

RAPPORT

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Jan-Paul Brekke

Missing

Asylum Seekers Who Leave Reception
Centers in Norway

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Institute for Social Research

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Foreword

Asylum seekers, reception conditions, migration control and return are recurring topics in the Norwegian public debate. Asylum seekers who leave reception centers without providing a new address constitute figure frequently in the public discourse on migration. Until now however, little knowledge has been produced about this group in Norway.

Using data provided by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, this report analyzes what distinguish those who are registered as missing from others who apply for asylum in Norway.

May 2012
Jan-Paul Brekke

A new research topic

Asylum seekers who leave reception centers without providing a new address figure frequently in the Norwegian public debate on immigration. They are labeled as missing or unaccounted for (Norwegian «forsvunnet»). Critics have argued that no one knows who these people are, where they are and what they are up to. Some see them as potential threats to society. Others presume they leave the country or do no harm if they stay. Information is scarce and assumptions have dominated the public discourse.

This report is the first to study the groups of asylum seekers who are registered as missing from Norwegian reception centers. It does so by looking at information gathered about the applicants before they leave. These data cannot, however, tell us about the asylum seekers' motivations and what they do after they have left. A few hints about what happens to some of them can be found in mainly qualitative studies of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in Norway (Brekke and Søholt 2005, Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011, Valentimfl. 2011).

The question asked in this report is: What characterizes the asylum seekers who are registered as «missing» from reception centers? What is the difference between this group and those that remain in the centers, those who return, who are forced to leave or are allowed to stay?

There are several reasons why the topic of asylum seekers, who are registered by asylum center employees as unaccounted for, or missing, figures in the national discourse. The lack of knowledge about their whereabouts fuels speculation.

Do they stay in Norway as irregular migrants? In a tightly controlled country like Norway, people living outside or at the margins of society represent a challenge to authorities in charge of health services, schooling and the labor market. In a labor market stressing monitoring, how do they survive (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011)?

The people working within the asylum system, in reception centers, in NGOs or in the Directorate of Immigration believe that a fair share of those who leave reception centers without rendering information about where they are going, in fact end up leaving the country. Perhaps the prospects of a posi-

tive outcome of their asylum application in Norway appear bleak, perhaps they have networks in other receiving countries, or perhaps they return to their home country.

One way of looking at those that go missing from the reception centers is to see them as less integrated in the asylum system and the society outside. According to this view they can be compared to drifters, people who will more easily than others move on to the next thing.

There is clearly a need for information about what they do after they leave the reception centers. That information is hard to come by. If they leave the country, they quickly exit also the public minds and they no longer produce worries for concerned politicians in charge of asylum policies. Former asylum seekers roaming about in the country do not make the politicians look good.

If they stay, the authorities and the public will want to know as much as possible about the group, the maxim being: If we cannot know what they do, we would at least like to know who they are.

On this point, this study may provide a platform on which research questions can be raised. Given a wider time frame and additional methodological instruments, answers may be provided also to the questions about motives and later trajectories of the asylum seekers.

What about the research ethics of the current study? Would it not be ethically problematic to provide the authorities with a map of who the missing asylum seekers are? Could that not have a negative influence on the present and future situation of missing asylum seekers (Brekke and Aarset 2009)?

In the field of applied migration research, it is important to constantly remind the research-community and the authorities funding research of these types of questions. Avoiding the broader discussion about the interests of potentially vulnerable research versus the interests of governments and nation states, I will only point to the stigma already ascribed to missing asylum seekers in Norway. This stigma is constructed in the sphere of a public debate that has not been based on information. Providing information may only improve the quality of this debate and make it more grounded.

One could argue that the perspective of the missing asylum seekers should be included in this kind of study. What do *they* think about the asylum process, living conditions in reception centers and their prospects outside the asylum system? Such critique is relevant. This report presents one restricted perspective on the topic.

One could also argue that missing asylum seekers do not constitute a separate group of people. They are merely a technical category created by the authorities for administrative purposes. This last point also makes sense. From the individuals' perspective, they have little in common. It remains to be seen whether they actually share certain traits, despite being individuals acting according to their own preferences.

Throughout this report I use «missing» as the term describing asylum seekers who leave reception centers without providing a new address. I am not completely happy with the term. Missing seems to implicate that someone is looking for them. Occasionally that may be the case. The police may for example look for rejected asylum seekers when carrying out forced returns. However, for the most part, these individuals are left alone. No one is looking for them. And, they may even have left the country.

An alternative label would be «unaccounted for». This is perhaps more correct, emphasizing the emotionally neutral origin of their registration when leaving the centers. The longer concept is however not very practical, and will only be used occasionally in this report.

It is the obligation of all administrators of reception centers in Norway to register all asylum seekers who leave. This information is then passed on the head office of the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). The label «missing» is one of several that the employees at the centers may use. The others are: «Settled», meaning that the applicant has been approved and is being settled in a municipality; «Police», meaning that the person has been picked up by the police either to as the first step to a forced return or as part of a criminal investigation (In Norwegian «hentet av politiet»); «IOM», meaning the person has left in order to return voluntarily with the assistance of the International Organization of Migration; and «Private», meaning that the person had left with the stated intention of moving to a private address. In addition to these categories, there are several less frequently used labels including «moved to different center». These less frequent instances are sometimes excluded from the analysis, other times they are referred to as «others». The same goes for the few asylum seekers who died in reception centers during the period in question.

A last category of asylum seekers who is used in this report are «remaining in centers». This is a possible outcome for asylum seekers as long as we look at shorter periods of time. If we look at a four-year time span, as we do in this study, some asylum seekers would have been living in centers when we start gathering data and they would still be there when we finish.

A final note on vocabulary: Norwegian Authorities would argue that the subtitle of this report, Asylum seekers who Leave Reception Centers in Norway, is incorrect. According to them, most of those leaving reception centers without providing a new address are no longer asylum seekers, since their cases have been rejected. They should instead be called former asylum seekers or persons who reside illegally in the country as irregular migrants.

I would argue against this understanding and restricted use of the term asylum seeker. Those filing an asylum application in Norway should instead be considered asylum seekers throughout the asylum process. When necessary, the term should be specified to describe the asylum seekers' situations as «newly arrived», rejected, former, returned or other. When does the asylum

process end? The formal answer, it ends when the application is accepted or is given a final negative decision, is not really helpful. The asylum seeker may always appeal to the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) (Norwegian: «omgjøringsbegjæring»).

The material presented in this report confirms this understanding of the concept. Of the more than 9000 asylum seekers who were registered between 2008 and 2011, many left reception centers before their applications had been rejected either by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) or the Immigration Appeals Board (UNE). Others were rejected once, twice or more before finally being allowed to remain in Norway. This would indicate that the use of «asylum seekers», albeit with specifications when needed, would be correct. Such an inclusive definition of the concept would probably also correspond to the usage in the media debate on the issue.

Methodology and data

The Directorate of Immigration has provided the data included in this study. It stems from the main register containing information about immigration in Norway, the Immigration Database (in Norwegian «Utlendingsdatabasen» (UDB)).

From the database, information about 47 175 asylum seekers was gathered. These constitute all applicants that at some point were registered as living in Norwegian reception centers between January 1st 2008 and January 1st 2011.

Many of these persons had lived in reception centers for months and even years before January 2008. Historical data on these individuals are included in the material. The only criterion is that they were registered as living in a center during the three years in question. In order to be able to see what happened to the asylum seekers in our material, we follow our selection of applicants until December 2011. However, no new individuals were added after the 1st of January that year.

This method gives us the opportunity to follow the first registered asylum seekers for a minimum of four years (January 2008 – December 2011). Many of them had histories stretching back to the early 2000s and some even to the 1990s.

Given this selection of people and the dynamic of the asylum process, there was a constant flux of applicants coming and leaving the centers during out period of observation. The number of applicants that were in the centers at any given time during the 2008 to 2011 period, fluctuated between 7500 and 20 000.

A few asylum seekers had arrived at the reception centers as early as 1995 and were still there at the end of our focus period, December 2011.

The Directorate of Immigration in cooperation with the Institute for Social Research made the selection from the larger database. Each line of data was

de-personalized. They were given random numbers identifying the individual cases. No sensitive or personal information was included. No specifics on the reception centers were included.

The data did include information about the applicants' nationality, age, gender, application dates, outcomes, entry and exit dates to reception centers, data on Dublin procedures and more.

The Dublin agreement states that the first country an asylum seeker comes to should process his or her case. When asylum seekers who are registered in a country resurface in another signatory country, the person is to be returned to the first country. There are exemptions, but this is the main rule.

The available information gives us the opportunity to study what characterizes asylum seekers who leave reception centers without notice. The data do not provide us with information about the motivations of the asylum seekers or what they do afterwards. The statistical information about those who do leave can be compared with other groups that remain in the centers, that receive a permit to stay in the country, that return voluntarily or who are picked up by the police.

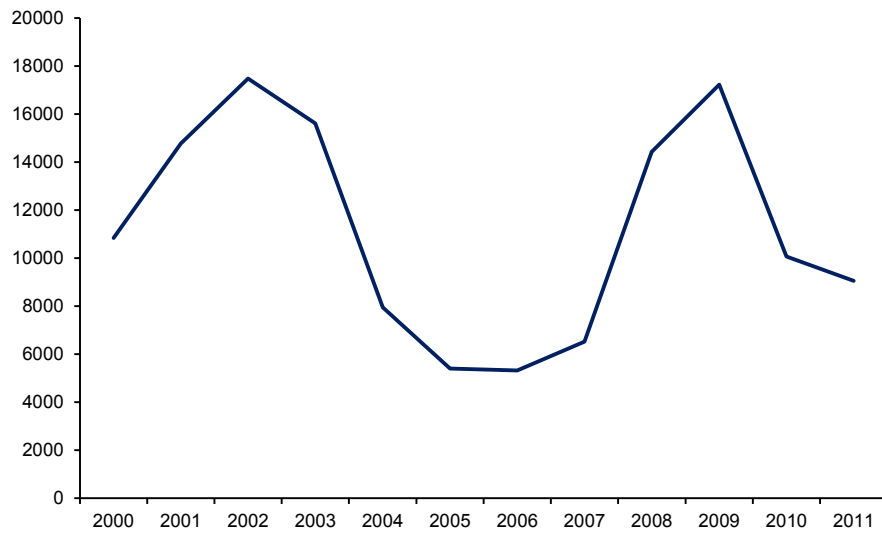
Our data cover a four-year span. The fluctuations and composition of the reception centers population may influence the probability of leaving. To check for any such effect, a sub-sample is drawn consisting of asylum seekers present in reception centers on January 1st 2008. This sample is discussed in chapter 7.

Fluctuations in asylum arrivals to Norway

In order for us to understand the variations in the population of asylum seekers in the reception centers, it is useful to have a sense of the overall arrival pattern.

At the end of the 2000s, Norway experienced a surge in asylum arrivals. From moderate and low levels during the middle of the decade, the number of applicants tripled in 2009, before tapering off in 2010.

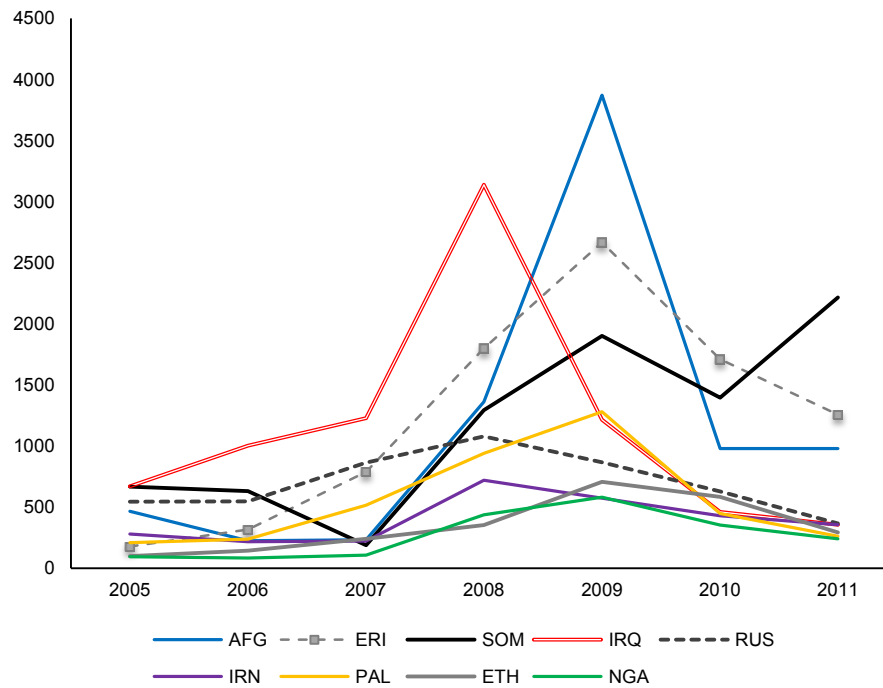
Figure 1. Asylum seekers coming to Norway, 2000 – 2011 (udi.no)



In figure 1, this pattern is displayed. Following the trend back to the start of the decade, a wave-like repetition with highs and lows appears. This pattern is largely unexplored by Norwegian migration researchers, but is currently being studied in a project funded by the Norwegian Research Council (Migration to Norway – Flows and Regulations).

