellow countrymen to succeed</li> </ul>

Could or did any of these negative repercussions occur as a result of our study? We received no information that any harm had come to the individuals that participated. Rather, more people from a group volunteered once some had started. This made us confident that negative effects were absent.

The effects of the study on the asylum seekers as a group, and the three selected nationalities in particular, are more uncertain. In the short term, the risks should be minimal. The eight- to ten-month delay between the interviews and publication should be enough for avoiding such effects.

In the longer term, however, the effects are more uncertain. Will this study and our findings contribute to increasing the «control and manipulation of individuals»? If so, it would violate the principle established by the Norwegian Ethics Committee (NENT 1992) mentioned earlier. More detailed knowledge may make national and international authorities more capable of hindering asylum seekers from crossing borders.

However, the effects of the study could also be positive, both for the individuals and for the group they belong to. The ethical framework for research is designed to ensure that negative repercussions are avoided, not to optimise positive effects. Possible beneficial desirable outcomes for the individual participant may include being listened to and being taken seriously. Their voices were heard and are presented in this report. This could create an understanding for the asylum seekers' situation in general and for specific nationalities. Another example would be if findings from this study led to government policy being more informed and thus more aware of the potentially unintended effects of restrictive measures.

Some would also argue that information about motivations and travel routes could help governments hinder the arrival of people with an insufficient need for protection, and thereby relieve strained reception systems. This

was the position of the Norwegian authorities in 2008 (St.meld. 1. 2008-2009).

The result of a British Home Office report from 2002, were later stated to have been advantageous for the participating asylum seekers (Robinson and Segrott 2002). At least, this was the conclusion of the left-wing newspaper *The Guardian* some weeks after the report was published (Socialist Worker Online 10. August 2002). There it was argued that the study had exposed the lack of rationality in the destination choices of the applicants and how difficult it would be for the authorities to influence the influx.

### Informants and interviews

We conducted eighteen interviews with a total of twenty asylum seekers from Eritrea, Iraq and Russia. The Eritreans interviewed were mostly from the Asmara region. Of the Iraqis, about half were from the northern part of the country and were of Kurdish origin. The rest were from Baghdad. The Russians consisted of Chechens, and will therefore be referred to as the Chechens or the Chechen group. The descriptions of the national, ethnic and religious identities of the asylum seekers are based on the asylum seekers own statements. We have not made judgements concerning the validity of these statements.

It was not possible to obtain a balanced representation of informants in the interviews. Only one-third of those interviewed were women and we were not able to interview the same number of people from each of the three country groups. It emerged that the informants of Chechen origin (3) did not volunteer to the same degree as Iraqis (7) or Eritreans (10).

Consequently, we have less information about the circumstances regarding the decision-making process and the flight of the Chechen group than we do about the other two country groups. The material serves to illustrate the processes and mechanisms behind the asylum seekers' decisions. If we were to make statements about how widespread their actions were, another range of methodological tools would have been needed.

The interview sessions lasted from thirty to ninety minutes. Less than a handful of the interviews were conducted in English with only us and the informant present. In the other cases, interpreters were present either in person or by phone. Interpreting in person was clearly favoured by us and the informants.

The asylum seekers sometimes referred to their reasons for seeking asylum in the interviews, and this was also reported in the case files. It is important to note, however, that we did not focus on the asylum seekers' reasons for leaving their country or their reason for seeking asylum as such in our questions. Instead, our questions revolved around the decision-making process and the choice of Norway. Their answers must be read and understood in this context;

their answers to the question of why they came to Norway cannot be read as explanations for why they left their home country.

### Reliability

How reliable was the information we obtained during the interviews with the asylum seekers? Given the precarious situation these individuals were in, and their strong interest in influencing the outcome of their applications, one might think that they would try to give «the right answers». It was our tasks as researchers to reiterate that we had no contact with the people handling their cases and that we wished to speak freely about their motivation and their journey to Norway.

Our insistence on the anonymity of the informants had therefore a methodological aspect in addition to the ethical one. It sent a strong signal to the interviewees that the detailed information they gave us would not be passed on. The implicit message was that strategic responses would be futile.

Despite these efforts, we could not be certain that the information we obtained was correct at all times. One sign that the asylum seekers did not supply a false version of events was when they told us about their failures or exposed weaknesses and missed opportunities. Some of our informants were angry at those that had functioned as their «helpers» or «smugglers» and wanted to give us their cell phone numbers so we could avenge them.

### Other sources of information

The forty-five case files were selected by the Directorate of Immigration according to our instructions regarding nationalities, positive/negative decisions, gender, age, the number of Dublin cases and other criteria. It was our impression that no particular bias influenced the Directorate's selection process. The cases had all been decided in 2007 and 2008. We were allowed to read the full set of documents in a separate room at the UDI. We were not allowed to copy any information, but we took notes that listed non-traceable characteristics of the individual cases. These concerned a network in Norway, the use of helpers/smugglers, travel routes, motivation and events while in transit.

The second group of interviews was conducted with key informants working in the asylum field, including civil servants, staff at the reception centres, NGO representatives and police officers. Some of the methodological and ethical issues discussed earlier also applied to these interviews. In particular, the question of strategic responses was relevant. Several of the informants were in positions that had a strong interest in presenting the issues in a certain

way. It was our job to penetrate this institutional correctness and gain access to fresh information about and new interpretations of these sensitive topics.

We interviewed employees at the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID), at the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), from the Foreign Service, from the Country Information Service (Landinfo) and at other institutions. In total, twenty interviews were conducted as part of this fieldwork.

We also contacted national experts on asylum arrivals in several relevant EU Member States. These included the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands and Finland. We also got the opinion of experts in Switzerland. This, perhaps odd looking, selection of countries was chosen on the basis of the statistical analysis of the asylum arrivals to Norway. They all represented countries that had high number of arrivals of the same nationalities that came to Norway in 2008. We contacted the experts through the IGC (Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration and Return) network. They were predominately civil servants with expertise within asylum arrivals and asylum management.

Statistical material was used in the analysis of arrivals to Norway and other relevant countries. Some of these numbers were supplied especially for this study by the staff of the UDI. Other discussions were based on numbers in the UNCHR's annual statistical reports. The 2008 report published in April 2009 was particularly useful.





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## Explaining destination choices

The classic view of refugees and asylum seekers is that they are forced to flee. Events in their home countries force them to leave without considering a specific destination (Havinga and Böcker 1997). This view of the refugee or asylum seeker as an actor with little or no influence over his/her actions has been criticised (Zolberg et al. 1989). In the literature it has, however, not been replaced with an actor that is fully in charge of his/her own actions. Instead, a picture has been drawn of individuals that vary in resources, information and autonomy. For governments wanting to understand and influence the arrival of asylum seekers, it may be tempting, however, to overestimate the degree of freedom of choice and rationality of the individuals coming.

The actor acts within a context, or a situation that may limit the number and availability of options. In the case of migration, borders and resources are two obvious examples. These limitations on the free choice of destination have to be considered separately for each migrating group. In addition, existing links between countries, such as former colonial ties or through chain migration, tend to direct migration in certain directions.

The concept of «mixed flows» indicates that the line of applicants includes people in need of protection, but also people searching for improved living conditions. But the concept can indicate that the reasons for leaving may be mixed at the individual level as well. Persecution may come on top of challenging living conditions and thus trigger migration. Or the other way around; persecution and a lack of protection may become more difficult to tolerate within the home country if the possibilities for a dignified life, schooling etc. worsen (see Richmond 1993 for a full typology).

The traditional dichotomies separating the forced and voluntary, and the economic and political motives for migration, have been challenged (Zolberg et. al 1989). With regard to our topic, one must ask what role the individual asylum seeker's choice plays in the selection of destination country (Havinga and Böcker 1999). An important point made in this report is that the individual's room for choice may change during the migration process.

In this chapter we will look briefly at a few elements from general theory of action and its relevance to the situation of asylum seekers. This is followed

by a presentation of a selection of relevant European studies. At the end of the chapter, we present a model of destination based on the available literature and for our destination decisions.

## A focus on action

As a starting point for considering why people act as they do, a continuum can be drawn between theories that emphasise the autonomy and rationality of the individual at one end, and those that emphasise forces beyond the actor's control at the other.

An example of the first category would be models like those used in elementary economics textbooks, where the individual chooses the best alternatives according to a set of preferences. Here, the methodological starting point is the individual actor, but some strands of the theory also include collective actors (Basu 1997). One such is the theories of Oded Stark that explain migration on a family level. He claims that it can be rational for a family to spread its members between different countries, thus lowering the risks of being struck by local variations in labour markets (Stark 1995). A useful concept from this tradition is *risk aversion*. The idea here is that given two equal alternatives, the actor will choose the one with the least perceived risk attached. This is relevant for understanding the behaviour and actions of asylum seekers that cross continents to apply for protection. All these choices presuppose a certain level of information. Access to information is needed to rank the alternatives, and knowledge is a critical point for the rational action model. It has also been argued that the contexts within which actions take place are not considered sufficiently.

In the second category, where one would find a social model of action, the assumptions of the rational choice model have been eased, leaving room for less than perfect information and presenting an actor in pursuit not only of economic gain, but also social gains (Collins 1993:352). Here there is also room for taking into account the context within which action takes place. Institutions, traditions, nations, structures, rules and regulations are used in explaining patterns of behaviour. In the «sequential model of action», presented at the end of this chapter, actors, information and context all play pivotal roles.

One exponent of structural explanations is Elko Thielemann and his efforts to explain patterns of asylum arrivals in Europe in the 1990s (Thielemann 2002). According to his studies, the variations came as a result of the countries' economies, past immigration experience, liberal traditions (including solidarity with developing countries) and national asylum policies. All these factors are on the macro level. After having considered these variables, he

found that countries with low unemployment and that had a substantial presence of earlier arrivals tended to receive a higher number of applications. Added to this were the effects of high recognition rates and access to work while waiting for the application process (Thielemann 2002:27). Although he did not thoroughly analyse it, he also introduced a final factor that influenced where asylum seekers submitted their applications: the asylum seeker's perception of the country as liberal or not. Ultimately, he found that the arrival of asylum seekers was mainly due to factors outside the influence of short-term policies. Here we think Thielemann underestimates the potential of government action. We have earlier argued this with reference to the Danish change in asylum policies in 2002 (Brekke 2004b).

The main paradigm in migration research used to explain migratory behaviour has been the push-pull theory (Zimmermann 1996). Here one looks at so-called pull factors in countries of destination and push factors in the country of origin. The basic theory states that: as the discrepancy in economic, political and safety conditions between the country of origin and country of destination increases, then migration becomes more likely (European Commission 2000, Biljeveld and Taselaar 2000). The model was developed to explain migration in general, but it has also been used in the field of forced migration.

In our study, we are less interested in the situation in the home countries of the asylum seekers than in the characteristics of the destination country, the pull factors. Which traits does Norway possess that serve to attract people that want to apply for asylum? Here one could distinguish between the real situation in the areas of asylum and migration policies, labour market, welfare system, traditional ties with the country of origin, the presence of a diaspora, access to education, language, climate or other possible pull factors, or one may look at the *perception* of these factors that the asylum seekers possess of Norway. It is this last approach which will be our main perspective in the present study. The exception is the changes in Norwegian migration policies. The effect of this factor will be discussed in chapter 5.

## Models of destination selection

There are a few earlier studies that have looked at asylum seekers' choice of destination country. These have mostly considered the selection as something that occurs at a particular point in time, and typically before departure from the home country. We will look more closely at some of these studies, developed in the United Kingdom for the Home Office. But first, a few words on three relevant studies from the Netherlands.

### The view of Dutch experts

The question of whether asylum seekers come to a particular country by choice or by chance was asked by the Dutch researchers Tetty Havinga and Anita Böcker (1999) in a study supported by the European Commission. In the study, Havinga and Böcker analysed the reasons underlying the asylum seekers' choice of country of refuge with a focus on Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK.

The study is based on statistics on asylum applications in the countries of the European Union and on interviews with key informants working for refugee associations, organisations providing assistance to asylum seekers, lawyers, immigration officers and interpreters.

The picture which emerges from this study is rather complex. The factor considered most important for asylum seekers varies for the different countries of destination. Social networks in the country of destination seem to be an important pull factor in all three countries, while former colonial ties were found to have greater explanatory value for the arrival of asylum seekers in the UK than in Belgium, and little or no explanatory value for the Netherlands. The authors' conclusion is that it is not so much the characteristics of the countries of destination as the situation of the asylum seekers or the circumstances of the flight which appear to determine the destination of the asylum seekers' flight.

On the question of whether asylum seekers end up in a particular destination country by choice or by chance, the authors find that many asylum seekers do not deliberately choose the country of destination, and that when there is a choice involved it is ultimately often the result of an opportunity to join a family member or friend and not the choice of the country as such.

Biljeveld and Taselaar's (2000) report from an expert meeting analysed why the Netherlands attracted large numbers of asylum seekers at the end of the 1990s. Here, they found that those that came without the help of smugglers/traffickers/helpers had a vaguer perception of the destination country than the rest. They saw the Netherlands as a kind, democratic and foreigner-friendly country with good social services. The group was also attracted by family and friends that were already in the country. It thereby confirmed the findings of an earlier Dutch study on the subject (Doornheim and Dijkhoff 1995). For these applicants, the reasons for leaving, i.e. the push factors were stressed as the most important.

It was the view of the expert group that those coming with the help of traffickers had more strategic and well informed motivations. The applicants were concerned with the length of the asylum procedure, quality of care, approval rates and the country as a stepping stone to further migration (Biljeveld and Taselaar 2000). The Dutch experts suggested that one needed a better understanding of the organised smugglers to grasp asylum dynamics.

Without stating this explicitly, this study equated smugglers with strategy and independently travelling asylum seekers with being naive.

In a third study, Roel Jennissen and colleagues from the University of Maastricht and the Ministry of Justice analysed the arrivals to the Netherlands from 2000 to 2007. They found that economic or labour market indicators did not seem to have an impact on asylum arrivals. Instead, their material indicated that the main cause of the fluctuations was network. The second most important factor was said to be policy measures directed at influencing the number of asylum applications. The Dutch team stated they could see in their numbers the effect of a faster application procedure and forced returns during the appeal period. Combined with a harsher tone in the political debate on immigrants, these measures contributed to a decrease after 2002 (Jennissen et al. 2009:179).

#### Four British studies

At the turn of the century, Britain experienced an increase in the arrival of asylum seekers. This elicited several reports that studied various aspects of asylum dynamics.

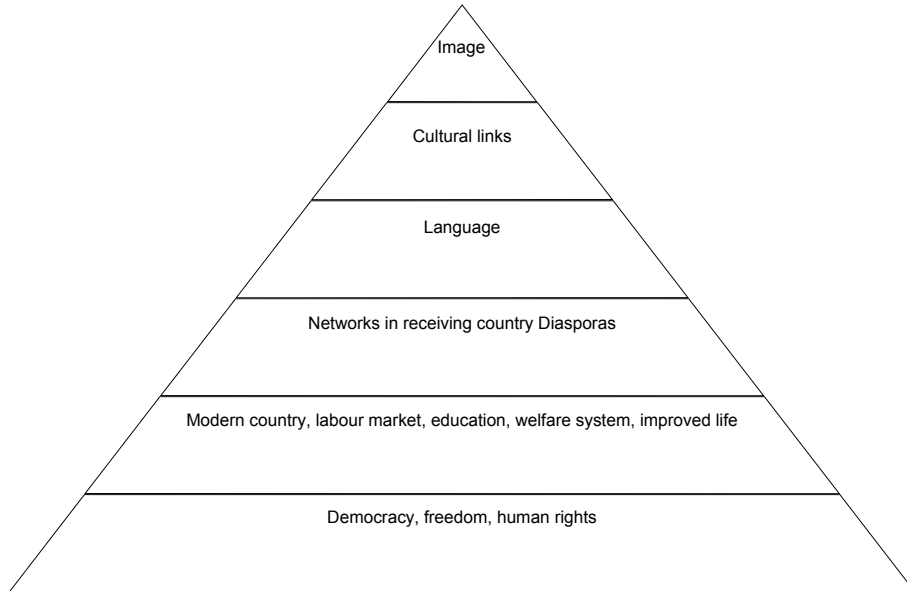
In a report for the Home Office from 2002, the British geographers Vaughan Robinson and Jeremy Segrott looked into the «decision-making of asylum seekers». Interviewing more than sixty former asylum seekers, they developed both a hierarchy of reason for coming to Britain and a model for understanding their decision-making (Robinson and Segrott 2002:61). It is worth noting that the sample of informants from the asylum seekers only included people that had already received a positive decision and were settled. Some of them had resided in Britain for more than five years (23 percent) (Robinson and Segrott 2002:12).

They found that all Western countries were democratic and protectors of human rights. This could therefore not account for their selection of one particular destination country within the region. This group of countries was also seen as *modern* and as providing opportunities for employment, education and social advancement (2002:62).

On top of these two basic traits, they found that four variables were used to select one particular Western country. The first was the presence of family and friends. The dual function of information and support from a network already in place in the destination country will be discussed later in our report. The second factor that Robinson and Segrott found was language. Knowing the language was seen as easing the settling process. A third factor was «cultural affinity», or cultural proximity between the country of origin and destination. This corresponds well to the importance of colonial links that other studies have found (Zetter et al 2003, Thielemann 2001). When all the above reasons were accounted for, and the individual still had a choice, the research-

ers found that *images* and *perceptions* of Britain and British culture were important. If we include the two basic preferences for democracy and modernity, we obtain the hierarchy of reasons presented in Figure 1. Here, the bottom layers are the most basic.

*Figure 1. Hierarchy of pull factors inspired by Robinson and Segrott (2001).*



From a Norwegian perspective, the triangle of reasons provided by the British researchers appears only partly relevant. The basic reasons (democracy and modernity) seem relevant, as does the presence of network. The Norwegian language, however, can hardly be a motivating factor for people coming from Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan or Somalia. The same goes for traditional cultural ties apart from the Diasporas and perceptions of Norway. Both sets of reasons must be expected to provide a minimal pull effect. Asylum seekers choosing the Scandinavian country with the smallest population and an obscure language must have other reasons to come. We will return to what a triangle of pull factors would look like in the Norwegian context (chapter 6).

The Robinson and Segrott study also provided a generalised model of asylum seekers' decision-making (2002:61). How is a destination decision reached and which outside factors influence the outcome? The model considers the decision to leave or stay, the use of agents or not, and the choice of region/specific country as influenced by push and pull factors, availability of resources and the hierarchy of reasons already described (figure 1).

The authors note that the process of decision-making may not be static. As we shall stress later in this report, the destination country may not have been selected at the outset of the journey. By introducing time as a main element, we develop a model that fits better with our empirical material. For two of our main informant groups, Norway did not appear as a possible destination until after the asylum seekers had left their own countries. But before we present this modified model, two more British studies need to be mentioned briefly.

Koser and Pinkerton looked into how information was spread among asylum seekers and the role that networks play in the process (2002). Well aware of other sources of information, such as the internet, agents, formal institutions and the media, the authors found that social networks were where their informants found the most trusted sources (2002:1). This was the case despite the fact that information from migrants already in the destination country, for example, could exaggerate positive aspects of the possibilities there or be out of touch with current regulations.

