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The Effectiveness of Norway's Readmission Agreements with Iraq and Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an analysis of the effectiveness of Norway's readmission agreements with Iraq and Ethiopia. Through the use of readmission agreements, Norway aims to reduce irregular presence by increasing the number of both voluntary and forced returns, as well as discourage future irregular migration by sending a "clear signal" to individuals without protection needs that they will be returned when their asylum applications are rejected. The effectiveness of these agreements thus lies in the extent to which they fulfill these objectives. While Norway's agreements with Iraq and Ethiopia have been explicitly highlighted as effective by Norwegian authorities, this article argues that readmission agreements may be expected to limit, but not to eliminate, return problems. Readmission agreements, however streamlined, will have different effects on different groups. It finds that Norway's readmission agreements have been only partially successful with Iraq, and wholly unsuccessful with Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

Like many other European countries, Norway has long attempted to control migration flows to and from the country. In September 2008, after a period of surging asylum arrivals, the Norwegian government announced a list of thirteen restrictive measures designed to limit the number of asylum applications and to increase the return irregular migrants. Two points on the Government's list referred to achieving bilateral readmission agreements with countries of origin. Today, concluding such agreements with countries outside the European Union (EU) is among the Norwegian government's top priorities (Janmyr, 2014: 182), even being mentioned in the Government's 2013 Political Platform (Government of Norway, 2013). While Norway's early agreements were largely ad-hoc in nature, following the development of a comprehensive and result-oriented readmission policy in the early 2000s, it began to conclude agreements at relative speed. In 2005 alone, Norway entered into six bilateral readmission agreements, bringing the total number of readmission agreements (or other agreements containing a readmission clause) to 16 (AD, 2006: 3). By the end of 2013, the total number of readmission agreements had increased to 29. As such, Norway has one of the highest numbers of readmission agreements in Europe (Janmyr, 2014). But how well do such agreements really work?

Readmission agreements are one of the oldest instruments used by states to control migratory flows (Coleman, 2009). Such agreements help governments to overcome bilateral difficulties by setting out reciprocal obligations on the contracting parties (as well as detailed administrative and operational procedures) to facilitate the return of persons who do not fulfill the condition of presence in the requested state (JD, 2010: 187). Aiming to influence migration flows both to and from

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the country, readmission agreements are generally seen as “essential tools” in the “fight against immigration” (Council of the European Union, 2011: 2). By increasing the number of returns and by sending a “clear signal” to individuals without protection needs that they might be returned when their asylum applications are rejected, these agreements are widely believed to reduce irregular presence and discourage future irregular migration (EMN/PU, 2012: 13; Janmyr, 2014: 185). Norwegian authorities have often argued that readmission agreements contribute towards lowering the number of asylum seekers in Norway, and a 2012 agreement with Ethiopia has been explicitly highlighted as an example whereby the conclusion of an agreement has significantly reduced the number of Ethiopian asylum seekers in Norway (JD, 2012: 200). Norway’s agreement with Iraq, entered into in 2009, has likewise been used to exemplify how both forced and voluntary returns from Norway have increased following the conclusion of the agreement (EMN/PU, 2012: 47).¹ Particular claims have also been made that readmission agreements contribute to a greater number of voluntary returns from Norway, and that rejected asylum seekers from countries with which there are readmission agreements tend to use the assisted voluntary return schemes more frequently than when no agreement is in place (AD, 2008: 328; JD, 2012: 200). These ideas generally correspond well with the prevailing assumptions by other European countries that the conclusion of readmission agreements leads to the implementation of more returns (Coleman, 2009: 58).

Despite the general presumptions about their usefulness, no comprehensive studies have been conducted relating to the effectiveness of readmission agreements, neither in Norway nor on a global scale. This is the precise focus of the current article, which aims to contribute to this field of knowledge by exploring the effectiveness of Norway’s readmission agreements with Iraq and Ethiopia. Through a qualitative and quantitative study it examines whether Norway’s readmission agreements with Iraq and Ethiopia have fulfilled their stated objectives, i.e. whether the agreements can be said to have led to a decrease in asylum flows and/or an increase in the number of forced and voluntary returns to these specific countries. When doing so, it concentrates on the socio-political context of implementing Norway’s readmission agreements with these two countries.

