

**A sense of control:  
Why rejected asylum seekers move  
out of reception centres**

*A re-analysis of data from the Fafo study *No way in, no way out: A study of living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway*, written by Cecilie Øien and Silje Sønsterudbråten (2011).*

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## Acknowledgements

This report is a re-analysis of data from the project *No way in, no way out: A study of living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway* (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). Although no interviews were conducted specifically for the re-analysis, I would like to thank the respondents whose stories I base the analysis on, for taking the time and effort to participate.

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## Executive summary

This report is a re-analysis of qualitative data from the 2011 Fafo project *No way in, no way out: A study of living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway* (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). Both the current re-analysis and the previous project were funded by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). The original report was based on qualitative interviews with twenty-nine irregular migrants of various nationalities and ages, who had all experienced having their asylum application rejected. The objective was to produce knowledge about irregular migrants' living conditions as seen from their personal perspectives. In this re-analysis the objective is rather to explore the motives rejected asylum seekers have for moving out of reception centres, and the considerations and reflections involved in their decision to do so.

While the objective of this report is to find out why rejected asylum-seekers move out of reception centres, the reasons for why people stay in centres in the same situation, are an invaluable intake to problematise the motivations for those who move out. Both decisions imply challenges, some are similar and others are different, but all shed light on the decision-making involved in deciding what to do if one's application for asylum is rejected.

Shifts in policies from 2004 to 2012 regarding what rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants should be offered in terms of welfare and housing has influenced those respondents who had been in Norway the longest. This was thus not a motive to move out in itself, but the rejection of their asylum application was originally the reason for why persons who had been in Norway without legal residence in the period between 2004 and through July 2010 had originally moved out, when the opportunities for staying in ordinary reception centres for rejected asylum seekers were limited.

In re-analyzing the data from our study, it emerged that it was often during the period between the first rejection from the UDI (that most had appealed) and the final rejection from the UDI that respondents had either moved out or started to consider what would happen if they had a final rejection. This period can thus be considered a decision-making moment for whether or not to leave the reception centre.

The findings from the re-analysis highlight that the reasons why (rejected) asylum seekers move out of the reception centres are mixed. Overall they are motivated by evading the control inherent in the reception centre system and aiming to gain control over their own situation as far as possible. Common motives given for moving out of a reception centre included:

- To avoid risk of deportation
- Finding work and so escape the passivity they associated with and experienced in reception centres
- Freedom to choose who to live with and away from
- The location of the reception centre
- Trying to get control over their own situation

Reasons why other respondents had chosen to stay were to:

- Have access to a minimum of welfare
- Give a signal that one 'sticks to the rules'
- Aiming to keep on good terms with the authorities and the 'system'
- A hope that they will achieve legal residence with time
- Not being able to see life outside the reception centre as viable without legal residence because of the costs this would imply.

Living outside reception centres and being without any economic support was experienced as hard for all the irregular migrants we interviewed. Having the responsibility for children or other relatives does, however, add to the challenges in everyday life. The majority of those with care responsibilities therefore chose to stay in reception centres. There was a clear tendency in the empirical material that having a family made people more likely to stay in reception centres because it would be difficult for them to manage even minimally decent living standards if they moved out.

Life outside the reception centre undoubtedly offered a number of challenges, but after moving out very few moved back in to a reception centre again.

In the report I suggest that the role ordinary reception centres play in migration and asylum management in Norway at present is that of internal border control. This relates to control measures in the centres. Two categories of control measures that had influenced respondent's decisions about whether to continue living in or to leave the reception are defined in the report. First, there are those measures that are directly aimed at limiting the movement and freedom of persons who have had their asylum applications rejected. Examples of such measures are e.g. limiting social benefits and access to health care, and withdrawing the right for temporary work permits for persons who cannot provide passports. Secondly, there are measures (often called incentives) that play on individuals' self-government or ability to pick up expectations towards them. This can be the focus put on voluntary and forced return in reception centres from the moment people arrive there, or the indirect impact of deportations taking place within a centre. Deportation or forced return can be both kinds of measures, and was reported by respondents to create fear and anxiety. For those who did not see a life outside the reception centre as a feasible solution, living in a reception centre was facing this fear every day not knowing if or when it would happen to them. For those who do not want to live in the suspense such a situation impinges on them, moving out of the reception centre is a strategy to establish a life where they have more control over their own situation.

## Sammendrag

Denne rapporten er en re-analyse av kvalitative data fra Fafo-prosjektet *No way in, no way out: A study of living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway* (Øien og Sønsterudbråten 2011). Både denne rapporten og det forrige prosjektet har vært finansiert av Utlendingsdirektoratet (UDI). Den opprinnelige rapporten var basert på kvalitative intervjuer med tjue ni irregulære migranter med ulike nasjonaliteter og i ulike aldre, som alle hadde opplevd å få avslag på asylsøknaden. Formålet var å skape kunnskap om irregulære migranternes levekår sett fra deres perspektiv. I denne re-analysen er derimot målet å utforske motivene avviste asylsøkere har for å flytte ut av mottakene.

Mens målet med denne rapporten er å finne ut hvorfor avviste asylsøkere flytter ut av mottakene, er det å forstå årsakene til hvorfor folk fortsetter å bo i mottak i samme situasjon en uvurderlig innfallsvinkel til å problematisere motivasjonene også for de som flytter ut. Begge typer avgjørelse innebærer utfordringer, noen er like og andre forskjellige, men alle kaster lys på beslutningsprosessen som er involvert når man skal bestemme seg for hva man skal gjøre hvis ens søknad om asyl blir avvist.

Endringer i policier fra 2004 til 2012 om hvilke velferdsordninger og botilbud asylsøkere med endelig avslag og irregulære migranter skal tilbys, hadde påvirket de respondentene som hadde vært i Norge lengst. Dette var ikke i seg selv et motiv for å flytte ut, men avslaget på asylsøknaden hadde vært den opprinnelige grunnen til at personer med endelig avslag som oppholdt seg i Norge mellom 2004 og 2012 flyttet ut, når mulighetene denne gruppen hadde for å bo i ordinære mottak var begrenset.

I re-analysen av data fra vår tidligere studie, kom det fram at det gjerne var i perioden mellom det første avslaget fra UDI (som de fleste hadde klaget på) og det endelige avslaget fra UDI, at de vi intervjuet enten hadde flyttet ut eller begynt å vurdere hva som ville skje hvis de fikk et endelig avslag. Denne perioden kan dermed betraktes som et beslutningsøyeblikk for om man skal eller ikke skal forlate mottaket.

Funnene i re-analysen fremhever at årsaken til at (avviste) asylsøkere flytter ut av mottakene er blandede. Vanlige motiver som ble oppgitt for å flytte ut av mottak var:

- Å unngå uttransportering
- Å skaffe seg arbeid og på den måten å slippe unna den passiviteteten mottakslivet representerte for dem
- Å få frihet til å velge hvem de ville leve med og ikke
- Plasseringen av mottaket
- Å prøve å få kontroll over sin egen situasjon

Grunner andre respondenter oppga for hvorfor de hadde valgt å bli boende på mottak var at:

- Det ga tilgang til et minimum av velferd
- Sendte et signal om at man forholder seg til gjeldende regler

- Man ønsket å være på god fot med myndighetene og "systemet"
- Et håp om at de med tid ville oppnå lovlig opphold
- De ikke kunne forestille seg at et liv utenfor mottaket var mulig uten lovlig opphold på grunn av de kostnader dette ville innebære.