The study was commissioned by the Home Office, and recommended using refugee and migrant community organisations to disseminate information about asylum practice and policy. Three trends were identified: first, asylum seekers increasingly came to countries with no prior links to their home country. Second, more asylum seekers spent significant amounts of time in transit before entering Western Europe. The third trend mentioned in the report was the use of human smugglers (Koser and Pinkerton 2002:2). This led them to conclude that transit countries and smugglers could be new targets for governments wanting to disseminate information.

Towards the end of the report a model is presented showing the flow of information through the different agents, organisations, governments, social networks and media in the host, transit and destination countries (2002:38). A



third report commissioned by the Home Office during the same period was an «assessment of the impact of asylum policies in Europe 1990-2000» (Zetter et. al. 2003). More detailed information is provided on the impacts of policy in five EU Member States: Sweden, Italy, UK, Germany and the Netherlands. Do legislation, policies and practices have a significant impact on the number and patterns of asylum applications in these countries (Zetter et. al. 2003)? Their findings were inconclusive and point to the difficulties that were encountered in their efforts to establish causality between policy and outcomes. Despite this, the researchers indicated that pre-entry measures appeared to be more effective than «indirect measures such as reception facilities, detention and the withdrawal of welfare benefits» (Zetter et. al. 2003:13). Although based on limited empirical fieldwork and statistics, this study will play a key role in our discussions of policy impact in chapters 4 and 5.

In an article in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* in 2006, Gilbert and Koser have presented results from another study, also funded by the UK Home Office. The focus of this study concerns what the asylum seekers knew about the UK before arrival. Their conclusion is that few of the respondents arrived with much knowledge of the UK: their knowledge was limited to general impressions of the country and they knew little about asylum policy and practice. The authors list five main reasons why the asylum seekers knew so little: (1) many had not chosen their own destination; (2) surprisingly few had family or friends already in UK; (3) in some cases they had been provided with false or misleading information; (4) many had departed from their country of origin in a rush; (5) most were relatively poorly educated. A majority of the asylum seekers had used a smuggler at some point in their journey, and according to Gilbert and Koser, the smuggler had often chosen the final destination.

This study was based on interviews with eighty-seven asylum seekers from four countries (Afghanistan, Colombia, Kosovo and Somalia). Some of the asylum seekers were interviewed up to five years after they had arrived in the UK, while others were interviewed within one year after arrival. In addition, the material included visits to study countries and meetings with informants knowledgeable in asylum matters.

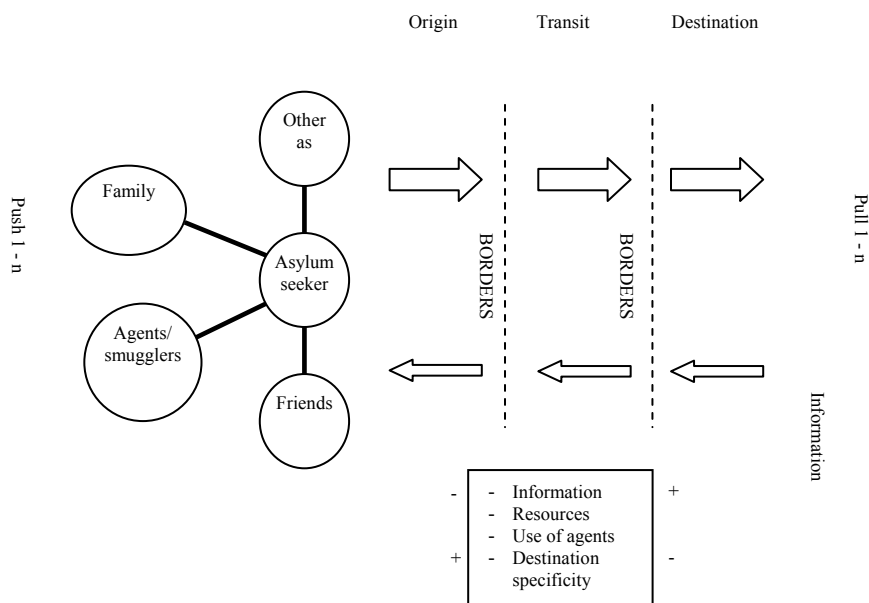
### Towards a sequential model

Inspired by our interviews with a sample of asylum seekers and by the models mentioned above, we have developed a model of the act of asylum migration. It incorporates the possibility of multiple migration decision points and the information sources discussed by Koser. At the base of the model lies the chronology of movement from a country of origin, through one or more transit stages, to the destination country. It is sequential in the sense that each move the migrant makes may open up a new context for action (Papadopoulou-

Kourkoula 2008). The choice of destination may manifest itself differently once the asylum seeker crosses the border to the first, second or third transit country. New supporting actors may become influential. The resources and information available may be different, etc.

The main movement in the model goes from country of origin, via one or more transit countries to the destination country. Apart from this, each situation producing asylum seekers will have its own profile regarding the urgency of flight, its duration, the number of stages, resources, the use of agents, flow of information, the importance of network, and destination specificity. On top of this comes variation on the individual level within each country group. The forces pushing people to leave their country of origin will be different from one country of origin to the next. Finally, the model opens up for each country group seeing different pull factors as important.

Figure 2. The asylum journey model



This is how the situation appears from the destination country's point of view. Seen from the country of origin, the characteristics of the outflow of people may be less homogenous. A few comments are needed at this stage to explain the elements presented in figure 2.

How *urgent* is the situation when the refugee/asylum seeker leaves the home country? Is the migration act a result of weeks, months and perhaps years of planning? Or do the reason and opportunity to flee present themselves in a shorter time frame? When interviewing refugees from Bosnia in the mid 1990s, Brekke found that even during a fully fledged civil war, both extremes were present (Brekke 2001). Some of the informants had spent weeks and months preparing to leave, while others were awoken in the middle of the night by soldiers ordering them to leave immediately.

In the present study, some of the Eritrean informants said they had considered fleeing, but then unexpectedly had to act when an opportunity presented itself.

Does the movement from the home country to destination last for a short or long time? What is the typical *duration* of the journey? Is the distance between the two countries short or long? In our material, most informants coming from Chechnya had spent less than a week travelling from their home town to Norway. This was different from the Eritreans or Iraqis. From Eritrea, some informants had spent a year or longer on their way to Norway. Like the Eritreans, many Iraqis had spent time in transit countries. For the people originating in the middle or southern part of Iraq, a period in Syria or Jordan was not unusual. People leaving northern Iraq typically reoriented themselves in Turkey before moving on. Their flight had several stages. The same was the case for the Eritreans, whose typical flight route involved Libya, and Italy, following time spent in Sudan. Later in the report we will argue that in some cases one could speak of *secondary movements* when the length of time in transit exceeded a certain limit.

The importance of *resources* for migration has been noted in earlier studies (Robinson and Segrott 2002). In our material, the amount of support and money influenced the duration and route of travel. For example, the journey from Sudan to Europe by plane was not an option for all asylum seekers from Eritrea.

The use of agents, smugglers, helpers or «business men», as some of our informants called them, was frequent and, for some travel routes, necessary. In our material a distinction may be drawn between professional, non-related by kinship, and commercial agents on one side of the spectrum, and amateurs that were related by kinship and operated on a non-profit basis. For the latter, the label «helpers» would be more fitting than «agents». These helpers or agents may assist the asylum seekers with passports and other papers, arrange shorter or longer parts of the travel, or take full responsibility from start to finish.

Information is at the core of understanding asylum migration. What information do the individual and surrounding actors have about Norway and alternative countries? Where does the information come from? What is the legitimacy of these sources? Our discussion is inspired by the Khoser and Pinkerton (2002) report, mentioned earlier.

Another important factor that will vary during flight, between individuals in one national group, and between nationalities coming to one destination country, is *destination specificity*. By this we mean whether the asylum migrant has locked in on one specific target country or not. Alternatives would be people aiming to go to «Europe», «Northern Europe», «Scandinavia», a few pre-selected countries, or one in particular. And of course, one will have persons ending up in other countries than the ones they had decided to go to (Brekke 2004).

The final two components of figure 2 are the push and pull factors. The specific push factors of the three case countries in this study, Eritrea, Russia and Iraq, will be described in the next chapter. In general, conditions of security, politics, economy and social policies may be included as push factors in forced migration. Some of these would be found on the pull list as well, but then with opposite signs. Here, the presence of security, the political situation (the presence of democracy, gender equality and human rights), a strong economy, labour market opportunities and social security would qualify as making a country attractive. Add to this list existing ties in the form of a common language and the presence of networks, and the chances for attracting migrants would increase.

In figure 2, other actors than the asylum seekers are included. It has already been noted that selecting a destination country may be the result of a process in which more people are involved. In our interviews we were looking specifically for clues as to who was involved in that process.

Before the interview material is presented, we aim to understand the increase in asylum arrivals to Norway from 2007 to 2008.



## Trends and explanations

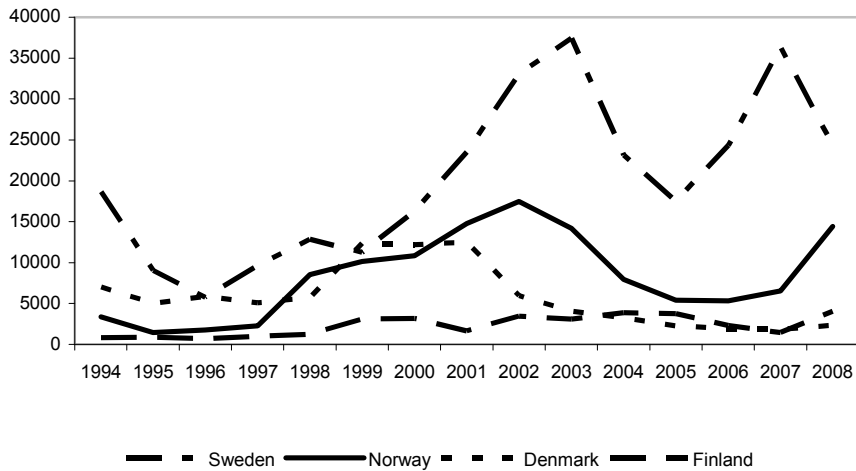
We have already established that the number of asylum seekers coming to a particular country, in our case Norway, varies from one year to the next, and that the number varies across countries in the same region. But why? In this chapter we look at the recent trends in Europe and Norway. The focal point is the increase in arrivals that surprised the Norwegian authorities in 2008.

### Recent asylum trends

The number of asylum seekers arriving in Europe hit a high point in 2001. During the next five years, the numbers fell across the continent. In 2006, only half the number of asylum seekers came to Europe (UNHCR 2009:4). Now the trend has changed again, and more people are seeking refuge in Europe. In 2008, the increase was around 10 percent.

In the Nordic countries, the European high point in 2001 hit Norway and Sweden the two following years. In Denmark, policy changes left the country unaffected by the increase in the surrounding countries (Brekke 2004b). In 2003, a tightening of Norwegian asylum policies and the introduction of the Eurodac registration system helped bring the national numbers in line with the decreasing trend in Europe. The Finnish numbers remained low. In figure 3 we can see the great variations in the numbers of arrivals of asylum seekers to the Nordic countries over the past ten years.

Figure 3. Asylum arrivals in the Nordic countries 1999-2008



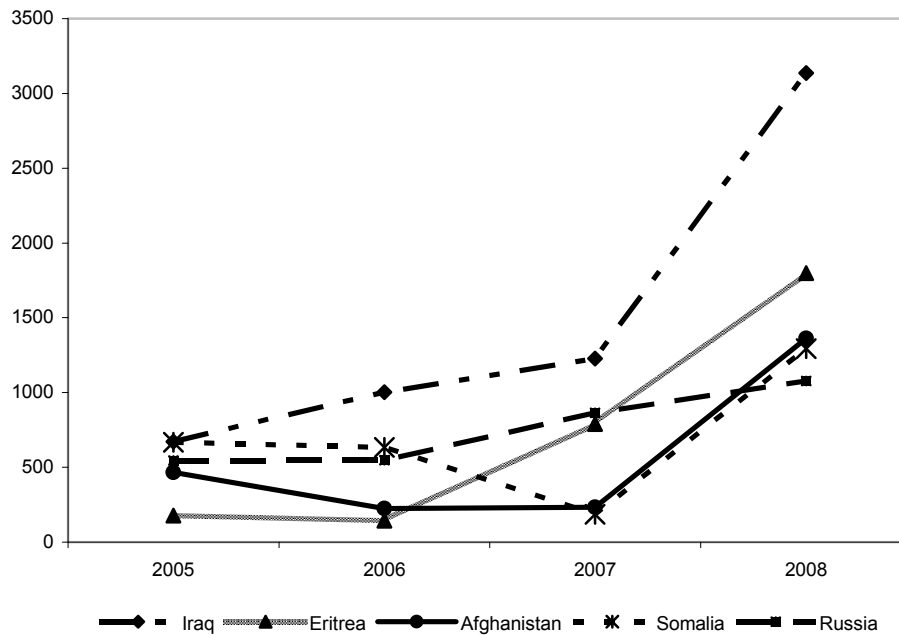
If we concentrate on the last two years, we can see a divergent trend in the Nordic countries. While the Swedish numbers tumbled from a high of 35 000, arrivals to Norway more than doubled. So did the arrivals to Finland. Even Denmark experienced a small increase, albeit from a low level.

The increase brought Norway into the group of top ten receiving countries in the world (UNHCR 2009:6). There it joined other countries that had seen substantially higher numbers in 2008, Italy (fourth) and Switzerland (ninth). Arrivals to Norway jumped from 6500 in 2007 to 14500 the year after.

### Nationalities coming to Norway

In 2008, the top five nationalities coming to Norway were Iraqis, Eritreans, Afghans, Somalis and Russians. The internal ranking and top five countries of origin vary from one year to the next. For example, the numbers during the first six months of 2009 showed a dramatic drop in arrivals from Iraq and a strong increase in people coming from Afghanistan. Likewise, the ranking from 2007 showed that Iraq was followed by Russia, Eritrea, Serbia/Kosovo, the stateless (Palestinians) and Ethiopia and Eritrea. The development in the top five nationalities in 2008 is portrayed in figure 4.

Figure 4. Development in top five nationalities of asylum seekers to Norway 2005-2008



The figure shows a strong increase in all five nationalities, except for Russians. Arrivals from Iraq made most impact on the Norwegian numbers, almost tripling from 2007 to 2008. Also the group from Eritrea increased exponentially, increasing from 800 arrivals in 2007 to 1800 the year after. Our goal here is to establish why there was such a strong increase in Iraqis, Eritreans and Somalis coming to Norway that year.

Let us start by looking more closely at these three selected countries. They were the ones with the strongest increase in arrivals to Norway in 2008.

The first place to look for causes would be in the influx to Europe. According to UNHCR numbers, the number of asylum seekers was up 13 percent in Europe (38 countries including the EU, the European Economic Area (EEA) and others) in 2008 from the previous year. Behind this total, we find big differences. A few countries experienced significant increases such as Italy (+122%), Norway (121%), the Netherlands (+89%), Turkey (+70%) and Switzerland (+53%). Other countries had considerably fewer applicants in 2008 than the previous year; Cyprus (-42%), Spain (-42%), Sweden (-33%), and Greece (-21%) (UNHCR 2009:5). Summing up, we could say that arrivals to Europe showed a moderate increase in 2008, and that Norway received a disproportionally large share of that increase.



Next we have to establish whether nationalities that are especially relevant to explaining the increase in Norway in 2008 came in larger numbers to Europe.

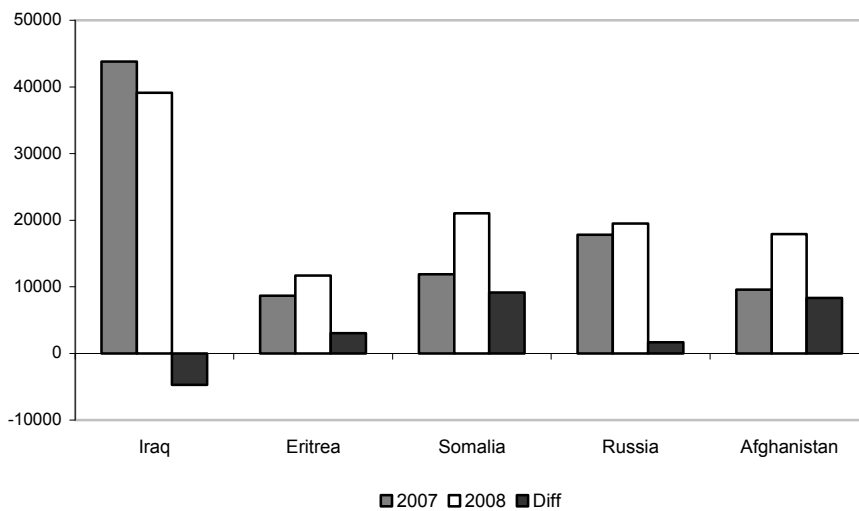
In figure 5 we can see the arrivals to Europe, including countries outside the European Union, for the period in question. From 2007-2008 the number of Iraqis coming to the region decreased by ten percent from 2007-2008.

The other nationalities all increased. People coming from Russia rose by slightly less than 10 percent. The number from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia all increased strongly, peaking in the second half of 2008. Yet as we can see, none of the three nationalities doubled. The increase in arrivals to Europe can only be a small part of the explanation for the disproportionate increase to Norway.

In the numbers for Europe used here, the Norwegian development was included. If we look only at the 27 Member States of the EU, the situation is slightly less dramatic. The increase in this limited region was six percent in 2008. Applications from Iraq fell by 30 percent within this area, while the numbers from Somalia (+69%), Afghanistan (+62%), Eritrea (+13%) and Russia (+7%) all rose.

From these figures, there appears to be a strong upward trend in Europe. But, as we have seen, only a few countries experienced a big increase in arrivals in 2008

*Figure 5. Origin of asylum applicants in Europe (38 countries) 2007 – 2008*



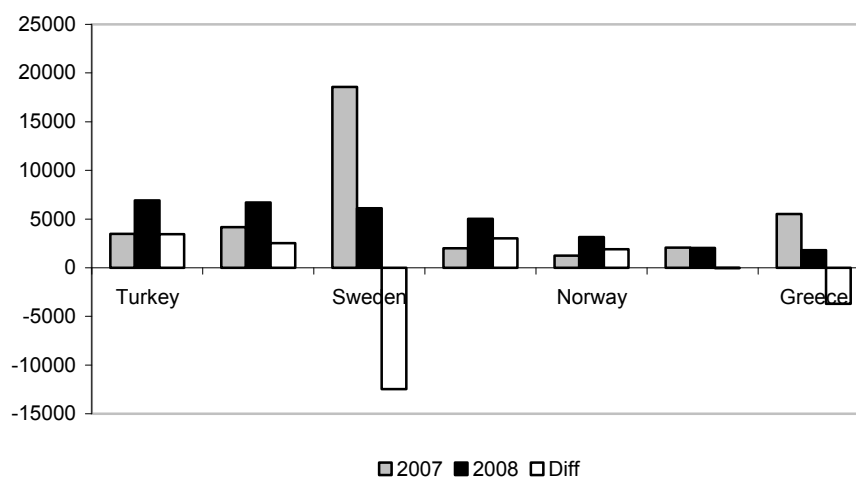
## Alternative destination countries

The next step in searching for explanations for the development in Norway is to look at competing destinations. If we isolate the other European countries that received a high number of asylum seekers with the same origins as Norway, we may get some clues. Did they show the same tendency as Norway in 2008?