This article begins with a discussion of the methodological and theoretical framework applied in this study. Following this, two case studies are explored: Iraq and Ethiopia. In each case study, both asylum arrivals to Norway and voluntary and forced returns from Norway are examined and contextualized with a view to shedding light on the effectiveness of readmission agreements in these sectors. A final section offers concluding remarks.

METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

How do we measure the effectiveness of readmission agreements? In light of several studies pointing to the difficulties of establishing causality between policy and outcomes, the effectiveness of migration policies in general has become widely contested, not the least because the term “effectiveness” requires an evaluative and subjective dimension to the analysis (Czaika and de Haas, 2013: 491). In contrast to the term “effect”, which is linked to the *actual* effect a policy might have, the term “effectiveness” focuses on a *desired* effect and thus establishes a relation to policy objectives. Thus, the effectiveness of readmission agreements lies in the extent to which they fulfil their objectives (Castles, 2004: 207). Within this framework, effectiveness refers to the relation between the objectives of policies on paper and actual migration flows, with the effectiveness of policies being potentially undermined by gaps in implementation and efficacy. Thus, while some studies argue that migration policies do have a significant effect on migration (Hatton, 2009; Ortega and Perri, 2013) on a global level, there appears to be a growing conviction among policymakers that migration policies do not produce the generally desired outcomes (Jandl, 2007). Rather, migration has been seen as driven by economic, demographic and political processes in the societies of origin/destination that are far beyond the scope

of migration policies (de Haas and Czaika, 2013; Castles, 2004; Cornelius et al., 2004). That said, there is often also a discrepancy between publically stated and “real” objectives of migration policy (Czaika and de Haas, 2013: 491); some have even argued that such policies are merely symbolic, and that governments are actually more concerned with the perceptions of their electorate than with pursuing effective policies (Gibney and Hansen, 2003).

With regard to the effectiveness of return policies or readmission agreements, few studies exist. One important exception nevertheless questions the alleged vital effect of EU readmission agreements on return practice, and argues that as long as the problems that cause people to leave their countries and migrate towards the EU continue to persist, it is unlikely that readmission agreements will function as a deterrent (Trauner and Kruse, 2008: 434). It furthermore argues that readmission agreements will not substantially decrease the flow of irregular migrants into the EU, and that unless readmitted persons receive meaningful reintegration support, readmission agreements will not work. To date, however, there appear to be no studies that examine the successful reintegration of deported people back into their communities of origin (Schuster and Majidi, 2013: 14). In the Norwegian context, Cathrine Eide's study (2013) of the unintended effects of Norway's readmission agreement with Ethiopia importantly demonstrated that migration policy may have effects both on flows and in the society, and that it is vital to include both receiving and sending states' perspectives when assessing policy outcomes.

Assisted voluntary return programmes have been more frequently evaluated in terms of their effectiveness. One recent study argues that voluntary return programmes are an important element in the policy mix that can reduce the number of irregular migrants, and, if successful, they could also discourage returned migrants from once again leaving their countries of origin and thus help reduce new asylum flows (Black et al., 2011). However, this same study also finds that such programmes generally do not attract large numbers of migrants, do not result in major development gains for countries of origin, and have limited impact on the behaviour of returned migrants (i.e. they might re-migrate).

The complex nature of migration policies nevertheless poses significant dilemmas in terms of methodological choices and conceptualization, and such problems often lead to inconclusive evidence of the effectiveness of migration policies (de Haas and Czaika, 2013: 41). In this article, the migration policy under scrutiny is narrowly restricted to concern two specific readmission agreements between Norway and Iraq and Ethiopia. The focus on these two cases is explained, as pointed out above, by the fact that Norwegian authorities have portrayed each, in one way or another, as having been successful, i.e. effective with regard to the stated objectives. With the exception of Norway's agreement with Russia (regrettably not within the scope of this study), the Norwegian government has refrained from making public statements as to the effectiveness of its other readmission agreements. Considerable – and critical – media attention to the agreements with Iraq and Ethiopia is a further factor that warrants this examination. No other agreements have received nearly as much national media attention as these.