Over the past decade, asylum seekers coming to Norway have tended to come from a limited number of conflict-ridden countries around the world. In figure 2 we find the main nationalities over the past 7 years.

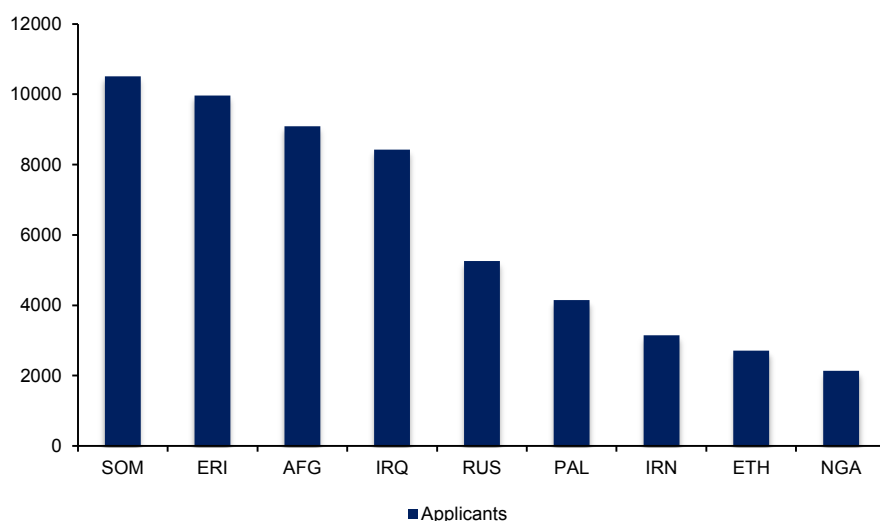
Figure 2. Nationalities of asylum seekers arriving 2005 – 2011. Trend



When we follow the development in these nationalities over time, we see a pattern of individual groups peaking and then residing. So, while Iraqi asylum seekers dominated the arrivals to Norway in 2008, Afghans and Eritreans peaked the year after. In 2011 Somali applicants were the dominant group.

The surge of the Somali group is also reflected in the overall numbers from the 2005-2011 periods.

Figure 3. The major nationalities among asylum seekers coming to Norway 2005 – 2011



In figure 3 the Somali group came out on top, followed by Eritreans, Afghans and Iraqis. The abbreviation «PAL» connotes stateless (mostly) Palestinians. NGA represents Nigeria, a group that will be recurring in this report.

A first glance at the data

The broader trend of asylum arrivals to Norway is reflected in the selection made for this study. Of the 47 175 applicants that were in the centers between January 2008 and January 2011, Eritreans, Afghans, Iraqis, Somalis, Russians (Chechnya), Stateless (Palestine), Iran, Ethiopia and Nigeria all counted more than 1000 people.

Table 1. Nationalities, all asylum seekers registered in Norwegian reception centers January 2008 - January 2011.

Eritrea	6761
Afghanistan	6572
Iraq	6012
Somalia	5231
Russia	3330
Stateless	3041
Iran	2077
Ethiopia	2044
Nigeria	1287
Serbia	955
Kosovo	687
Sri Lanka	669
Sudan	570
Uzbekistan	427
Others	12890
Total	47158

Some of the asylum seekers in the material arrived before January 2008 and were still in reception centers when we stopped gathering data in December 2011. The majority, however, stayed only for parts of the period. Some were in the centers, left, and then returned. The possible implications of duration of stay will be discussed below.

The three years of arrivals that are included in the data can be seen as fairly representative of asylum seekers coming to Norway over the past ten years. Of the top eight nationalities (>2000 applicants), only the Eritreans would not have made the list in 2002. In the 1990s and early 2000s, various groups from the Balkan region dominated the list of arrivals. The effects of the war and conflicts in that region can still be seen in the presence of 955 Serbs in our material.

A long list of factors can be put forward as contributing to asylum seekers leaving reception centers. Variation in the presence of nationalities is just one piece in this puzzle. Others could include conditions in the centers, possibilities in the Norwegian labor market, fluctuations in acceptance rates, same-nationality networks in Norway, and others. Our material does not allow for a close up study of these factors. We will, however, look for a possible effect of acceptance rates in chapter 7.

During the four years that our data material covers many of the asylum seekers finalized their stay in reception centers and their application process. In table 2 below, we see that in addition to those who remained within the reception system, the largest group was composed of those that were locally settled. About one third of the 47 000 total were registered as settled by the end of 2011. The Police had picked up one out of ten from the reception centers. It is worth noting that this does not necessarily mean that these individuals were escorted out of the country. They may also have been picked as part of ongoing criminal investigations.

The police may have returned persons also from the other categories listed here at a later stage. These returns are not listed in table 2, but will be analyzed in the following chapter. We will see that while the police picked up 4 878 persons from the reception centers, they ultimately returned 6 783 (out of the 47 158 total) either to the applicants' home country or to another European country where their cases could be processed according to the Dublin Agreement.

In table 2 we also see that five percent were assumed returned with IOMs voluntary assisted return program (VARP) (Brekke 2010). Here the registration done by the center personel diverted from final numbers registered by the Directorate of Immigration. While 2523 were presumed returned with the IOM by the center leaders that did the registration, the final numbers at the end of the period showed that 3354 persons returned through assisted by the IOM (out of the 47 158).

Table 2. All asylum seekers registered in centers between January 2008 and January 2011, outcomes of stay.

	Asylum seekers	Percentage
Settled	14992	32%
Still in centers (as of 2011, Arrived before January 2011)	10175	21%
Voluntary assisted return, IOM	2523	5%
Picked up by the Police	4878	10%
Other reasons (changed centers, death and others)	520	1%
Private address	4795	10%
Missing	9275	21%
Asylum seekers in centers January 2008 – January 2011	47158	100%

The asylum seekers we focus on in this study – those who moved to private addresses or were unaccounted for (missing) – were both represented with substantial numbers.

Almost 5000 (10%) moved to private addresses during the period, and a bit more than 9000 (21%) were unaccounted for.

These are the two groups we will study in detail throughout this report. The unaccounted for are of particular interest.

Reader's guide

The report is structured according to the analysis of the data material. The different chapters look at different aspects that may help distinguish the asylum seekers who end up being unaccounted for. In chapter 2 we look at the basic characteristics of the applicants such as age, gender and nationality. In chapter 3 we look at the importance of length of stay and periods of absence before finally leaving, as well as changes of location – i.e. number of reception centers the asylum seekers have stayed in.

Chapter 4 focuses on family relations and children. We also look at the situation for unaccompanied minors. How are they represented in the group that disappears from centers? The Dublin regulation is the topic of chapter 5, where we also discuss return rates. In chapter 6 the question of identity, working permits and acceptance rates are discussed.

In chapter 7 we look closer at the subset of data comprising those present in centers in January. That chapter also includes a thorough reduction of the missing group into subgroups of which we have information and a smaller group of which we know little. The chapter also includes a multivariate analysis that compares the effect of a list of variables on the probability of going missing.

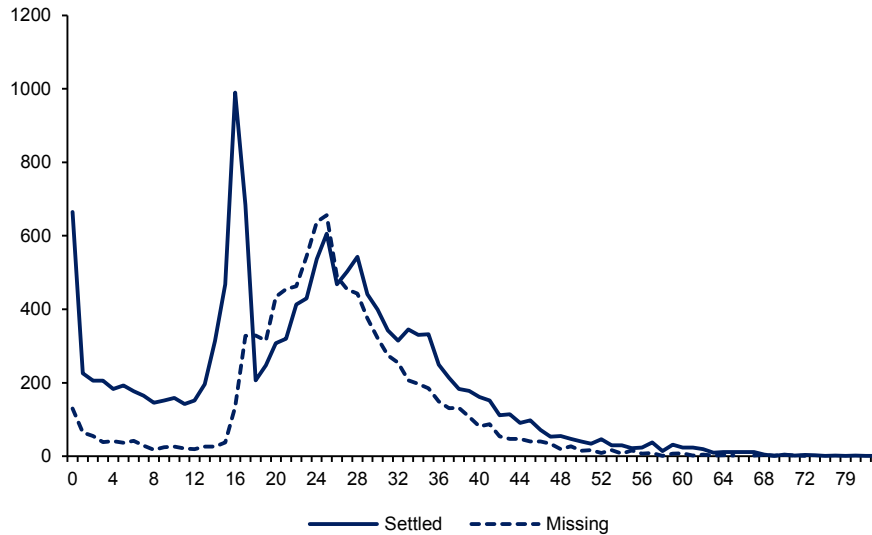
In the final chapter the results and findings are presented.

Unaccounted for

The term unaccounted for or missing («forsvunnet» in Norwegian), is the one used in the asylum reception centers reports. The center leaders are obliged to register all departures. What happens to these asylum seekers once they have left is not registered. This study is a first step to understanding the characteristics of those who leave without giving a reason for doing so. In this chapter we look at their age profile, gender and nationality.

Age

The age of the asylum seekers who arrived between 2008 and 2011 may tell us something about the group in question. Here the age is the one stated at the first time the individual was registered as present between January 2008 and January 2010. The variations in average age were not substantial. Those moving to private addresses and missing were somewhat older (average 26 years old) than those remaining in centers (23). The overall average of the asylum seekers was 24 years. However, the average may conceal greater variation. In figure 4, we see the age profiles of two groups, «missing» and «settled».

Figure 4. Age profiles missing and settled asylum seekers

In figure 4, we see two quite similar lines. Still, the line portraying the age profile for the asylum seekers with positive decisions that had settled locally diverges from the one for those missing in three important aspects. First, the adults in the settled group are slightly older than those missing. Second, there are substantially more children in the group that settled. Third, there is a sharp peak in the settled group, around ages 15-18. This reflects the number of unaccompanied minors that arrived during the late 2000s predominately from Afghanistan and Somalia. We will return to the details on that group below.

In figure 4, both lines start high, i.e. there were many babies registered as being 0 years old. The reason for this is not clear. In the group that had been settled, more than 660 children were registered as infants less than one year. Among those missing there were only 130.

The age profiles of the other groups in the material, those returned by the police, those moving to private addresses and those still in the reception centers are not displayed in figure 4. Those picked up by the police showed a more evenly distributed profile, characterized by fewer children. The same was true for those who moved to private addresses, despite all groups having a surprisingly high number of infants. Those who remained in the reception centers had a similar curve to those who settled, although with somewhat fewer children, and with no peak produced by unaccompanied minors. The surge in minors had ended by the end of 2010, and the group was therefore not represented among those still in reception centers by the end of 2011.

From the above we can conclude that the missing group was somewhat younger than those who settled and that there were fewer children in the group.

Gender

Traditionally, more men than women apply for asylum in Norway. Over the four years covered in this report, seven out of ten applicants were men. In table 3 we see the distribution of gender across the different categories registered when leaving reception centers.