### Asylum seekers from Iraq

If we begin by looking at the Iraqi group, the major receiving countries were Turkey, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands in 2008. Norway was the fifth largest European recipient of applicants from Iraq. As noted earlier, the overall number of Iraqi applicants to Europe (38) fell by 10 percent from the previous year, while it plummeted by 28 percent if we look only at the EU-27 (UNHCR 2009:17).

Figure 6. Destinations for Iraqis coming to Europe 2007-2008



As we can see in figure 6, Sweden and Greece both registered substantially fewer asylum seekers from Iraq in 2008.

Sweden, our neighbour to the east, saw its numbers plummet. The decrease in Iraqis coming to Sweden was the major asylum event in Europe that year. In 2007, approximately 1500 Iraqi asylum seekers came to Sweden each month. This trend continued in January 2008, before falling off throughout the year. In December 2008 only 300 Iraqis came. In Norway, the trend was the opposite. Arrivals from Iraq started at a low level in 2008, increased substantially through the summer, reaching almost 400 per month in October, before declining at the end of the year. This distinctive opposite trend, with numbers falling in Sweden and increasing at the same time in Norway, gave rise to speculation of a causal link.

The reason for the downwards tendency in Sweden has been explained by a stricter asylum policy, lower acceptance rates for Iraqis and a compulsory return agreement with the Iraqi authorities. These measures were directed in particular towards reducing the arrival of asylum seekers from Iraq. Swedish authorities also took initiatives in the transit countries of Syria and Jordan to hinder the proliferation of false visas and passports that were used to enter Sweden. And this seemed to work. The restrictive measures did not, however, seem to have an effect on other nationalities. If the Swedish arrival numbers are considered without the Iraqi group, they were stable during 2006 (15000), 2007 (18000) and 2008 (18000).

It is tempting to conclude that the stricter policy towards Iraqis in Sweden made many asylum seekers apply instead to Norway and the other countries with increased numbers. To a certain extent this appears to be true. The fall in overall arrivals to Europe by Iraqis in 2008 was 30 % in the EU region and 11% in the wider region (Europe 38). This taken into account, Norway would be a plausible candidate for Iraqis finding Sweden a less attractive alternative. Some of our informants from Iraq said this explicitly, as we shall see in chapter 6. Sweden appeared less attractive, leaving Norway a more favourable option. An indication that such a link existed is the number of requests from the Norwegian authorities to Sweden under the so-called Dublin agreement. Under that agreement, the country where an applicant is first registered should process the case. Iraqis coming to Norway after having been registered in Sweden were up from 25 in 2007 to 104 in 2008. This could be an indication that more Iraqi applications were rejected in Sweden in 2008, but it may also indicate that the country next door appeared more attractive.

While the policy towards the Iraqi group was tightened in Sweden, the Norwegian practice was left unchanged at the start of 2008. This made Norway stand out as more liberal in comparison.

The assumption underlying this way of thinking is that the information about the various possible destination countries is widely spread. The sources

and the content of the destination information are crucial for understanding the processes that lead the asylum seekers to one country and not another.

In Greece, the number of registered asylum seekers from Iraq was down in 2008. They registered 1800 applications that year compared to 5500 the year before. This should be seen as a result of a very low approval rate for this nationality and rough conditions for those in the asylum process. Greece was also criticised for not ensuring access to the asylum system during 2008 ([www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)), and for not fulfilling its obligations to register arrivals in line with the Dublin II Agreement.

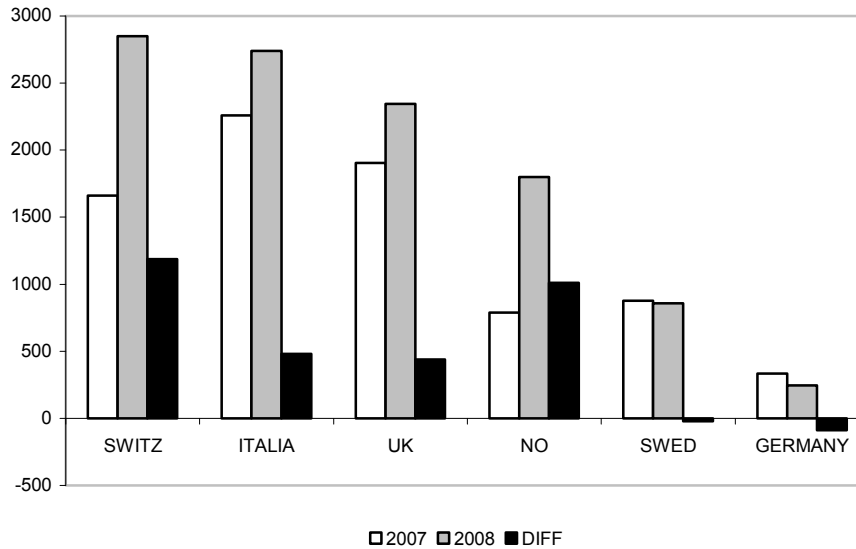
The Netherlands and Turkey also experienced a sharp rise in Iraqi arrivals in 2008. Dutch experts were quick to look into the reasons for the increase. This country experienced higher numbers in general, but particularly saw a rise in Iraqi and Somali arrivals. The Iraqi group came because of changes in the Swedish policy, according to the experts. Although the presence of Iraqis in the Netherlands made the Dutch expect a high number of arrivals even in 2007, this group of asylum seekers seemed to prefer Sweden until the policies there were altered (Jenissen et al. 2009).

### Asylum seekers from Eritrea

In 2008, Norway ranked even higher among the European countries receiving applicants from Eritrea. Having received more than 1500 asylum seekers from this East African country, Norway was the fourth largest destination country for this group in Europe (see figure 7). As mentioned earlier, the overall number for Europe (38 countries) was up 35 percent. In the EU-27 area, the increase was smaller (13 %).

All four top recipients experienced increases in arrivals compared to 2007. Switzerland was top of the list after almost 3000 Eritreans submitted their applications in 2008. Italy held second place followed by the UK. The development in these countries was, however, very different. Norway experienced the sharpest rise, more than doubling its numbers from 2007 to 2008. Switzerland also saw a substantial increase, while both Sweden and Germany received fewer applications from Eritreans than the year before.

Figure 7. European destinations for asylum seekers from Eritrea 2007-2008



How can we explain this considerable increase in Eritrean arrivals in Norway in 2008?

Norway has been a destination for Eritreans for the last ten years, but only with modest numbers until the last three years. In 2006 only three hundred found their way from Eritrea. The year after, as we can see from figure 7, the number rose to 800, then more than doubling again the year after to reach 1800.

One part of the answer may lie in Italy. Our interviews and data on requests for returns under the Dublin agreement show that Italy is the main point of entry to Europe for Eritreans. With historical links between the two countries, Italy is a traditional destination for Eritreans seeking refuge in Europe. Although the registered number of asylum seekers from this former colony did not rise substantially in Italy from 2007 to 2008, the influx of un-registered people later seeking asylum elsewhere in Europe may have risen. In our interviews we were told of Eritreans trying to avoid being registered when arriving in Italy. The conditions for asylum seekers in Italy were experienced as tough by informants. Italy itself did see a sharp rise in arrivals in 2008 (up from 13000 to 31000). This may have led to worse conditions and a greater urge for asylum seekers to register elsewhere.

Some informants told stories of months being spent in Italy while gathering momentum. These were repeated in the case files.

And Norway would then be one of the most attractive destinations in Northern Europe. We will later look at how the Eritreans viewed Norway as a possible country of asylum. Here we can reveal that relatives, friends and acquaintances already in the country played a major role. Another positive factor may have been the approval rate of those that had arrived earlier. In 2008, the Directorate of Immigration reported that 95 percent of the applications from Eritreans finalised that year had resulted in a positive decision.

Another place to look for reasons for the increase in Norway is in its neighbouring countries. We have already mentioned the tightening of Swedish asylum policy. These efforts, although particularly targeting Iraqi arrivals, may have had a wider effect on applicants from some other countries.

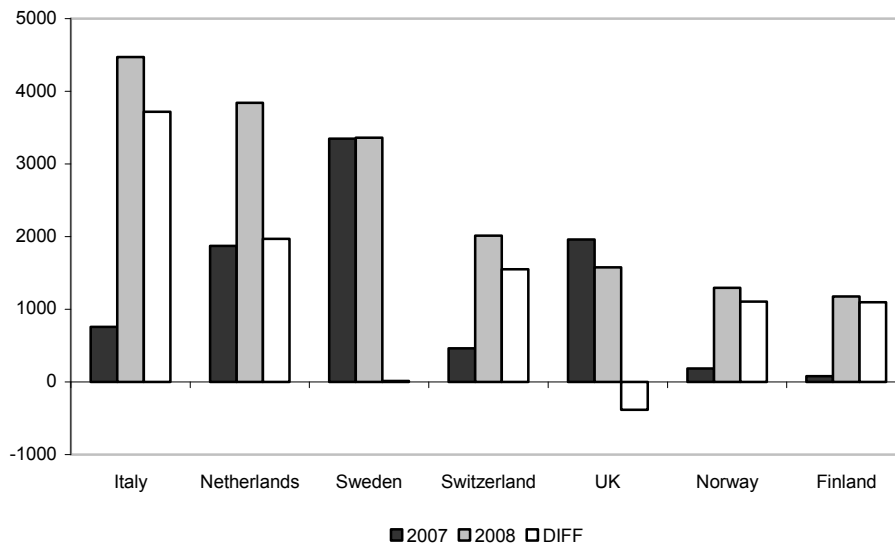
Swiss experts have traced the increase in arrivals from Eritrea back to a court decision from 2005 that opened the door for Eritreans who had experienced problems related to their compulsory military service. It took some time before this information became known to Eritreans (Interview with civil servant at Federal Office for Migration, Bern, June 2009). During 2008 the number of arrivals increased. Eritreans came through Italy to its neighbour to the north, Switzerland. Some of these people had previously been registered in Italy. In December 2008, Switzerland signed the Dublin Agreement, thus opening up for returns to Italy. After this, the number of Eritrean arrivals dropped significantly.

In the UK, experts interpreted the small increase in Eritrean arrivals as a sign that conditions in Eritrea had deteriorated. The stricter border control was not seen as relevant for this group.

### Asylum seekers from Somalia

A third nationality that showed a sharp rise in Norway in 2008 was Somalis. In this case the increase was perhaps easier to understand. The influx to Europe and the EU-27 almost doubled (+77%). Italy alone saw a rise from 750 registered arrivals in 2007 to 4500 the year after (UNHCR 2009:16). During 2008, reports were emerging from Somalia of a heightened intensity in the long-lasting civil conflict that also included troops from neighbouring Ethiopia.

Figure 8. European destinations for asylum seekers coming from Somalia 2007-2008



As we can see from figure 8, the numbers coming to Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway and Finland rose considerably in 2008. Sweden stayed at the same (relatively high) level, while fewer Somalis applied to the UK than the year before.

Ranked according to their 2007 numbers, Sweden and the UK were number one and two as European recipients of Somali asylum seekers. They both have long traditions of receiving people from this East African country, and thus one would expect them to experience the effects of chain migration. Why did these countries avoid the increase of arrivals from Somalia in 2008?

When asked, the British experts indicated to a strict UK policy towards Somali applicants (Operational guidance note, Somali, Home Office 2009). This included rejecting applicants without individual need for protection and enforcing returns to all parts of the country. This was believed to act as a deterrent to Somali asylum seekers from making their claims in the UK (Interview civil servant, July 2009).

Swedish experts were a bit puzzled that more Somalis did not come in 2008. This may have been a side effect of the measures concerning Iraqis. In the first few months of 2009, however, there was a substantial increase in Somali arrivals to Sweden as well.

## Secondary movement and Dublin returns

Before summing up what these country-specific numbers can tell us, we need to look for signs of secondary movements within Europe. Perhaps the increase in Norway was caused partly by people who were already on the continent? The place to look for signs of these types of movements would be in the number of Dublin cases. We have already mentioned such intra-European movements as a possible factor in the explanation for Eritreans moving from Italy to Norway in 2008. The question is whether some of the increase in Norway could be explained by intra-European secondary migration. In other words, by the onward movement of Afghans, Eritreans, Iraqis and Somalis who would otherwise have stayed at the large points of entry and transit in Europe, Greece and Italy? The number of return requests could be seen as an indicator of such movements. And for each person registered in the two countries mentioned, several others may have stayed unregistered before leaving for other countries in Europe in 2008.

In general, the number of Dublin cases which involved Norway requesting that other members of the agreement accepted the return of applicants more than doubled from 2007 to 2008. This was to be expected given the overall increase in arrivals.

If we look at the requests made by Norway to countries where the asylum seekers were first registered, Greece, Italy and Sweden emerge on top. The requests to Greece increased from less than 200 in 2007 to almost 1000 in 2008. The nationalities in question were the big groups: Afghans, Iraqis, Somalis and Eritreans.

Italian authorities were asked to accept 200 Dublin cases in 2007 and 800 the year after. The biggest group was of Eritrean origin (300), followed by Somalis (200) and Iraqis (50). Interestingly, only ten requests were sent to Italy regarding Afghani applicants. It is clear that Italy is not their European point of entry to Norway.

The sharp increase in Dublin cases suggests that there were an increased number of people leaving Greece and Italy to come to Norway. How long they had stayed in these transit countries before moving north is unclear.

If we compare the Dublin requests from Norway to the number of arrivals from the biggest sending countries, we find that the percentage of such cases increased in all groups except Iraqis (from 25 percent to 19 percent). The largest increases came from Afghans and Eritreans: one in five was Dublin cases in 2007 and one in four the year after (sources: UNHCR 2009, UDI-statistics).



## Tracing the effect of networks

We have briefly mentioned a recent Dutch study that found networks to be the main explanation for asylum arrivals (Jennisen et. al. 2009). The researchers state that asylum seekers of certain nationalities go to certain receiving countries. Over time, this makes it more plausible that new arrivals of the same origin will follow the same track. What they found was that at times when more applicants from these sending countries enter Europe, the numbers in their «favoured» receiving country also increase.

Conducting a thorough time series analysis of whether this thesis also fits the Norwegian case would be beyond the scope of the present study. However, a brief look at the numbers for 2007 and 2008 shows that two of the groups that increased strongly in Norway also did so in Europe. We mentioned previously in this chapter the near doubling of arrivals to Europe our continent from Afghanistan and Somalia. Both these countries have a well-established diasporas in Norway (24000 of Somali and 9000 of Afghani background as per January 2009, [ssb.no](http://ssb.no)). Higher numbers of arrivals to Europe were also noted from Eritrea, a country which also has a history of seeking refuge in Norway (there are 4000 people of Eritrean background residing in Norway). The increase in arrivals from this group to Norway in 2008 would also seem to support the network thesis.

However, the group with the largest increase in 2008 came to Norway from Iraq. And during that year, the number of Iraqis coming to Europe (38) was down (10 percent). In other words, other explanations have to be used in this case. If we maintain the changes in Swedish policy as the main cause for the arrivals in Norway for this group, we may say that the *relative asylum policy* factor trumped the *historical network* factor.

So let us look more closely at the role of national asylum policy vis-à-vis the arrival of asylum seekers. The measures in Sweden seemed to be the direct cause of the steep fall in Iraqi arrivals in 2008. In the next chapter, we attempt to trace the effects of policy interventions in Norway at the end of the summer of 2008.

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## The impact of policy

Following the sharp increase in asylum arrivals during the summer months of 2008, the centre-left government felt it had to act. The pressure from the opposition parties and the strain on reception centres necessitated a response. In the first week of September, a list of restrictive measures was presented to the public. This chapter will analyse the process that produced the content of the list and look for possible effects. In June 2009, another list containing eight points was presented, bringing the total of restrictive measures to twenty-one (see appendix).

In Norway, one study has been conducted on the impact of policy on the arrival of asylum seekers (Brekke 2004b). Among other conclusions, it was reported in that study that: a) the same policy measure can have different effects on different groups; b) the communication and perception of policy may be as important as real changes; and c) profound policy shifts in neighbouring countries will impact burden-sharing. A fourth finding in that report was that d) the belief in the effect of policy on arrivals varied between politicians, civil servants at the ministry responsible and those closer to the practical implementation of policies at the Directorate of Immigration (Brekke 2004b:47). The rule appeared to be: the closer to political power, the greater the belief in a strong relationship between policy change and subsequent arrivals.

As mentioned earlier, several studies have been conducted within and outside Europe considering the impact of the policy factor. In the most recent one, Roel Jennissen and his colleagues rate this cause as the second most important when explaining developments in arrivals to the Netherlands (Jenissen et al. 2009:3). The Dutch team stated they could see in their numbers the effect of a shorter application procedure and forced returns during the appeal period. They concluded that, combined with a harsher tone in the political debate on immigrants, these measures contributed to a decrease after 2002 (Jenissen et al. 2009:179).

The authorities in many countries distinguish between general asylum policies and measures that target specific countries of origin. In Britain, for example, each country of origin is laid out in separate policy-position documents that are kept updated. In Norway, interpreting the situation in the home

countries is performed by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre ([www.landinfo.no](http://www.landinfo.no)), established as a neutral institution not directly involved in generating asylum policies.

## Restrictive measures summer 2008

During the first half of 2008, the number of asylum arrivals surged in Norway. The increase became even more pronounced during the first weeks of the summer. In mid-July the newspaper *Aftenposten* announced that numbers had tripled compared to the year before (17.07.2009). The arrival numbers rose to the top of the public agenda. Pressure increased on the centre-left government and the newly appointed minister for labour and social inclusion, Dag Terje Andersen.

Criticism came from the political opposition. They claimed that the Government had lost control in the asylum field (*Dagbladet* 17.07.2008, *Aftenposten* 19.08.2008). While the number of arrivals kept rising, the three-party Government was still trying to piece together a national budget for the forthcoming election year, 2009. An updated prognosis predicted a total of 15000 arrivals in 2008. As there had only been 6000 cases the year before, the cost of reception, case handling and integration measures were bound to be a topic in the budget discussions.

In the media, asylum policy was discussed as a possible sore point ahead of the election that was now little more than a year away. The government appeared to be in a tight corner. By standing tall amidst increasing numbers, the left-wing member of the Government, the Socialist Left Party (SV), would find it easy to face its pro-refugees voters. On the other hand, by not acting, the Government would play into the hands of the conservative opposition parties, and particularly the far-right Progress Party (Frp). They would then be strengthened in their claims that the asylum policy was «out of control».

In addition to the budgetary and political reasons for acting, the reception system and the Directorate of Immigration was put under pressure following the increased number of arrivals. By mid-August, weekly arrivals had broken a new barrier. Between 11 and 17 August, more than 400 people submitted their asylum claims to the Norwegian authorities. Of these, more than forty applications came from each of the top five nationalities: Iraqis, Eritreans, Palestinians, Afghans and Somalis. The pressure on the Government to act, mounted.