This study combines quantitative data (statistics) and qualitative data (interviews and written material). The combination of these two methods in migration research has been considered important in order to strengthen the overall analysis (de Haas and Czaika 2013: 42). Qualitative literature on policy implementation provides an awareness of the political and social context in which migration policies are implemented and, as such, will enhance the capacity to interpret results of quantitative analyses. The aim is to achieve a more reliable assessment of policy effects. In other words, this method might help explain changes in both the number of asylum arrivals to Norway and the number of forced and voluntary returns from the country. In this study, interviews were conducted with key informants working in the asylum field, including civil servants within the Ministry of Justice (JD), Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the International Police Immigration Service (PU), as well as with NGO representatives. Representatives from the International Office of Migration (IOM), the operational partner on assisted return for the Norwegian Immigration authorities, as well as researchers with country-specific knowledge, were also interviewed. Written materials such as Norwegian government reports and media reports have been analysed.

For the quantitative aspects of this study, statistics have been achieved from PU, UDI, and UNHCR's Statistical Online Population Database. However, in both industrialized and developing societies, reliable statistics on population movements are notoriously difficult to calculate (Crisp, 1999: 6). Many figures are not readily comparable, and statistics are confused as the legislative categories used to quantify these individuals change frequently (Havinga and Bocker, 1999: 48). A slight divergence between UNHCR's statistics on the number of asylum seekers to Norway and the figures provided by the UDI was noted. As explained to the author by UNHCR, this can be due to two reasons: retroactive data revisions by the Norwegian authorities which did not reach UNHCR prior to the release of UNHCR statistics; or that the official Norwegian figures include repeat applications, i.e. the applicant has lodged more than one application during the reference period.² UNHCR strives to present the new intake, thereby excluding repeat applications.

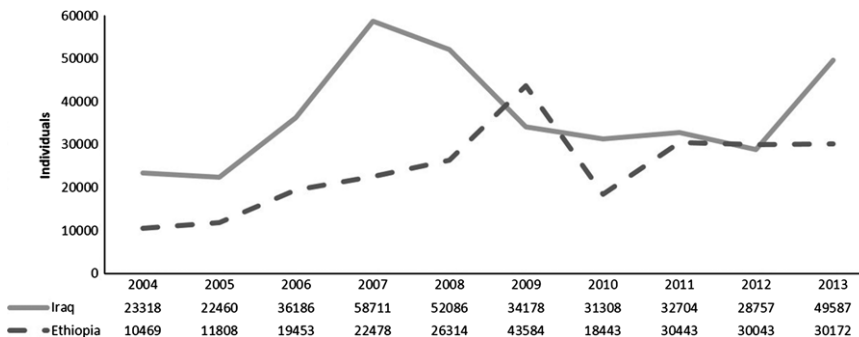
NORWEGIAN READMISSION AGREEMENTS: REDUCING IRREGULAR PRESENCE AND DISCOURAGING FUTURE IRREGULAR MIGRATION?

Iraq

In May 2009, Norway and Iraq signed a readmission agreement that entered into force on the day it was signed and that opened for the return of Iraqi nationals lacking legal residence in Norway (MFA, 2009). This agreement is one of Norway's more ambiguous; upon Iraqi request, it was drafted in a manner that aims at downplaying, and ends up effectively concealing, the fact that it concerns the *forced*, and not only the mere *voluntary*, return of Iraqi nationals (Janmyr, 2014: 196). Although it is not confidential, for several years it was also deliberately withheld from all websites providing public access to Norwegian bilateral agreements and other legislation.

There have been many large-scale waves of emigration from Iraq over the last decades, and Iraqi nationals have constituted the largest group of asylum seekers in Norway during the greater part of the last decade (Castles and Miller, 2009; Strand et al., 2011: ix). While Norwegian statistics generally do not differentiate between individuals from Iraqi Kurdistan and those from areas under the administration of the Baghdad-based Government of Iraq, people of Kurdish descent have formed the majority of Iraqis in Norway. In contrast to other parts of Iraq, where the rate of acceptance has been higher, only a small percentage of Iraqi Kurds have actually been granted asylum in Norway (Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2013: 18–9).