Table. 3 Gender of asylum seekers leaving reception centers

	% Women	% Men
Total applicant population (2008-2010)	29	71
Settled	38	62
Still in centers (end of 2011)	36	64
Picked up by the Police	30	70
Moved to private address	16	84
Missing	14	86

The overall percentage of men among asylum seekers during 2008 to 2011-period was 71. A bit more than seven out of ten applicants were men or boys. When we break this total down on subcategories, an interesting pattern appears. In table 3 we see that the percentage of women was higher among those still in centers and those already settled.

Interpreting this finding may be risky, but one understanding of it would be that there were more men with weaker claims than women. One could also speculate that the authorities are more inclined to accept applications from women, for example because their claims could more often include children. A third interpretation would be that the presence of Dublin cases produces the effect. At first appearance, that would not seem compatible with the 36 percent women still in reception centers. However, if we remember that all the Dublin cases should have been resolved during the period between the last registered arrivals (January 2011) and the last registered outcome (December 2011), it may still be the case.

Also in table 3, we find that the percentage of women drops as we move away from those settled or still in the centers. Asylum seekers who were picked up by the police during the period resembled the overall population (30 percent women). Of those who moved to private addresses, however, only 16

percent were women, and of those missing, even fewer, 14 percent. In other words, the share of women among those that are settled or had cases pending was twice that of the group that went missing.

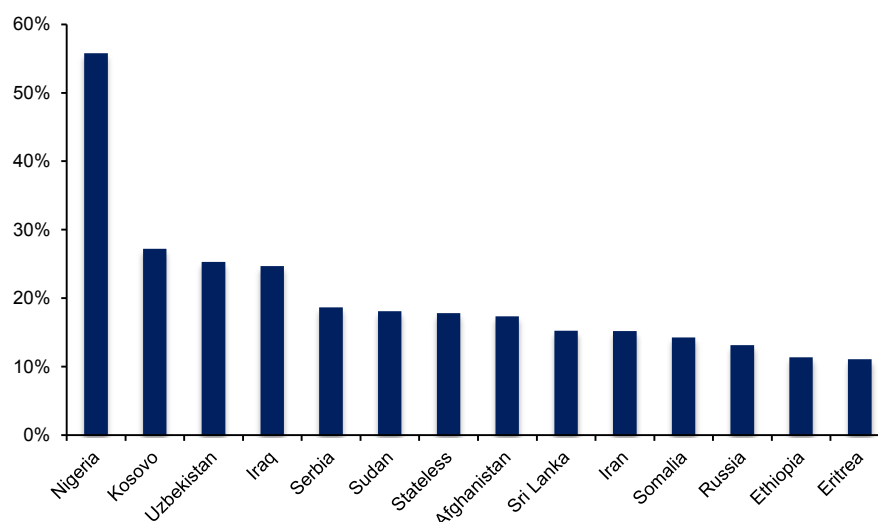
From the above we can conclude that the groups «missing» and «moved to private addresses» were dominated by men, and more so than the rest of the population at reception centers.

Why was this? A series of hypotheses could be put forward to each of the findings in this report. On this particular point, suggestions could include the role of (lack of) network, absence of family or lack of dedication and belief in the asylum process.

Nationality

In chapter 1 we got a first peak at the nationalities that are represented among asylum seekers who come to Norway. The applicants travel from home countries that are marked by conflict, war, oppression and often with a lack of opportunity and poor living conditions. The top five countries of origin in our material have all seen protracted conflicts. During the past decade Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan experienced war or war-like situations. In Eritrea and Russia (Chechnya), long lasting conflicts and strict top down rule have given people reasons to flee. The road to Norway is also different for the various groups of asylum seekers. Some spend months and even years on the road. Others complete their journeys in a few days (Brekke and Aarset 2009). Fleeing their home countries can mean different things to different individuals. Some will have networks ready to help them along the way. Some have friends and family already present in Norway. Others do not. In addition to individual differences, nationality must be expected to influence behavior with regard to going missing or not. If nothing else, one should expect differences in acceptance rates to play a role. If more people with one background end up with negative decisions, one should perhaps not be surprised if more people from that group leave reception centers without further notice.

In figure 5, we have looked at the percentage of applicants from the top seven sending countries that ended up as missing.

Figure 5. Missing according to nationality

From figure 5 we see the nationalities ranked according to the percentage that is registered as unaccounted when they leave reception centers. One group stands out – the Nigerians (56 % - see appendix 1). Of the approximately 1300 Nigerians that were registered in reception centers during the 2008-2010 period more than half ended up unaccounted for. This is double the rate of the next group of countries, citizens of Kosovo (27%), citizens of Uzbekistan (26%) and Iraqis (25%). The average for the group as a whole was 20 percent. So whereas one in two Nigerians and one in four from Kosovo, Uzbekistan and Iraq ended up missing, the rest of the nationalities were represented with one in five or less in this category. Some of the major sending countries, like Eritrea and Ethiopia, had a deviation rate of one in ten.

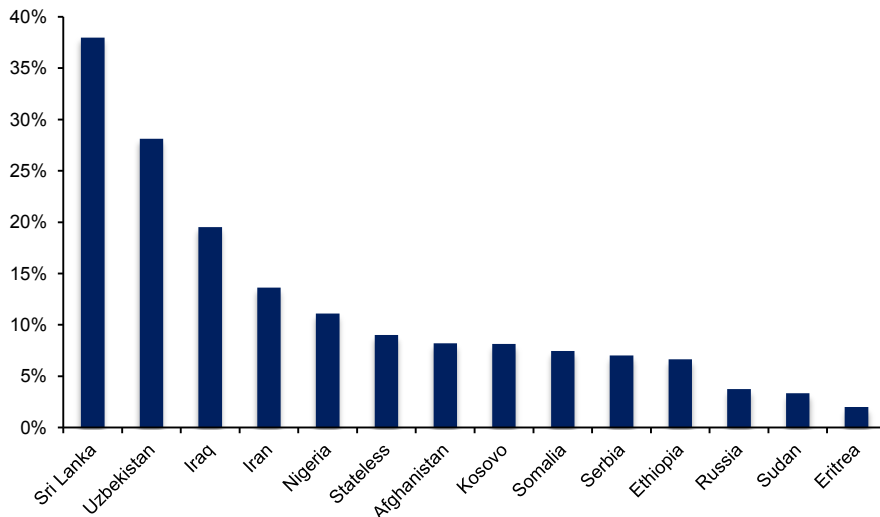
How can we explain the differences between the groups? The Nigerian group is a special case, as the statistics show. Without going into a detailed analysis, the outcome of their stay in reception centers should probably be seen in the context of regular and irregular immigration coming from this African country. Less than 2 percent of the applicants from Nigeria that had been registered in reception centers moved on to local settlement, indicating a low acceptance rate. While a third of the 1300 Nigerians registered was part of a family, only one in seven among those that was unaccounted for had such ties. Another general trend that was also true for the Nigerians was the tendency for women to remain in the reception centers, while the men left. The Nigerian group consisted of 30 percent women. However, a full 60 percent of the 200 people that remained in reception centers at the end of 2011 were women. Among the unaccounted for, 80 percent were men. Among those stating a private address, the number was 68 percent. At the end of 2011, the police had

deported 376 of the 1300, while 78 left as part of IOM's Voluntary Assisted Return Program. Those deported were registered in the Immigration Database as returned with the Police as operative agency.

We will not go into detailed analysis of each nationality, but the issue of national differences will be revisited in the following chapters.

Before moving on, however, a comment needs to be made regarding nationality and the rate of stating «moving to a private address» as the reason for leaving the reception centers. In figure 6 we see the top countries.

Figure 6. Ranking of «moving to a private address» according to nationality



In Figure 6, a new group tops the ranking. More than one in three asylum seekers from Sri Lanka left reception centers stating a private address when leaving. This could indicate a strong network among other countrymen already residing in Norway. However, also the Eritreans would be expected to have a network, given the number of arrivals to Norway in recent years. Despite this only 2 percent of the Eritreans were registered as having moved to a private address in our material.

It is worth noting that in both the previous figures, the percentage of unaccounted for and moving to private addresses are drawn from a base that includes persons still in reception centers. If we remove asylum seekers who were still in centers in December 2011, the percentage of these two categories would increase. For the group of Nigerians, for example, that would give a 66% rate disappearing from reception centers. For the Afghans it would increase the percentage to 25 and to 31 for the Iraqis.

However, would it be right to estimate the percentage disappearing from centers on the base of those that had left, i.e. excluding those remaining in the centers? In our material asylum seekers who were registered in reception centers between January 2001 and January 2008 are included. The category labeled «still in reception centers» included persons who had not left by December 2011. The argument could be made that these persons had characteristics that would make it less probable for them to end up as unaccounted for at a later date; if they were prone to leave the centers, they would have done so already. Either way, one could argue that the real percentage of leavers would end up somewhere between the two estimates.

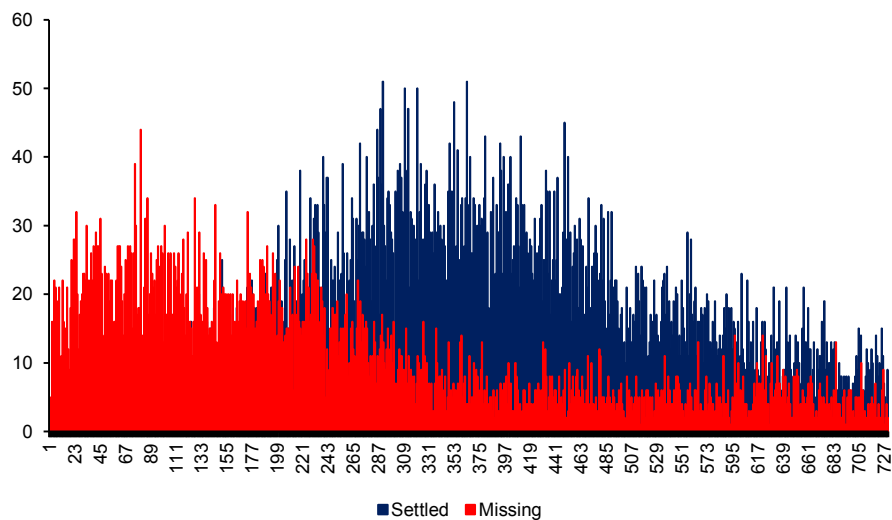
The stay in reception centers

What kinds of trajectory do the asylum seekers have who end up unaccounted for, compared to other residents of the reception centers? In this chapter we look at the length of stay and periods of absence. As in the rest of this study, we are on the outlook for characteristics that distinguish those who disappear.

Length of stay

The length of the stay in reception centers varied among the asylum seekers. Some made only short stops before leaving, while others (28 persons) in our material had spent more than 10 years in the centers and were still there at the end of 2011.

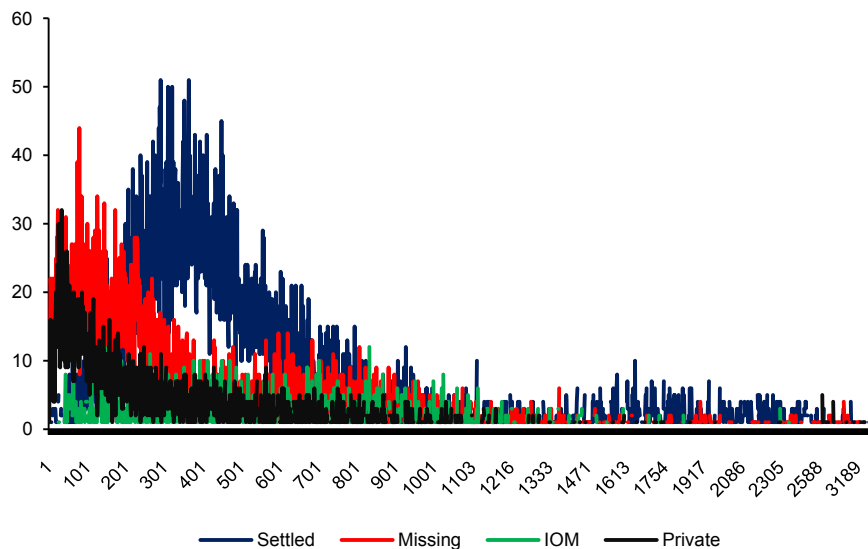
Figure 7. Length of stays settled and missing



As displayed in Figure 7, the group that ended up settling spent longer time in reception centers than the group that went missing. Both groups spread out along the timeline, with long tails towards longer stays (not displayed in figure 7). The tendency was shorter stays in reception centers for those who ended up as unaccounted for. The average waiting time for this group was 405 days, while those settled waited 536 days and the group that stated private addresses averaged 373 days. Reading these figures, however, one needs to bear in mind that these averages are strongly influenced by a minority of cases with long stays. For example, among those settled, 1400 (out of approx. 14 400) applicants spent more than 1000 days in the centers, and 350 persons spent more than 2000 days. Out of those who went missing, 750 (out of 9275) stayed more than 1000 days.