Over the summer, the government and the Ministry for Labour and Social Inclusion (MLSI) which was responsible for asylum had been working on a list of measures aimed at altering the trend of increasing arrivals.

At the Ministry and in the Directorate of Immigration the civil servants had followed the rising numbers of asylum arrivals. To coordinate the various

institutions involved in implementing asylum policies, an inter-agency expert group provided monthly projections for future arrivals. At the end of 2007, the number of arrivals in 2008 had been estimated at 5500. This was increased to 7500 at the start of 2008. But the actual arrivals kept rising during the spring. The projection was adjusted to 10500 at the start of May and then again to 15000 in June 2008. A list of measures was prepared by the Ministry during the spring. Some of the points on that list, however, appear to have ended up in the media before they were supposed to be announced. One of the measures that attracted attention was the possible use of an NGO (SOS Barnebyer) as a partner in efforts to stem the arrival of unaccompanied minors. With a new minister in place, further initiatives were left until after the summer. Besides, there was a slim possibility that the situation would change over the summer. But, as we have seen, the surge continued.

At the end of August, the Government's conference on the national budget took place. Here Minister Andersen probably had to spell out the alternatives to his colleagues: either his Ministry had to be given much more money to deal with the arrivals, or restrictive measures would have to be introduced. Without measures, estimates indicated more than 20000 arrivals in 2009. Put bluntly the Minister's message must have been: «Money or measures»!

With the Socialist Left Party's Kristin Halvorsen in charge of the Ministry of Finance, the tight corner was obvious: either she would have to pay up or face a set of measures that did not correspond well with her Party's line in asylum policies.

A list of thirteen restrictive measures was prepared at the Ministry in the late summer of 2008. Time was short and ideas for measures were welcomed by the Ministry from within and from external institutions (e.g. the Directorate of Immigration (UDI), the International Police Immigration Service (PU)). There was no time to fully estimate the consequences of these measures. A long list of measures was preferred to a shorter one, simply because this would increase the chance that some of the policy changes included would have an effect.

At the end of the conference on the Government's budget for 2009 in August/September 2008, the list of measures must have remained pivotal for reaching an agreement. Would the Minister of Finance choose money or measures?

### The press conference launching the measures

On 3 September, a press conference was held by the Prime Minister. Pointing out that several restrictive measures already had been announced in June, he introduced thirteen new points (Press release 129-09, Regjeringen.no).

Four of them concerned changes in the procedures for case processing (measures number 7, 10, 12 and 13, see appendix). For example, a fast track

would be applied for cases when the identity of the asylum seeker had not been clearly established. The existing fast-track procedures for groups that traditionally had low acceptance rates were expanded to include additional groups.

Three of the measures highlighted a renewed focus on the individual assessment of cases (measures no. 1, 2 and 4). The point here seemed to be to avoid giving merely cursory treatment to applicants from certain areas, such as the middle and southern parts of Somalia or certain regions in Iraq considered highly unsafe. It was also pointed out that return to other parts of the country of origin than the individual's home town would be part of future policy. This particular message appeared to be directed towards an ongoing debate on the possibility of returning rural Afghans to Kabul. The potential nationalities targeted by these measures were not spelled out in the press release.

Two points on the Government's list referred to achieving bi-lateral return agreements with countries of origin. A particular focus was placed on reaching a deal with the Iraqi authorities.

The four remaining restrictive measures concerned: temporary protection only for unaccompanied minors (no. 6); aligning Norwegian asylum policies better with those of other countries; increasing the requirements for family reunion permits for certain groups granted residence permits following an asylum application (5) and, making fingerprints obligatory in cases of uncertain identity (11) (press release 129-09, Regjeringen.no).

The Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, highlighted the renewed focus on individually processing each case. Coming from a particular area should no longer automatically qualify one for residency. The second measure he wanted to promote was number three, renewed efforts to align Norwegian asylum policies and their implementation better with those of surrounding countries. However, sending a clear message on this point did not appear to be straightforward. He said:

By introducing these measures, we wish to send a clear signal that the Norwegian practice *is*, and will be largely in line with the practice in other comparable countries. This will be so unless there are particularly good reasons for deviating from such practices. We wish to have a practice that in general is comparable to that of neighbouring countries (Jens Stoltenberg, Press conference 03.09.2008, Regjeringen.no, 6.20).

A third point stressed was the stricter policy on family reunification.

At the end of his presentation, the Prime Minister announced that the government member, the Socialist Left Party, disagreed with some of the measures. In fact they disputed the first eight of the thirteen points on the list. According to the civil servants at the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion,

these were the eight most important measures. From the Socialist Left Party's perspective it may have appeared that the measures would be implemented willy-nilly. Disagreeing openly was then a way to stay in power while saving face vis-à-vis their members and voters.

The Prime Minister argued that instead of agreeing on a compromise across party lines within the Government, the Government wished to make the dissent visible and thus be able to present a list containing stronger measures.

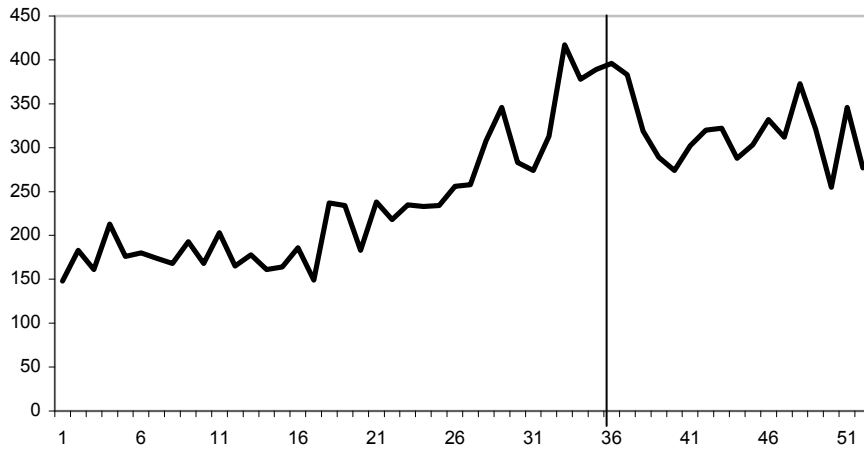
The question was how strong an impact this apparently fragmented list of measures and its announcement would have on the number of asylum arrivals to Norway. In the following weeks, the numbers were followed by politicians, the press and the staff at the Directorate of Immigration. Would the announcement of the thirteen measures have an effect?

## The effect of policy changes on arrival numbers

In the introduction to this report, we mentioned the two views of the relationship between policy changes and arrivals in the field of asylum. Some contend it is a *strong* link, others a *weak* link. The latter position states that national policies matter less than a range of other factors, many of which are international (Brekke 2004b).

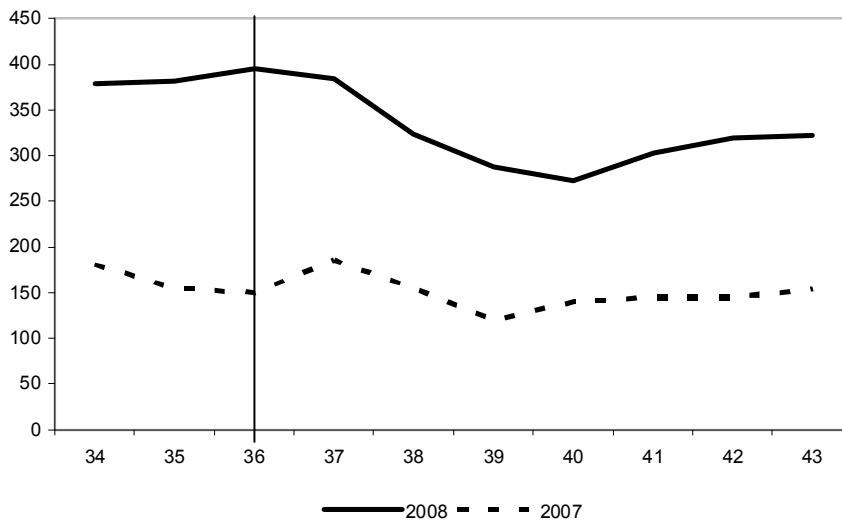
The package of restrictive measures announced in Norway in September 2008 was a clear-cut attempt to reduce the number of arrivals to the country. If we look at the week-by-week numbers in 2008 (figure 9), we can see the increase throughout the summer and early autumn. The press conference was held in week 36 (shown with a vertical line in figure 9.)

Figure 9. Arrival of asylum seekers to Norway, per week, 2008



It is clear that the number of arrivals did drop in the first few weeks after the measures were introduced. Amidst partly conflicting numbers cited in the media (from the Directorate of Immigration and the International Police Immigration Service (PU)), it was discussed whether the drop in numbers was caused by seasonal trends or the tighter policies.

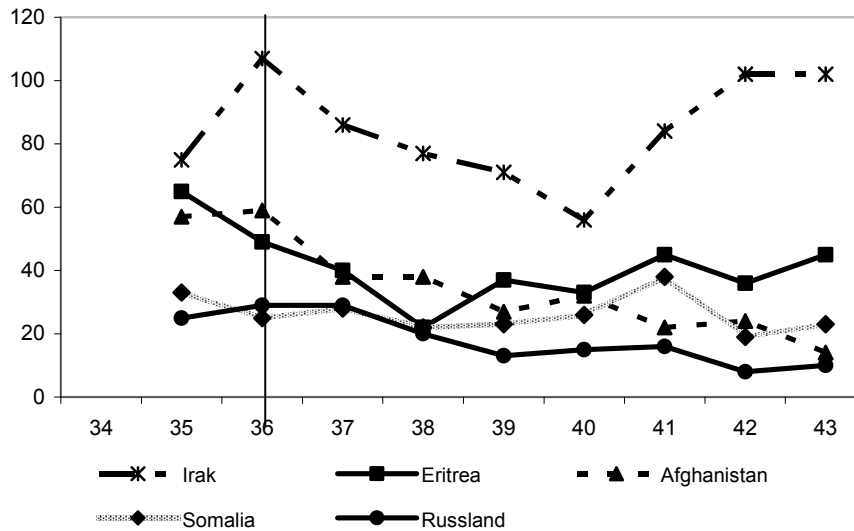
Figure 10. Arrivals early autumn 2007-2008 (week 34-43)



As we can see in figure 10, the seasonal trend for 2008, with the measures in place, appeared to be similar to that of the year before, when no special measures had existed. When this was discussed with the civil servants at the Ministry (MLSI) and at the Directorate for Immigration, some pointed to seasonal changes, others argued that the drop was caused by the announcement of the measures in September. Those in favour of the last interpretation also argued that 2007 was an abnormal year. If compared to 2004-2006, no similar seasonal pattern could be found. In this report we do not wish to argue one way or the other on this issue. Instead we wish to point out the possibility that seasonal changes may have caused the drop in arrivals in September and October 2008. It is worth mentioning that some informants told us that they expected a drop in numbers during the Muslim sacred month of Ramadan. A review of the arrival numbers for the period of 2004-2008 support their thesis. If they are right, the 2008 measures appear to have been well timed given that the Ramadan started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September that year.

As we mentioned earlier, any restrictive measure may have different effects on different nationalities. If we look at the five largest groups during the same weeks in 2008, we find that they showed a similar pattern (figure 11).

Figure 11. Asylum arrivals to Norway, top five nationalities week 34-43 2008





Again indicated by a vertical line, the trends for the different nationalities show an inconsistent pattern. Arrivals from Iraq dropped from the annual high of 107 in week 36 before again reaching the same level five weeks later. Arrivals from Eritrea also dropped from 50 when the measures were introduced and reached a low point two weeks later. But this group also regained its earlier high level. Towards the end of the year, between 40 and 50 Eritreans were arriving each week.

Unlike the other groups, the Afghans showed a decreasing tendency throughout the ten weeks presented in figure 11. Could the thirteen measures possibly be the cause of this fall? As we have seen, some of these were relevant for the Afghans' situation. Interestingly, the level of arrivals from Afghanistan stayed below 30 until week 46 in 2008. From then on, the numbers rose again and the group even took over the number one spot in the ranking for arrivals in 2009.

By the end of the year, the overall picture was more or less the same as before the measures were introduced (see figure 9), with around 300 arrivals per week.

## Did the restrictive measures work?

The numbers presented above did not show a considerable or permanent drop in arrivals in 2008. When asked about the effect almost a year later, the Political Adviser to the Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion stated that the measures had been a success (*Aftenposten* 09.07.2009). This statement came despite a further increase in arrivals in the first half of 2009. She argued that without the measures in September 2008, even more people would have submitted their asylum applications in Norway.

The measures did have an effect. We saw an upwards trend month after month from May to August in 2008. This was broken in September (Hadia Tajik, *Aftenposten* 09.07.2009)

The civil servants at the Ministry revealed that this was the official position of the Ministry regarding the effects. However, in interviews they were quite clear that everyone involved in the process had hoped for a drop in numbers. This did not materialise despite a range of follow-up measures in the months that followed. A high rejection rate may have contributed to a steady decrease in applicants from Russia. A coordinated effort and fast track processing of Iraqi applications contributed to a decrease in arrivals from Iraq.

It is difficult to predict what would have happened if the measures had not been introduced in the autumn of 2008. During the press conference on 3 September, the Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion stated that the purpose of

the restrictive measures had been to stem the increasing trend in arrivals. An argument that would support such a view is that the estimate used in the 2009 budget at that time was the same as the level predicted in 2008 – 15 000 arrivals.

Despite this, it is difficult to support the view that the measures had significant short-term or intermediate effects.

Let us conclude with the diplomatic view that the effect was less than hoped for by politicians and their bureaucrats. If this is correct, what could be the reasons for the absence of clear effects from the measures? Possible explanations could include:

### **1. Content**

- The list of thirteen measures announced in September 2008 lacked an inner structure and produced a fragmented impression. Some of the initiatives were linked, but these links were not highlighted.
- The measures did not have a clear target apart from reducing arrivals in general.
- The authorities appeared to have used a shot-gun strategy. With a bundle of initiatives, some might hit the target.
- Several of the measures would be implemented only weeks or months after they had been announced. Eight months later, some of them were still not operative.

### **2. Communication**

- Given its fragmented content, the list of thirteen measures was difficult to communicate.
- With disagreement on eight of thirteen issues, the message remained unclear. What was the position of the Norwegian Government?
- A desire to send out «clear signals» was mentioned several times at the press conference in September 2008 and in the ensuing weeks. It was believed that the symbolic effect of a set of restrictive policy changes could be as effective as the actual measures themselves. Spelling out the hope for a signal effect of the measures may have decreased the chances of attaining an announcement effect: «We are now sending a strong signal because we believe the signal in itself will have an effect».

### 3. Recipients of the message

- Who were the intended recipients of the message at the press conference? Most probably the Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion were speaking for the political opposition, the general public (voters), and asylum seekers (both present and future). This lack of a precisely defined audience may have added to the lack of clarity in the communication process.
- The stated goal was to reduce the number of asylum applications. Were the content, form and form of communication of the restrictive list adapted to the fact that potential asylum seekers and their helpers were important intended recipients?

Communication in the field of asylum policies is no easy task. In this chapter we have indicated some of the difficulties the Norwegian Government faced in 2008. The attempt to stem criticism and the inflated number of asylum arrivals was only partly successful.

## Destination Norway – the asylum seekers' perspective

The analysis in the previous chapter was based on statistics available from the authorities. We shall now turn to the case files and interviews with asylum seekers. The perspective in this chapter can be said to be from below; voices of asylum seekers from Eritrea, Iraq and Russia (Chechnya) are heard regarding what kind of decision-making process led them to Norway. We will look at the three nationalities separately and then highlight a few shared features. These are:

A. *The journey*: How did they get from their home country to Norway? Was the journey direct or did it include stops in transit countries?

B. *Facilitators*: Who helped the asylum seekers finance and organise their flight? Who provided documents and transportation?

C. *Decision makers*: Who were the decision makers? Who made the decisions to leave the homeland and come to Norway? Was it the asylum seekers themselves or their families, agents or smugglers?

D. *Social network in Norway*: Did they know anyone in Norway before they arrived?

E. *Knowledge and information*: What did they know about Norway before they left their home country? What were the sources of this knowledge? Did information about Norway change during the asylum journey?

## Applicants from Eritrea

The Norwegian authorities generally agree that the political situation in Eritrea has deteriorated over the past five years. Strictly enforced and compulsory military service has created an unpredictable environment for all citizens. They do not know for how long they have to serve, and they can be recalled for duty without notice. Conflicts involving military service were among the top reasons for leaving Eritrea mentioned by the asylum seekers that reached Norway. This was stated in our interviews with experts and confirmed in the 15 case files and 10 interviews with Eritreans. As mentioned earlier, the acceptance rate for Somalis was above 95 percent in 2008. Most of them first crossed the border to Sudan. In Sudan there were an estimated 150 000 refugees from Eritrea in December 2008 (UDI internal document, dated January 2009). The larger camps (Kassala, Wad Sherif) are dominated by earlier arrivals of a predominately Muslim faith (Tigre, Beni Amer and Saho). The more recent arrivals are of Tigrinya and Bilen origin. They are Christians and find it difficult to stay at these camps. They seek company with others who have the same background outside the camps and in the capital, Khartoum. Some of these have later moved on to Europe and Norway. The situation for the refugees in Sudan, and the in-camp dynamics, may explain why more Eritreans have recently sought out more distant destinations (Informant in UDI, 23.01.2009).

The majority of Eritrean asylum seekers were of Tigrinya origin, coming from the Asmara region. Many of them were Pentecostals (Norwegian: pin-sevenner).

In addition to the general uncertainty created by Eritrean military service, most of our informants also mentioned direct assaults leading to their flight. Many of the young Eritrean women reported being raped while serving in the military. In one of the case files, a young woman described how her elder sister had been raped and harassed in the military. Her family had decided that the only way to avoid this happening to her was to send her out of the country.

The religious persecution of Pentecostals was another reason for leaving Eritrea. Several Eritrean asylum seekers reported being harassed and imprisoned because of their Pentecostal beliefs and their association with Pentecostal communities.

Eritrea has been a recipient of Norwegian development aid since 1996, and strong relations already existed then between the two countries (Smith-Simonsen 2006). The role of this established relation in motivating the asylum seekers' choice of destination is unclear, however. Our interviews indicated that it was unusual to have decided on a clear destination when leaving Eritrea.

## The journey

For the majority of the Eritrean group, departure from Eritrea had often been urgent. Although many of the informants had thought and dreamt about migrating for some time, normally an urgent situation sparked the decision to leave. There was little time to plan ahead; the immediate objective was to get out of Eritrea. In this phase of their migration process, the push factors out of Eritrea seemed to be strongest for many of the Eritrean informants. As one of the Eritrean asylum seekers said: «When you're from Eritrea you just think about getting out of Eritrea alive. You don't think about where to go».

Our informants had crossed the border to Sudan and passed through a refugee camp near the town of Kassala, and later they moved to Khartoum. Kassala was described as a place with no future. One informant told us he did not feel safe in Kassala, and that he had to leave. He said the Sudanese and the Eritrean police collaborated and that the Sudanese police sometimes extradited Eritrean refugees to the Eritrean police.