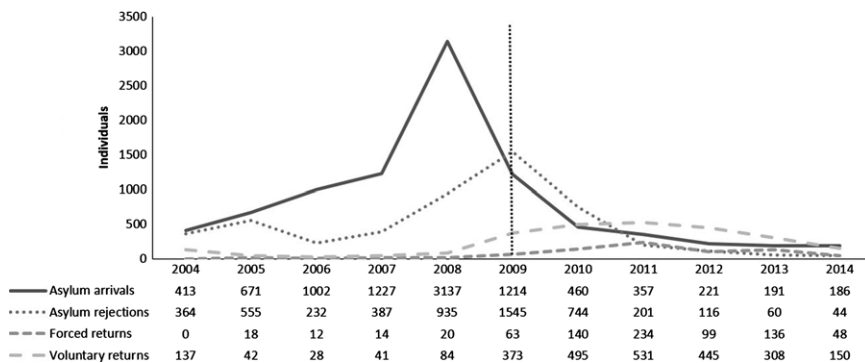
FIGURE 1
TOTAL NUMBER OF ASYLUM ARRIVALS FROM IRAQ AND ETHIOPIA WORLDWIDE 2004–2013



We see a notable rise in the number of Iraqi asylum arrivals to Norway in the year before the signing of the readmission agreement (Figure 2). Migration researchers and Norwegian authorities alike have attributed this increase to the stricter policy towards Iraqis in neighbouring Sweden, including the signing of a readmission agreement between Sweden and Iraq in February 2008 (Brekke and Aarseth, 2009: 42). While the number of Iraqi asylum rejections in Norway soared in 2008 and 2009, a distinctive decrease in the number of asylum arrivals began in 2009 and continued into 2014 (Figure 2). Even though these asylum arrivals decreased after the signing of the readmission agreement in mid-2009, the *greatest* decrease in arrivals appears to have begun *before* the readmission agreement was signed and immediately after it was signed. This drop in arrivals appears too soon to be attributed to the readmission agreement.³ Moreover, this decrease is largely reflected in a downward trend for Iraqi asylum applications on a worldwide basis (Figure 1), which is why it is currently difficult to attribute the decrease in Norway to the readmission agreement. Interestingly, the 2013 rise in Iraqi asylum applications worldwide is not reflected in Norwegian statistics, and, in 2014, the number of Iraqi asylum arrivals to Norway continued to decrease.

On a worldwide basis, and if compared with the total number of Iraqi refugees, the number of returnees to Iraq has generally been very limited (Strand et al., 2011: viii). While Norwegian authorities experienced considerable difficulties in their attempts to forcibly return Iraqi nationals prior to the 2009 agreement – indeed, the number of forced returns remained stable at between 10 and 20 each year, and most of these were of convicted criminals – the readmission agreement appears to have had a direct and immediate effect on Norway's practice of forced return to Iraq (Figure 2). Immediately after the signing and entry into effect of the agreement, Norwegian authorities intensified forced returns to Iraq, even directly contradicting the recommendations made by UNHCR and other human rights organizations to halt all returns to five central Iraqi governorates, including Baghdad (UNHCR, 2009; Norwegian People's Aid, 2009).⁴ In December 2009, a chartered flight to Iraq forcibly returned 30 individuals, approximately half of the total number of forced returns in 2009 (Strand et al., 2011: 18). Subsequent years saw a manifestly sharp rise in forced returns, leading many to view the readmission agreement as successful and well-functioning (Norwegian ID Centre, 2013: 27–29).⁵ During this period, the generally good relations between Norway and Iraq probably increased the number of forced returns.

FIGURE 2
MIGRATION FLOWS IRAQ – NORWAY 2004–2014*



*The vertical dotted line indicates year when Norway-Iraq readmission agreement was signed.