Å bo utenfor asylmottak og dermed være uten økonomisk støtte ble opplevd som vanskelig for alle de irregulære migrantene vi intervjuet. Å ha ansvar for barn eller andre slektninger gjør hverdagslivets utfordringer enda flere. De fleste av de med omsorgsansvar valgte derfor å bo i asylmottak. Det var en klar tendens i det empiriske materialet at det å ha en familie gjorde det mer sannsynlig at folk ble boende i asylmottak, fordi det ville være vanskelig for dem å klare å opprettholde selv et minimum av anstendig levestandard hvis de flyttet ut.

Livet utenfor mottaket innebar utvilsomt en rekke utfordringer, men etter å ha flyttet ut var det svært uvanlig å flytte tilbake igjen.

I rapporten antyder jeg at den rollen ordinære mottak spiller i utlendingsforvaltningen i Norge i dag er en form for indre grensekontroll. Dette har sammenheng med kontrolltiltak i mottakene. To typer av kontrolltiltak som hadde påvirket respondentenes avgjørelse om å fortsette å bo i eller forlate mottaket blir definert i rapporten. Først er de tiltakene som er direkte rettet mot å begrense mobiliteten og friheten til personer som har fått avslag på asylsøknaden. Eksempler på slike tiltak er for eksempel begrensninger i sosiale ytelser og tilgang til helsetjenester, og at personer som ikke kan fremvise pass fratras muligheten til midlertidig arbeidstillatelse. Dernest er det tiltak (ofte kalt insentiver) som spiller på individens evne til å lede seg selv ut i fra forventninger i omgivelsene. Dette kan være det fokuset på frivillig og tvungen retur som praktiseres i asylmottak fra det øyeblikket folk ankommer, eller det kan være den indirekte virkningen uttransporteringer som finner sted i asylmottaket har på beboere. Uttransporteringer eller tvungen retur kan være begge typer tiltak, og det ble beskrevet av respondenter at disse tiltakene skapte frykt og angst. For dem som ikke ser et liv utenfor mottaket som en mulig løsning på sin situasjon, så innebar det å bo på mottak at de måtte forholde seg til denne frykten hver dag uten å vite om eller når det ville skje med dem. For de som ikke orker å leve i den spenningen en slik situasjon skaper i livene deres, så er det å flytte ut av mottaket en strategi for å etablere et liv der de har mer kontroll over egen situasjon.

## Introduction

This report examines the reasons why rejected asylum seekers or irregular migrants choose to move out of reception centres, based on a re-analysis of the qualitative data from the 2011 Fafo project *No way in, no way out: A study of living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway* (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). The aim of the analysis is to explore the considerations and reflections respondents gave as underlying their choice of place to live, or in other words, the various motives and incentives influencing the decision to move out.

The original report was funded by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), as is this re-analysis of the data. Yet, while the objective of this report is to find out why rejected asylum-seekers move out of reception centres, I argue that understanding the reasons for why people stay in centres in the same situation, is a valuable intake to problematise the motivations for those who move out. Both kinds of decisions imply challenges, some are similar and others are different. A section on the motivations for staying is thus included as a comparative case, as it offers a more in-depth perspective of what it means to move out of the reception centre in the often precarious situation irregular migrants are in.

In the report I describe the main methodological and ethical considerations of the 2011 study, before I give an introduction to how reception centres and the asylum application process are organized. Further, rejected asylum seekers motives for moving out of reception centres are categorized and then explored through empirical examples. The next section is a description of motives for staying in reception centres after the final rejection. Finally, I introduce an analysis on reception centres as border control institutions. In this part the aim of the analysis is to problematise the changes in policies directed at rejected asylum seekers, and how practices within migration management and the centres also influence why some choose to move out while others stay.

## Empirical data

This report is based on a re-analysis of data from for the 2011 living condition study among irregular migrants (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011), and did therefore not include interviews for the purpose of exploring the reasons why rejected asylum seekers leave reception centres. The qualitative interviews I build on here were undertaken between February and December 2010. In total we interviewed twenty nine rejected asylum seekers, of which one had the application rejected in another Nordic country. As can be seen in *Table 1* below, seventeen of those interviewed lived outside reception centres, twelve persons lived in reception centres and for one person the housing situation was unknown.

*Table 1: Interview list for the study of living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway*

No.	Gender	Family in Norway?	Accommodation	Years in Norway
1.	Male	No	Unknown	1
2.	Female	No	Private	Unknown
3.	Male	No	Private	7
4.	Female	No	Private	7
5.	Male	Wife also present, 2 children born in Norway, all without legal residence.	Private	11
6.	Male	No	Private	5
7.	Male	Wife (also present during interview).	Private	3
8.	Male	No	Private	2
9.	Male	No	Private	4
10.	Male	No	Private	1
11.	Male	No	Private	
12.	Male	Child with Norwegian woman.	Private. Slept rough in periods, moved around between friends, stayed with family when taking care of his daughter.	8
13.	Male	No	Private. Sleeping rough or staying with friends.	9
14.	Female	1 child in another country.	Private	4
15.	Female	Husband abroad	Private. Bought her own flat after a long period in a reception centre and renting.	16
16.	Male	Daughter abroad, girlfriend.	Waiting reception centre.	7
17.	Male	No	Private	2
18.	Male	Parents and a brother under 18 years of age, all without legal residence.	Reception centre	6
19. & 20.	Male and female	Couple with two children, both born in Norway, all without legal residence.	Reception centre	13 & 8
21.	Female	Twins, born in Norway.	Reception centre	6
22. & 23.	Male and female	Couple with 2 children born in another European country, all without legal residence.	Reception centre	5
24.	Female	Husband and two children with legal residence, one child without. All children lived with her.	Reception centre	3
25.	Male	Mother (also without legal residence), sister in another European country.	Reception centre	8
26. & 27.	Females	Two sisters (17 and 18), mother also present during the interview.	Reception centre	2
28.	Female	Daughter (1 1/2 years at the time of interview). Both without legal residence. Asylum application rejected in another country.	Private	1 (and 1 1/2 years in another country before coming to Norway).
29.	Male	No	Private	3

As it was a study of living conditions it has also been important to ask both persons who moved out of the reception centre before they knew what the outcome of their application was and those who no longer had legal residence, what considerations had

gone into their decision. The kind and standard of housing was an important concern for respondents.

The living conditions and situation of families with children was also an important focus in the 2011 study, something which is reflected in the selection of respondents. In addition, I have discussed the issue of why rejected asylum seekers stay or leave centres in conversations with reception centre staff in this project and in other contexts.

## A brief note on methodology and ethics

While this is a re-analysis of data, I include here a short explanation of the main methodological and ethical issues that were relevant for the previous study.<sup>1</sup> Contact between the researchers and the respondents were established at the *Health Centre for Undocumented Immigrants* run as a collaboration between the Oslo Church City Mission and the Red Cross, and through NGOs working with immigrants and more generally for immigrants' rights.

We ended up only doing research with rejected asylum seekers and not other irregular migrants that had never been registered with the authorities. This means that there is a bias in the study, but we argued that the main themes we covered in the report are relevant also for those who never registered. While there are of course other challenges for this group than for those we wrote about in the report, the material from the previous study thus lends itself particularly well to a re-analysis concerning why rejected asylum-seekers move out of reception centres.