The stay in Sudan could last from a couple of weeks to a year or longer. During this period they oriented themselves, made contacts and sorted out their finances. This often took place by contacting family and friends in other countries who might have the resources to help them through the rest of the journey. Those with sufficient finances and resources then travelled by plane directly from Khartoum to Western Europe or from Tripoli in Libya, for instance to Germany, France or the Netherlands. Approximately half of the asylum seekers from Eritrea, both in the interviews and in the case files, reported having come to Europe by plane.

For the others, the only option was to cross the desert to Libya and then make the equally long and hazardous journey across the Mediterranean, from Libya to Italy, and in a few cases to Greece. Crossing the Mediterranean was described as extremely difficult and dangerous. Other parts of the journey, such as crossing the desert were also referred to as strenuous and risky. One young man explained how he had chosen not to inform his family about leaving Eritrea and his flight across the desert because this journey involved so many risks. He did not want his family worrying about him so it was better they did not know, he said. Another young man, who had taken a route involving Turkey, described how he had tried to cross the sea between Turkey and one of the Greek Islands several times in a rubber boat, but was discovered and sent back to Turkey by Greek patrols. The Greek patrols once holed the boat. Neither he nor the others in the boat could swim, but the Greek patrols did nothing to help them, according to the young man. «They didn't help us at all, we could have drowned,» he said quietly.

The stop in Italy or Greece could last from a couple of days to weeks and months. Both in the interviews and in the case files there are descriptions of the difficult situations for asylum seekers in Italy and Greece. The informants told us stories of being scared, hungry and alone, and of harsh confrontations

with the Italian and Greek police, sometimes resulting in arrests and imprisonment.

The conditions in Greece and Italy for asylum seekers are so bad – that’s why they want to come to Norway and Sweden – where there are rules. There are no rules in Greece and Italy.

(Eritrean man, 20)

For some, Norway did not seem to be the final destination. One man said that «All Eritreans want to go to the UK or the United States. If they get a residence permit, they will move on to the UK or the United States after a while.»

Regarding documents and passports, our impression is that the majority had used false passports. Some mentioned that smugglers had «taken care» of all their identity documents; others explained how their documents had been lost or destroyed during their flight.

### Social network in Norway

An existing social network in Norway was mentioned in half of the interviews and in slightly less than half of the Eritrean case files. Reference was made to both family members and friends in Norway. Some had kept in close touch with their family members or friends in Norway by phone, mail and e-mail while they were still in Eritrea. For many, however, the social network in Norway consisted of a distant uncle or an older brother to whom they had not spoken for years. The presence of family members and friends in Norway was often stated as one of the reasons why Norway became their destination country.

Other social networks in Norway, for example in the form of organisations or religious communities, were not mentioned in the interviews. The existence of Eritrean organisations and religious communities in Norway might also be a pull factor, for instance for the Pentecostals. We did not, however, hear or see any information to confirm this.

### Facilitators: Helpers, agents and smugglers

The Eritrean informants’ stories involved a range of different facilitators: family, friends, agents, and smugglers or ‘businessmen’ as they called them. They described how they were given help by family, relatives and friends to raise the money necessary for the different stages of the flight. Some also described how their friends had helped them reach the Sudanese border, while others had used smugglers. In Sudan, a combination of help from family, friends and more professional agents or smugglers was described. As one Eritrean man

put it: «Some friends in Khartoum put me in touch with a businessman who could help me get to Norway.»

All Eritreans reported having used some kind of smuggler or 'businessman' during parts of their journey. They often used several 'businessmen' who each organised parts of the journey. For some their migration process – from Eritrea to Norway – involved the use of four different 'businessmen'. One would help them cross the Eritrean-Sudanese border and get to Kassala, another organised crossing the desert on their way from Khartoum or Kassala to Libya, a third the crossing of the Mediterranean, and a fourth helped them get from Italy to Norway.

In transit countries help from other migrants, especially fellow countrymen, was important. As one man explained:

In Italy Eritreans help each other move on to other European countries. It is our culture to help each other.

This help consisted of finding a place to stay, food and work, and of passing on information about possible destination countries.

### Who decides?

The majority of the Eritrean asylum seekers interviewed said that they personally had made the decision to flee Eritrea and where to go. However, as already explained, the flight or parts of the flight were often financed with the help of relatives abroad. One Eritrean informant described how he contacted an aunt in Germany when in transit. She gave him the money to buy a plane ticket directly to Germany, but she also helped him with information about Germany, Norway and Sweden. She recommended he try Norway, which he did. This shows how the information flow, the decision-making and the financing can be intertwined.

Our impression is that 'the businessmen' decided on or suggested specific destination countries only to a small extent. When asked whether the 'businessmen' had suggested a specific destination, one man said:

The business men just take the money. Where I decide to go doesn't concern them. They just arranged my journey.

We only met one informant who said that 'the businessman' had suggested Norway.



### Knowledge and information

A few of the informants said they had heard about Norway and had formed an image of the country while still in Eritrea. Their knowledge at this point seemed to be confined to an image of Norway as a democratic and peaceful country. One informant said:

I had heard for many years that Norway is a good country. I talked to friends in Eritrea about Norway. And because of all the good things I heard I chose Norway in my mind. I was always thinking of Norway.

The image this informant had of Norway had functioned as a pull factor, drawing him out of Eritrea towards Norway. In addition, his specific situation in Eritrea functioned as a push factor out of Eritrea.

Their image of Norway seemed to build on descriptions they had been given by family and friends in Norway. But, as one of the informants said, the information they were given about Norway was not always correct: «Eritreans in Norway give incorrect information about Norway to those back in Africa». In addition to the information and knowledge received from Eritreans in Norway, one man also referred to Norwegian development aid activities in Eritrea.

However, many of the Eritrean informants said they had little or no knowledge of Norway and that they first heard about and thought of Norway after they had left Eritrea.

People in Eritrea don't know about Norway. They get information about Norway in Sudan or Italy.  
(Eritrean man, 30)

First I had to go to Sudan. In Sudan I heard about different countries. I heard that life in Italy was difficult.  
(Eritrean man, 40)

Some of the informants described obtaining information about Norway in Sudan. It is our impression, however, that what was said in Sudan was often about Europe and not about any particular European country, and that for many of the Eritrean asylum seekers it was only when they reached Greece or Italy that they obtained information about particular European countries. For instance, one of the informants described how he originally had no intention of seeking asylum in Norway. When he left Kassala his goal was «a life in Europe», he said. In Kassala, all the information he got and the talk he heard was about 'Europe', not about Norway or other individual countries:

My goal was a life in Europe, but the only way was through Italy. I had no intentions of coming to Norway, but life in Italy was so hard that I had to leave.

I heard people talking about Norway and that Norwegians are just and that you get fair treatment as an asylum seeker, so I came here.

The difficult situation in Italy seemed to be a push factor driving the migrants from Italy to other European countries. But bad experiences in Italy could also make the migrants cautious, as one informant described:

The conditions in Rome are so bad that you want to move on. But we assess the information we get about other countries. We're sceptical now, because we expected the situation in Italy to be better than it was. We expected good things, but got bad things.

The Dublin Asylum Agreement, or at least some of the repercussions of the regulation, seemed to be known to Eritreans in Italy. One man said:

We talked to friends here [in Norway], and they tell us about the life here and about the Dublin Agreement. We know that it is difficult to get an acceptance when you're in the Dublin system, but we try. And if you're lucky...

Some of the informants described how they had tried to avoid being registered as an asylum seeker in Italy because this would lower their chances of having their asylum application assessed in other countries. For instance, one man described how he, after arriving by boat on the shores of the Italian island of Lampedusa, had made a hazardous run through the forest to escape the Italian Immigration police.

The internet was also mentioned as a source of information while in transit. The homepage of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, [www.ecre.org](http://www.ecre.org), was named as one of the internet pages visited by one young man. He said:

I read about Norway on the Internet, There was a website on the Dublin Agreement and fingerprints. I tried to find out what kind of agreement Norway had with other countries. I read about Norway on [ecre.org](http://ecre.org)

Some of the Eritrean informants said they kept in touch with family and friends in Eritrea and in Italy, and that they told them about Norway and their lives at the reception centres. However, when asked whether he would recommend their friends and families come to Norway, one informant said: «No, it's difficult to recommend such a thing. It's a decision they have to make themselves.»

To sum up, some of the Eritrean informants had some knowledge of Norway before they left Eritrea, others had heard about Norway on the way. The decision to come to Norway had in a few cases been taken while in Eritrea. For the majority, however, the decision was taken in Norway, Sudan or Italy.

## Asylum seekers from Iraq

The group which came from Iraq to Norway in 2008 consisted of Kurds (Northern Iraq) and Arabs (Shias and Sunnis) from the middle and southern parts of the country. The two groups stated different reasons for claiming asylum in Norway and also used different routes to get here.

People of Kurdish descent have formed the majority of Iraqis seeking refuge in Norway over the past decade. Their applications have mostly described conflicts stemming from traditional culture (honour killings, local feuds and gender repression) and the Kurdish uprising in the 1990s. Following the US-led invasion in 2002, other claims concerning the need for protection have been added. One informant at the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) stated that this group often had weak cases and that some saw the trip to Norway as a way of working in Europe for a while (interview 22.01.2009). Kurds coming from the disputed areas of Mosul and Kirkuk stated a wide range of reasons for fleeing. Here, the level of conflict had been higher than further north in Iraq. The situation for minorities, conflicts related to the Baath party and religious conflicts were among the issues experienced in this area.

The other main group of Iraqis coming to Norway in 2008 was from the middle (Baghdad) and southern parts of the country. These came from war-torn areas, but had usually spent shorter or longer periods in Jordan (Dalen 2007) or Syria before heading for Europe. Although 2008 showed some improvement in the security situations in Baghdad and surrounding areas, the situation was still unsafe for many residents.

A fear of being arrested, tortured and killed because of their own or family members' political activities and/or religious affiliations was the main reason for leaving Iraq according to the fifteen case files we reviewed concerning Iraqis. This was also expressed in our seven interviews with this group. Several of the asylum seekers had experienced being arrested and often tortured and/or they had family members who had been arrested or killed.

One of the case files described how an Iraqi woman and her family had to flee Iraq because she and her husband had been given death threats due to her husband's political activities. They feared for their lives and felt that they had no other choice than to flee Iraq. The woman said: «We want to live in peace. All my life there has been war. There is no future in Iraq, no education, no work». This quote illustrates how the decision to leave can be based on a combination of a wish to survive and wanting to improve one's life situation.

## The journey

Some of the Iraqi asylum seekers had come more or less directly to Norway, while others had spent time in Syria or Jordan or Turkey before entering Europe. For those originating from the middle or southern part of Iraq, a period in Syria or Jordan was not unusual. People leaving northern Iraq typically reoriented themselves in Turkey before moving on. In addition to the stops they made before entering Europe many also made a stop, seldom voluntarily, in Greece or «the key to the door of Europe» as one informant called it, before moving on to Norway.

The flight from their homes to Syria, Jordan and Turkey, and especially the distance from Turkey to Greece, was described as difficult and dangerous. The informants reported rough meetings with Greek patrols and described life-threatening situations when trying to cross the sea between Turkey and Greece. One man put it thus: «People die every day on their way from Iraq to Greece. It's hard.»

For some, the flight was urgent and there was little time for planning. Another informant from Iraq explained it thus:

We are not like tourists who have the time and opportunity to assess and choose our destination. We had to get out of Iraq. We left because our lives were in danger. We were searching for a safe haven.

Others had more time to plan before making their decision and had discussed and planned their flight and possible destinations with family, friends and neighbours before leaving Iraq.

Some of the Iraqi asylum seekers reported having used their own passports until reaching Turkey where they bought false passports or in Greece which they used for the rest of their journey. Others explained how the smugglers had taken all their identity papers and that they did not know what kind of passport or papers had been used during the journey.

The majority of the Iraqi asylum seekers said that they had decided on Norway as their destination country while still in Iraq, but some said they had decided while in transit in Greece. Some also conveyed that Norway had not been their 'first choice'. They had had their applications rejected in other countries before coming to Norway. Their cases were therefore classified as Dublin cases in Norway.

One of the Iraqi informants said that he had not planned for Norway to be his final destination. He had wanted to use Norway as a transit country on his way to the United States or Australia, where he had family. But the plan had not succeeded. He was now waiting to be sent back to the Netherlands where he had earlier applied for asylum.

### Social network in Norway

Half of the Iraqis we interviewed had family, friends or relatives already in Norway. Likewise, half of the case files included stories of family or friends in Norway. Some stated this link as the main reason for choosing Norway as their country of destination, while others presented it as one of several factors. When asked why some Iraqis choose Norway instead of Sweden, one young Kurdish man said:

The come to Norway first and foremost because they have relatives here. And second, because they think it is easier to get a job, and that they'll earn more money.

Some, however, had relatives in several countries and then the process of deciding on a destination was not that straightforward. The young man who mentioned earlier that he had planned to use Norway as a transit country on his way to the United States or Australia said that in addition to having relatives in both these countries, he also had some in Sweden.

As with the Eritrean group, the social network in Norway could also consist of acquaintances whom the asylum seekers had met during their journey and who had travelled on to Norway before them.

The story of one woman illustrates how the presence of a social network in Norway can be combined with a complex of reasons for choosing Norway. After her husband had been killed in a terrorist attack she was alone with her five children. One of her children had a medical condition which the doctors in Iraq were not able to treat. The woman was advised by the doctors to take her son to a Western European country where the chances of getting the right treatment would be better. The woman knew that she would not be able to make the difficult journey from Iraq to Europe with all her five children, so she decided to leave four behind, taking only her sick child with her. She had an uncle living in Norway, and she had heard from him and other Iraqis living in Norway that it would be easy to get asylum in Norway and that it would also be possible to get her other children to come later through family reunification.

### Facilitators: Helpers, agents and smugglers

As with the Eritrean informants many of the Iraqi informants described how they had help from family, relatives and friends in arranging and financing the flight.

In half of the case files, and in all the interviews but one, smugglers were mentioned explicitly. The majority seemed to have used smugglers throughout the journey. One informant, who had decided on Norway as his destination

country while still in Iraq, said that he had found a smuggler specialising in the journey Iraq-Norway.

Our impression is that those who had spent long periods in transit countries often built up a network of contacts and acquaintances in these places that helped them survive in transit and provided them with information about possible destinations. Such networks could be of critical importance. As one young Iraqi man said:

As an asylum seeker in Greece you're left on the street without any money. Without friends, family or other acquaintances you have no chance – you'll starve.

### Who decides?

In our interviews, some informants said they had made the decision to flee Iraq themselves, while others said that it had been made in cooperation with family members, or that family members had made the decision for them. In the case files family members, especially fathers and fathers-in-law, were mentioned as decision-makers.

According to the Iraqi informants the smugglers seldom decided or suggested a possible destination. As one man explained:

The smugglers job is to take you from one place to another. The smugglers are like the Mafia, they don't care about where you go.

### Knowledge and information

While in Iraq, the knowledge and image of Norway were mainly built on information the asylum seekers had been given by family and friends in Norway. Another source was Iraqis living in Norway that had come to visit them in Iraq. A few informants also mentioned the internet as a source of information. One informant said he had searched for information on Norway on the internet using «Norway» as a keyword.

As with the Eritrean asylum seekers, the Iraqis referred to Norway as «a good country» with democracy, peace and respect for human rights and with a welfare system. One Iraqi informant said that before he had left Iraq, he had discussed with others in his home town which country was «best on human rights». Norway had «come up», he said, and that had made him decide on it as his destination country. Norway's «good image» in Iraq was confirmed by several of the informants. As one man put it: «I knew human rights were strong in Norway. You help people».

For some, the information they possessed about Norway at this point was often abstract and scattered. As one man said:

When I left Iraq the only thing I knew about Norway was that Norway respects human rights and that there is a lot of snow, that the nights some places are sixteen-hours long and that the people speak Norwegian, not English.

Another man said that when he arrived at the asylum reception centre in Norway, he was told that it was easier for Iraqis to have their applications approved in Germany, and the other Iraqis asked him why he had not gone to Germany instead of Oslo. When asked whether he would have tried Germany instead of Norway if had known this before he left Iraq, he answered that it would not have mattered. He wanted to go to a country that respected human rights and he had heard that Norway was the best country on this point.

When asked whether Iraqi asylum seekers in general knew a lot about Norwegian asylum policies, one informant answered:

No, they only know that it's far away, and that they can earn money here. They get this information from relatives living in Norway.

Others, however, mentioned having heard of changes and restrictions in Norwegian asylum policy before they had arrived in Norway. One man said:

I have a sister that has been living in Norway for ten years. She told me that Norway is a good country, and that people are kind. But I was told that it was difficult to get a residence permit in Norway. (...) People in Iraq have heard about the restrictions in the asylum policy for Iraqis in Norway. I recommend they wait and not come to Norway now. But I don't recommend other destinations.

Some also had knowledge of the asylum policies in Sweden and compared them to Norway:

Give more rejections. Then fewer Iraqis will come to Norway. Sweden closed the doors in 2008, and then the Iraqis come to Norway instead.  
(Iraqi man, 40)

Few of the asylum seekers mentioned having been given information about openings and retrenchments in asylum policies from relatives and friends staying in asylum reception centres in Norway or in other countries. At the same time, several of the informants said that they gave or would give this kind of information to friends and relatives in Iraq or in transit countries.

As with the Eritrean group, the key role of transit countries for the dissemination of information about possible destination countries was emphasised. One man said he was sure that the smugglers in Athens had made agreements with the Greek police. Otherwise it would not have been possible to maintain their business the way they did, he said. The internet was also

mentioned as a source of information. The homepage of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, [www.ecre.org](http://www.ecre.org), was mentioned again as one of the internet pages visited.

One man said he had chosen Norway as a destination country while in Greece:

I heard that Norway doesn't return asylum seekers to Greece because Norway is aware of the situation for asylum seekers there.

This informant was referring to the moratorium on the return of persons classified as Dublin cases from Norway to Greece. This was effective from spring 2008 to spring 2009.

The Iraqi informants revealed a greater knowledge of changes in Norwegian asylum policy than other two groups. Why this is so is difficult to say. It may be a coincidence, or it may be that that this type of information is more spread more easily for some reason among Iraqis.

## Russian (Chechen) asylum seekers

Asylum seekers from Russia and Chechnya have been coming to Norway since the 1990s. Although some applications are submitted by other Russian citizens, arrivals have been dominated by people affected by the conflicts in the Caucasus and the war in Chechnya in particular. In this chapter we will therefore refer to the asylum seekers from Russia as Chechens.

After two rounds of violent civil war, the conditions in Chechnya are reported to have stabilised. President Kadyrov has established a regime based on Islam, and the rebuilding of the capital Grozny is said to be rapid. Despite less activity by guerrillas, there are reports of intolerance and a lack of respect for human rights. Critics of the regime are followed closely and risk repercussions, according to NGOs (NHC).

According to Norwegian informants, the financial resources of individuals or households limit people's opportunities to leave Chechnya. The poorest remain, the middle layer leave for Russia, while those possessing some funds can buy a package that takes them to Western Europe.

A change in the Norwegian rules for handling cases from this region was made in 2007. This meant that applicants from Chechnya could be returned to other parts of Russia. It was stated that they could find protection from prosecution there, i.e. that internal flight was a viable alternative. This also meant that the number and proportion of positive decisions for Chechen asylum seekers dropped considerably.