Since 2011, however, the readmission agreement has been difficult to implement, and forced returns have subsequently become more challenging to realize.⁶ The decline in the number of forced returns from Norway to Iraq in 2012 may be ascribed partially to the fact that the difficulties in returning Iraqi nationals before the signing of the readmission agreement in 2009 had led to the accumulation of a considerable “pool” of potential Iraqi returnees in Norway. Once the agreement entered into force, however, Norwegian authorities could fairly easily return individuals already identified for return. With the decline in the number of individuals identified for return by Norwegian authorities, the actual number of forced returns also decreased. In addition, many of the remaining Iraqis in Norway are families and youths, and these are difficult to forcibly return.⁷ Having said that, many of the reasons why forced returns from Norway have declined are to be found in the internal political situation in Iraq, which has also influenced the quality of the general relations with Norway. The Government of Iraq in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have experienced increasing political tensions and internal splits, and both entities have diverged in their views of forced returns. The KRG has regarded forced returns as a violation of human rights, and has also complained that European countries have not negotiated the practice of forced return with the KRG, in addition to authorities in Baghdad (Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2013: 35, 42–3; Strand et al., 2011: 13).⁸ For this reason, since 2010 the KRG has attempted to halt forced returns to areas under its administration, and has generally only accepted the forced returns of convicted criminals of Iraqi nationality from Norway. Rejected asylum seekers have largely been excluded, and many chartered flights have reportedly been redirected to Baghdad.⁹

Nevertheless, Norwegian authorities currently find it easier to cooperate with the Kurdish authorities than with the Government of Iraq in Baghdad. Since November 2011, the latter has largely been unwilling to implement the readmission agreement in any form. Iraq’s readmission agreements with European countries have attracted substantial, and predominantly critical, media coverage and have also proved to be a sensitive issue in Baghdad politics (Thorbjørnsrud et al. 2013). Allegedly, the Iraqi parliament ordered the Government to refuse to accept forcibly returned Iraqi refugees and to review certain readmission agreements (Bowcott, 2012). For Norway’s part, Baghdad’s lack of political will to implement the agreement was expressed by the difficulties in verifying the identity of Iraqi nationals, and by Baghdad’s sudden acceptance only of the forcibly returned Iraqi nationals in possession of Iraqi passports (Norwegian ID Centre 2013: 27–28).¹⁰ While Norwegian statistics do not differentiate between forced returns to KRG and to areas officially under the control of Baghdad, in 2013, the number forced returns increased to 2010-levels (Figure 2). In June 2014 – due to events related to the emergence of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq – Norwegian authorities indefinitely halted forced returns to eight provinces in Iraq. This is a major reason to why only 48 individuals were forcibly returned in 2014 (UNE, 2014).

In 2008, the Information, Return, and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq (IRRINI) programme was established to facilitate the voluntary return and reintegration of persons from Iraq. In connection with the signing of the readmission agreement, Norwegian representatives expressed a hope that the agreement would contribute to the voluntary return of an increasing number, and indeed, after the signing, authorities claimed a decisive increase in the number of programme applications (MFA, 2009; Norwegian ID Centre, 2013: 27–28).¹¹ While Iraqi nationals have been the most numerous applicants and returnees in Norway’s assisted voluntary return programmes (Brekke, 2015:34), the greatest increase in the number of voluntary returnees occurred immediately after the launch of the programme and before the signing of the readmission agreement (Figure 2). The general improvement in conditions in northern Iraq after 2009, as well as the surge in Iraqi asylum rejections in Norway between 2008 and 2010 have been identified as important factors which may have contributed to this increase (Brekke, 2015: 34; Oslo Economics, 2013: 69; Strand et al., 2011: ix). Indeed, more asylum rejections increase

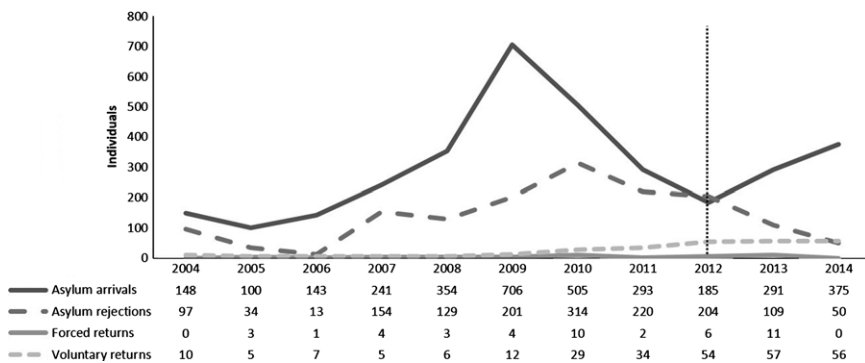
the pool of people that may choose assisted return. As with the number of forced returns, however, the number of voluntary returns has also decreased since 2011, with the sharpest drop in 2014.