A key aim of the study was to understand the situation of families without legal residence and if possible youth between 16-18 years of age. We were not expected to interview anyone younger than this, and in fact only one minor was interviewed. However, several of the persons we interviewed had the experience of being youth and living in this situation over time. Apart from the few individuals this involved, our understanding of how it is to be a child in this situation is based on the expressed concerns of parents and their perception of what their children were going through.<sup>2</sup>

The ethical considerations involved when doing research with irregular migrants are manifold and complex, often associated with the vulnerable position they have in society in general (cf. Friberg 2004; Brunovskis and Bjerkan 2008; Brunovskis 2010; Bilger and Liempt 2009), and particularly because of the very limited access they have to health care, work and shelter (Brekke and Sørholdt 2005; Aarø and Wyller 2005; Andenæs 2009; McKay et al. 2009; Anderson and Ruhs 2010; Aschehoug 2010; Hjelde 2010b; Valenta et. al. 2010; Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). One of the challenges in the research was to identify respondents. There were events towards the end of the project, such as the publication of the book *Illegally Norwegian* by the young irregular mi-

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail about the methodological framework of the project, please see the original report.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the situation of children living with their families in reception centres in Norway, see Seeberg 2009; Lidén, Seeberg and Engebriksen 2011; Winswold and Engebriksen 2011.

grant Maria Amelie and the debate around her later arrest, that were part of a process where the issue of irregularity emerged as a public concern associated with a broad field of activities, actors and arenas. As a consequence this has changed the situation for researchers who would like to have access to do research involving irregular migrants, but this happened as we were finishing our report. We were fortunate, though, to be able to contact people directly at the Health Centre for Undocumented Immigrants in Oslo. This offered an alternative arena that our Fafo colleagues Anette Brunovskis and Lise Bjerkan (2008) had not had in their study *Research with irregular migrants in Norway. Methodological and ethical challenges and emerging research agendas*. We were from the beginning of the project nevertheless dependent to a great degree on contacts with and in NGOs and reception centres to identify potential respondents for us. The ethical challenge this produces is that it can be easy to recognize the stories of respondents for contacts and key informants, when key informants are the contact point between researchers and respondents who are irregular migrants. It can be difficult for researchers to anonymise the identities of respondents sufficiently when this is the case (cf. Brunovskis and Bjerkan 2008:31).

There is also a danger that it results in a bias in the data (cf. Brunovskis 2010:56). Many of the people we met and interviewed wanted their identity to be known as they felt they had nothing to hide. Some were used to being in contact with journalists or NGOs. A few regretted in hindsight having been open about their situation, as it did not help their case and had left them feeling more vulnerable than before telling their story. Thus, anonymisation is not only a matter of how respondents feel about their identity being revealed there and then, but also about how they potentially feel after the project is finished. Respondents' stories published in research publications or policy papers are in the end representations and analyses of their situation, and as such it is also a transformation of how they speak about themselves and their experiences. Anonymisation is about the privacy of respondent now and in the future, about how they may tell different aspect of their stories to different people and not least that, friends, children and other relatives may be recognized through the recounting of their stories. One way we chose to deal with this was to sometimes split stories in separate parts, and we were also consequent with not revealing peoples nationality or ethnicity when discussing individual stories.

Informed consent is an important principle in all qualitative research, and in particular with vulnerable individuals. The researcher needs to stress for the respondents that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from participation at any time. As we were doing this project for the UDI, it was particularly pertinent not to give the impression that participation in the study would have any impact on their asylum case – neither in a positive nor negative direction. As a result of stressing our independence from the UDI whilst at the same time communicating that the UDI was funding the study, made our role somewhat unclear for some. Yet, while we also were very clear that we would anonymise all information, providing them with the framework of the research was crucial so that they knew that the information they provided would also be accessible to the authorities, but in a transformed way. For both those still awaiting a decision for their asylum application and rejected asylum seekers the UDI is ultimately the keeper of their fate as they see it- the key to a future residence permit. For us doing applied research funded by the UDI, it was crucial to explain we were nevertheless independent from the authorities. This can be hard get across, but important as being associated with

the UDI necessarily will influence what people tell about themselves during interviews. As researchers doing commissioned work for what the respondents see as the gatekeeper to potential improvement of their situation, we were therefore both concerned with not pushing themes respondents were not keen to elaborate on and to be sensitive towards what motivations they had for participating. Informed consent has thus been an ongoing process throughout the contact with the respondents referred to in this report.

## The role of reception centres vis-à-vis (rejected) asylum seekers

To answer why rejected asylum seekers move out of reception centres it is necessary to provide some context for the role of these centres in Norway at present. All asylum seekers arriving in Norway are offered a place in a reception centre, but even though staying there is voluntary most applicants choose to stay within this system while awaiting the decision of their application. In Norway, the UDI is responsible for the guidelines and inspection of the reception centres (the exception being care centres), but the Directorate does not run the centres themselves. The management of reception centres is contracted out to municipalities, NGOs and private actors who take on the responsibility of catering to the needs of both the state and the asylum seekers. The objective of the reception centres is that,

*A state reception centre should be as normal a place to live as possible for people in abnormal life circumstances. The reception centre should attend to and give the residents opportunities for development according to their individuality, belonging and ability for coping. Such services should have a modest, but reasonable standard.<sup>3</sup>*

Currently there are four main categories of reception centres and a fifth that was relevant during our living condition study, but that was closed down half way through the project:

1. **Transit reception centres:** Upon arrival in Norway, asylum seekers are offered a place in a transit reception centre where they stay until they have been registered by the police and had obligatory health checks.
2. **Ordinary reception centres:** After this initial registration phase, individual adults and families are moved to ordinary reception centres.
3. **Care centres:** Unaccompanied minors are moved to care centres if they are clearly below 15 years of age or believed to be so. These centres are the responsibility of the Child Welfare Service.

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<sup>3</sup>My translation from Norwegian: "Et statlig mottak skal være et mest mulig normalt bosted for personer i en unormal livssituasjon. Mottaket skal ivareta og gi vekstmuligheter for beboernes individualitet, tilhørighet og mestringsevne. Tilbudene skal ha en nøktern, men forsvarlig standard." The quote was taken from a report on one of the reception centres:

<http://www.udi.no/Global/upload/RegionKontor/felles%20for%20alle%20regionkontor/Tilsyn%2009/RKS/Tilsynsrapport%202009%20Larvik.pdf>. Downloaded 23 February 2012.

4. **Separate reception units or centres for unaccompanied minors:** The UDI is responsible for those unaccompanied minors who are between 15 and 18 years of age.
5. **Waiting reception centres:** From 2004 to 2010 welfare benefits were withdrawn from rejected asylum seekers who did not collaborate to return to their country of origin (Brekke and Sørholt 2005; Valenta and Thorshaug 2011), and at the same time the authorities initiated a new kind of voluntary facility for this group, called waiting reception centres. These centres had lower living standards than the regular centres and were intended as a place that would motivate persons without legal residence to return to their country of origin. The conditions of the three centres in questions were heavily criticized by NGOs as well as researchers, as was the case with the report by Valenta et al. (2010) that evaluated the situation for the people living there and if these institutions met their intended purpose.

The publication of our report on the living conditions of irregular migrants took place a few months after riots and fires in two of the waiting reception centres that had ended in their closure. The summer of 2010, and parallel with these events, the UDI also had a public tender for a kind of facility intended to replace the waiting reception centres, namely the so-called return centres. As of 2012 the plans for establishing these have been abandoned, because none of the offers received were considered satisfactory to the UDI.