In other words, the tendency was that those who move to private addresses stay the shortest in reception centers, followed by those who end up unaccounted for. The group that stays the longest of the three is those who end up settling after having received a positive decision.

Figure 8. Lengths of stay



In figure 8 we have also included the group that chose voluntary assisted return with the IOM. This group showed a more drawn out tendency, meaning that the timing of their return was not concentrated to one short time interval. From figure 8, we can see the tendency that the IOM group waited somewhat longer before leaving the reception centers than the other categories of asylum

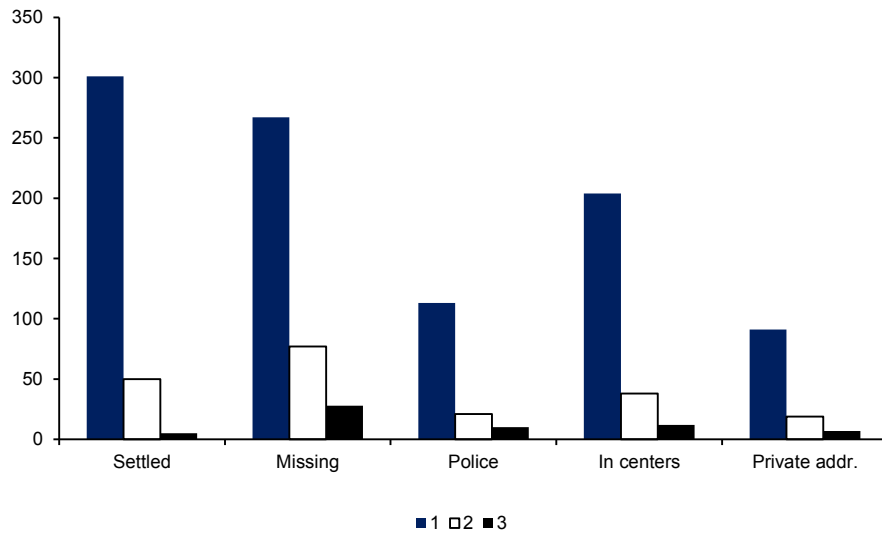
seekers. If we had included the group that was escorted by the police, we would have seen that their average stay was shorter than the other groups. The reason for that was that this group included a majority of the Dublin-group, being returned to the country where they were first registered. The return of the Dubliners follows a set time schedule including a series of deadlines meant to facilitate return.

A check of the number of reception centers the individual asylum seeker had lived in did not appear to be strongly correlated with the tendency to go missing. Those missing had a slightly lesser chance of reaching their third center than the group that settled (2% fewer did) and those escorted by the police (6% fewer).

Periods of absence

Very few of the asylum seekers who are registered in reception centers have periods where they are absent and then return. The overall number is 3 percent. And there are only small variations between the different categories of applicants. Those who end up leaving reception centers have a slight tendency to have more periods of absence, but it must be stressed that only 4 percent of them are registered as having been away and then returning.

In figure 9 we can see that among those who did deviate and have one or more periods of absence, those who would end up being unaccounted for were more represented than the other groups.

Figure 9. Asylum seekers with one or more periods of absence, categories

Interestingly, despite the low number of absences overall, the total number of people being absent was higher for the missing group than for those settled.

Counting the number of periods of absence does not tell the whole story. And although the number of such periods is miniscule across the categories, they may be significant for the ones involved and the reception centers that are left in limbo. In order to explore these periods further, we can ask how long they last.

Again we meet the enormous spread in individual trajectories. Some individuals go missing for months and years before reentering the reception system. More than 100 persons of those unaccounted for had registered periods of absence stretching for longer than a year before returning and then leaving again. Out of the near 400 persons that had been absent from this group, near half of them had shorter periods away from the centers (less than 60 days).

A few conclusions can be drawn from the analyses in this chapter. The unaccounted group has shorter careers in the Norwegian reception centers than do the other groups. The applicants moving to private housing have even shorter stays, while the persons settling after having been permitted to stay spend more time in the centers.

There does not appear to be any effect from moving between centers. The number of reception centers that asylum seekers visit, and the periods of absence do not seem to distinguish according to asylum category. Those who end up being unaccounted for have a low rate of absence (as do the other groups, 3 to 4 percent) though some of the absences have a prolonged duration. One in four of those missing spent more than one year outside the system before returning to the centers.

Family and children

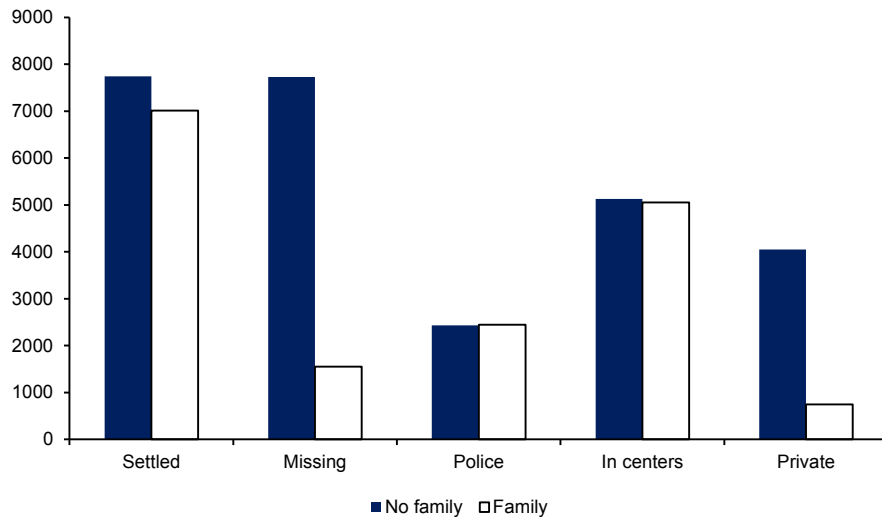
Family and children are recurring topics in the public debate on migration. The issue of persons who go missing from reception centers is rarely mentioned in these discussions. In this chapter we will look for characteristics regarding family and children that distinguish those unaccounted for from the other groups of asylum seekers.

We will also explore the relation or lack of relation between the status of unaccompanied minor and leaving reception centers without further notice.

Family ties

The Norwegian Authorities makes sure to register family ties when asylum seekers hand in their applications. To this study, the question on whether the applicant comes alone or is part of a family that seeks protection is particularly relevant.

The thesis being that a family is more likely to remain in the centers, waiting patiently for a positive outcome of their cases. Figure 10 confirms this presumption.

Figure 10. Family ties according to status when leaving reception centers

As expected, there is a big difference between asylum seekers who end up settling. Out of the close to 15 000 persons in our material who were settled, 48 percent had family ties. This balanced tendency was reflected in the group that was still in centers at the end of 2011. Not so for the group gone missing from centers. Here only 17 percent, or less than two out of ten had family ties to others applicants. Interestingly, the applicants that moved to private addresses showed a similar pattern to that of the unaccounted for. Only 16 percent of those stating private addresses as reason for leaving the reception centers had family ties. This opens for different interpretations. According to Norwegian Police, some in this group leave an address without really moving there. When the police later go to the address, they do not find the persons they are looking for. So, one interpretation is that the group stating private addresses may be similar to those that go missing. In preparing for this study, representatives of the police indicated that leaving the address might be a strategy from asylum seekers to distract the authorities.

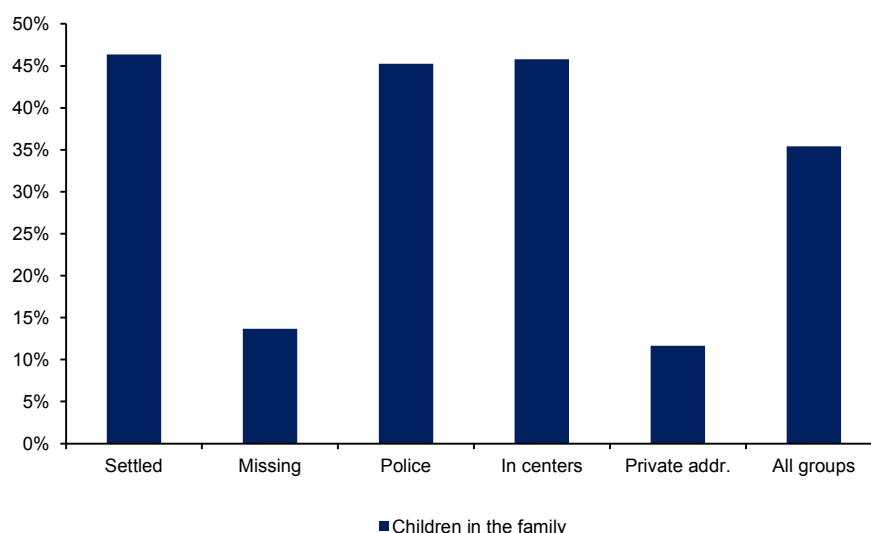
Another interpretation of the tendency displayed in figure 10 may be that those moving to a private address are single persons who have family ties outside the asylum system, i.e. people that are already settled in the country. In chapter 2 we saw that applicants from Sri Lanka were over-represented among this group, indicating ties to the well-established Sri Lankan diaspora in Norway.

Both applicants with families that move to a private address and those registered as unaccounted for showed a similar pattern regarding whether there were children in the family. Only one in five were in families that did not include children.

Children

From what we already know about the categories of asylum seekers leaving the reception centers in Norway, we should expect to find differences regarding children. We have seen that the missing group includes fewer younger persons, and that fewer have family ties. These differences are again reflected in the registered association with children.

Figure 11. Percentage of asylum seekers in different categories that have children in their families



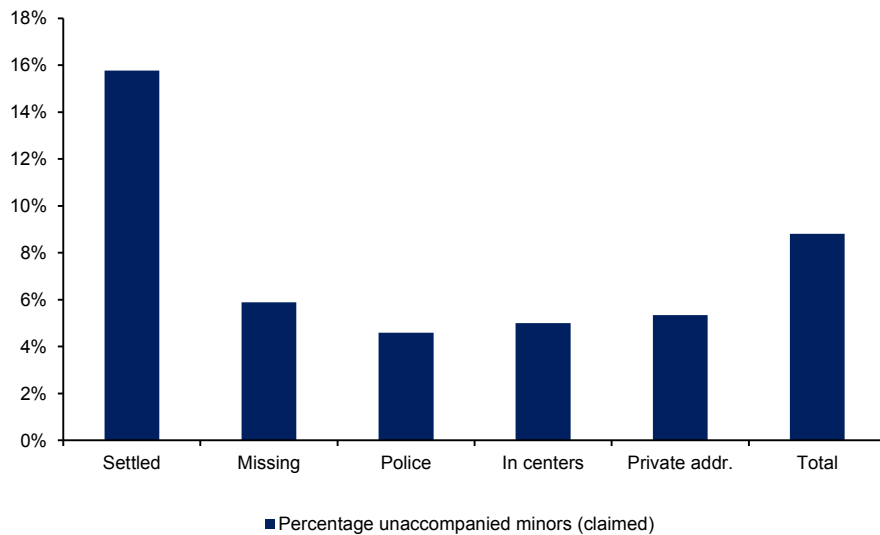
In figure 11 we recognize the pattern from earlier. The percentage of the asylum seekers who have children registered as belonging to their case, or are children of such families, is similar for the groups that are settled, that are picked up by the police and those in our material that remained in centers at the end of 2011. Those moving to a private address or go missing from reception centers are much less likely to have their cases related to children. Only one in ten had such a connection or was a child in such a relationship.