The varying levels of successful implementation of the Iraqi readmission agreement sheds light on the temporal aspects of evaluating such agreements – when can we expect to see the effects of a readmission agreement? State officials interviewed in this work claim to have no temporal aim, but admit that they feel pushed by government politicians to obtain results within a very short period of time.¹² Viewed from a short-term perspective, the readmission agreement with Iraq may indeed be considered an important milestone in that it paved the way for the forced return of hundreds of Iraqi nationals in its first few years. Once we base our analysis on a long-term perspective, however, the intended effect of this agreement must be said to be unfulfilled so far.

Ethiopia

In January 2012, Norway and Ethiopia signed a readmission agreement that aimed at facilitating both voluntary and forced return of Ethiopian nationals residing irregularly in Norway. Having sought such an agreement with Ethiopia for more than 20 years, the signing was seen as a major achievement for the Norwegian government (Eide, 2014; Janmyr, 2014: 203ff). Based largely on a draft proposal brought to the negotiating table by Ethiopian representatives, the agreement is partially ambiguous and differs considerably in form and substance from Norway's many other agreements (Janmyr, 2014: 196). Importantly, it applies only to Ethiopian nationals whose request for refugee status or residence permit has been rejected. It has also been criticized by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) and Norwegian human rights organizations alike for falling short on a number of core human rights standards (NOAS, 2012; UN OHCHR, 2012). Shortly after the agreement was signed, however, Norway's Ministry of Justice and Public Security reported that it had had its anticipated effects in that it had affected "both asylum arrivals and the number who choose assisted voluntary return" (JD, 2012: 200).

FIGURE 3
MIGRATION FLOWS ETHIOPIA – NORWAY 2004–2014.*



*The vertical dotted line indicates year when Norway-Ethiopia readmission agreement was signed.

Emigration from Ethiopia has taken place in several different phases since the 1970s, the most recent of which was characterized by the post-1991 flows that included not only people fleeing political oppression, but also skilled migrants and family reunification cases (Tasse, 2007). A few hundred Ethiopian nationals have sought asylum in Norway each year, with a steady increase between 2006 and 2010 (Figure 3). A distinct drop can be observed immediately following the signing of the Ethiopia-Norway readmission agreement in the first quarter of 2012. Some observers have attributed this decrease to the immediate signal effect of the new policy (Eide, 2014). However, this drop may arguably also follow the downward trend with regard to Ethiopian asylum applications that had been ongoing in Norway since 2009, and which largely corresponds to worldwide trends (Figures 1 and 3). What is interesting, however, is that while Ethiopian asylum trends on a worldwide basis remained steady in 2013, these figures increased in Norway by 57 per cent from 2012. In 2014, the number of arrivals continued to increase quite dramatically.

The number of forced returns from Norway to Ethiopia has long been, and continues to be, extremely modest, even after the signing of the readmission agreement (Figure 3). The few forcibly returned Ethiopians have mainly been Ethiopian nationals convicted of crimes, a group that has generally been unproblematic for Norwegian authorities to readmit, and which falls outside the scope of the 2012 readmission agreement. Some returns labelled as forced returns in Norwegian statistics have also been so-called escorted voluntary returns (“ledsaget frivillig retur”), which involves voluntary return of Ethiopian nationals with the assistance of the Norwegian Immigration Police.¹³ Against Norwegian expectations that the readmission agreement would contribute to the return of more than 700 Ethiopian nationals whose asylum applications had been rejected, these low numbers can thus only be understood as a considerable disappointment from the perspective of the Norwegian government. In 2014, not a single Ethiopian national was forcibly returned from Norway (Figure 3).