The closure of these centres was in many ways welcomed both by those who had criticized them and by those who had lived there. It is also an example of how shifts in policies from 2004 and until 2012 in what rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants should be offered in terms of welfare (Brekke 2008; Aarø and Wyller 2005; Valenta and Thorshaug 2011). This change is linked to changing political attitudes and practices, and starting in 2004, there was a change in the offer of housing and benefits accessible to rejected asylum seekers (cf. Brekke and Sørholdt 2005). The most important changes being the “repeal of the offer of housing in reception centres and the tightening-up of rights to social benefits” (Aarø and Wyller 2005:3). At the time, Aarø and Wyller, point out, this “placed people without legal residence who did not cooperate on return in a difficult situation – socially, financially and personally” (ibid.). In addition, the waiting reception centres were established to offer a bare minimum of support for those who chose this option. The material standard of these centres and the provisions of welfare for the residents were often mentioned by the respondents in the study as ‘the worst case scenario’. But after these centres were closed, what support is offered to rejected asylum seekers today?

While families and persons with special needs have been able to live in ordinary reception centres all through the period from 2004, the offer of housing and minimum subsistence support through the ordinary reception centre system has been available for all rejected asylum seekers since the incidents that closed the waiting reception centres down in July 2010. At present ordinary reception centres for adults and families therefore have a mixed population: both those who are applicants and those who have had their applications rejected live in the same centres. In addition, there are also quite a large group of persons who have been granted asylum or a residence permit on strong humanitarian grounds who live in the same facilities while they wait for a place to live in

a municipality. Some centres are centralized, meaning that all residents live in larger units, whereas others are decentralized or consisting of a number of flats or smaller houses. In some cases one institution can have a mix of different kinds of housing facilities. Members of staff perform many tasks in the centre, but an important delimitation of their responsibilities and rights to information about residents is linked to the rejection of applications. When the final rejection is a fact, staff are not informed about the decision as this is intended to protect the privacy of residents. The way they normally find out, if the person does not tell them about it him- or herself, is the immediate changes in the social benefits people without legal residence receive. While this does not concern the motivations of rejected asylum seekers to move out, it has to do with the relationship between them and staff and the experience of the reception centre as a site of state control and governance. I will return to latter issue below.

## When in the asylum application process do people move out?

A brief explanation of the asylum application process and the reception centre system in Norway is in place here, as this will serve as part of the contextualization of when and why rejected asylum seekers move out of reception centres.

If an application is rejected the applicant can appeal the decision to the UDI within three weeks (called rejection in first instance, or in this report first rejection). The UDI then reconsiders the case, but if they do not change their decision he or she receives the final rejection from the UDI and are provided with a set date for leaving Norway. There is, however, a final opportunity to appeal this decision, but this time to the *Immigration Appeals Board* (UNE) which handles complaints over the decisions made by the UDI. When an applicant has received the final rejection and is not intent on appealing the decision, he or she is obliged to leave the country or has to decide to apply for voluntary return scheme within three weeks.<sup>4</sup> This is a short time frame to make such an important decision for the future, and it demands of the migrant that she or he has thought through potential alternatives before the final rejection is received. While some wait until the final rejection is a fact to take action, others stop the process after the first rejection and move out the reception centre. Some live without legal residence either in reception centres or privately for a longer or shorter period before they apply for voluntary return. Those we interviewed did not feel they could move back to their country of origin and thus continued to stay in Norway without legal residence.

Looking at statistics from the UDI regarding the numbers for asylum seekers who have received a first rejection, others for whom the process has stopped and those who have received the final rejection builds a better understanding of when people move out. At the end of 2011, there were a total of 15737 persons living in reception centres. Of these 3896 had received a rejection by the UDI and were awaiting a decision to their appeal. 517 of those living in reception centres either had their cases dismissed, had their case withdrawn or had some other status that was not considered as being an applicant

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<sup>4</sup> The general rule is that the date for departure is set three weeks after the decision, but there can be longer or shorter deadlines for leaving.

anymore. Finally, there were 4851 persons with a final rejection and “a duty” to leave Norway.

Judging from the data from our study, it was often during the period between the first rejection (that most had appealed) and the final rejection from the UDI that respondents had either moved out or started to consider what would happen if they had a final rejection. This period can thus be considered a decision-making moment for whether or not to leave the reception centre. According to the statistics for 2011, a total of 9264 persons who were in the phase between the receiving the first and final rejection from the UDI continued to stay in a reception centre. In the same period, 3377 persons in the same stages of the asylum seeking process had moved out from the reception centres or were now unaccounted for.<sup>5</sup> The majority of people, who were in a situation of decision-making about staying or leaving, thus decide to stay in the centres. This makes it essential to understand the reasoning of both categories of (rejected) asylum seekers.

There are also people who never appeal the first rejection and opt for finding a way to cope with their situation. Of those with a final rejection from the UDI or who appeal to UNE, however, many continue to work hard at achieving legal residence despite having few options left. They do not see the final rejection as the end of their fight for legal residence (Valenta and Thorshaug 2011: 218; Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011). Of those we interviewed the majority had decided to move out when they received the final decision. While it often was the rejection itself that triggered the move, the motives people had for doing so were more complex.

## Motives for moving out

Re-analyzing the data from the study on irregular migrants, it is clear that the motives people have for moving from the reception centre are varied. There was a clear tendency in the accounts of the respondents that something had happened between the first and second rejection of their application. Reasons may directly concern issues of avoiding deportation, wanting to work or move to a new place – but often there are more existential motivations as well. Though many were willing to share their experiences as irregular migrants with us, it was also challenging to get respondents to expand on issues related to work and housing. Respondents generally preferred talking about their asylum case and legal situation, rather than more existential issues and their futures. Housing was, as we describe in the report, one of the most challenging aspects of irregular migrants’ everyday life, and as such it was difficult to get enough information about how the places they lived were. As we mostly met people outside their homes, on neutral ground so to speak, it was also difficult to understand the implications of how they were living. Generally the uncertainty of their situation and the stress of not having anything to do was part of the underlying reasons guiding their decisions to move out before a final rejection even had been received. It was also the case that the respondents had understood the asylum application process to varying degrees.

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<sup>5</sup> Source: the UDI.

The main reasons given for moving out of the reception centre were recurrent themes when people were asked what had motivated their decision, and it was not uncommon that the decision was based on a mix of causes:

- **To avoid risk of deportation:** He or she had been afraid of being deported as a consequence of a rejection or a *potential* rejection, and thus moved out to escape the control of the UDI and the police. Those who live outside centres are also at risk of deportation, but for respondents staying in the centres heighten this risk.
- **Move out to find work and so escape passivity:** Several of the respondents explained how they had wanted to escape the passivity and boredom associated with living in a reception centre, often expressed through the wish for getting a job, making a contribution to society or living independently because they did not want to be a burden. Some respondents, who had been living in Norway for a longer period of time, had temporary work permits at the time they left the reception centre and had continued to receive tax cards when they no longer had legal residence. Others had managed to keep jobs in the informal market and although they were worried about being found out/caught they had an income that enabled them to put food on the table and pay rent.
- **Freedom to choose who to live with and away from:** Many experience that living in the reception centre deprives them from their privacy. This does not necessarily have to do with the density of people, but can be related to the presence of people with whom one does not want to live and that it is an institutional setting. The fact that other residents are people in the same situation as oneself is not to say that one feels any familiarity with them. Respondents emphasized that they tried connecting with people who were not asylum seekers, and some felt alienated by life in the centre. Moving out of a reception centre was, on the other hand, associated with living a life where one was not only categorized as a (rejected) asylum seeker. Another issue was that the loyalty of staff was experienced as uncertain. Ultimately they are grouped together with the authorities although they are not directly employed by the UDI (cf. Brekke and Søholt 2005:91). Living in the reception centre thus also meant having their continued gaze or attention on one's status and situation. Furthermore, the wish to live with family, friends or other people they themselves had chosen to live with was as strong as the desire to exercise control over who they shared everyday life with. Alternatively, they had sought to live independently despite the difficulties this implied for them.
- **The location of the reception centre:** Reception centres are often situated in small communities, where there are few opportunities for asylum seekers to get work or to get to know new people. In small communities it is very hard to escape the fact that they are asylum seekers and foreigners. In respondents' accounts life in the reception centre was associated with the feeling that this one aspect of their lives imprisoned them in a given role and identity. Changing location, by moving out of the reception centre, was as such often a means to attempt escaping the isolation or alienation they felt.
- **Trying to get control over their own situation:** For the rejected asylum seekers we interviewed, life in the reception centre and the asylum application process was a phase in their lives they desperately wanted to move on from. It represent-

ed a situation where everyday life had been shaped by waiting for the decision on one's asylum application. Therefore, moving out was an attempt to establish a life for oneself that moved forward. From the data it is clear that having access to work and housing, and being part of a social network, are particularly important for rejected asylum seekers as something that gives their lives meaning. This is not least a matter of being accepted and having value as a person, or an acknowledgement of their existence which the irregular migrants we interviewed often felt was lacking in their lives. In some ways irregular migrants who do not see return to their country of origin as a solution to their situation end up in an unresolved situation where nothing is certain. Yet, most of those living outside the reception centre described it as a place from the past – not a place for the future.

Life outside the reception centre undoubtedly presented respondents with a number of challenges in terms of living conditions, but for respondents who had moved out and lived for a longer period outside the centre moving back into such an institution seemed unbearable (cf. Valenta et. al. 2010:106). Only one family had moved back in to a reception centre after a longer period living privately. This was felt as a defeat, as they had in fact moved out in the period before any decision had been taken in regard to their application. They had settled in a local community and started a small business. Then after the first rejection they decided to close the business and the husband took a job in a factory. When they received the final rejection, he lost his job, and with two children to protect they saw no other opportunities than asking to move in to a reception centre. They found life there very difficult, and for the parents the living conditions they experienced and the potential for deportation was a constant worry. Life outside had not been difficult as long as they had temporary residence permits – it was the practical and material consequences of living without legal residence as a family that they felt had forced them back.

Respondents themselves, independently of the actual motivation(s) they described for moving out, focused on how important it was for them to feel they were able to make decisions regarding how their everyday life should be organized and who to live with. The negative effects of a life in waiting has been noted upon and analyzed in numerous publications (Brekke and Sørholt 2005; Aarø and Wyller 2005; Hjelde 2010a; Valenta et. al. 2010; Valenta 2012). This is in accordance with the findings in our report. Moving out of the reception centre was described as a means of escaping the limitations, passivity and boredom their lives presented them with, and was thus an active strategy to try to get control over their lives.

There are differences between those who had been in Norway for a longer period of time, since the late 1990s up to mid 2000, and those who had arrived more recently. During this period there have been many changes to the regulations and practices regarding rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants, something which was mentioned above. For persons who had been forced to move out in 2004 because of policy changes, several years had passed by and they had gotten used to life outside the centres. Such changes produce different cohorts of irregular migrants, as their opportunities over time differ. For those who had arrived more recently, moving out may seem a less attractive choice if access to work is becoming more difficult than it used to be at the same time as they are allowed to stay in centre. Apart from also demonstrating how changing policies affect people in different ways, those who have established themselves with a life out-

side the centres accentuated the original purpose or ideal function of the ordinary reception centres, namely that they are supposed to be a temporary place of residence during the asylum application process. Yet, regardless of what their intentions had been when moving out, respondents were also quite open that in reality their choices were limited outside the reception centre due to their legal status.

## Life outside the reception centre: the search for a room of one's own and job to go to

Housing is not only a very important aspect for how people perceive their living conditions, but lack of appropriate housing also negatively affects mental and physical health. In a recent report, the World Health Organization (WHO 2012: 23) argues that "housing in particular has been recognized as an important parameter affecting population well-being and health", and furthermore that "poor living environments [...] may generate chronic stress". As is also pointed out in the WHO study, stress is- as well as being a psychological state- a physical reality that produces illnesses. In our study we found that housing constituted a particular challenge for rejected asylum-seekers (see Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011:61). Not having legal residence means that they often are dependent on friends, acquaintances, relatives or employers to put them up. This section is meant to illustrate what emerged as a very important theme in the data: namely that moving out of the reception centre was also a matter of trying to move on with their lives by making decisions about being active and taking as much control over their situation as they found possible.

Finding a home outside the reception centre is dependent on having a certain amount of resources, in terms of social network and often access to paid work. Some have relatives they can trust, but this is often dependent on the kind of relationship in question. The solidarity felt towards a child or a sibling may be stronger than towards a second or third cousin, or friends from the village back home. A young man had been in Norway a little over a year and had close relatives living permanently in Norway. When he first arrived he had been in a centre, but soon chose to move out to stay with relatives. This was an opportunity for him to be with his family and re-establish his relationship with them. His relatives were all well established in Norway and were working. This made moving out of the centre easy for him, as he had people to look after him with established networks within and outside their own national group. More importantly, rejected asylum seekers in a similar situation as this young man do not have to worry about finding a place to live and how to survive without the economic support living in the reception centre offers. Those who chose to move out do not receive any economic benefits, and thus are totally dependent on being able to produce a minimum of resources to support themselves.

Housing and work is in fact closely related, as a minimum of income is necessary to cover for the cost of shelter. For persons without work, or for those who only have casual work, the dependency on others is greater. As compensation for being put up, we were told people would make food and clean for everyone in the household. A couple that had lived for a while privately before becoming parents, holding jobs and a flat, said that they had to give up living outside the reception centre as they felt abused by their

friends. The moment they were dependent on help, their relationship with friends changed, they could now be asked to do anything in return for shelter. They were disappointed in friends from their country of origin, and were at the time of the interview living in a reception centre in a city south of Oslo. I asked if they missed being in touch with their friends, but they said that it was better this way. Their situation was the way it was and living in the reception centre was a better solution for them as parents than struggling to cope with life without the support the centre offered them. There they were not dependent on social networks for basic subsistence. Thus, the distress of living in Norway without legal residence was in their opinion not about the authorities knowing where they lived, but rather about experiencing that life was on hold because they neither could get legal residence nor see any prospects for returning to their country of origin.