In the fifteen case files and the three interviews, the Chechen asylum seekers reported a list of reasons for leaving their home country. This included



being arrested and tortured by militia groups and/or a fear of being arrested and/or killed by such groups; primarily because of their own or family members' (most often men's) activities in the war or other political activities as the reasons why they left their home country. Some also stated that they left because there was no future for them in Russia. Some of the women explained that members of their closest family - husbands, sons or fathers – had been killed or had been forced to flee the country, and that they were on their own. One woman described her situation in Russia as «hopeless» – she was afraid of both «the Chechens» and «the Russians», and she was sick and alone. «Nobody takes care of me. All my sons are in Norway» she said, according to her case file.

### The journey

Most of the asylum seekers from Chechnya had travelled more or less directly to Norway with few stops on the way. The majority had spent less than a week travelling from their home town to Norway. The typical route involved stops in Grozny, Moscow and Poland before reaching Norway. In the case files there were some Dublin cases. Some of these persons had been stopped and had their fingerprints taken in Poland. They risked being returned to have their cases considered in Poland.

Vans, minibuses, cars and trailers were usual means of transportation. The informants described the journey as strenuous and filled with uncertainties. One woman said:

I didn't know which countries we passed through. Whenever we stopped, the man [the smuggler] said we had to keep quiet. I had a sick child with me. It was very difficult.

In one of the case files, a man had obtained a tourist visa and came to Norway as part of a tour organised by a travel agency. This was an exception: the majority had come with domestic passports, with false documents or without any passports.

### Social network in Norway

The Chechen asylum seekers we interviewed said they had family in Norway. In more than half of the case files such links were mentioned. The presence of families and relatives in Norway was stated as part of the reason for choosing Norway. In some of the interviews and case files, relatives in other European countries were mentioned, but the majority reported having relatives only in Norway.

### Facilitators: Helpers, agents and smugglers

As with the Eritreans and Iraqis, help and assistance in the migration process were important. Family members and friends, both in Chechnya and Norway, helped with the financing and planning. Concerning those who already had a social network in Norway, this network tended to take part in the decision-making, and in the organising and financing of the journey.

The story of an elderly Chechen woman illustrates this. Her adult children, some in Chechnya and some already in Norway, had «arranged everything», she said. She knew little about her journey; she did not know which countries they had passed through on their way, nor did she know how much they had paid the smuggler bringing them to Norway.

In addition to help from family members and friends, using professional smugglers appeared to be widespread. Almost all of the asylum seekers leaving Russia had used some kind of smuggler. However, in contrast to the Eritreans, the Chechens seemed to have used one smuggler who helped arrange the entire journey from leaving their home town to arriving in Norway.

### Who decides?

The Russian (Chechen) group coming to Norway was characterised by what could be called high *destination specificity*: most of the asylum seekers had decided on a destination country before leaving Russia. The decision to leave Russia and to come to Norway appeared to be taken together with their extended family. For the youngest members of the group the decision-making (both whether to leave and where to go) seemed to be taken by the parents. One unaccompanied minor, a boy aged 16, reported that his mother had decided that he had to leave for Norway. She had arranged the journey for him - documents, papers and transport, according to his case file.

### Knowledge and information

We have little information about how specific and detailed the knowledge was the Chechen asylum seekers had of Norway before coming here. Our impression is that the knowledge they had came from relatives and friends in Norway.

When asked why they had chosen Norway as their destination country, the informants mentioned characteristics like «democracy», «stable political situation», «stable economy», «peace», «friendly people» as important reasons. One Chechen woman said:

In Chechnya we can only dream of a democracy. We can't understand that there is a country like Norway that puts human beings and their rights first on their list. I know *now*, but I still can't believe it.

She said she had to flee because of the political situation in Chechnya and that she wanted to go to a democratic country with a stable political and economic situation. She elaborated that she had heard from her aunt living in Norway that Norway was «a good country»; based on this she decided to come. This woman also had relatives in France, but chose Norway nevertheless as her destination. She believed Norway had better conditions for bringing up children than France.

Apart from the general impression of Norway as a democratic, stable and peaceful country, their knowledge of Norway often seemed limited. As one woman put it:

We knew we were going to Norway, but we didn't know what Norway looked like. We only knew that it was far north. We imagined Norway would be something like Alaska.

## The three country groups seen together

Before we discuss what sort of decision-making process makes Norway the end of the journey, let us present a comparison and discussion of the findings from the three groups.

	Eritreans	Iraqis	Russians (Chechens)
<b>The journey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The journey had several phases</li> <li>▪ Numerous and often long stops in transit countries</li> <li>▪ Several months, in some cases years, could pass from leaving Eritrea to arrival in Norway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A mix of migration processes:</li> <li>▪ The journey could take a couple of weeks to several months</li> <li>▪ Some more or less directly to Norway,</li> <li>▪ Others had longer stops in transit countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Often a more or less direct journey, with few stops along the way</li> <li>▪ The majority spent less than a week from leaving their home town to their arrival in Norway</li> </ul>
<b>Social network in Norway</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family and friends in Norway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family and friends in Norway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family and friends in Norway</li> </ul>
<b>Facilitators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family and friends in Norway</li> <li>▪ Family and friends in Eritrea and other countries</li> <li>▪ The majority used smugglers – often several</li> <li>▪ Social network built up while in transit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family and friends in Iraq</li> <li>▪ The majority used smugglers. Some used one smuggler, while others used two</li> <li>▪ Social network built up while in transit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family in Chechnya and in Norway</li> <li>▪ The majority used smugglers</li> <li>▪ The same helpers/smuggler arranged the whole journey</li> </ul>
<b>Who decides</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lower destination specificity</li> <li>▪ Alone or with their extended family</li> <li>▪ Smugglers seemed to have little influence on the choice of destination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mixed destination specificity</li> <li>▪ Alone or with their extended family</li> <li>▪ Smugglers seemed to have little influence on the choice of destination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High destination specificity</li> <li>▪ Alone or with their extended families</li> <li>▪ Smugglers seemed to have little influence on the choice of destination</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge and information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ From Eritreans in Norway and in transit countries</li> <li>▪ Transit countries as important places for dissemination of information</li> <li>▪ General impression of Norway as democratic, stable and peaceful</li> <li>▪ Welfare system</li> <li>▪ Some information on asylum policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ From Iraqis in Norway and in transit countries</li> <li>▪ Transit countries as important places for dissemination of information</li> <li>▪ General impression of Norway as democratic, stable and peaceful</li> <li>▪ Welfare system</li> <li>▪ Some information on asylum policies</li> <li>▪ From relatives in Norway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ From relatives in Norway</li> <li>▪ General impression of Norway as democratic, stable and peaceful</li> <li>▪ Welfare system</li> <li>▪ Little specific information about asylum policies</li> </ul>

### The journey

The three groups' journeys from their country of origin to Norway differed in distance and duration. This should not surprise the reader, since this was one of the criteria used when we selected the three nationalities. There were also variations in the urgency of departure. While a typical journey from Chechnya to Norway was more or less direct and took less than a week, the Eritrean group could spend one year or more and made long stops in transit countries. The experiences of the members of the Iraqi group were mixed: some journeys resembled the Chechen group's, others the Eritrean group's.

The journey could involve walking long distances by foot, being driven in cars, vans etc., and travelling by boat or plane. Some asylum seekers, like some of the Eritreans, had used all these means of transport, while others, mainly the Chechens, had used only one or two.

The importance of resources has been noted in earlier studies (Robinson and Segrott 2002). In our material, the amount of logistical and money available influenced the duration and route of travel. For example, the journey from Sudan to Europe by plane was not an option for all of the Eritrean asylum seekers.

The journey was described as difficult and strenuous by all groups. Crossing the desert and the Mediterranean and the Aegean Seas involved life-threatening situations. The conditions in transit countries could also be tough.

### Social network in Norway

Migration research has established that social networks are often an important determinant of migration plans and the choice of destination (Böcker 1994, Faist 1997, Haug 2008). In Robinson and Segrott's (2002) study, the presence of a social network - family, relatives and friends - is described as a strong pull factor. This was confirmed by this study in which a social network in Norway was mentioned in approximately half of the interviews and case files. A majority of asylum seekers seemed to have close family members, such as parents or siblings, in Norway. Others reported having a distant uncle or aunt whom they said they had not been in touch with for years. Some stated the presence of family or friends as the main reason for choosing Norway as their country of destination, while others presented it as one of several factors. In the case of the Chechen asylum seekers, the social network mentioned seemed to be family members, while in the Iraqi and Eritrean groups friends were mentioned in addition to family. Among the Eritreans and the Iraqis, the social network in Norway might also include people they had met in transit countries and who had moved on to Norway.

However, the proportion of asylum seekers that have family, relatives or friends in Norway may be even higher than was disclosed in our material. A

fear of reducing their chance of obtaining permission to stay and/or of placing their families or friends at risk may be a reason for not mentioning friends and relatives in Norway in the asylum interviews or in the interviews with us. In one of the interviews, a friend in a nearby city was initially mentioned, but later denied.

The fact that so many of the asylum seekers from Eritrea, Iraq and Chechnya had family, relative and/or friends in Norway, and that these country groups are relatively large migration groups in Norway, indicates that the migration may be understood as a form of *chain migration*. Had we interviewed persons from countries with fewer asylum seekers or residents in Norway, the social-network aspect would probably not been as key as it is within these three groups, and the migration stories might have been different. Perhaps we were given the answers we asked for. By choosing nationalities with a strong presence in Norway, it should come as no surprise that networks functioned as an important pull factor.

### Facilitators

There were many stories about helpers, smugglers or «business men». Such figures can be placed on a continuum that stretches from non-profit helpers, often family members, relatives and friends on the one hand, to professional and commercial agents, human smugglers and traffickers on the other. They may be friends and family in the home town collecting money for the flight, a friend driving those fleeing to the border or an uncle in the United States sending money or buying a plane ticket. Or they may be a professional agent or smuggler providing transport and documents and assisting those fleeing on parts of or the whole journey.

The asylum seekers from all three countries had used different types of social networks and helpers at different stages of the migration process. Family members and relatives seemed to be important for all three country groups, in particular during the initial phase of the migration process – i.e. in making the initial decision to leave and in financing the journey.

A vast majority of the asylum seekers in our study, as demonstrated both during the interviews and in the case files, had used agents or smugglers on their way to Norway.

It varied whether the same smuggler was used to organise the whole flight or several smugglers were used on different parts of the journey. The typical Chechen asylum seeker used one smuggler who arranged the entire journey, while an Eritrean asylum seeker might use several smugglers. The Iraqi group may be placed in-between the typical Chechen and the typical Eritrean; some used one smuggler for the entire journey, others used different helpers/smugglers on different parts of the journey.

When writing about transit migrants, Michael Collyer differentiates between 'spontaneous social networks' and 'absent social networks' (Collyer 2007). Spontaneous social networks are ones based on individuals encountered on their journey, people that are a source of help and information on how to survive in transit and of possible destinations and travel routes. According to our informants from Eritrea and Iraq, such spontaneous social networks could be of great importance. As Collyer writes, transit migration is a chaotic, disordered process involving tremendous uncertainty and danger at every stage and it is perhaps because of this that social networks are so important (Collyer 2007:675).

### Who decides?

The question of *who* decides is interrelated with the question of *what* decision is being made. For some asylum seekers there are several decisions that have to be made. First, deciding whether to leave or not, and second, where to go and how to get there. Some may have to go through the decision-making process more than once (Robinson and Segrott 2002). Different people may participate in the decision-making at the different stages.

For some the decisions concerning departure and destination were interconnected, for others not.

In all three groups age, and to some degree gender, seemed to be important factors in whether it was the asylum seeker who had made the decision to leave. There was a tendency for male and older family members to have a stronger voice in the decision.

The decision-making was also closely connected to the question of resources, money and help. When paying large sums to professional helpers/smugglers becomes necessary, the migration decision often becomes a family matter. Our informants described how they were given help by family, relatives and friends to raise the money needed. In these cases decision-making, finances and information seemed to be intertwined. People providing money may also be involved in the decision-making, and in many of the cases information about possible destinations seemed to follow the money. When a relative abroad sent money or bought a plane ticket for the migrants, they often also included information about possible destinations.

According to Robinson and Segrott's study (2002:25), agents play a key role in directing migration towards or away from particular countries. This is in line with the findings in a study by Gilbert and Koser where three-quarters of the respondents were found to have used a smuggler at some point during their journey, and half of these came to the UK only because of the decision taken by their smugglers (2006:1215).

These findings do not, however, correspond to what we have seen in our material. Although using smugglers was widespread among our informants,

the smugglers did not seem to have strongly influenced the decision-making process. They seldom decided the destination country. Additionally, none of the asylum seekers, neither those interviewed nor those in the case files, reported having been brought to Norway by smugglers without knowing the destination in advance. It is plausible that having a social network in Norway reduces the chances of ending up in Norway at the hands of smugglers without knowing the destination beforehand.

Smugglers may have played a more important part in the decision-making process than our informants revealed; informants may not have told us this because they were afraid of revealing information about smugglers or because they wanted to seem autonomous and able. However, there was no indication that this was the case. The informants seemed to speak quite freely on the issue of assistance and smugglers and they often mentioned the influence of their families and of the other asylum seekers they met during their journey.

It may also be the case that some persons described by the informants as «contacts», «friends» and «acquaintances», providing them with information about possible destinations etc, gave this information in exchange for money. In that case, these helpers would perhaps better fit under the label of «agents», and not «friends» etc.

### Knowledge of Norway and information dissemination

The amount of knowledge the asylum seekers possessed about Norway before leaving their country of origin varied. At that stage, the knowledge and the image they had seemed to be based largely on information they had been given by their social network in Norway. The sentence: «I heard that Norway is a good country» was heard in many of the interviews. This was often related to a general image of Norway as a democratic country that respects human rights and that offers good opportunities for work and education.

As Pinkerton and Koser (2002) have written, for some migrants transit countries have become places for receiving and assessing information. Because of the different forms the migration processes took for the different country groups, the Chechens with a more direct journey with fewer and shorter stops and the Eritreans and some of the Iraqis with a longer journey both in time and distance, the accumulation of information during transit played a far greater role in the Eritrean and the Iraqi group than in the Chechen group. The information that was acquired during transit could be general and diffuse, but it could also be specific, e.g. concerning possibilities and retrenchments in asylum policies or the Dublin Agreement. It is our impression that information was often spread as rumours with unclear content. One such could be that «Norway is a good country now. You should go there and try.»

We have already seen that a social network is an important pull factor. In addition, networks functioned as channels for information, images and ru-



mours. To obtain information, whether on general features such as democracy and peace or asylum policies, the individuals need to have sources of information. Friends and family that have been living in Norway for a while may often be able to give only outdated or more general information, while friends, relatives and acquaintances current residing in asylum reception centres may be sources of information and rumours about current asylum policies and practices. Having one or several social networks in a particular country increases the chances of getting information about this country, which again might increase the reasons for wanting to go to that country. Koser and Pinkerton (2002) point to the key role social networks play in disseminating information about possible destination countries; in their study they also found that social informants were the most trusted informants. The empirical data in our study give the same impression.

## Deciding on Norway

If we look at the research questions posed in chapter 1 we have now given some preliminary answers to the questions of when the decision is taken and by whom, what type of information influenced the decision and what the sources of this information were. We will now try to provide some answers to the more overarching question of what sort of decision process makes Norway the end destination.

The migration processes of the three groups have different dynamics that impact variously on the decision-making process: as Collyer has written, imposing the same linear logic on all the individual cases would be to omit all the essential details that brought the migrants to a destination country (2007:681). To understand the different processes that lead to Norway as the end of the journey, one must «open up» and «stretch out» the migration process.

Based on the findings from the interviews and the case files we can place the different migration processes on a scale. On the one side we find migration processes characterised by high destination specificity, more or less direct travel from the country of origin to the destination country with few stops and little time spent in transit countries, and with the entire journey/flight organised by a smuggler from start to finish. Here we can place the migration processes of many of the Chechen asylum seekers. On the opposite side of the scale we find processes characterised by lower destination specificity, a long duration and distance. Here we would find most of the Eritreans and some of the Iraqi asylum seekers in our material. Collyer's (2007) notions of «transit migration» and «fragmented journey» are descriptive of the migration process of these two groups. The destination may not be determined when they leave

home and it may change many times during the course of the journey. Some may have to go through the decision-making process more than once (Robinson and Segrott 2002).

In chapter 3 we presented a sequential model of the migration process. The model incorporated the possibility of multiple migration acts and various information sources. Each phase of the migration process may open up a new context for action. The model can therefore be used to illustrate what the interviews and the case files made visible; that the migration process does not necessarily consist of one journey, one decision and one choice. For many of the asylum seekers the migration process is composed of several journeys and several decisions with often several persons involved. Our material supports the sequential model. The final destination may be locked in before the journey starts (as with the Chechens) or the choice may present itself over and over again during a long journey (as with the Eritreans and some of the Iraqis). The result of the route to asylum for the individual comes on the basis of information about the destination country (pull factors), hindrances on the way there, one or several actors communicating on the issue, resources at the outset and underway, along with the strong impact of networks.

As emphasised at the beginning of this chapter, our focus in the interviews and in studying the case files has been on the decision-making process and the choice of Norway, not on the individual reasons for leaving the country of origin. The empirical data presented must be understood in light of this. When one informant says that she has come to Norway because she has relatives here and because of the welfare system, this does not necessarily mean that these aspects were the reasons for leaving her country in the first place. The reasons for leaving and the decision to come to a particular country may not be the same. Whether the decision to leave and the decision to come to a particular country are two separate decisions will differ between country groups and from one individual to the next.

As mentioned in chapter 3, it is a simplification to presume that it is easy to draw a clear line between voluntary and involuntary migration. The decision to leave can be based on the need to survive, a desire to improve one's life, or a combination of the two. Persecution may come on top of challenging living conditions and thus trigger migrations. The concept of «mixed flows» can be used to draw attention to the possibility that the reasons for leaving may be mixed on the individual level, in addition to indicating that motivations may be mixed within a group of people arriving. The point here is that the two motivations for migration may be of varying importance at different stages in the migration process. For example, in the case of the Eritreans: they first stated the reasons for leaving Eritrea, second the reasons for coming to a particular country.

Anthony H. Richmond (1993) has constructed a continuum of movement with pro-active free decision-making on one end of a continuous scale, and

forced migration on the other. Our interviews highlight that placing the individual asylum seekers on this scale will often alter during the migration process. The interviews and case files show how the situation may alter during the time between departure from the home country and arrival in Norway. The journey may bring about changes in the social network, resources, information, priorities, wishes and needs. As the duration of the trip becomes longer, one would also expect the possibility for such changes to occur to increase. For some, the push factors may be strongest in the departure phase, and pull factors become stronger during the journey. One may be forced to flee one's country because of a life-threatening situation, but during the journey through transit countries the situation can be changed to one where the room for decision-making increases and bettering one's living conditions becomes the goal. In addition, a stay in transit countries like Greece and Italy, where the situation for asylum seekers is often extremely difficult, may create new push factors – pushing the asylum seekers out of these countries.

«Norway is a good country . . . *now*».