When it comes to the number of voluntary returns from Norway to Ethiopia, initially very low, this has increased since 2009, and most dramatically in 2012 (Figure 3). Norwegian state officials have ascribed this rise to the readmission agreement,¹⁴ but because the greatest rise took place before the signing and entry into force of the readmission agreement, the impact of the agreement is difficult to confirm, although the number of voluntary returns lay stable in both 2013 and 2014.

It is clear that Norwegian authorities have faced difficulties in implementing the readmission agreement with regard to the forced return of rejected asylum seekers, and these difficulties have contributed to making the agreement one of Norway's least successful.¹⁵ It is generally perceived that Ethiopian authorities are unwilling to implement the agreement, and several reasons have been given to explain why this is the case; among them are changes in diplomatic personnel, the death of President Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia in August 2012 and the subsequent political turmoil, and, interestingly, the number of forced returns to Ethiopia on a worldwide basis.¹⁶ Saudi Arabia's 2013 decision to deport approximately 150,000 migrants back to Ethiopia has clearly put a strain on the Ethiopian government (Muchler, 2014). While the Ethiopian government has allocated 2.6 million USD for reintegration projects for what it estimated would be a mere 30,000 migrants, the number of forced returns to Ethiopia clearly exceeded the anticipated number. Authorities are faced with rapid urbanization as many returnees prefer to stay in or around the capital or major cities, a factor exacerbated by the current rate of urban unemployment at 17.5 per cent (Muchler, 2014). In such a scenario, financial remittances from the diaspora constitute an important source of income and contribute to the social investment and development of regions from which the migrants originate. The Ethiopian government's apparent unwillingness to adhere to the readmission agreement is perhaps most blatantly expressed in the unwillingness of the Embassy of Ethiopia to the Nordic countries, in direct contradiction of the terms of the agreement, to issue identity papers to the rejected asylum seekers that Norway wishes to forcibly return (Brandvold, 2012).

Considering the unstable start, it is questionable whether the Ethiopian readmission agreement ever will be implemented as anticipated. If government authorities are unwilling to implement an

agreement that they just signed, why would these and subsequent governments be more willing to implement provisions that were agreed under other conditions? As has been pointed out elsewhere, when it comes to readmission, the question of incentives often lies at the very heart of these relations (Janmyr, 2014: 197ff). Because readmission agreements and forced return mainly bring about negative consequences for concerned third countries, unless they receive something worth more in return, states seldom find it worth cooperating in readmission. A few months before the signing of the Norway-Ethiopia agreement, the Norwegian government had donated approximately 350 million Norwegian kroner to forestry, energy- and agricultural projects in Ethiopia. This donation stirred certain media attention considering that it was in addition to the 200 million Norwegian kroner to which the Government had already committed, and despite the fact that countries such as Sweden, in response to Ethiopia passing a number of "anti-human rights" laws, chose to considerably reduce its development aid to Ethiopia. Norwegian authorities were subsequently fiercely accused of trading development aid for readmission, but representatives of the Norwegian government persistently denied any link between the two (Janmyr, 2014: 197ff). It remains unclear to what extent, if at all, Norway's development aid may have *de facto* affected Ethiopia's decision to enter into the readmission agreement, and, to what extent this relation may have influenced the subsequent implementation of the agreement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The descriptions and discussions in this article add to the body of knowledge being built pertaining to the effects of migration policies. The effectiveness of Norway's readmission agreements with Iraq and Ethiopia are not readily apparent. The agreements' effect on asylum arrivals remains uncertain in Iraq, and in Ethiopia, the number of asylum arrivals in Norway has continued to increase despite the existence of this agreement. When it comes to return, Norway's readmission agreements have been only partially successful with Iraq, and wholly unsuccessful with Ethiopia. This suggests that claims made by Norwegian authorities that these two readmission agreements have contributed to a decrease in the number of asylum seekers to Norway from Iraq/Ethiopia, and to more returns from Norway to Iraq/Ethiopia, do not hold water when confronted with empirical realities. Rather, this official line appears based on unproven assumptions.

