



Department of Public Administration and Sociology

Program: Governance of Migration and Diversity

Student: Andrine Aam Strand (738798as)

Supervisor: Dr. Prof. Arjen Leerkes

Word count: 9982

*Caught Between Inclusion and Exclusion: Liquid Integration and Reactive Secondary
Migration among Rejected Unaccompanied Minors*

Abstract

Rejected unaccompanied minors represent an overlooked group in migratory research on vulnerability. These minors are caught in the institutional tension between the policy goals of integration and return employed by Norway and the Netherlands. Using a comparative case study design, this analysis draws on key informant interviews to explore how return operates as both a formal objective and a largely unenforced practice. The findings point to a condition of “governed non-deportability” – a form of institutional limbo in which minors are deprived of both removal and regularization. Despite partial access to services like education, these youths face a system of precarious, “liquid integration” characterized by unstable legal status, limited future prospect, and psychosocial liminality. In many cases, the absence of durable solutions contributes to “reactive secondary migration” – onward movement driven by fear of removal and lack of integration opportunities. This study argues that such trajectories are not merely individual responses but structurally shaped by institutional contradictions and governance logics.

Keywords

Governed Non-Deportability; Institutional Tension; Liquid Integration; Reactive Secondary Migration; Unaccompanied Minors

Introduction

Children and adolescents fleeing war, persecution, poverty, and discrimination represent a growing yet vulnerable group in global migration (Uzureau et al., 2024). Underage migrants are recognized as particularly vulnerable, a fact enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1998). Like all migrants, their trajectories are shaped by the institutional environments they navigate (Moshe & Miodownik, 2022; Tazzioli, 2020). Environments that often fluctuate between inclusion and exclusion. This thesis situates itself within the broader context of institutional contradiction, focusing on how these conflicting impulses manifest in the policies that govern young migrants.

Among the many inclusionary and exclusionary policies, this thesis concentrates specifically on integration, as an inclusionary measure, and return, as an exclusionary instrument. This focus reflects the particular position of the target population; rejected unaccompanied minors (UAMs). These are asylum-seeking children aged 15 to 18 who arrive without a guardian and whose application for protection has been denied. As a small and distinct group within migration governance, rejected UAMs are caught between two competing imperatives: the child rights-based commitment to integration on one hand, and the enforcement of return policies on the other.

The institutional tension, between inclusion and exclusion, is especially pronounced in the context of migration governance within welfare states, such as Norway and the Netherlands. These states operate under a logic that seeks to preserve access to social benefits for legal citizens, which fundamentally shapes how migration is regulated. Scholars like Boswell (2007), Castles (2004), and de Haas (2019) argue that welfare states have introduced mechanisms of exclusion by selectively allocating rights and entitlements based on migrants' legal status. As a result, rejected UAMs, who often remain in an irregular situation, face significant barriers to accessing social services and welfare benefits (Weiss, 2020). Such exclusionary policies reinforce the precarious position of these youths and contribute to the institutional contradictions between integration efforts and return enforcement that characterize migration governance in these countries.

At the same time, welfare states do not operate in a vacuum. They also recognize the values of certain forms of migration. Particularly by addressing labor market needs and fulfilling humanitarian obligations. Migration is often framed as economically beneficial, and some level of integration is both practically necessary and normatively expected (Boswell, 2007). Human rights law and international norms oblige states to treat migrants, especially

minors, with dignity and care. Consequently, inclusionary policies often reflect a balancing act between domestic political preferences and international legal commitments (Boswell, 2007; de Haas et al., 2019; Hollifield, 1992). In this way, the policies toward rejected UAMs are not only shaped by national interests but also by broader global frameworks and moral imperatives.

While the institutional frameworks in Norway and the Netherlands attempt to balance exclusionary return measures with inclusionary efforts, such as education, rejected UAMs are not passive recipients of policy. Despite their vulnerable legal and social positions, many have clear aspirations and goals for their futures. This paradox profoundly shapes their decision-making and life course trajectories (Schapendonk et al., 2020; Snel et al., 2020). In response to this institutional contradiction, UAMs adopt different strategies: some choose to abscond and live undocumented, others manage to regularize their status, and some are returned upon reaching adulthood. These divergent pathways illustrate how life trajectories are shaped by the interplay of institutional forces and individual agency. Understanding these trajectories requires recognizing life as a series of transitions, where human agency – the capability to act and make choices – remains crucial in navigating complex institutional landscapes (Elder, 1998).

Ultimately, the ability of rejected UAMs to navigate these contradictory systems is tied to broader dynamics of migration governance. As Castles (2004, p.852) notes, migration policies often fail to achieve their intended outcomes and can generate unintended consequences. He further claims that the more states attempt to enforce control through restrictive policies, the more they may foster alternative and informal pathways. These dynamics underscore the importance of understanding not only the content of policies, but also how individuals engage with, resist, or adapt to them within the constraints and openings produced by welfare state governance.