To be able to live outside reception centres, the majority of rejected asylum seekers need access to work – be it in the informal sector or for a small category of people with a temporary work permit. The regulations of such permits have changed over the last few years, and a recent development that has strongly affected irregular migrants is the so-called “cleanup” Tax Norway undertook before sending out tax cards for 2011. Whereas persons who have been granted asylum or any other kind of permanent residence permit will get a national insurance number or social security number, those who await a decision on their application will be given a temporary identification that is called the D-number. When a person has received the final rejection and when the mandatory departure date has been set by the UDI, the person stops existing as far as the social security number is concerned. The person becomes non-existent or invisible to other public bodies than the UDI and the police. However, until the beginning of 2011 Tax Norway had not systematically checked D-numbers to remove persons who had received rejections to their asylum claim, who earlier had temporary work permits. One of the women interviewed had been in Norway for sixteen years. Although she was without legal residence she had earlier had a temporary work permit and received a tax card every year. For a long period of time she had held a permanent job, and this had enabled her to buy a flat of her own. First she had lived in a reception centre, before she moved out to rent a place. Every year, at the time a new tax card was expected, she was nervous she would have been found out. Her worry was that this would mean she would lose her job and potentially her flat. A few months after she was interviewed, the above-mentioned check by Tax Norway took place.

An important finding in the re-analysis of the data is thus that it is not uncommon for (rejected) asylum seekers to move out of the reception centre for mixed reasons. The most common motivations given are as mentioned above, that they do not want their whereabouts to be known and because they need work. These are often mentioned together. One of the interviewed men had received his final rejection from the UDI three years prior to the interview, but decided not to appeal it to the UNE. Instead he moved out of the reception centre. He told us he had struggled with depression since before his arrival in Norway. After moving out of the centre he had lived in different flats in Oslo, much helped by friends and acquaintances he had done favors for at the reception centre and later. He was on good terms with people in the local community, where he also had made friends. He missed this when he moved to Oslo. However, because he had helped many people with their computers and other menial jobs at the reception centre, he could use his contacts from there when he needed help, either for housing or jobs. During

some periods he had also lived in the property of a religious community,<sup>6</sup> something he was very satisfied with as it was out of the question for him to move into a reception centre again. In his opinion, it was not good for people to live in reception centres for long. He and several of the others who were interviewed, both of those who had moved out and those who were living in reception centres, not having anything to do and at the same time also being a receiver of social benefits felt ‘wrong’. Working emerges in this context as a key activity to feel dignity and not least that one is contributing towards one’s own subsistence.

Work was thus spoken about as a means to provide an income as well as a way to avoid passivity and the feeling of being a freeloader. Another man, in his late thirties, had been in an irregular situation for a year at the time of the interview. He received the rejection a year after he had applied for asylum. However, he had moved out of the reception centre six months after arriving. He had two main reasons for this. Firstly, he was tired of “only sitting on his bum, drinking tea” and secondly he disliked the small community the reception centre was in. Worst, though, was the fact that he did not have anything to do. He wanted to be active and work. So, his decision was based on wanting to fill his days and to live independently from the reception centre. Therefore, he moved to another part of the country together with a friend he was acquainted with through the centre. Through their network they had received contacts for potential employers while at the reception centre and easily found jobs. He said that he realized himself and through what he heard from others that it had become increasingly difficult in the last few years to get work for persons without legal residence. During the year he had been living privately he had been employed all the time although at times with a very low salary. He complained about employers abusing their situation. Yet, he had managed to pay for a place to live with friends and was content with his situation in this regard. Life outside the reception centre was hard, but moving back was out of the question.

Both these men had mixed reasons for moving out, while for one the fear of deportation had been a motivating factor for moving out of the reception centre, the other man felt the strain of not doing anything even before the rejection. As for one of the families living privately only the husband was interviewed. He had been in Norway ten years longer than his wife. During his time here he had worked as a taxi driver, he had his own business and he took any work available to him to support himself. But this was before he got his final rejection. He had in fact spent very little time in a reception centre, and had lived what he saw as a “normal life” integrated into society, for a long time. He got married and they had two children to support. He had saved money in the years he was working, but now he could not pay for his apartment anymore. He did not live in hiding, for, as he said, everyone knew where they lived. After the final rejection he had not been able to renew his temporary work permit and he did not want to do anything that was against the law. This, of course, left him with no options for supporting his family and he was left waiting for another appeal regarding his case, he had ran out of ideas of how to get out of the situation they were in.

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<sup>6</sup> Religious communities and networks of persons with the same ethnic background or nationality were important for many of those trying to cope outside the reception centres. However, based on the empirical data we had, it is not possible to say whether religious communities influence the decision to move out of centres.

Living outside reception centres and being without any economic support was experienced as hard for all the irregular migrants we interviewed. However, being part of a family with children where all are in the same situation creates other concerns than individual migrants have to consider. As can be seen in Table 1, only two persons who had children lived privately. In addition to the man whose story I referred to above, a woman with a young daughter also reported living privately. Her story was that she had come to Norway after her application for asylum had been rejected in Sweden, and as such she had never lived in a reception centre here. Afraid of the authorities, she would never consider contacting any institution or organization for a place to stay. Thus, in our data, these two stories were exceptions, as the majority of those interviewed who had children or other relatives they were responsible for, chose to stay in reception centres.

## Motives for staying or moving back in

In the study on the living conditions of irregular migrants in 2011, we contacted parents with a final rejection living in centres, as we found it a challenge to get in touch with enough families outside the reception centre context. We wanted to understand the differences between people who were caregivers for children (or other relatives) and those who were single. Had they stayed in the centre or moved back in because of their children? While there are people in centres who do take on informal work, most of the people we interviewed said that they do not work because they don't have a work permit. The answer we often received was that since they were not allowed to take a job, they were worried that doing so would hamper their opportunity for a residence permit now or in the future. Their argument was that without a job they could not see how they would manage a life outside the centre. While we also heard about people in reception centres who did work, the difference was still, as discussed above, that for those who move out some kind of work is absolutely necessary to survive on one's own without the infrastructure and minimum of support the reception centre in fact offers.

Rejected asylum seekers living in the centre also worried about reception centre staff or others finding out about their work and then reporting it. This is related to the double-bind loyalty of staff who have both responsibilities towards the residents as well as the UDI. As Brekke and Søholt (2005:91) point out, if they lose the loyalty of their employer they lose their jobs, and if they lose the loyalty of residents, their work environment can become unbearable. Worries residents have over sharing information about themselves with staff can be associated with the social control inherent in institutions like reception centres, a question I analyze further below.

The following outlines the main motivations and reasons for deciding to stay in a reception centre:

- **Access to a minimum of welfare:** In the centre rejected asylum seekers are provided with a room, they can stay in contact with a GP (or *fastlege* in Norwegian), they receive limited economic support and have access to staff that can help them understand the process they are in.
- **A signal that one 'sticks to the rules':** Most of the respondents were eager to stress that they were law-abiding and that they strived to do 'the right thing'. Those living in centres stressed the importance of keeping the asylum application

case on track and most tried to avoid doing things they thought would impact their case negatively (such as working or breaking rules in other ways), as they worried this would have serious implications for their case if they were to appeal it at a later stage or come back to Norway after a period outside the country.

- **Aiming to keep on good terms with the authorities and the ‘system’:** Staying in the centre can also be a way for rejected asylum seekers to show they have done nothing wrong, have no reason to hide and that they are cooperating as far as they can with the authorities. Moving out could be an indication for some that she or he had something to hide, and people feared that this could have negative consequences.
- **The hope that they will achieve legal residence with time.** I here point to persons who for specific reasons know that they can apply through a child or a spouse for family reunification at a later stage, or who have organizations working with them to bring their case to court.
- **Not being able to see life outside as viable without legal residence:** This was emphasized by the majority of those living in reception centres as a key reason for staying and also by the couple who had moved back in. While some living in centres wondered about the loyalty of staff, the majority felt that the reception centre context offered a place where they could ask for help. Adults with children to look after also felt they had support in the local community where the centre was located. In these two aspects they differed greatly from those who had chosen to move out.