Unaccompanied minors

Since we have already established that there are few children among asylum seekers who went missing, we should not expect there to have been many unaccompanied children either. Unaccompanied minors, coming mainly from Afghanistan and to some extent from Somalia, posed a challenge to both politicians and bureaucrats in Norway at the end of the 2000s. The number of arrivals was high in 2008 and 2009 eliciting targeted measures aimed at stemming the arrival from this category (Brekke and Aarset 2009).

One of the discussions in Norway at the time focused on age determination. The authorities suspected that young asylum seekers falsely claimed to be minors (aged 17 or younger). In our material, the final outcome of the cases for those who claimed to be unaccompanied minors was not included. The numbers discussed in this chapter therefore refer to those claiming to fall within this category.

Figure 12. Unaccompanied minors according asylum categories



The number of unaccompanied minors among those who go missing is not as low as one maybe would expect. In figure 12 we see that six percent of the missing group consisted of asylum seekers who claimed to be unaccompanied minors. This is albeit a modest number compared to the 16 percent of those settled (out of 15 000), but still comprised more than 500 people during the four years covered in our data. The heightened attention paid to this group

over the past five years in Norway, justifies a closer look at these 546 persons who applied as unaccompanied minors and later went missing.

A couple of striking features appear when we look at these cases. Firstly the number of Iraqi applicants within this group was high. If we look at all the asylum seekers who had registered applications as unaccompanied minors in the 2008-2011 periods only 12 percent were from Iraq (55 percent from Afghanistan). Among the minors that went missing, this number had more than doubled (33 percent) and Iraqis was the largest group (157 persons out of the 546).

Secondly, we find a high percentage of rejected applications. Out of the 546 missing unaccompanied minors, 87 percent had already received rejections by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and 75 percent had appealed and been rejected by the Immigration Appeals Board (UNE). This does not mean that the remaining percentage of applicants had been approved. Out of the 546 missing unaccompanied minors, 47 received a positive decision. Out of the same total, 72 persons were not (yet) rejected by the UDI.

Of the 546 asylum seekers that claimed to be accompanied minors and went missing, 14 percent had received a temporary working permit at some point. Based in the current empirical material, it is not possible to establish how old they were when their applications for such permits were approved. What is clear is that the percentage with working permits was higher among this group of minors compared to the unaccompanied minors who were accepted and left the centers to settle in local communities. Of the 2327 persons who belonged to this latter group, only one percent obtained work permits. Among unaccompanied minors who moved to private addresses, 61 percent (157 out of 256) were issued such permits. The empirical material does give us some indication as to the relationship between age and work permits for missing unaccompanied minors. Although a number of permit were given to 17 year olds, most permits were given to persons around the age of 18.

When discussing the unaccompanied minors who left reception centers without providing a new address, the age issue is pivotal. Were they actually older than the required 17 years, or were they below limit? Was the detection of their real age part of their reason for leaving the centers? Our data include their registered age when they apply for asylum. Of the group registered as unaccounted minors who went missing during the four-year period (546 persons), 113 were registered with ages 18 or older. This left 433 persons aged 17 or younger. There may be several reasons why these persons leave the reception centers, such as the age assessment procedure, rejections, or reunifications with networks in Norway or abroad.

More than 20 percent (125) of the unaccompanied minors who went missing (546) were registered as having left Norway. Of these 125 persons, 47 had been escorted to Iraq by the police or had returned there with IOM. The second largest nationalities of these returns were Dublin-cases to Germany (10)

and returns to Afghanistan (8). Of the 125 returns, 37 were assisted by the IOM and the police handled 88.

A final feature of the missing unaccompanied minors is the number of Dublin-cases involved. Out of the 546, a bit less than a third had been registered as potential Dubliners. 43 of the 125 returned from Norway were returned to Dublin countries.

In this chapter we learned that a moderate number those missing from reception centers were unaccompanied minors (6 percent of those missing). A closer look at these 546 individuals shows a high rate of rejections.

Dublin cases and return rates

According to the European Dublin agreement, asylum applications should be processed in the first country where the applicant is first registered. If she or he later applies for protection in one of the other signatory states, the asylum seekers shall be returned to the first country.

When a Dublin case is detected in Norway, a request is sent to the first country. If accepted by the authorities in that country, the Norwegian Police escorts the asylum seeker and hand him or her over to the authorities of the first country. The procedure of these returns is regulated by the Dublin agreement.

In the current empirical material, we have information about the Dublin requests and Dublin returns back to the first countries. In the following, a Dublin case is defined as one where a request for return has been sent from Norwegian authorities to the authorities of the first country. This does not necessarily mean that the person is later deported to that country. Neither does it mean that the case did not end up being processed in Norway.

On average, 24 percent of all asylum arrivals to Norway during the 2008-2011-time span were at some point registered as Dublin cases.

Table 4. Dublin cases according to asylum seeker category

Category	Total count 2008-2010	No of Dublin requests	Percentage Dublin cases
Settled	14755	1020	7 %
Missing	9275	3943	43 %
Picked up by the police	4878	3437	70 %
Private address	4795	744	16 %
In reception centers	10175	1410	14 %

In table 4 we see substantial differences between the categories of asylum seekers regarding their contact with the Dublin procedures. Among the former applicants picked up by the police, seven out of ten were Dublin cases. As we have noted earlier, this does not necessarily mean that those picked up will later be deported. However, as we shall see later, of those deported by the police that were registered as missing, 66 percent were Dubliners. This high number confirms findings in previous studies on return operations in Norway (Brekke 2010).

Next we find that of the group missing from centers, 43 percent were registered as Dubliners.

It is perhaps understandable that these percentages are substantially higher than that of persons remaining in reception centers (14%). Given the lag between the last person to enter the material (January 2011) and the last observation (December 2011), most Dublin cases should have been resolved and the persons returned to the first countries. The 14 percent may also contain persons that had their cases removed from the Dublin procedures and then have entered ordinary processing within the Norwegian system.

To which Dublin-countries did the Norwegian authorities send their requests for returns? Of the close to 11 000 Dublin cases (out of the 47 158) Norwegian authorities wished to return 3000 to each of the major entrance points in Europe, Italy and Greece. Sweden was the third largest receiver of requests for Dublin returnees from Norway (1200 applicants), followed by Poland (591) and Germany (590).

It is one thing for Norwegian authorities to send requests to first countries, another whether their authorities will accept, and a third whether the applicants are actually returned.

Out of the near 4000 Dublin requests made for the group that went missing from centers, 550 were rejected. The remaining were either accepted by the first countries, or passed the deadline set in the Dublin agreement and therefore accepted by default.

Of the 4000 Dublin-requests that were sent to first countries concerning those registered as unaccounted for, 875 persons were returned. From the rest of the 9275 applicants that were registered as missing, another 1003 were either returned or went back with IOM, bringing the total number of returns (voluntary or forced) to 1878.

To which countries did the applicants registered as Dublin and registered as missing return to? The top three first countries were the same as those mentioned above. Out of the group of 4000 Dublin requests for returns of persons that were registered as missing, Italy (1206 requests and 263 returns), Greece (917 requests and 80 returns) and Sweden (468 requests and 149 returns) came out on top.

Return Rates

Which nationalities registered as missing was most prone to return? Of the total returns from the group, both Dubliners and ordinary cases (a total of 1878 returns), a selection of the nationalities most prone to return is displayed in table 5.

Table 5. Returns from the group registered as missing from reception centers, nationalities.

	IOM	Police	Total returns	Total missing	% Returns
Afghanistan	17	97	114	1139	10 %
Eritrea	1	96	97	748	13 %
Nigeria	11	212	223	718	31 %
Iraq	215	180	396	1483	27 %
Iran	10	23	33	316	10 %
Russia	36	84	122	437	28 %
Serbia	19	41	60	178	34 %
Somalia	1	76	77	746	10 %
Stateless	15	78	93	541	17 %
Sudan	4	9	13	103	13 %
Syria	1	17	18	124	15 %
Uzbekistan	17	20	37	108	34 %
Others	78	523	601	2300	25 %
Total	425	1453	1878	9275	20 %

Of the total of 9275 asylum seekers in the missing category, we see that 20 percent returned, either to a first country or to their country of origin. The variation from one nationality to the next was however quite significant. Among the top nations we find Uzbekistan (34%), Serbia (34%) and Nigeria (31%). In addition to these nationalities with a modest number of asylum seekers in the total group of 47 158 that arrived between 2008 and 2011, we find two larger groups, Russia (28%) and Iraq (27%) among those with a high return rate.

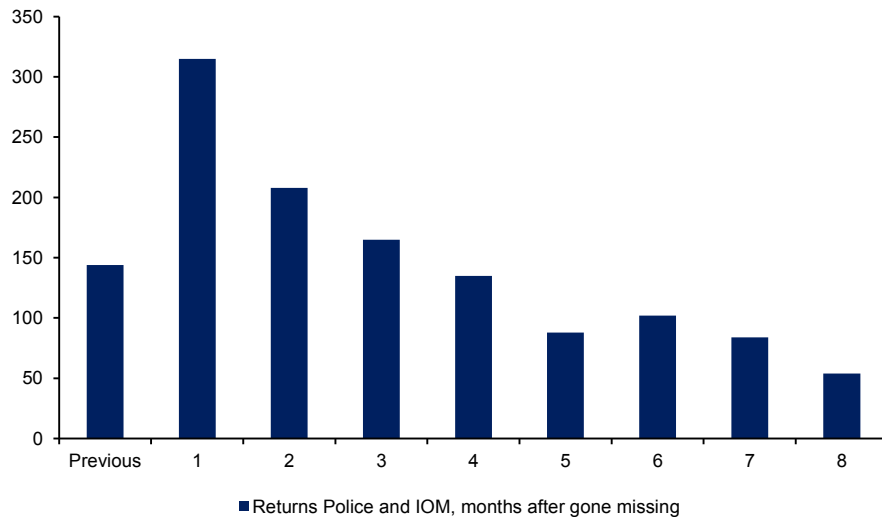
The other major asylum nationalities during the 2008-2011-period, Eritrea (13%), Somalia (10%) and Afghanistan (10%), all showed lower numbers. A discussion on why these numbers were low could include the continued conflict in these countries and the difficulty of implementing forced returns.

Table 5 distinguishes between assisted voluntary returns with IOM and returns escorted by the police. The general trend would be that one in four re-

turns from this group that went missing from centers was organized by the IOM. The Iraqi group stands out with a high ratio of voluntary to forced returns. A reason for this can perhaps be found in the elaborate efforts by Norwegian Authorities to process and return Iraqi applicants, starting in the fall of 2009. As part of this project, labeled the Torshavn project, a voluntary return program was also initiated targeting the Iraqi group. Under this arrangement, those choosing voluntary assisted return would benefit from financial incentives and support when reintegrating in Iraq (Strand mfl. 2011, Brekke 2010).

When did the asylum applicants who were registered as missing return? Since they were registered as missing and not as picked up by the police or as returned by with IOM, one should expect that they were returned after they left the reception centers. But how much time passed between them leaving the centers and being returned by the police or returning with the voluntary assisted return program?

Figure 13. Time between being registered as missing and returning (IOM or Police). Number of persons returning and number of months after leaving reception centers.



In figure 13 we see that almost 150 of the missing asylum seekers had left Norway (escorted by the police or assisted by the IOM) before they were registered as missing by the center administration. The police returned most of these. In the figure the period with most returns was around the time and shortly after they left the centers. Within the first four months after being registered as missing, half of those who would return from the group had done so. In the months following the timespan displayed in the figure, there was a long tail of diminishing numbers. Of the 1878 total returns from the group, 350 waited longer than a year before leaving with the IOM or being escorted out of the country by the police.

Work permits, identity and acceptance rates

In order to give as complete picture as possible of the group of asylum seekers who go missing from reception centers, three elements will be analyzed in this chapter, working permits, the question of identity and acceptance rates. In the next chapter we will begin to sum up and then conclude in the final chapter 8.

Work permits

Over the past year, there has been a public debate in Norway on whether asylum seekers should be allowed to work while their cases are processed. Those who think they should be, argue that this will help them integrate more easily if they are allowed to stay and that it keeps them idle during their waiting period. Those who argue against hold that the possibility to work may pull people looking for work to the country posing as asylum seekers.