Several of the informants used the phrase «Norway is a good country» to describe why Norway became their destination country. In addition, the sentence «Norway is a good country... *now*» was also uttered by some of the informants. Understanding what this sentence means brings us to the heart of our question why some asylum seekers come to Norway instead of other alternative countries. The two sentences also point to the distinction between a basic set of reasons to go to Norway («Norway is a good country»), and updated reasons for going there «now» («Norway is a good country *now*»). The basic reasons for going to Norway were often recounted as a general impression of Norway as a peaceful and democratic country that respects human rights and that offers good educational and job opportunities. The presence of a social network, of friends and family members, may also be one of the aspects that make Norway «a good country».

The sentence «Norway is a good country *now*», on the other hand, implies a temporal aspect; there is something in the Norwegian context that makes it «a good country» *now*. This was often related to the changes in asylum policy: «There is an opening *now*». Or sometimes more specifically: «There is a stop in the return of persons with Dublin cases to Greece from Norway *now*.» It may also be related to changes in the asylum policies of other countries. Stricter policy towards Iraqi asylum seekers may lead to Norway being perceived as «a good country now».

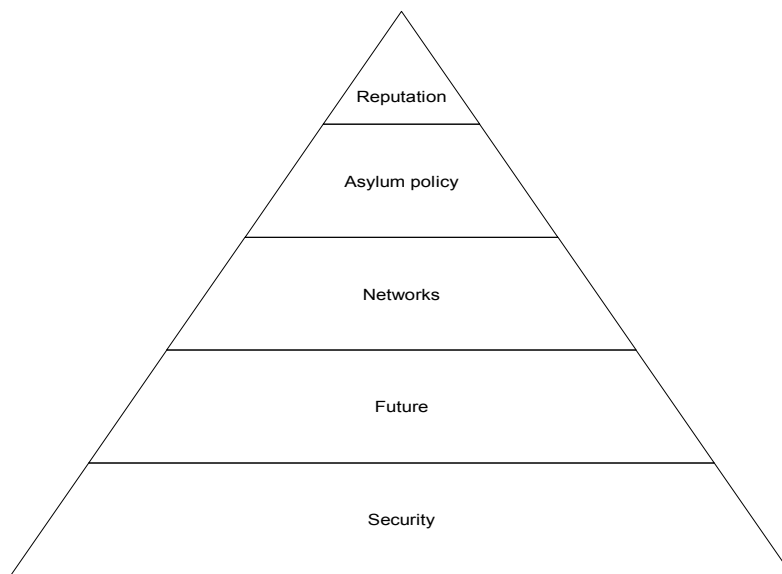
These pieces of information or rumours appear to float around in camps, transit cities and social networks. They may be based more or less on true changes in entry policies, approval rates, economic compensation, reception conditions or other relevant regulations or practice. To fully understand the

dynamics and fluctuations in asylum arrivals, such macro changes and their perception and dissemination among asylum seekers have to be combined. As the interviews and the case files show, there is considerable variation between asylum seekers of different nationalities.

In chapter 1 we presented a figure showing a hierarchy of reasons for choosing a particular country based on Robinson and Segrott's study (2002) (see figure 12). As mentioned earlier, the triangle of reasons provided by the British researchers appears not to fit the Norwegian situation. Language and traditional cultural ties were mentioned as important reasons in the British study. These cannot be expected to be reasons for choosing Norway. Based on the interviews and the case files, we have developed an alternative figure showing a hierarchy of reasons for coming to Norway (see figure 12).

The logic of the model is that if the first level is present in more than one country, the country where the elements in the next level are present is chosen, and so on.

Figure 12. Norwegian pull factors



The first level consists of democracy, freedom and human rights. We may also add respect for the value of human life and the chance of being treated fairly in the asylum procedures and in society at large. We have called this level *Security*. The next level, *Future*, involves being a modern country which offers opportunities to improve one's life situation. This includes the welfare state, education, the jobs market and good conditions for bringing up children. *Security* and *Future* are the basic levels that are present in all Western European countries. On top of these two basic levels we can place the presence of friends and family - Network. Next we find the level of *Asylum Policy*, involving aspects such as acceptance rates for different nationalities, stops in returns to particular countries, etc. If we also include the regulations for family reunification, it would perhaps be more correct to use the term *immigration policy*.

On top we have placed the concept of *reputation*. This is a slight alteration from the pyramid based on the British studies (figure 1), where the term *image* was used. In our triangle, we wish to highlight the pull factors from the asylum seekers' point of view. A country's image is something that politicians and others seek to build and nurture. The phenomenon we try to pinpoint here is less static. Changes in a countries reputation (Norwegian: «omdømme»)

appears to be more dynamic and may easier provoke action. It is important to distinguish the concept of reputation from the related term rumour (Norwegian: «rykte»). Understanding the relationship between image, reputation and even rumours, and their role in migration decision-making, is listed as a suggested topic for further research at the end of this report. Despite distinguishing «reputation» from «image», it is obvious that these terms are overlapping. In our case, both would point out the impact of a diffuse, overall conception of Norway which builds on the aspects in the other levels of the pyramid. Both would also include images the asylum seekers have of things such as the Norwegians and Norwegian culture and nature.

In working with this figure and the hierarchy of reasons, we discussed whether this type of ranking of reasons is helpful in understanding the decision-making, and whether such rankings present a true picture of the asylum seekers' reasons for choosing Norway. There are some problematic aspects related to the hierarchy.

Firstly, diagrams and models imply reducing the complexity of the material. This is also the case here. For the asylum seekers, the different aspects may be intermingled and blurred into one image: «Norway is a good country», composed of all the levels in the figure at once. Trying to separate and differentiate between the different reasons may produce a result that does not correspond to the reality. It may be that the model presupposes hierarchical preferences that do not exist as such among asylum seekers.

Furthermore, our study does not discuss how such a hierarchy of pull factors will vary for different groups of asylum seekers or within groups. In chapter 3 we raised the question of whether destination choices are rational decisions. This brings us to a second point; does this hierarchy of reasons presuppose a type of rational actor found in rational choice models? Further, the hierarchy of reasons does not take into account elements such as resources or chance events during flight. When asked by us why they have chosen Norway as their destination country, the informants are somehow forced to reflect on the question and present some reasons for coming. It might be that the reasons were not that clear-cut to them before arrival.

Viewing the hierarchy of reasons together with the sequential model presented in chapter 3 may make the former seem less rudimentary and reductionist. The sequential model illustrates how each move the migrant makes opens a new context for action. The choice of destination may present itself differently at each step of the process. The sequential model takes into account changes in resources, priorities and space for choice. The hierarchy of pull factors plays a different role at these stages. It may also change as the asylum seekers come closer to the destination.

In relation to the question of rational choices, the sequential model indicates that the level of rationality could alter during the migration process. As

the situation is altered during the migration process, the reasons for choosing a destination and the prioritising of the different reasons may also change.

There are also important differences between the different levels in the triangle that must be mentioned. Only the first level of *Security* is acknowledged as a legitimate reason for applying for asylum; the other levels, *Future* and *Network*, are defined as illegitimate reasons by the immigration authorities. This illustrates the differences between the projects of the authorities and those of the asylum seekers. As discussed, choosing a country where one has a social network and where the acceptance rate is high does not imply that the basic need for security is not present. Furthermore, there is also a distinction in that the first three levels (*Security*, *Future* and *Network*) represent goals the asylum seekers seek; they are part of their future life after the migration process is over. However, level 4 (*Asylum policy*) can be said to be part of the migration process itself. This represents hindrances, or rather, a lack of hindrances in reaching the goals (safety, future, being with family and friends), rather than being goals in themselves.

Taking all these considerations into account, the hierarchy will not necessarily fit the decision and reasoning of all the individual asylum seekers, but it helps us differentiate between various aspects of the «choice of Norway». This hierarchy of reasons for choosing Norway is not an answer in itself to the question why asylum seekers end up in Norway, but may be seen as constituting one of the pieces in the puzzle that this question represents.

#### Main findings presented in this chapter:

- A social network in Norway functioned both as a strong pull factor and as an important source of information for asylum seekers
- The majority of the asylum seekers used some type of facilitator or smuggler. The smugglers did not, however, seem to play an important role in deciding the destination country
- The migration processes in the three groups have different dynamics with different impacts on the decision-making process. A long journey with several stops in transit countries makes for a different kind of decision-making than a shorter more, direct journey. The level of destination specificity will often be higher when leaving the departure country in the latter case than in the first
- The interviews and case files show how the situation can alter during the time between departure from the home country and arrival in Norway. The hierarchy of pull factors may play a different role at the different stages. It may also change as the asylum seekers come closer to the destination

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- A distinction can be made between a basic set of reasons for going to Norway and updated reasons for going there «now». The basic set of reasons is related to security, future life plans and social network. The updated reasons, on the other hand, are related temporal aspects such as changes in the asylum policy





## Discussion and findings

In the first chapter, we asked how changing patterns of asylum movements could be explained. We opened up for a range of possible causes at the individual, national, regional and international levels. These included conditions in the receiving countries, national policies, existing links between sending and receiving countries, information flows, changing conditions in transit countries and many more. The goal was to look for similarities in the explanations suggested by the micro and macro analysis.

In this chapter we will return to the research questions and review the possible answers indicated by our empirical material.

We then comment on the relationship between the different levels of analysis in this report before we list the main findings based on the analysis of asylum patterns, the model of individual asylum movement and the effects of policy changes on arrivals.

### Research questions revisited

The overarching question was: why do asylum seekers come to Norway? We looked at the question from three different angles and with three different sources of data.

#### The decision-making process

The first set of data consisted of qualitative interviews with asylum seekers and a review of a selection of case files. Both sets of data consisted of people from Iraq, Eritrea and Russia (mostly Chechnya). Based on these data and existing literature we developed a sequential model of asylum movement. We also developed a hierarchy of Norwegian pull factors that influenced the actions of asylum seekers.

The research questions on the individual level asked how we are to understand the decision-making process of asylum seekers, including who is involved, when and what the role of information is.

Our model of action (Figure 2) highlights the temporality of asylum movements. Decisions may be taken at one instance or several times during the asylum journey. The destination country may remain the same or change. The journey from country of origin to destination may be fluid or involve several stops.

The first set of research questions in the introductory chapter can be answered in compact form by the elements included in the model. We asked what sort of decision-making process makes Norway the end of the asylum journey. As part of this we asked when the decision is taken and by whom. Furthermore, we wanted to know about access to and sources of information.

From what they told us, the process starts with the individual in the country of origin being surrounded by other potential decision-makers. These actors may or may not be physically in the same country. For example, they may already have left; they may be in transit, in a specific country of destination or be well established in a third country.

Push factors, such as a lack of security, or the presence of violence or deprivation, influence the asylum seeker's decision to leave. These factors may be acute or long-lasting. The decision to leave may have been long planned or triggered by single events, or a combination of the two. At the outset, the asylum movement will vary according to access to resources, the role of agents, the amount and quality of information available and the level of dedication to a specific destination country. A border is crossed. Knowledge of the destination area or target country may serve as pull factors.

While in transit, the same set of elements are again made relevant. The same or new relevant people may influence the actions and destination choices of the individual. Resources may have to be renewed, new information from new sources may occur and new agents may offer new destinations or make the individual scrap old ones. New push factors may force the individual to move on from the transit country. In short, the same frame of action is relevant in transit. New borders are crossed and a destination is reached.

This simplified model of action helps us point out the differences in the decision-making process of the three groups of asylum seekers studied in this report.

At one end of the spectrum we find those coming from Eritrea. These made several stops along the way and a long-lasting journey. In a few cases, Norway had been decided on as the target country from the outset, mostly due to relatives and friends already there. But most of the Eritreans made the decision in transit while in Sudan or in Italy. Norway was chosen as part of a secondary movement. The decision was taken under the advice of relatives, often living abroad. Information came from relatives and friends living abroad. In

addition, information in transit was of great importance. The knowledge of conditions in Norway was limited. Some of the Eritreans had resources enough to fly from Khartoum to Europe, but most of our informants had made the trip over land to Libya and then crossed the Mediterranean.

At the other end of the spectrum we find the applicants coming from Russia/Chechnya. These had only a short journey with no or few stops along the way. Most had come by bus/car through Poland. The duration of their trip was also short. The destination had been predetermined when they left their home town, and the trip was a primary movement. Individual agents were used to obtain papers and make travel arrangements but did not participate in deciding on the destination. The decision-makers were families, often influenced by networks already in Norway. Information came from relatives in Norway.

The Iraqi group represents both types of asylum movements. Some of them headed more or less directly to Norway from Iraq, while others spent months and years in transit outside the EU (Jordan, Syria and Turkey) or inside the Union (Greece). Agents were necessary to make the trip. One or two were used to make travel arrangements and obtain papers. The decision was taken by the individual and extended family. Information came through applicants already in Norway or in transit. Some had limited knowledge of the asylum policies in Norway and other European countries. Some had considered alternative countries of destination, such as Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands. Networks and reputation at the time contributed to Norway becoming the preferred alternative.

#### A hierarchy of reasons to come

Why did the asylum seekers that came in 2008 end up in Norway and not some other country? One part of the answer based on the interviews and case-file review was summed up in a ranking of the country-specific pull factors. We presented this in a hierarchical pyramid (figure 1). *Security* (human rights, the absence of violence, democracy, stability) and the possibility for a *future* (access to the labour market, social security) were basic traits that Norway shared with other Northern European countries. At this level one could also perhaps place integration programs that help newly arrived asylum seekers into the labour market or education. A few informants were aware of these efforts. The presence of a *network* was the distinguishing factor for our three groups. Perhaps not surprisingly, given that the selected groups all had a history of arrivals to Norway. Given that the applicants had connections in several countries, national *asylum policy* played a role. Under this heading, the applicants mentioned approval rates and fair processing as key elements. Here the relative standing of a national control regime is of importance. Family reunification regulations were also mentioned by some of our informants. These would seem to fit under the asylum policy heading.

The top of our pyramid of pull factors was labelled *reputation*. This indicated the totality of the other factors in the pyramid. Norway was considered a *good country* by those who came. Snippets of information about the country were combined to help form the concept of «Norway» involving positive connotations for those making decisions at various points of the journey.

The pyramid can help us distinguish between the reasons asylum seekers have for coming to Norway, and those they have for coming at a particular moment; between «Why Norway?» and «Why Norway *now*?» The security that Norway can provide will be fairly stable, as will the possibilities for a safer future, despite changes in labour-market conditions, fluctuations in the economy etc. The presence of networks will develop and vary as a pull factor. A question arises as to the genesis, function and dynamics of networks in the destination countries. These factors may help explain for example the increased number of arrivals to Norway in 2008 and the first half of 2009, as may the asylum policies. It seems clear that the tightening of Swedish policy concerning Iraqis made the Norwegian alternative appear relatively more attractive, at least in the short run. We seem to be left with networks and asylum policy, together with the remaining pull factor, the overall image or *reputation*, as the most important explanations why some informants at the moment of decision perceive that: «Norway is a good country now».

Was the hierarchy of reasons identical for the three nationalities? Based on the information presented in this report, it would seem that Iraqis were slightly more aware of details in the asylum policies, Eritreans more greatly emphasised the presence of networks, while the Chechens more greatly emphasised the possibility of creating a new life, a future.

### Patterns of asylum migration

The qualitative answers from the informants and the case files were both supported and modified by the statistical material. The statistics can give us some further indications of the causes behind the increase in arrivals to Norway in 2008.

The increase was not caused solely by more applicants entering Europe. Although there were higher numbers than before of Somalis, Eritreans, Russians and asylum seekers from Afghanistan in 2008 in Europe, the influx to Norway was much higher. In addition, fewer Iraqis came to Norway while the numbers dropped in Europe for this group.

The analysis of alternative destination countries for Iraqis, Somalis and Eritreans showed that neighbouring countries' policies may have some effect. Again the case of Iraqis in Sweden, where the sharp decrease came as numbers rose in Norway, may apply. It can be argued that the stable number of Somalis and Eritreans coming to Sweden in 2008 also affected Norway. Given that more applicants were coming from these countries to Europe, the

net effect of a stricter regime in Sweden may have made applicants seek other destinations. According to Swedish experts, the restrictive measures taken may have made the prospect of being granted permanent residency appear less likely. Interestingly, the stable numbers of Somali arrivals in 2008 was followed by a sharp increase in 2009. The Swedish experts in the Swedish Directorate of Migration contended this was caused by many Somalis already in the application process being granted asylum (Interview Swedish Migration Board, August 2009).

The *relative policy effect* may also have influenced the arrivals of Somalis in 2008. The UK experienced a drop in arrivals from war-torn Somalia in 2008. And this occurred while Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway and Finland all had a 100 percent increase or higher. Again, Sweden was an exception. The British experts maintained that their active return policy to Somalia was a key deterrent (Interview UK Border Agency, June 2009).

When asylum arrivals are discussed at academic seminars, the analogy of a «waterbed» is sometimes used. When one country in a region, like Europe, pushes its numbers down, they go up elsewhere. One possible critique of this analogy would be that the region itself may be more or less attractive depending on harmonisation of regulations.

Statistics on Dublin requests from Norway to Greece and Italy indicated that an increasing number of people decided to go North after having entered Southern Europe. Along with those already registered in the two countries, one would expect there to be many more that had avoided having their prints taken. An important question is whether the Iraqis, Eritreans and Somalis had stayed for a prolonged period in transit. If this were the case, one should look for push factors in the two Mediterranean countries. Our qualitative data clearly showed that there are rougher conditions for asylum seekers in Italy and Greece than, for example, in Norway. Changes in regulation and practice may have spurred people to move on, as our interviews indicated. Reports from Greece told of problems gaining access to the asylum procedure, harsh living conditions for applicants and low acceptance rates (Seminar, Norwegian Helsingfors Committee, 25. May 2009).

A recent Dutch study found that networks were the key explanatory factor for fluctuations in asylum arrivals (Jenissen et. al 2009). The asylum seekers tend to follow in the path of others from the same country of origin. At the same time, each receiving country has its own particular profile or asylum arrival history. Jenissen argues that when there is a large influx from one sending country, the destination countries that traditionally receive this group also experience an increase. We have shown (in chapter 5) that the picture is not that simple by referring to the case of Iraqis in Sweden: their presence in Sweden was countered by a stricter policy.

### The impact of policy

As we have seen, there are forces outside a national Government's control that influence the numbers of asylum arrivals, including arrivals to Europe, secondary movements, the policy of other governments and the perception or image potential applicants possess of the particular destination country.

In 2008 the Norwegian Government wished to reduce the number of arrivals. The question we posed in the first chapter was whether there is a strong or weak link between national policies and arrivals. The empirical material in this report cannot provide a conclusive answer. A list of thirteen restrictive measures was presented in the peak season of arrivals in 2008. Announcing the list and its initial introduction did not have the effect wished for by the authorities. Numbers soon returned to the same level.

Earlier findings have suggested that communicating changes in policy was important (Brekke 2004b). Indeed, part of the reason for the lack of effect of the thirteen measures in 2008 may be found in the communication of the new policy. Fragmented content was combined with a lack of clarity concerning the intended recipients of the message. Internal disagreement within the Government also reduced the signalling effect hoped for.