This latter point goes to the core of the findings of our 2011 study, that staying in reception centres was particularly important to the adults we interviewed who had responsibilities towards children or elderly parents as a means to secure basic living conditions for their family. It was clear to us when writing up the report that when comparing the situation of respondents living in reception centres and those who were living privately, that the first group had better living conditions than the second group despite the relatively low standard and crowded space in reception centres. Ordinary reception centres did offer the irregular migrants in our study better material conditions. However, in terms of subjective experience and the existential issues related to staying in Norway without legal residence both groups struggled equally and both groups defined themselves as irregular migrants. Common to their experience of the reception centre was that it was a place for deportations and uncertainty.

## The fear factor: reception centres as a border control institution

Writing about ID cards, biometrics and surveillance, Lyon (2005) argues that one of the important purposes of these different technologies is to strengthen the control of movement and anonymity within a nation. He further claims that practices of control and surveillance constitute new borders within borders. In a similar vein, based on my re-analysis of the data from the 2011 study and more broadly on my work on issues of irregularity, return and asylum policies, I suggest that ordinary reception centres are places of control and surveillance of migrant populations that produce new borders within.

While the dominant European way to deal with unauthorized migrants is through a focus on security and pre-border control measures through an externalized migration management of European borders (cf. Carling and Hernández-Carratero 2011; Aas 2007; Aas 2011), in Norway at present the role ordinary reception centres play in asylum management is that of internal border control.

Many who know the reception centre system in Norway would be inclined to disagree to this view, arguing that people live there for years without being deported. They would also say that people are free to come and go as they want. There are certain freedoms of movement for rejected asylum seekers living in the reception centre system, but structurally speaking there is no doubt that reception centres are important sites of socio-political control of rejected asylum seekers. Foucault's concept of governmentality (cf. Foucault 1991) is useful to explain this intertwining of subjective, social and political measures to create and avoid control. In his perspective, the government is not limited to "the activities of the state and its institutions, but more broadly [points to] any rational effort to influence or guide the conduct of human beings through acting upon their hopes, desires, circumstances, or environment" (Inda 2005:1). In other words, contemporary political power is exercised not only through practical politics and institutions, but aims to influence individuals directly. The state is only one actor trying to influence the situation of rejected asylum seekers and create measures that affect them, organizations, professionals, different networks and bodies also participate in exercising power and influence over individuals and groups.

Above, I described the differentiation in types of reception centres in Norway, and pointed out that waiting reception centres had been closed and that the return centres one originally had planned to open in 2011 had also been shelved. The situation now is one where the population within one and the same institution can be very mixed. This can have consequences for the social dynamics in the centres, as people compare their situation before and after rejection, and their own situation with others in the centre. Staff reported that it can be difficult for those who have received a rejection to live side by side with others who are successful in their claim, and who often will continue to live in the centre until they are secured a place to live in a municipality. Likewise I have explained the effect of deportation on rejected asylum seekers and those still waiting for a final decision to their asylum application. Altogether this can make for very tense relations within a reception centre. So, what implications does it have on the situation in reception centres that they are dealing with very mixed populations, and— in the absence of specific facilities for rejected asylum seekers— how is control imposed?

There are, as suggested above, other ways of imposing control on populations than building fences around their living quarters. Khosravi (2010:71) reflecting on his own experience of being a refugee and living in a refugee camp in Sweden, argues that "camps produce refugees, or rather refugeeness". He tells how,

I, who had crossed so many borders and lived in dangerous places, shared room with prostitutes and a cell with a murderer and drug smugglers, had become afraid of taking the bus to the city centre, in one of the safest countries of the world (ibid.).

What he describes here is how insecurity and feeling vulnerable is not only a consequence of his experiences that led to him coming to Sweden, but also of the context the camp or reception centre represents for asylum seekers. Living in a reception centre leaves little room for focusing on other aspects of life than the asylum application

process and waiting. This in itself imposes restrictions on self-expression, although it is not an intentional control measure. Returning to how the rejected asylum seekers in our study explained why they had either moved out or continued to stay in reception centres, I would define two categories of control measures that had influenced their decision. First, there are those measures that are directly aimed at limiting the movement and freedom of those who have had their asylum applications rejected. Examples of such measures are e.g. limiting social benefits and access to health care, and withdrawing the right for temporary work permits for persons who cannot provide passports. A very important direct measure for control and surveillance is also deportation that can be inflicted on one person in a family and not all, having consequences on the remaining relatives' understanding of what would be best to do next. It can work as a motivation for leaving the reception centre, for choosing voluntary return or for continuing to stay with the implications this has for their situation.

Secondly, there are measures (often called incentives) that play on individuals' self-government. This can be the focus put on voluntary and forced return in reception centres from the moment people arrive there, or the indirect impact of deportations taking place within a centre. Deportations were events that created a lot of unrest and anxiety among those respondents who lived in reception centres.<sup>7</sup> Deportations are at the same time a demonstration of power and an effective implementation of politics. The message of deportation as an indirect control measure is thus that if you do not choose to leave the country voluntarily yourself, there is a grave risk of the decision being made for you. This is the intention from the side of the authorities, and this is how respondents and reception centre staff I have met in course of this and other projects also talk about forced return. This is in line with Miller and Rose (2008:52) when they maintain that "modern political power does not take the form of the domination of subjectivity [...]. Rather, political power has become dependent upon a web of technologies for fabricating and maintaining self-government". Deportation was reported to create fear and anxiety, and for those who did not see a life outside the reception centre as a feasible solution, living there could best be described as either sitting in an airport terminal uncertain about the timing of the departure or clinging on to the hope that someone with the necessary authority will accept that their claim to asylum had been right all along. For those who do not want to live in the suspense such a situation impinges on them, moving out of the reception centre is a strategy to establish a life where they have more control over themselves.

I argue that it is avoiding what I have called the fear factor above, which summarizes the motivations for why people choose to move out of reception centres. Rejected asylum seekers move out of reception centres aiming to escape the control of the authorities and to increase the control over their own situation. 'Escaping control' is not used here as a way to criminalize persons without legal residence. Rather, I use it to describe how the control measures inherent in and associated with reception centres motivates different kinds of solutions depending on the circumstances of the person in question. Those who are able to defy the structural restrictions imposed on them through various control measures in e.g. the labour and housing market, and not least the restrictions of what providing care for children or other relatives entail for them, did move out. None of the respondents in our study would have stayed in the reception centre after

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<sup>7</sup> For a report on forced return in Norway, see Econ Pöyri 2009.

rejection if there was not something that held them back, such as children, elderly parents or ill health.

The data collected shows a clear tendency that having a family made people more likely to stay in reception centres because it would be difficult for them to manage even minimally decent living standards if they moved out. Inside, they receive benefits and support depending on the number of people in the family. Outside the reception centre, the more people one has to provide for, the more expensive it will be to survive. For individual migrants, other issues may influence the decision to move out, such as a high rate of deportations to their country of origin. Knowledge of such a practice can make the continued stay in a reception centre feel like a very real threat to one's own security.