This study furthermore confirms earlier findings that readmission agreements may be expected to limit, but not to eliminate, return problems (Coleman, 2009: 318). Readmission agreements, however streamlined, will have different effects on different groups. As exemplified in the cases of Iraq and Ethiopia, such agreements cannot guarantee return in all cases and are of limited value when it comes to overcoming practical obstacles. On the face of it, the main obstacles to the efficient implementation of many readmission agreements appear to be related to questions concerning the identity of the returnees, as well as a lack of cooperation on the part of readmitting states. Clearly, there are factors outside the control of a national government that will influence the number of asylum arrivals, as well as opportunities for return. Due to factors such as the internal political situation in Iraq, since 2011, Norway's readmission agreement with Iraq has been difficult to implement and forced returns more challenging to realize. Whether or not a readmission agreement will lead to an increase in forced returns appears often dependent on the quality of the general relations with the country in question. Iraq's political situation surely effected its relations with Norway; the Government of Iraq in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have experienced increasing political tensions and internal splits, and both entities have diverged in their views of forced returns. Since 2010, the KRG has attempted to halt forced returns to areas under its administration, and has generally only accepted the forced returns of convicted criminals of Iraqi nationality from Norway. Since November 2011, the Iraqi government in Baghdad has largely been unwilling to implement the readmission agreement in any form.

While Norwegian incentives in the form of development aid were offered to Ethiopia prior to the signing of the readmission agreement in 2012, it is unclear to what extent Norway's development aid may have de facto affected Ethiopia's decision to enter into the readmission agreement, and, to what extent this relation may have influenced the subsequent implementation of the agreement. Relations between the two countries remain strained, and Ethiopian authorities are currently unwilling to implement the agreement. Several reasons have been given to explain why this is the case; among them are changes in diplomatic personnel, the death of President Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia in August 2012 and the subsequent political turmoil, and, interestingly, the number of forced returns to Ethiopia on a worldwide basis.

Thus, however willing Norwegian authorities may be to put in place long-term readmission policies, international and national political fluctuations, in which migration flows are influenced by factors outside of the control of national asylum policies, may indeed restrain governments to accept the inevitable short-term effect of such readmission agreements. While the possibility should not be ruled out that the negotiation of readmission agreements in general may decrease asylum applications and increase the number of returns, there is clearly a need for more research into the policy-making processes concerning readmission agreements as well as further studies into the causality between such agreements and asylum seeker flows.

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NOTES

1. Forced returns are commonly defined as the compulsory return of an individual to the country of origin, transit or third country, on the basis of an administrative or judicial act, while voluntary returns are to be seen as the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or third country, based on the free will of the returnee. The voluntariness of such voluntary returns has frequently been questioned (Webber, 2011). For these definitions, see also the IOM's Glossary on Migration (2011).
2. Personal correspondence, UNHCR Statistics (8 Aug 2014).
3. Interview. Researcher (27 Aug. 2014).
4. The general view was that these returns contradicted UNHCR's recommendations to grant refugee status or to afford international protection through the application of the extended refugee definition to Iraqis who originate from these five governorates.
5. Interview. PU(b). (7 Oct 2014).
6. Interview. JD. (1 Oct. 2014).
7. Interviews. JD. (1 Oct. 2014); Researcher (27 Aug. 2014).
8. Both Kurdish media and politicians have evoked normative arguments against deportation that run directly counter to the perspectives dominant in European, Australian and American immigration debates, i.e. that all forced returns violate human rights, people should be free to move, and, more implicitly, decent and well-integrated people do not deserve deportation.
9. Interview. PU (a). (7 Oct 2014).
10. Interview. PU (a). (7 Oct 2014).
11. As for voluntary returns to Iraq, recent studies have suggested that participating in voluntary return programmes is generally not regarded as voluntary, in fact, it is often referred to as a deportation and surrounded by stigma and shame (Thorbjørnsrud et al. 2013: IX).
12. Interview. JD. (1 Oct. 2014).
13. There may be many reasons to why PU will accompany an individual in these cases; s/he may have a psychiatric illness or it may be for the simple reason that the International Organization for Migration, which

usually assists in voluntary returns, is not present in the readmitting country, as in the case of Ethiopia. Interview. PU(b). (7 Oct 2014).

14. Interview. PU(b). (7 Oct 2014).
15. Interviews. JD. (1 Oct. 2014); PU(b). (7 Oct 2014).
16. Interview. PU(b). (7 Oct 2014).

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