Lastly, by focusing on rejected UAMs, the study amplifies the voices of a marginalized group, aiming to bridge the gap between academic inquiry and policy (Burawoy 2005). Furthermore, by comparing Norway and the Netherlands, the research seeks to contribute to knowledge-sharing on how states balance integration and return policies, as well as exploring to what extent institutional tensions influence the life course of UAMs. This approach aligns with the identified gap in theory-driven sociological research on vulnerabilities. The authors in the VULNER-project argue that there is a need for more nuanced exploration of ambiguities and rights dilemmas, as well as how precarity is both shaped by legislation and further institutionalized (Lidén et al., 2021, p.16). Therefore, this

thesis focuses on the role of institutions and their contradictions in shaping the migration and integration trajectories of rejected UAMs. Hence, the role of individual agency remains secondary, as the analysis is based on the perspectives of key informants rather than those of the minors themselves.

The Norwegian and Dutch Case

In the Norwegian and Dutch context this contradiction is particularly evident in the case of rejected UAMs, a vulnerable group caught between inclusion and exclusion. These minors often face institutional contradictions where they may be granted access to education and support while simultaneously being expected to prepare for return. This becomes evident through the states combined and complex interests in deterrence, security and integration (Schultz, 2022). The deterrence strategy becomes apparent through the exclusion of rights and the strict enforcement of return, with the goal to make it unattractive to apply for asylum (Lillevik & Tyldum, 2021). Security is ensured through the preservation of the welfare system to those classified as citizens. And some degree of integration, especially in the case of minors, are perceived as humane (Castles et al., 2002). Additionally, the host country may view integration as a means to prevent homelessness, and other unfavorable social outcomes.

A general trend in Norway, as well as in the Netherlands, over the last decade has been an increased focus on return, while at the same time shifting the integration policy towards a “deservingness” approach, that emphasizes achieving qualifications through work and education (Goerdat et al., 2021; Schultz, 2022, p.30). This tension between integration and return is institutionalized in recent legislative measures. For instance, Norway’s Integration Act (2021) aims to formalize education for newcomers, including UAMs with temporary permits, despite their uncertainty (Schultz, 2022). Similarly, the Netherlands’ Civic Integration Act (2022) reflects the same dual objectives of fostering integration through language requirements, education and employment goals (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.).

Together, these developments raise the central question in this thesis: *How do Norwegian and Dutch authorities construct institutional tensions between policies that foster host country integration and policies that promote migrant return for rejected unaccompanied minors, and with what outcomes for these minors’ migration and integration trajectories?”*

By making integration policies secondary to migration control objectives, authorities increase the number of individuals living with insecure legal status for an indefinite period of

time and ultimately create a two-tiered system of rights for people admitted to Norway (Schultz, 2022) and the Netherlands.

The thesis proceeds as follows: First, the theoretical framework is outlined, defining key concepts such as integration, return, institutional contradiction and trajectories. Second, the methodology is presented, including the comparative case selection, data collection, and ethical considerations. The findings section then draws on key informant interviews to unpack how institutional tensions are constructed and experienced in Norway and the Netherlands. Finally, the conclusion and discussion reflect on the broader implications for policy and future research.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, integration and return will be conceptualized as the contradictory outcomes of the institutional approach in the respective countries. Then, institutions and institutional contradiction will be examined as key factors. Ultimately, the consequences of this approach will be outlined and later analyzed.

Return

To contextualize the term return, it needs to be distinguished from the more commonly used academic term “deportation” and the legal term “expulsion”. Deportation is described by de Genova and Peutz (2010, p.1) as the compulsory removal of “aliens” from the state’s physical, legal, and social space, involving force or the threat of force. Similarly, Walters (2002, p.268) defines deportation as the removal of foreign nationals by state power, whether through force, the threat of force, or under the guise of voluntary departure. Comparably, expulsion as defined by Goodwill-Gill (1978, p.201), is the exercise of state power to remove a foreign national from its territory. Expulsion can happen through force, under the threat of force, or through so-called voluntary departure. In other words, it encompasses any form of removal (Karlsen, 2016).

To provide a more nuanced understanding of return, it is important to recognize that return encompasses a variety of measures and outcomes, rather than a singular, uniform process. The FAiR-Return project (Finding Agreement in Return [FAiR], 2025) highlights the complexity of return policies and practices across European countries, emphasizing that return can be voluntary, assisted, or forced, each with distinct implications for migrants.

Additionally, return does not have to be to the country of origin, it can also be to a country of

transit, meaning a place where the migrant lived for a certain period. Turkey is by many perceived as a transit country (Moshe & Miodownik, 2022).