Valenta (2012:225) chooses to define those rejected asylum seekers living outside reception centres in two categories: persons who are easy to deport and those that are not. This was also the case in our data. What cannot be concluded from our data, however, is whether or not those nationalities that are considered easy to deport are more likely to move out of reception centres than those who are considered more difficult to deport.<sup>8</sup> There are other factors complicating this picture, and many of those we interviewed had not been able to establish their identity in a sufficient way. This was also at the heart of many of the rejections of asylum claims that we were made aware of by respondents.

From when they arrive in the centre people hear stories about deportations or they know about persons this has happened to, something which many described as very stressful as they feared the same happening to them. Why some are deported and others are not can seem random for rejected asylum seekers. Residents in reception centres compare their own situation with others in terms of why others get a residence permit and they do not, as a way to try to understand why some get it and others don't – e.g. why certain nationalities are more likely to have their application accepted than others or why someone have better living quarters than themselves. Comparing oneself to others can create hope that one will succeed with one's case, but it can also create a lot of anxiety or add to the frustration residents feel. The thought of living with a constant threat of deportation acts as a strong motivation for many rejected asylum seekers to move out of reception centres. Seen in this light deportation or forced return from the side of the authorities is a way to enforce border control through reception centres. In a report from the UDI to the Ministry of Labour and Inclusion in 2006 (in Brekke 2010:30) it is stated that "A vital premise for voluntary return to take place is that forced return functions effectively. Forced return must come across as a real consequence of disregarding the deadline for departure without having applied to the IOM for voluntary return".<sup>9</sup> This outspoken policy and practice is experienced by many rejected asylum seekers as what I refer to above as the fear factor. For persons who move out, this is a strongly motivating factor, for those who stay it is a constant presence in their everyday lives. It is thus an effective and successful control measure in policy terms, but for a certain cohort of re-

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<sup>8</sup> Individuals are considered easier to return when Norwegian authorities have an agreement with their country of origin about forced and voluntary return of nationals, than when no such official agreements are in place.

<sup>9</sup> My translation from Norwegian: "En sentral forutsetning for at frivillig retur skal skje er at tvangsmessig retur fungerer effektivt. Tvangsmessig retur må fremstå som en reell konsekvens av å oversitte utreisefristen uten å søke IOM om frivillig retur."

jected asylum seekers this is an important reason for why they leave the reception centre and disappear off the radar for the authorities.

## Summary of findings

- It was often during the period between the first rejection (that most had appealed) and the final rejection from the UDI that respondents had either moved out or started to consider what would happen if they had a final rejection. This period can thus be considered as a decision-making moment for whether or not to leave the reception centre.
- Independently of the actual motive(s) they described for moving out, respondents themselves focused on how important it was for them to feel they were able to make decisions regarding how their everyday life should be organized and who to live with. This they imagined would be easier outside the reception centre.
- Moving out of the reception centre was described by respondents as a matter of trying to move on with their lives by making decisions about being active and taking as much control over their situation as they found possible.
- The uncertainty of rejected asylum seekers felt concerning their situation and the stress of not having anything to do, were potential reasons underlying decision to move out before a final rejection even had been received.
- There are differences between those who had been in Norway for a longer period of time, since the late 1990s up to mid 2000, and those who had arrived more recently. Those who had been here longer were more likely to live outside the reception centre. During this period there have been many changes to the regulations and practices regarding rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants. While this cannot be considered a motive per se, it was the reason they had moved out.
- Life outside the reception centre undoubtedly presented respondents with a number of challenges in terms of living conditions, but for respondents who had moved out and lived for a longer period outside the centre moving back into such an institution seemed unbearable.
- Access to housing and work were closely related in the ability to manage life outside the centres, as a minimum of income is necessary to cover for the cost of shelter and subsistence.

- Work was spoken about as a means to provide an income as well as a way to avoid passivity and the feeling of being a freeloader.
- Life outside reception centres and being without any economic support was experienced as hard for all the irregular migrants we interviewed. However, for those who had a family to think of this weighed extra heavily on their decision to either leave the centre or stay. The majority of those we interviewed who had responsibilities for a family chose to stay in reception centres.
- There is a clear tendency that having a family made people more likely to stay in reception centres because it would be difficult for them to manage even minimally decent living standards if they moved out.
- When comparing the situation of respondents living in reception centres and those who were living privately, it emerges that the first group had better living conditions than the second group despite the relatively low standard and crowded space in reception centres.
- Both groups at the reception centre felt that the centre was a place for deportations and uncertainty.
- For those who had moved out, the reception centre was a place of the past and a phase they had put behind them – not a place for the future.
- Ordinary reception centres are today places of control and surveillance of migrant populations that produce new borders within national space.
- None of the respondents in our study would have stayed in the reception centre after rejection if there wasn't something that held them back such as children, elderly parents or ill health.
- There was not a clear link between 'returnability' and the fact that people lived outside reception centres. 'Returnability' here refers to those migrants who can 'easily' be returned because Norwegian authorities have an agreement with their country of origin about forced and voluntary return of nationals. There are other factors complicating this picture, and many of those we interviewed had not been able to establish their identity in a sufficient way. This was also at the heart of many of the rejections of asylum claims that we were made aware of by respondents.

## Conclusion

Staying in centres or moving out is thus a decision about what a person wants for him or herself in light of the situation they are in, the opportunities they have for work and shelter, a wish to escape the passivity and the control measures living in a reception centre necessarily entails. Residing in a centre means that the authorities know where you are at any given time. A person receiving the rejection to his or her asylum claim has to reconsider their situation. For many it also means a period where they do not know what to do or where to go.

While moving out of a reception centre is often a complex decision to make, with many concerns and alternatives being weighed up against each other in the decision-making process, the desire to establish a life outside the reception centre, to avoid the control of the authorities and to be able to take work seem to be the strongest motivations. For many of the rejected asylum seekers we interviewed for our study (Øien and Sønsterudbråten 2011), the reception centre was associated with a restrained life, passivity and control.

Those respondents who lived with their families in reception centres had chosen to stay there because it offered them a minimum of security in regards to housing, economic support and access to health care. Yet, they also revealed that staying there had a price, the constant fear of deportation. The image of people being picked up in the early hours of the day, be it if they had seen, knew someone who had been deported or had just heard about it, was a vivid image for them. Knowing this could happen because they were identified for the authorities by living in the reception centre also made it a place of control and insecurity.

Another finding emerging from the original study, but that is also prevalent in the re-analysis of the data is that while people will move out because they want to find work, moving out of the reception centre also require people to get an income one way or another. Work, however, is not only a matter of income, but also of doing something valuable and getting away from the passivity that they experience when they live in reception centres.

The reasons for why people move out of reception centres are thus complex. Based on the re-analysis of the data from Fafo's study on the living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway and empirical input from other projects, it is doubtful that there will ever be a time when the reception centres will represent a desirable place to live for all rejected asylum seekers or other irregular migrants. This has to do with the fact that people do not only move out because they want to escape the control measures implied in living in such centres, but also because they may want to live independently and escape the passivity they associate with living in a centre. The current situation, where the waiting reception centres are closed and the plan to create so-called return centres has been abandoned is very positive for rejected asylum seekers considering the evaluation and reputations of the former and expectations to the latter (cf. Valenta et. al. 2010; Valenta 2012). Ordinary reception centres, albeit expected to keep a "sober" standard, seem to be considered better places to live by many rejected asylum seekers. Nevertheless, living in a reception centre over time is a trying experience as life is put on hold, living quarters are crammed and one is not able to choose with whom one wants to live.

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