During the period we are looking at in this study, 2008-2011, the asylum seekers were allowed to work if their applications for a permit were accepted. In our material we can see how common these permits were among the different categories of applicants.

Table 6. Work permits according to asylum seekers categories

	Work Permits	Total group	Permits %
Settled	4731	14755	32 %
In centers	2400	10156	24 %
Police	451	4878	9 %
Private address	2849	4795	59 %
Missing	2374	9275	26 %
VARP IOM	979	2510	39 %

There are several interesting features in table 6. One is the high percentage of persons moving to private addresses who had obtained work permits. Six out of ten had such permits, far outnumbering the other categories of asylum seekers. Two comments can be made about this finding. One is that this may indicate a higher level of integration among those who state a private address when leaving reception centers. Another would be that those stating a private address when leaving reception centers do so with the intention of settling and aim at local integration. If this is correct, the hypothesis suggested by the employees of the National Police Immigration Service (PU), that many applicants state a private address do not intend to move there, may be weakened. However, one could also argue that even persons stating an address without actually moving there still may intend to locally integrate somewhere else.

Another interesting finding in table 6 is that the overall percentage of work permits was 33. In other words (numbers), one in three asylum seekers obtained a work permit during the 2008 – 2011 periods. This is higher than could perhaps be expected. The process of applying for work permits, where this is part of the asylum interview, may provide a part of the explanation of this phenomenon. For a long time the applicant received two answers at the same time, one to the application for asylum, and one for the request for a work permit. However, it should be noted that the current data material does not reveal whether the asylum seekers actually worked, only whether they had permission to do so.

The asylum seekers who went missing from reception centers had a lower than average ratio of work permits (26%). One explanation to this could be that they leave reception centers and do not have as easy access to follow the application process afterwards. Another could be the high percentage of Dublin cases in that group. Persons with an ongoing Dublin-process should not qualify for work permits.

The question of identity

Another hot topic in Norwegian public debate on asylum has been the issue of identity. In the initial contact with the National Police Immigration Service (Norwegian: «Polities Utlendingsenhet»), i.e. when the application is handed in and the preliminary interview is made, few asylum seekers present identity papers. According to informants within the Police, this changes somewhat when the applicant and the authorities meet again a few weeks later. The asylum seekers are told to bring whatever papers they have to this second meeting. And more people do so. Around one in three present papers at that stage, according to the informants (Brekke 2010).

In the present data material, we have the opportunity to see which asylum seekers have presented evidence of their identity and how the authorities have perceived this. The authorities register the question of identity according to

the following categories in the Immigration Data Base (UDB): Documented, substantiated identity («sannsynliggjort»), not substantiated («ikke sannsynliggjort»), not considered («ikke tatt stilling til») and not registered («tom»). If we merge these categories into documented/substantiated ID and not (yet) documented/substantiated (not substantiated, not considered and not registered), we get the spread between the different types of asylum seekers displayed in table 7.

Table 7. Identity certainty among selected groups of asylum seekers

	ID document- ed/substantiated	ID not (yet) document- ed/ substantiated	Total	Percentage ID
Settled	14156	599	14755	96 %
Missing	2150	7125	9275	23 %
Police	570	5688	4878	12 %
In centers	3512	6483	10175	35 %
VARP IOM	865	1645	2510	34 %
Private address	2124	2671	4795	44 %
Total	23384	23004	46388	50 %

In table 7 the degrees of uncertainty regarding the asylum seekers identity has been reduced to two, documented/substantiated or not (yet) documented/substantiated. This may be said to give a distorted picture of the identity situation, since those cases where no effort has been made to establish an identity are seen together with those where the authorities have been unable to secure one.

This simplification does however show the broader trend; among those settled almost all asylum seekers had documented or substantiated identities.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the other categories showed lower scores. Those picked up by the police and those missing from centers, may have left the centers before an ID could be substantiated. In some high percentage rejection cases («klare avslagssaker»), no attempt is made to substantiate an identity, according to informants within the Directorate of Immigration. The group assisted by the IOM in their voluntary returns also had a low level of established identities (35%). However, the IOM and the Police must have found these individuals' data sufficiently supported to go through with the return process. In order to return under the Voluntary Assisted Return Program, the applicants have to present documentation or contribute in the process of obtaining travel documents from embassies of their home country.

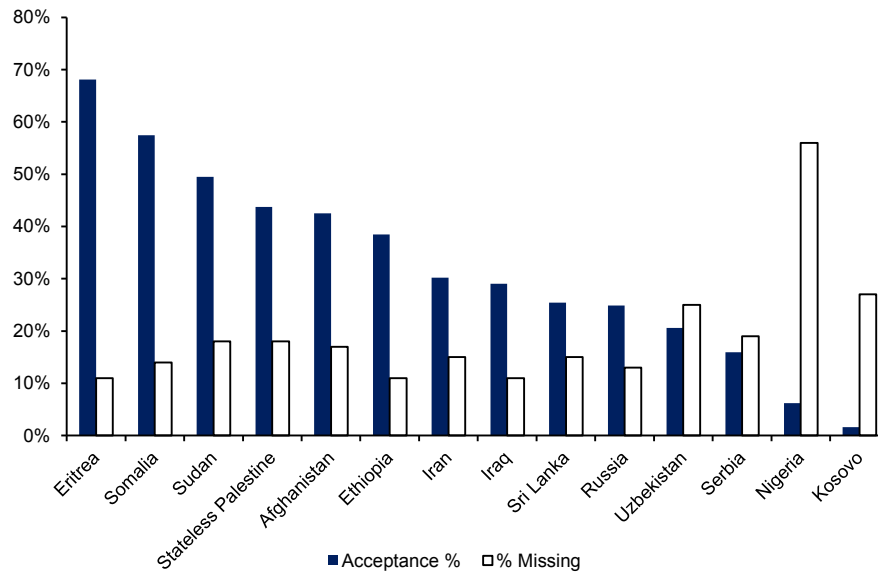
The percentage of persons with a supported identity that leave the reception centers stating a private address is higher than the other categories, with the exception of those who settle. This may be taken into the discussion of the

rationale of making this move. Is it part of a strategy to avoid being picked up by the police or a straightforward way of informing the authorities about one's whereabouts? The individuals within the group may of course represent these and a range of other motivations.

A quick look at the variations of identity across nationalities does not show a distinct pattern. It could be argued that asylum seekers from certain countries would have a harder time securing documentation of identity, such as Eritrea, and Somalia. Although such an assumption would find some support in the material, more in-depth studies would be needed in order to establish correlations between nationality and identity.

Acceptance and rejection rates

Why do asylum seekers go missing from reception centers? One explanation may be that people leave because they do not think their applications will be rejected. If this is so, one should expect there to be a correlation between acceptance/rejection rates and ending up as unaccounted for. At the group level this would mean that the higher the acceptance rate, the higher the individuals' expectations of being accepted, and following the lower the rate of going missing. On the individual level, we may assume that the perception of the futility of staying on and keep on pressing for an acceptance of the application may vary accordingly. If this is correct, we should see a distinct pattern when different nationalities are compared with regard to acceptance rates and rates of going missing.

Figure 14. Acceptance rates and nationalities unaccounted for

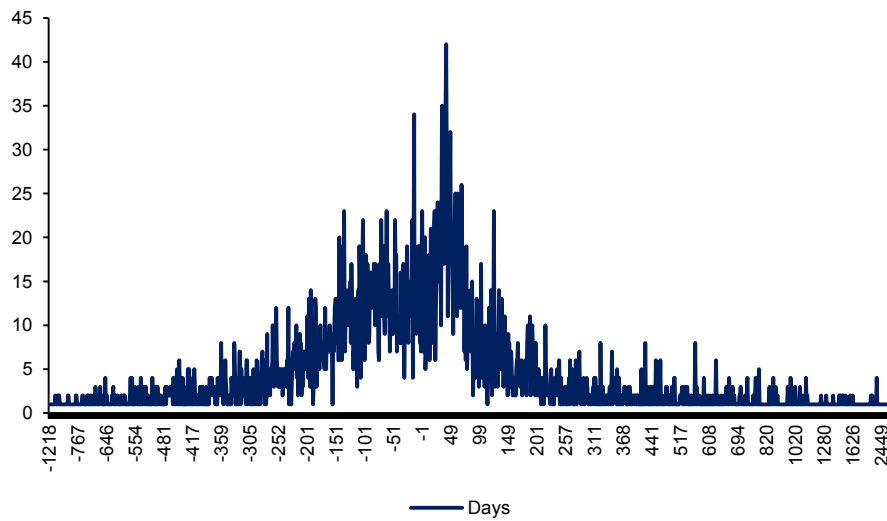
The pattern in figure 14 somewhat supports the assumption that there is a correlation between acceptance rates and ending up in the missing category. As we can see, the countries that have a high percentage score on missing, like Nigeria, Kosovo, Uzbekistan and Serbia, are at the lower end of the acceptance rates. However, for the rest of the field of nationalities no such effect is found. One possible conclusion would be that the four-mentioned countries are special cases, and we have to look elsewhere for explanations.

Another would be that the data include a series of cases that were still being processed, and that the timing of the arrival of the different nationalities may influence the pattern. However, knowing the high acceptance rate of the top countries in table 14 over the past five years, Eritrea and Somalia, there is little reason to believe that these groups would not benefit from pushing their cases to the end and remain within the reception center system.

The cross table analyses displayed in this and the previous chapters may always be influenced by variables not visible in each table. In the interpretation of this table, we could for example argue that the percentage of Dublin cases within each nationality group would influence the pattern displayed in figure 14.

Related to the relationship between rejections and going missing, we need to establish the time that passes between someone having their own application rejected and going missing.

Figure 15. Days from 1st rejection (by UNE) and going missing from reception centers



In figure 15 we see variation in the time between the asylum seekers who received a rejection from Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) and being registered as missing. The hypothesis was that most would first get the negative decision and then leave the centers. As we see, there are negative values on the left of the x-axis, indicating that a substantial number of asylum seekers would leave the centers before they got their rejections from IAB (UNE). We also see that the values are higher closer to zero, in the middle of the variation, indicating that there was more activity around the time of the rejection. We find the top values during the first three months after the negative message from IAB was received.

What do we know about the missing asylum seekers?

In this chapter, the outcome for the asylum seekers of the period in reception centers will be analyzed from two angles.

First we will look at the cohort of applicants that were in Norwegian centers on the 1st of January 2008. This group is chosen because it is the first complete set of persons who is in the current material, and the group that we can follow for the longest time after the initial observation.

Second we will look at all the information we have on the asylum seekers who were registered as missing from reception centers between January 2008 and December 2011, in other words during a four year period. Out of the nearly 10 000 asylum seekers who went missing, what do we know about them?

The group of January 2008

On January 1st 2008, 7637 asylum seekers were registered as living in Norwegian reception centers. The group included persons who had been living within the asylum system since 1993. 60 asylum seekers had spent more than 8 years in the centers.

If we move to the end of 2011 and look back at what happened to this group, a few interesting observations can be made.

One is that of the approximately one thousand that had already gotten a negative decision by January 2008, 25 percent were later registered as missing. Another 25 percent had their cases overturned and ended with permits and settlement.

Another 25 percent were still in centers at the end of 2011, while the rest had either stated private addresses, been escorted by the police or returned with the IOM.

A second observation is that 15 percent of the total population at the time was later registered as missing. This is a lower number, we recall, than that for all asylum seekers being observed in the four-year period (chapter 1, percentage of whole group gone missing: 20 %).

A third point that can be made is that of the around 1000 asylum seekers from the 2008 cohort who went missing, one in four ended up returning from Norway, either with the IOM (10%) or being escorted by the police (15%).

A fourth point is that the number of Dublin cases was substantially lower for the 2008 cohort than for the four-year period as a whole. Of the asylum seekers from this group who were picked up by the police, only 31 percent had Dublin requests attached to their cases. This is a lot fewer than the overall number of those that were picked up by the police, 70 percent, discussed in chapter 6. In the group of 2008, 15 percent of those who were registered as missing were Dublin cases. This number was also lower than the overall number for all asylum seekers in our material.

This may be an indication of one of the differences between asylum seekers staying in reception centers during periods of high and low influx. In times with more arrivals, the rate of Dublin cases may tend to surge (Brekke and Aarset 2009).