Further, return will be conceptualized in terms of how the two respective countries in this study define it. The Dutch government writes that “[f]oreign citizens residing in the Netherlands who have no right to a residence permit or who have never applied for one are in the Netherlands illegally. They must leave the country” (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). This is similar to the phrasing of the Norwegian government, as they write “[i]f you are staying in Norway without a legal residence permit, you must return to your home country or to another country where you have a residence permit.” (Utlendingsdirektoratet [UDI], n.d.).

In both the Netherlands and Norway, return policies are primarily determined by the rejection or revocation of a residence permit. In the Netherlands, a foreign citizen is required to leave the country if the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) rejects their residence permit application and any subsequent judicial review or appeal. Similarly, return is mandated when the IND declined to renew an expiring residence permit or revokes an existing one. In Norway, return obligations arise if an individual’s application for residence is rejected and, after an appeal, the rejection is upheld. In such cases, the applicant is required to leave the country. These policies illustrate how legal status is contingent upon the administrative and judicial decision of immigration authorities, shaping the conditions under which individuals must return.

Comparably, the Netherlands and Norway both encourage voluntary return as the desirable solution for undocumented residents. Voluntary return refers to migrants choosing to leave a country on their own accord (Lillevik, 2019), yet the voluntariness in voluntary return has been heavily debated (Blitz et al., 2005; FAiR, 2025). Moreover, independent return (the Dutch terminology) or assisted return (Norwegian terminology) is often aided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This form of return is alluded to as the dignified option for undocumented residents as it offers more practical and financial support than forced return or deportation (Karlsen, 2016, p.9). Empirical studies have also shown that forced return and the use of detention – prevalent in the U.S. deportation system – is often counter-effective and rarely leads to the wanted outcome (Valenta & Thorshaug, 2011). Therefore, significant effort is dedicated to assisted returns in the Dutch and Norwegian regimes.

Outcomes of return are equally varied. While some returns lead to successful reintegration in the country of origin, others result in non-return due to migrants absconding, secondary migration, or prolonged legal and social limbo. Even though Leerkes and Van

Houte (2020, p.327) identified the Netherlands and Norway as two of the most successful EU+ countries in enforcing return, the rates are still considerably low. Leading to what they term as (non-)deportability (Leerkes & Van Houte, 2020). A term that builds on de Genova's (2002) deportability yet recognizing the fact that the majority of rejected asylum seekers will remain un-returned. This is also something governments acknowledge and to some degree accommodate as well.

This complexity challenges simplistic academic and legal definitions of return, deportation, and expulsion. It also underscores the importance of considering the diverse experiences of migrants, especially vulnerable groups like rejected UAMs, whose trajectories are shaped by these multifaceted return regimes.

In this thesis, return will be used as an umbrella term (Karlsen, 2016, p.6) encompassing these varied measures and outcomes, reflecting the terminology used by Norwegian and Dutch authorities, as well as the European Return Directive.

Integration and its Aspects

Social integration is a complex and multi-layered process. Newcomers become part of society across various domains, and research shows that immigrant and refugee integration is often shaped by implicit assumptions, concepts, and definitions rather than clearly articulated frameworks (Castles et al., 2002, p.112; Heckmann, 2005). Due to its broad nature, integration cannot be defined in simplistic terms (Castles et al., 2002). Castles and colleagues (2002, p.113) emphasize that "integration of newcomers to a society takes place at every level and in every sector of society."

A common misconception is that integration follows a linear trajectory and is solely the responsibility of the immigrant (Berry, 2011; Castles et al., 2002; Heckmann, 2005). Integration is rather a two-way process that involves both newcomers and the host society. Various actors, such as policymakers, educators, service providers, and local communities play crucial roles in facilitating integration. As noted by Castles and colleagues (2002, p.113), this process "requires adaptation on the part of the newcomer but also by the host society."

Integration in a diverse society occurs when all individuals, regardless of background, gain civil, social, political, human, and cultural rights, fostering greater equality. Firstly, *structural aspects* involve access to education, employment, housing, and social services, and are understood as fundamental for integration (Castles et al., 2002; Heckmann, 2005). If immigrants face barriers in these areas, such as job market discrimination or housing

segregation, their ability to integrate socially and economically is significantly hindered (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Closely connected to this is the *cultural aspect*. For instance, language proficiency, as it plays a pivotal role in social participation, employment, and education (Ager & Strang, 2008; Castles et al., 2002; Heckmann, 2005). Additionally, integration is influenced by public narratives and intercultural adaptation, meaning how well immigrants can maintain their cultural identity while engaging in the host society (Berry, 2011).