The largest group arriving in the autumn of 2008 was Iraqis. During the last three months of the year, all new applicants were processed at one centralised reception centre in Oslo. The process was speeded up and most cases were rejected. This specific measure seemed to have some effect. Fewer Iraqis came as the new processing scheme gained speed. The fall arrivals should however not solely be attributed to this measure, according to the civil servants we interviewed. Other factors, like the general drop in arrivals from Iraq to Europe during the same period, must also be taken into account.

We think that in order to estimate the effects of a national policy or policy change, we have to see it as one force of several others that affect (change in) the number of arrivals. Several factors may increase or decrease numbers. At times, and for certain groups, policy will have a strong effect. At others, the effect will be countered by other forces. Brekke's 2004 study showed that if the changes made in a country's immigration regime are massive, this will have significant effects. This is with reference to the changes in Danish asylum and integration policies in 2002.

In this study, the combination of micro and macro data has been fruitful, as illustrated by two examples. First, the role of networks. The importance of this factor both as facilitator and as pull element was confirmed by both sets of data. Second, information on travelling routes. Qualitative information about the transit situation for Eritreans in Italy made us look at statistics on Dublin requests between Norway and Italy. This supported a thesis of secondary movements from Greece and Italy explaining the increase in arrivals to Norway in 2008.

## Selected findings: Why Norway?

### The statistical material

The statistical material is consistent with the idea that several forces influence the arrival numbers to one particular country. Their relative importance will vary over time and the factors must therefore be regarded as unranked.

- A. Arrivals to Europe (fluctuate between 200 000 and 400 000)
- B. Secondary movements (e.g. from Italy and Greece to Norway)
- C. Relative national asylum policy (e.g. Swedish policy on Iraq)
- D. The destination country's reputation/image among potential applicants

### According to the asylum seekers

In their own words, the asylum seekers interviewed ranked the reasons for coming to Norway as follows:

1. Security (human rights, protection, fair asylum process)
2. Future (access to labour market, education for children, welfare state)
3. Networks
4. Immigration and asylum policy
5. Reputation/image (Norway is a good country ... now)

The first two pull factors (security and future) are present to a similar extent in all north-western European countries. The last three vary across nations and time. They may help explain why Norway was seen not only as «a good country», but also as a «good country now» at the time of decision.

### A model of individual asylum movements

Individual destination decision-making is complex. The material analysed in this study indicates that it has to be seen as an individual who, under the advice and influence of established and spontaneous networks, with varying resources and information, is pushed out of his/her country of origin, goes via transit and ends up in a destination country. Borders are crossed with or without danger and destination countries present themselves and give the individual varying goal specificity. At each stage of the process the information, resources and networks may change or strengthen the individual's direction. In other words, the decision-making process is sequential and reliant on repeated and reversible decisions.



### Increases in 2008 and the effect of restrictive measures

The increases in asylum arrivals in Norway in 2008 was a result of a larger number of asylum seekers coming to Europe from groups with established networks here, relative national policy (Sweden, UK), secondary movements of Iraqi, Eritrean and Somali applicants from Greece and Italy and high approval rates.

National asylum policies can influence arrivals if targeted, well communicated or all-encompassing. The Norwegian measures announced in September 2008 met none of these criteria. Specific measures on Iraqi arrivals later in the autumn were targeted and appear to have contributed to the reduction for that group.

### Information as a tool

This study shows that secondary movements in Europe play a major role. Destination choices are made based on available information in countries of entry, such as Greece and Italy. Providing correct information at key points in transit may be a tool in influencing asylum arrivals.

### Research topics

- The role of networks in asylum movements
- The genesis and dynamics of (forced) chain migration
- Pyramid of pull factors. Are they different for different nationalities?
- What role does information play in asylum movements and how does this role vary across groups?
- Friend, assistant, helper, agent or commercial smuggler?
- The relative impact of changes in national migration policy on arrivals
- Asylum management
- Secondary movements
- Push factors in transit
- The economy of asylum movements
- Is Norway the final stop? Onward movement by asylum seekers who come to Norway

## Some final thoughts

Three groups of asylum seekers were selected by the researchers undertaking this study. One criterion was that these were among the top three nationalities arriving in Norway in 2008. Discovering later that a network was important in their choice of destination did not surprise us that greatly. This was to be expected in a way given our choice of cases. However, the interviews demonstrated the dynamics and variations in the role networks play in the asylum journey and destination selection. In addition, the quantitative data supported the findings concerning the importance of networks. But how do chains of forced migration arise; how are they maintained? Interviews with individual asylum seekers from more marginal nationalities might have produced different results but they would be less relevant to questions of asylum management.



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# Appendix 1

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## Interview guide asylum seekers

Sted:  
Dato:  
Landbakgrunn:

---

### INNLEDNING

- Hva studien handler om
  - Taushetsplikt
  - Behandling av data
  - Kan trekke seg, la være å svare
  - Intervjuet har ingen betydning for din sak
  - Intervjuet kan gi dem en stemme som blir hørt inn til norske myndigheter.
  - Kan hjelpe norske myndigheter til å forstå hvorfor de velger Norge
  - ... og hva det vil si å være flyktning
- 

### 1 STATUS

1. Hva har skjedd etter at du kom til Norge?
2. Hvordan er det å være her på mottaket?

### 2. LIVET I NORGE

3. Kjente du noen her i landet før du kom? Hvem?
4. Har du eller noen i familien vært i Norge før? Noen som bor her nå?
5. Hva hadde du hørt om hvordan forholdene var i Norge før du kom?
6. Fra hvem hadde du hørt dette?
7. Hva slags rykte har Norge i ditt hjemland?
8. Hørte du noe om Norge underveis på reisen?
9. Har du selv vært i kontakt med de hjemme for å fortelle om Norge?
10. I så fall – Hva har du fortalt?
11. Hvilket land ville du flyktet til hvis du kunne velge helt fritt?



12. Hva er forskjellen på dette landet og Norge?

### 3 BAKGRUNN

13. Hva gjorde du før ting ble vanskelig i hjemlandet? Har du tatt utdanning eller jobbet?
14. Hvor i landet bodde du?
15. Hvis du skulle forklare situasjonen i hjemlandet ditt til en nordmann, hva ville du si?
16. Etnisk tilhørighet? (har du feks en kurdisk etc bakgrunn)
17. Jeg vet at situasjonen kan være vanskelig for noen religiøse grupper i ditt hjemland. Er du en del av denne?

### 4. GRUNN TIL Å FLYKTE

18. Kunne du fortelle kort hva som gjorde at du måtte forlate hjemlandet?
19. Hadde du lenge ønsket å forlate landet? Hva gjorde at du dro akkurat nå?

### 5 FLUKTEN

20. Nå ønsker jeg at du kan fortelle litt om reisen til Norge.....
21. Først om avreisen: Hadde du planlagt å reise i lengre tid eller måtte du reise på dagen?
22. Hvordan ble avgjørelsen om å reise tatt? Hvem var med på å bestemme?
23. Fikk du pengehjelp fra slekt, venner eller andre for å betale for flukten?
24. Fikk du hjelp til finansiering før du forlot hjemlandet fra andre enn venner eller familie? Av hvem? Enkeltperson eller organisasjon?
25. Tilbød disse hjelperne flere ulike alternative land å reise til?
26. Hva slags råd ga de når det gjaldt reisen dit og valg av målland?
27. Hjalp de deg med ID-papirer eller pass?
28. Hjelp fra folk i Norge?
29. Dro du alene eller sammen med andre?

### 6 VALG AV DESTINASJON

30. Hadde du bestemt hvor du skulle da du dro? Ble land bestemt senere?
31. Valgte du et spesielt land? Hvem valgte destinasjon? Familie, venner, du selv?
32. Vurderte du å søke tilflukt i et naboland? Eller et nærmere land enn Norge?
33. Var flere land aktuelle? Hvilke? Hvorfor?
34. Hva fikk til ikke å velge de andre? Var det vanskelig å komme inn der?
35. Hva var det som gjorde at Norge ble valgt?
36. Hva skiller Norge fra de andre landene du/dere vurderte?
37. Endret du destinasjonsland underveis på flukten? Når? Hvorfor?

38. Hvis du skulle velge tre ting som var viktige for ditt valg av land å søke asyl i, hvilke ville det være?
39. Hvordan kom du deg ut av landet?
40. Hvor dro du etter du forlot landet? Hvordan?

#### 7 TRANSITT

41. Hvordan var det i leiren/byen/landet i transitt? Hadde du vært der før?
42. Kjente du noen der?
43. Hvor lenge ble du der?
44. Hvem fikk du hjelp eller informasjon fra?
45. Var det noen som foreslo en reiserute eller land man kunne reise til for å søke om asyl? Fikk du hjelp av agenter/smuglere/hjelpere i transitt?
46. Hvor dro du så?
47. Hvordan kom du inn i Norge?
48. Var Norge lett å komme til?

#### 8 BILDE AV NORGE

49. Hva visste du om Norge før du forlot hjemlandet (venner, internet, organisasjoner, familie)? Hvor lærte du mer?
50. Hadde du mobiltelefon da du var i hjemlandet?
51. Hvordan trodde du at Norge ville være? Annerledes enn andre europeiske land?
52. Visste du noe om norsk kultur før du kom?
53. Har du hørt om noen kjente nordmenn?
54. Så du på Norge som et land fullt av nordmenn eller med mennesker fra hele verden?
55. Visste du noe om språket, om klima om naturen?
56. Hvis du skal beskrive Norge med tre ord, hvilke ville det være?
57. Hvis du kunne velge, ville du heller vært i et land der man snakker engelsk?

#### 9 POLITISK OG SOSIALE FORHOLD

58. Vet du noe om politikken i Norge?
59. Vet du noe om hvilken støtte man kan få fra den norske staten?
60. Kjente du til om det er lett å få arbeid i Norge?
61. Har du hørt at det er lettere å få jobb her enn i andre land som du vurderte å reise til?
62. Visste du noe om mulighetene for å få en utdanning i Norge?

**10 ASYLPOLITIKK**

- 63.** Hva trodde du kom til å skje etter at du kom til Norge?
- 64.** Hva visste du om norsk asylpolitikk og regler da du kom?
- 65.** Trodde du at det ville være enklere å søke asyl i Norge enn i andre land? Hvorfor?
- 66.** Tror du Norge er strengere eller mindre streng enn andre land når det gjelder å gi opphold til asylsøkere fra ditt land?
- 67.** Visste du at du måtte bo i asylmottak?
- 68.** Visste du at du kom til å få litt lommepenger?
- 69.** Kjente du til dine rettigheter som asylsøkere i Norge?

**11 BÅND TIL HJEMLANDET**

- 70.** Kjenner du til noen bånd mellom ditt hjemland og Norge?
- 71.** Har du sett nordmenn eller norske organisasjoner i ditt hjemland?
- 72.** Tror du at folk fra ditt hjemland er mer velkomne her på grunn av denne kontakten?

**12 NETTVERK I NORGE**

- 73.** Hadde du kontakt med folk som allerede hadde flyktet/dratt til Norge?
- 74.** Du sa du hadde familie/venner/kontakter her allerede. Var den kontakten viktig da du valgte land å reise til?
- 75.** Har du venner og familie i andre land i Europa? Hvorfor dro du ikke dit?

**13 FREMTIDEN**

- 76.** Hvis alt går som du håper, hvor bor du om ti år?
- 77.** Hva slags jobb har du?
- 78.** Tenker du å bli boende i Norge, eller tenker du at du bare vil være her noen år?
- 79.** Er tankene om dette fremtidige livet en av grunnene til at du har kommet akkurat til Norge?

**TAKK – MINNE OM AT TAUSHETSPLIKT, ANONYMISERT**

## Appendix 2

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### Norwegian restrictive measures announced September 2008.

1. Praksis når det gjelder opphold på humanitært grunnlag skal baseres på en individuell behandling av den enkelte sak, og ikke en gruppevurdering i forhold til det enkelte landområdet.
2. Manglende tilknytning til et geografisk område i saker som omhandler internflukt, skal ikke være tilstrekkelig alene for å få opphold på humanitært grunnlag. Det må foreligge andre sterke menneskelige hensyn for at oppholdstillatelse kan gis.
3. Norsk flyktning- og asylpolitikk fastsettes av norske myndigheter. Både i dag og fremover skal norsk praksis i hovedtrekk samsvare med praksis i andre sammenlignbare land.
4. Praksis etter Dublin II-reglene tilpasses praksis i andre land, slik at det ikke gjøres generelle unntak fra hovedprinsippet i Dublin II-reglene med mindre det foreligger særlige grunner. Det vil gjøres en individuell vurdering når det gjelder returner til Hellas og returner av enslige mindreårige asylsøkere.
5. Det innføres et vilkår om at referansepersoner som har opphold på humanitært grunnlag, må ha fire års utdanning eller arbeidserfaring i Norge for at det skal kunne innvilges familiegjenforening eller -etablering. Det samme vil gjelde for personer som har flyktningsstatus, men bare ved familieetablering.
6. Det kan etter en individuell vurdering gis begrensede tillatelser uten rett til fornyelse, for enslige mindreårige søkere over 16 år som i dag får oppholdstillatelse kun fordi norske myndigheter ikke finner omsorgspersoner.
7. Etablering av praksis i strid med UNHCRs anbefalinger om beskyttelse skal som hovedregel prøves i stornemnd med mindre praksis følger av instruks fra AID til UDI.
8. UD har ansvaret for å fremforhandle og inngå en tilbaketakelsesavtale med Irak. Arbeidet forsettes. Forutsetningene for å inngå en slik avtale, herunder de budsjettmessige konsekvenser utredes.

9. Regjeringen vil intensivere arbeidet med å få på plass tilbaketakelsesavtaler med viktige opprinnelsesland, for personer uten lovlig opphold i Norge.
10. Det utredes nærmere et forslag om eget hurtig saksbehandlingsløp i de tilfellene der asylsøkeren ikke bidrar til å avklare sin identitet.
11. Det skal tas fingeravtrykk av alle søkere som ikke kan dokumentere sin identitet, eller som må antas å oppgi falsk identitet.
12. Forslag til forskrift som begrenser nemndmøtebehandlingen i UNE til de vesentlige tvilsspørsmålene i en sak, sendes på høring.
13. Det etableres et hurtigløp som skal gi fullført saksbehandling og vedtaksfetting for enkelte grupper hvor det erfaringsvis er høy andel avslag. Det forutsettes at alle berørte etater som er nødvendige for å få til hurtigløpet, inngår i samarbeidet.

# Institute for Social Research

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## Sammendrag rapport 2009:12

<i>Forfatter/Author</i> Jan-Paul Brække and Monica Five Aarset
<i>Tittel/Title</i> Why Norway? Understanding Asylum Destinations
<i>Sammendrag</i> <p>Hvordan kan man forklare at asylsøkere ender opp i ett land og ikke et annet? Dette spørsmålet har undret forskere, politikere og byråkrater i lang tid. I denne studien bruker vi økningen i asylankomster til Norge i 2008 som utgangspunkt for å forstå mer av mønstre i asylankomster.</p> <p>På bakgrunn av intervjuer med asylsøkere og nøkkelinformanter blant offentlig ansatte beskriver vi ankomstmønstrene til Norge og andre land i Europa. Vi utvikler en handlingsmodell der tid spiller en sentral rolle. Forhold i hjemlandet, transitt og ankomstland settes der i sammenheng med tilgangen til ressurser, informasjon, nettverk og hindringer på veien. Et hovedpoeng er at det vil være stor variasjon i målrettethet. Målet kan også skifte flere ganger underveis på reisen. Ved å sammenligne asylreisen for personer fra Eritrea, Irak og Tsjetsjenia kommer variasjonen i handlingene frem. Materialet viser at hendelser underveis og i transitt kan være avgjørende for hvor en person ender opp med å presentere sin asylsøknad.</p> <p>I rapporten gjør vi et poeng av å skille mellom grunner til å forlate hjemlandet og grunner for å komme til Norge. De vil i mange tilfeller ikke være sammenfallende. Ved å skille mellom primær og sekundær migrasjonshandling, peker vi på handlings- og tidsrommet som kan ligge imellom mellom de to bevegelsene.</p> <p>I jakten på forklaringer på økningen i ankomster til Norge i 2008 dukket en nøkkelsetning opp under intervjuene. Denne lød: «Jeg hørte at Norge er et godt land .... nå». Hva innebærer denne i noen tilfeller handlingsutløsende setningen? Vi skiller mellom grunner til at Norge er et godt land for asylsøkere, og det at det var det i året 2008. Denne forskjellen komprimeres ned til hierarki av trekk faktorer. Sett fra asylsøkernes side var «trygghet/sikkerhet» helt grunnleggende her. Deretter fulgte muligheten for en «fremtid», «nettverk», «asylpolitikk» og til siste det «bildet» de hadde av Norge.</p> <p>Den statistiske analysen pekte også på andre faktorer som påvirket ankomstene til Norge i 2008: Svingninger i ankomster til Europa, og da spesielt av grupper som tradisjonelt kom til Norge. Sekundære bevegelser fra Hellas og Italia av Irakere, Eritreere, Somaliere. Nasjonal asylpolitikk relativt til andre land. Forvaltningen og betydningen av et destinasjonslands omdømme/rykte/image blir nevnt som ett av flere tema for videre forskning.</p> <p>De restriktive tiltakene som ble formidlet på en pressekonferanse i september 2008 blir analysert. Foreliggende kunnskap tyder på at forutsetninger for at nasjonal politikk skal påvirke ankomsttall er at tiltak er målrettet, vel kommunisert eller svært omfattende. Tiltakene fra 2008 fremsto som fragmenterte. Motsetninger i regjeringen bidro til å svekke kommunikasjonen utad. Den uttalte målsettingen var å stabilisere ankomsttallene. Samtidig var det et ønske om at tallene skulle gå ned og belastningen på mottakssystemet reduseres. Dette ønsket ble ikke oppfylt.</p>
<i>Emneord</i> Asyl, asylsøkere, flyktninger, politikk, etikk, valg, nettverk, Eritrea, Russland, Irak
<i>Summary</i> <p>Why do asylum seekers end up in one particular country? This question has long puzzled researchers, politicians and civil servants in the receiving countries. In this report, we use the sharp increase in asylum arrivals in Norway in 2008 as a starting point in our search for explanations.</p> <p>By interviewing newly arrived asylum seekers and civil servants, reviewing case files and using statistics,</p>

several aspects of asylum arrival patterns are described and analysed. A model of action is developed based on earlier models and the empirical material presented in the study. This demonstrates the complexity of the individual's asylum journey. Time is identified as a key factor interacting with individual and structural conditions, information and resources.

A distinction is drawn in the report between reasons to flee and reasons to end up in a particular destination country.

In the search for explanations for the surge in asylum arrivals in Norway in 2008, a key sentence was identified and deconstructed. «We heard that 'Norway is a good country ... now'», was the answer some of our informants gave to what elicited their choice of country.

A hierarchy of pull factors was identified as part of the analysis of the key sentence. According to the asylum seekers, «safety», «future», «networks», «asylum policy» and «reputation» served to attract them to Norway. In the report we look at the content of each of these factors.

The statistical analysis showed that arrivals to Europe, secondary movements, relative national asylum policies and the reputation of Norway all contributed to the increase in 2008.

*Index terms*

Asylum, refugees, asylum seekers, policy, destination, choice, ethics, networks, Iraq, Eritrea, Russia