Do we know more than we think we know?

A few more pieces of information are needed in order to conclude regarding the situation and fate of asylum seekers going missing in Norway. If we return to the group of all asylum seekers who were registered during the 2008-2011 period we can do a stepwise elimination, steering towards singling out those individuals of whom we know little.

This is an exercise that may be relevant to the ongoing debate in Norway on the whereabouts and risks believed to follow from the group of asylum seekers who are registered as missing from reception centers.

Out of the total number of applicants (47 156), 9275 were registered as missing. Of these, we know that 1878 were returned (one fourth with IOM, the rest escorted by the police). Of those that returned, nearly 1000 were Dublin related cases. If we subtract the 1878 that we know left Norway, we are left with 7397.

From this group we have already established that some of those registered as missing were given permits to stay. Out of the 7397 still in the group, 449 persons belonged in this category, leaving us with 6948 asylum applicants.

Of these, 2889 were Dublin-related cases. Again the three major «first countries» were Italy, Greece and Sweden. The significance of the connection to the Dublin procedure is not clear. We will return to this issue towards the end of this chapter.

If we for the sake of the argument subtract these Dublin-cases from the group of missing asylum seekers (7397-2889), we are left with a group of 4059 persons. Reasons for using the Dublin connection to narrow down the group of persons in the missing group could include that we actually know quite a bit about these people: They are registered in the biometric database

EURODAC and have an ongoing process in one or more European countries. One could of course argue the opposite; we do not know their whereabouts, whether they remain in Norway and if so, what they are doing there.

If we leave this discussion aside, we find that we know a bit about even about the group of 4059 we are left with if the Dubliners are excluded. For example there is information about identity. For more than half of the group (2400), the Norwegian authorities had not (yet) evaluated their identity. There may be several reasons for this, as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, for 1150 out of the 4059, an identity had been established. The rest of the group, 662 persons, had been evaluated without identities being supported (in Norwegian «ikke sannsynliggjort»).

If we continue this experimental subtraction, and remove those with an established identity (4059 – 1133), we are down to 2926 cases. Do we know anything about this group?

In the available data, we may for example find that 398 of these persons at one point had submitted an application for voluntary assisted return with the IOM. In order to do so, a list of personal data has to be submitted. In other words, one could argue that those that register such an application also submit information that may exclude them for a list of unknown missing asylum seekers. Again, this line of argument could be countered by pointing to the fact that they were not registered as having returned. There is no available information on the outcome of these applications. We know from earlier that the rejection rate of applications for voluntary assisted return in Norway varies between 15 and 20 percent (Brekke 2010).

If we accept the first line of argument we may subtract the 398 persons from the unknown missing group, leaving us with 2 528 (former) applicants. Out of these, 431 were registered as parts of family with children. If these are subtracted we are left with 2097. We could continue this exercise, for example by removing those out of the group of 2097 that at one time had been granted a work permit. If these 724 persons are out, we are left with 1373.

Perhaps one could argue that the 119 unaccompanied minors among these 1373 should not be on the list. However, the group with ages at the end of the teens may have grown older since their first registration and may not be considered as being outside a list of unknown missing. Against this one could state that the unaccompanied minors are given particular focus in reception centers and during the processing of their cases. Following the logic used thus far in this experiment, we remove them from the list and end with 1254 persons on the missing and unknown list.

From the original 9275 persons that we started out with, 1254 seems like a small number. And even of these persons, there is information given in interviews with the police and the Directorate of Immigration, despite the question of identity not being investigated or not supported. Reception centers also have information about these persons.

The exercise of reducing the group of unknown missing asylum seekers could have been done in many ways. By choosing to subtract the characteristics in a different order, a different process and argument would have been displayed. The end results would however have been more or less the same, given the limited variables in the current data material.

When civil servants from the National Police Immigration Service and the Directorate of Immigration read early drafts of this report, they commented on the method used in this stepwise reduction of the missing group. They agreed that certain groups could be subtracted from the 9275 total of missing asylum seekers (namely those that have returned or have been given permissions to stay), thereby reducing the group of «missing». They were not «missing» any longer, they had either left the country of been given residence permits. Yet they disagreed that the group could be cut further.

And the premises of this exercise are open for discussion. What the exercise aims to show is that there is information of various sorts about the individuals often referred to as missing in the public debate in Norway.

We actually know a quite a bit about them. What we know little of is what they do after they go missing from the reception centers. The point was not to show what happened next to these people. Of this we have very limited knowledge, as I have stated throughout the report. Some reappear in the statistics as returnees either by the hand of the police or in the form of voluntary return, while the rest remain out of sight. Do they leave Norway to try their luck in other countries in the Dublin/Schengen area? Do they go back to their home countries or do they remain in Norway? We do not know.

The logic of the subtraction in table 8 below is that from the original group of 9275 missing asylum seekers, each step eliminates persons and reduces the size of the group. So that when «those returned» are subtracted, we look at rest and look at how many of these that had residence permits. These are then removed before the next step of the exercise is carried out; how many of those registered as missing that did not return, nor had residence permits were Dublin related? This logic is followed through to the end. The question we seek to answer in by this exercise is how many from the group of asylum seekers who go missing from reception centers do we know little or nothing about?

Table 8. Subtraction – Reducing the group of unknown missing asylum seekers

Asylum seekers registered as missing 2008 – 2011	9275
Returned (police and IOM)	1878
Residence permits	449
Dublin related	2889
Documented/substantiated identity	1133
Applied for VARP to IOM	398
With work permits	724
Unaccompanied minors	119
Remaining unaccounted for	1254

The 1254 people we are left with may now be analyzed. This may be the last piece of the puzzle that has to be established before we can conclude.

The unknown missing

The group of 1254 is distilled from the larger group of missing asylum seekers. We can therefore recognize several of the top nationalities represented in the narrower group.

Table 9. Top 7 nationalities in remaining missing group

	Number among Remaining 1254	Total nationality	Percentage missing with little information
Afghanistan	140	6572	2%
Iraq	111	6012	2%
Nigeria	96	1287	7%
Stateless (Palestine)	96	3041	3%
Eritrea	81	6761	1%
Somalia	60	5233	1%
Algeria	50	275	18%

In table 9 we see that for the larger groups of asylum seekers, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia and the Stateless Palestinians, only a very small fraction end up as unaccounted for in the particular sense used in this report. For the Nigerians the frequency is higher and Algerians come out on top with 50 persons among the 1254 in the distilled group out of 275 in the total population

of 47 275 asylum seekers who were registered in reception centers between 2008 and 2011.

The group had even fewer women than the larger group of missing asylum seekers, 11 percent. The Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) had rejected a majority (60 percent) of the remaining 1254 persons.

The probability of going missing

So far in this report we have looked at the different factors that may influence whether an asylum seeker ends up as unaccounted for or not. Two or three have been considered at the same time. It is now time to look at a larger selection of variables at the same time. This can be done by using multivariate analysis, in this case a binary logistic regression.

Once we introduce a series of variables into an equation, explaining the results becomes a challenge.

The regression analysis allows us to isolate the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable. And in doing so, we can take a series of other variables into consideration. These are held constant while the one independent variable is allowed to vary. In our case, the effect of having a family can be used as an example. The question is how much having family influences whether the asylum seekers end up as unaccounted for or not. Because other factors, like gender, country of origin and whether their application has been rejected also influences asylum seekers' likelihood of being unaccounted for, we want to estimate the effect of having a family while controlling for these other factors.

This can be expressed in two different ways: Firstly we can ask what the relative odds are that an individual in our material with a family will end up as missing compared to an individual without a family. Secondly we can ask what the probability is that an asylum seeker with certain characteristics will end up in that category.

In table 10, below, both odds-ratios and probabilities are listed for a range of relevant variables.

Table 10. Odds-ratios and probability of asylum seekers ending as missing. List of independent variables (full results in appendix, model limited to listed variables).

Variable	Odds-ratio	Probability
Family	,530	16 %
Children	,475	14 %
Gender (K=0)	1,408	33 %
Unacccminor	1,045*	27 %*
Documentation	,722	20 %
Rejected UNE	1,278	31 %
Accepted	,143	5 %
Work permit	,887	24 %
Dublin case	2,030	42 %
Somalia	,614	18 %
Eritrea	,707	20 %
Iraq	1,036*	27 %*
Afghanistan	,706	20 %
Russian	,851	23 %
Nigeria	3,542	56 %
Constant	,356	26%

* Not significant, Nagelkerke R Square = ,315

The odd-ratios in table 10 can be read in the following way: Values bigger than 1 indicate that asylum seekers with the relevant characteristic have higher odds of being unaccounted for than the reference group. Values below 1 indicate that asylum seekers with the relevant characteristics have lower odds of being unaccounted for than the reference group. For each variable the reference category is individuals that do not have the specific characteristic. So if we take family as an example again, the reference category for this variable would be someone without a family.

If we keep this person in mind and then look at an otherwise similar individual that has a family, we can see that the odds for that person ending up as missing from reception centers is 47 percent lower than for a person who does not have a family (odds ratio=0.53). In our study, we see that a range of the variables we have been discussing throughout the report reduce the odds: children, documentation, being accepted, having a work permit. The same goes for belonging to several of the nationalities; Somalia, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Russia. In the regression we have included only the five most numerous asylum nationalities coming to Norway 2008-2011. Nigeria was added since this group has been included earlier in the study.

As we see from the high odds-ratio of this group, having this background gives a 3,5 times higher odds than the reference case of ending up as unaccounted for. Being registered as a Dublin case doubles the odds.

Interpreting the *probability* of the various variables is perhaps a bit closer to how we are used to think. Starting with the constant, the reference case if you will, we can see the probability of a person ending up as missing if she has none of the characteristics listed in table 10. The probabilities reported in the rest of the table take this reference case as a starting point, and for each variable the probability is calculated by adding that specific characteristic. It is important to keep in mind that the probabilities cannot be interpreted independent of the other characteristics of the reference case. This means that the probability of being missing for someone with a family can only be interpreted as the probability for those with a family who are also women, without children, without documentation etc. If one of these characteristics would change, for example if the reference category were men, the probability reported for family would change accordingly.

It would therefore be a misinterpretation to conclude from the table that e.g. male asylum seekers has a 33% probability of going missing, independent of the other variables. This would be wrong because the probability relates to the reference case. A correct interpretation would be that there is a 33% probability that men who do not have a family, nor children, that have neither been accepted or rejected, that do not have a documented identity or a work permit, that is not a Dublin case and do not come from any of the listed countries, is registered as unaccounted for.

The list of probabilities repeats the direction of the impact of the odds-ratio mentioned above, by showing that having a family etc. makes it less probable for an individual to end up as missing, while being a Dublin case etc. makes it more probable. For example, the 3,5 higher odds among Nigerians, finds its equivalent in the 56% of going missing among Nigerian women that do not have a family, children, documented identity etc. Pointing to the reference case, we can compare this to the 26% probability of disappearing for identical women that are not from Nigeria (or any of the five largest nationalities listed in the model).

Missing asylum seekers

In the introduction to this report, I pointed out that asylum seekers who go missing from reception centers have been a recurring topic in the Norwegian public debate over the past ten years. Critics have argued that no one knows who these people are, where they are and what they are up to. Some see them as potential threats to society. Others presume they leave the country or do no harm if they stay.

In one sense the critics are right. Politicians, civil servants, the public or researchers do not know where most of the missing asylum seekers are. In another sense, the critics are wrong. We do know quite a bit about *who* they are.

This report reviews the information registered by Norwegian authorities before the asylum seekers go missing. A more elaborate design is needed if we want to know what happens after they leave, whether they remain in Norway, move to another Schengen country, continue on to countries outside Schengen or simply go home.

In this report all asylum seekers (47 275) who were registered in Norwegian reception centers during a four-year period (2008-2011) are analyzed. The question asked is «What characterizes the applicants that end up as unaccounted for/that go missing»? Answers are found by comparing different groups of asylum seekers. Various traits are discussed; age, gender, nationality, absences, length of stay, family ties and the presence of children. The data allowed for additional analyses of unaccompanied minors, Dublin-cases, the impact of acceptance rates, working permits and uncertainty of identity. In order to evaluate the role of these factors on the probability to go missing, this group of asylum seekers is compared to those who were accepted for settlement, those who returned, those who remained in the centers and others.

More than providing us with a detailed account of the missing asylum seekers motivations and actions after they leave the centers, the current data allows us to draw a profile of the group and give a few insights about their behavior.

Findings

One in five asylum seekers «go missing» from reception centers

- Approximately 9000 asylum seekers were registered as «missing» from Norwegian reception centers from January 2008 to January 2011, constituting 20 percent of all applicants in the four-year period (approx. 47 000 total applicants).

We know more about this group than what is normally assumed

- The wide spread notion that there is no information about this group is not correct. What is correct is that little is known about what happens to most of these individuals once they leave the centers. We know who they are, but not where they are or what they are doing.
- The number of missing asylum seekers of whom we know little, is substantially smaller than the number often quoted in Norwegian media: 10 000. Depending on methodology, this group can be reduced to a fraction. Despite the available information, however, we do not know where around 7000 former applicants are.
- 20 percent of those missing were confirmed as returnees. 1878 out of the total of 9275 missing asylum seekers had left Norway either by force (1453 persons) or by opting for the voluntary assisted return program (425 persons).
- Some of those registered as missing obtained residence permits. 449 out of the 9275 missing asylum seekers were permitted to stay in Norway.

Those gone missing: Young men, without families and children, often Dublin cases

- The typical missing asylum seeker was somewhat younger than those who were accepted and settled in Norway.

- Men were overrepresented. The overall gender balance among asylum seekers in Norway is seven to ten. Among those who were settled during the four-year period, six out of ten were men. The group missing consisted of 86 percent men. Asylum seekers who stated private addresses when leaving the centers showed similar gender (un) balance.
- More than four out of ten of those missing (43%) were Dublin cases, i.e. they were facing being returned to the European country where they first applied for asylum.
- Those missing came mostly without their families. Almost half of all asylum seekers who came to Norway during the period had family ties to other applicants. Among those who went missing, only two out of ten had such affiliation.
- There were few children among those missing. Only one in ten missing asylum seekers was part of a family with children.

Nationality matters, major sending countries lower than average

- A small group of countries had high rates of missing asylum seekers. The top three nationalities going missing in the period were Nigeria (56 percent), Kosovo (27 percent) and Uzbekistan (25 percent). However, despite these high percentages, these countries contributed only 1000 persons (out of the approximately 9000 total missing).
- Applicants from the major sending countries had average or below chance of ending up as missing. Apart from Iraq (25 percent), the top seven nationalities scored below the average (20 percent), with Somalia, Russia, Ethiopia and Eritrea all being closer to a 10 percent missing-rate.
- One in three applicants from Sri Lanka stated that they moved to a private address instead of living in reception centers (37 percent). Apart from Iraq (18 percent) only a few applicants from the other major sending countries chose this option.

Absences from centers had little impact on going missing

- Missing asylum seekers have shorter stays in reception centers than those who settle. The only group with even shorter stays was those who move to private housing.
- Few asylum seekers were absent from centers and then returned. Only 3 percent of asylum seekers are registered as having left reception centers and then coming back. The number for those who end up as missing was also low, 4 percent.

Six percent of those missing were allegedly unaccompanied minors

- Although constituting only 6 percent of the total number of missing asylum seekers, 546 persons stating to be unaccompanied minors went missing during the four-year period. Within this group there were many rejected cases.

Return rates were high for certain groups of «missing» asylum seekers

- The nationalities with the highest return rates (forced and assisted voluntary) among the missing asylum seekers were Serbia, Uzbekistan, Nigeria and Russia. The «missing» Iraqis also showed a high return rate. Contrary to the before mentioned groups, the Iraqis had more voluntary than forced returns.
- Most returns of missing asylum seekers happened in the first three months after they went missing. A substantial number (150 persons) were however returned before they were registered as being absent from the centers.

Many work permits among applicants moving to private addresses

- Among asylum seekers who were approved and settled in Norway, three out of ten had work permits during their waiting period. This number was lower for the group that went missing (26 percent), but substantially higher for those that stated private addresses (59 percent).

Fewer with documented or substantiated identity

- More than nine out of ten settled asylum seekers had documented or substantiated identities (96 percent). The process of establishing identities stops once asylum seekers leave the asylum process. This may help explain why fewer of those returned by the police and those missing had documented or substantiated identities (12 and 23 percent respectively).

Rejections did not increase the percentage «missing». Exemptions

- No general correlation was found between group acceptance rates and rates of missing asylum seekers. For the major sending countries there were no such relations. Some minor sending countries had many rejections and a high percentage of missing, indicating a possible co-variation. These exemptions influenced the probability of going missing somewhat (see below).
- Most missing asylum seekers disappeared around the time of the final rejection (the Immigration Appeals Board). However, about half (3346 persons) of those rejected (6539) left centers before they knew the final outcome of their cases.

No family and no children increased the probability of going missing

- A multivariate analysis confirmed the factors that affect the probability of going missing. No children, no family ties, being a man, not having a documented or substantiated identity, having a Dublin case, being rejected, all increased the probability of going missing. So did having a nationality with a high missing percentage, such as Nigeria.
- Inversely the opposites reduced the probability of ending up as unaccounted for: Being a woman, having family and children etc. Coming from most of the major asylum sending countries, such as Somalia, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Russia, also reduced the probability.

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Appendix

Table 11. Nationalities number of asylum seekers to Norway 2008-2011, number of asylum seekers gone «missing» and percentage missing

	N=	Missing/unaccounted for	Missing/unaccounted for %
Eritrea	6761	748	11 %
Afghanistan	6572	1139	17 %
Iraq	6012	1483	25 %
Somalia	5233	746	14 %
Russia	3330	437	13 %
Stateless	3041	541	18 %
Iran	2077	316	15 %
Ethiopia	2044	232	11 %
Nigeria	1287	718	56 %
Serbia	955	178	19 %
Kosovo	687	187	27 %
Sri Lanka	669	102	15 %
Sudan	570	103	18 %
Uzbekistan	427	108	25 %
Others	12603	2237	18 %
Total	47158	9275	20 %

Table 12. Case status for all asylum seekers in Norwegian reception centers per January 1st 2008 and outcome of their cases.

	Settled	Missing	Police	In centers	IOM	Private address	Total
Other status	309	39	2	50	4	51	455
Negative	217	238	77	238	89	162	1021
In process	1391	499	285	331	273	564	3343
Permits	1348	34	12	32	2	42	1470
Awaiting forced returns	210	209	250	315	63	99	1146
Total	3481	1022	628	972	432	919	7454

Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	p	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Family	-.635	,062	103,597	1	,000	,530
	Children	-.745	,065	133,396	1	,000	,475
	Gender (K=0)	,342	,038	79,462	1	,000	1,408
	Unaccminor*	,044	,057	,590	1	,442*	1,045
	Documentation	-.326	,034	89,919	1	,000	,722
	Rejected UNE	,246	,030	67,140	1	,000	1,278
	Accepted	-1,944	,057	1153,036	1	,000	,143
	Work permit	-.120	,033	13,120	1	,000	,887
	Dublin case	,708	,031	510,236	1	,000	2,030
	Somalia	-.488	,051	91,465	1	,000	,614
	Eritrea	-.346	,051	45,734	1	,000	,707
	Iraq*	,035	,039	,810	1	,368*	1,036
	Afghanistan	-.348	,043	66,050	1	,000	,706
	Russian	-.161	,060	7,215	1	,007	,851
	Nigeria	1,265	,066	370,609	1	,000	3,542
	Constant	-1,034	,047	481,101	1	,000	,356

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Family, Children, GENDERK0, Unaccminor, IDOK, REJECTUNE, ACCEPTED, WORKPERMIT, Dublin, Somalia, Eritrea, Iraq, Afghanistan, Russian, Nigeria. * Not significant

Model Summary			
Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	36335,735 ^a	,198	,315

Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than ,001.

Classification Table ^a					
Observed			Predicted		
			Unaccounted for		Percentage Correct
			Other categories	Unaccounted for	
Step 1	Unaccounted for	Other categories	36398	1487	96,1
		Unaccounted for	7362	1913	20,6
Overall Percentage					81,2
a. The cut value is ,500					

a. The cut value is ,500

Institutt for samfunnsforskning

Rapport 2012:2

<i>Forfatter/Author</i> Brekke, Jan-Paul
<i>Tittel/Title</i> Missing – Asylum seekers who Leave Reception Centers in Norway (Forsvunnet – Asylsøkere som forlater mottak i Norge)
<i>Sammendrag</i> Asylsøkere som forsvinner fra mottak har figurert i den norske innvandringsdebatten de siste årene. Lite kunnskap har imidlertid blitt produsert om denne gruppen. Det er en utbredt oppfatning om at disse personene «vet vi ingenting om». Denne rapporten er et første skritt i retning av en mer informert debatt på området. Hva kjennetegner de som forsvinner? Rapporten er basert på tall fra Utlendingsdatabasen (UDB) og studerer samtlige asylsøkere som var innom norske mottak mellom januar 2008 og januar 2011. Drøyt 47 000 asylsøkere var registrert i løpet av de tre årene. Noe over 9000 av disse forlot mottakene uten å oppgi ny adresse. Analysen viser at en av fem asylsøkere ble registrert som forsvunnet og at det finnes mer informasjon om denne gruppen enn det den offentlige debatten kan tyde på. Resultatene viser også en rekke faktorer som øker sannsynligheten for at en person forsvinner fra mottak. Blant disse var det å ikke ha familie eller barn, være mann, ha avslag og ha en såkalt Dublin sak. Nasjonalitet hadde også betydning. Et interessant funn var at det å ha bakgrunn fra de fleste av de store asyllandene (Eritrea, Somalia, Afghanistan og Russland) ga en lavere sannsynlighet for å forsvinne. Av de rundt 9000 asylsøkerne som ble registrert som forsvunnet i løpet av de tre årene, returnerte ca 2000 fra Norge (frivillig eller med tvang). Ytterligere 500 fikk oppholdstillatelse. For de resterende ca 6500 (tidligere) asylsøkerne hadde norske myndigheter mer enn et minimum av informasjon. Det er med andre ord ikke riktig at «vi» ikke vet noe om asylsøkerne som forsvinner fra mottak. Det som er riktig er at vi vet lite om hva som skjer med de fleste av dem etter at de forsvinner.
<i>Emneord</i> Asyl, asylsøkere, Norge, migrasjon, mottak, flyktninger, retur, politi
<i>Summary</i> Asylum seekers who leave reception centers without providing a new address figure frequently in the Norwegian public debate on immigration. They are labeled as missing or unaccounted for (Norwegian «for-svunnet»). Critics have argued that no one knows who these people are, where they are and what they are up to. Some see them as potential threats to society. Others presume they leave the country or do no harm if they stay. Information is scarce and assumptions have dominated the public discourse. This report is the first to study those reported to be «missing» from Norwegian reception centers. It does so by looking at information gathered about the applicants before they leave. The data material consists of the more than 47 000 asylum seekers who were registered in Norwegian reception centers between 2008 and 2011. What characterized the asylum seekers who eventually ended up as «missing» from reception centers? The analysis shows that one in five asylum seekers were registered as unaccounted for (approx. 9000 out of 47 000) and that more information about this group is available than what is normally assumed. Factors that increased the probability of going missing included: Not having family or children, being male and

having a registered Dublin case. The results also showed that nationality matters. Most major sending countries (Eritrea, Afghanistan, Somalia and Russia) had lower than average numbers of asylum seekers who went missing from reception centers. A few nationalities showed high numbers of missing (former) applicants.

Out of the bit more than 9000 asylum seekers registered as missing during the three-year period, approximately 2000 were later returned (or returned voluntarily) from Norway. 500 were allowed to stay. For most of the remaining approximately 6500 (former) asylum seekers the Norwegian authorities had more than the minimum information.

The wide spread notion in Norway that there is no information about missing asylum seekers is therefore not correct. What is correct is that little is known about what happens to most of these individuals once they leave the centers. In other words, we know who they are, but not where they are or what they are doing.

Index terms

Asylum, Norway, migration, policy, refugees, reception, return, police, unaccompanied minors