Furthermore, *social aspects* entail the presence of social networks, community participation, and the absence of discrimination and xenophobia (Ager & Strang, 2008; Heckmann, 2005). Hostile environments and negative stereotypes can lead to exclusion and marginalization. Subsequently, in democratic societies, full integration also requires the acquisition of legal and political rights, enabling newcomers to achieve equality with native-born citizens (Heckmann, 2005). Thus, *political aspects* refer to legal status, citizenship policies, and political rights. Ager and Strang (2008) argue that this is the foundation for integration because it particularly impacts how fully an immigrant can participate in society.

Lastly, *individual determinants* also play a critical role in determining the integration trajectory. Factors such as age, gender, education level, and migration motivation influence integration experiences (Castles et al., 2002; Heckmann, 2005). For example, younger immigrants often integrate more easily, particularly if they enter the educational system early.

Integration Policies and its Contradictions

Due to the complexity of integration, states often adopt policies that involve compromises and contradictions (Ager & Strang, 2008; Castles, 2004; de Haas et al., 2019). These inconsistencies arise both from competing social interests and from the nature of the policymaking process itself (Castles, 2004). As a result, immigrants may experience simultaneous inclusion and exclusion across key areas of integration. For example, immigrants may be included in the educational system but are excluded or disadvantaged in the welfare and labor market. Or in other instances, they are included in the former but excluded from political and legal membership (Castles et al., 2002, p.115).

Integration is a dynamic, multi-dimensional process influenced by structural conditions, individual agency, and societal attitudes. A successful integration strategy requires policies that address multiple aspects simultaneously, ensuring equal opportunities, inclusion, and social cohesion for both immigrants and the host society (Castles et al., 2002; Castles, 2004).

However, integration does not yield uniform outcomes. Building on this, segmented assimilation theory (Fitzgerald, 2025; Portes & Zhou, 1993) challenges the idea of a single, upward integration trajectory. Instead, it suggests that immigrants may assimilate into different segments of society, some successfully into the mainstream, others into marginalized or precarious positions, particularly when structural barriers and discrimination are present. This perspective aligns with the idea that integration is highly dependent on access to resources, legal status and institutional support (Ager & Strang, 2008; Castles et al., 2002). For rejected UAMs, the uncertainty of legal status and the concurrent strengthening of return mechanisms limit access to such resources, shaping pathways that are more fragmented and unstable.

Institutions and Migration

Dahinden (2019, p.2209) defines the migration apparatus, as “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, and scientific statements.” The migration apparatus emerged alongside the nation-state and became linked to the idea that migrants are different from citizens, leading to efforts to manage this difference, which eventually became institutionalized.

In alignment with Dahinden’s (2016) statement, the infrastructure of return and integration can be understood as social institutions that shape the experiences of migrants. Parsons (1990) defines institutions in both objective and subjective terms. The objective perspective sees institutions as concrete social structures – sets of social relations that organize behavior. The subjective perspective, on the other hand, views institutions as regulatory norms that shape these social structures by guiding individual actions (Coleman; Parsons, 1990). This subjective understanding connects micro-level individual behaviors with macro-level social systems (Moshe & Miodownik 2022), illustrating how institutional norms influence both personal decisions and broader societal patterns (Coleman; Parsons, 1990)

A key distinction between institutions and norms lies in their scope. As Parsons (1990) explains, institutions are not just isolated regulatory norms, but entire sets of norms rooted in shared values, resulting in structured social relationships. Institutions, therefore, establish uniform and expected patterns of behavior, shaping interaction between individuals and groups.

One defining feature of institutions is the presence of sanctions, which reflects the normative element of institutions. Institutions not only prescribe specific behaviors but also

impose consequences for deviations. If an individual deviates from these established behaviors or relationships, they may face formal or informal sanctions – ranging from legal repercussions to social exclusion (Parsons, 1990) and feelings of guilt and shame, known as internal sanctions (Coleman, 1990).

Institutional norms have both internal and external elements. The external element consists of the actions regulated by the institution, their intended outcomes, and how they are carried out. This regulation is often made explicitly through formalized rules, for example through legal frameworks that govern behavior within institutions (Coleman; Parsons, 1990). This is the case with return and integration, their intended outcome is set out in legal frameworks, however this may be hampered by, for example, street-level bureaucracy and discretion.

Furthermore, Parsons (1990) highlights that highly rationalized legal systems formalize these institutional rules in abstract terms, setting explicit limits and conditions on actions and relationships. This is particularly relevant in migration governance. Migration policies, such as return and integration frameworks, can be classified as explicitly established institutional norms, as they define the rights, obligations, and legal conditions under which migrants navigate social structures (Castles, 2010; Dahinden, 2016; de Haas et al., 2019).

Institutional Contradictions

The complexity of migration strategies often leads to contradictory policies (Castles, 2004, p.854; de Haas et al., 2019). The contradicting policies are a result of competing interests, as various objectives are expected at once (de Haas et al., 2019). In the field of migration there is often a clash between the need for care and control concurrently. How to manage this intricacy is a puzzle for policymakers, as institutions are dynamic and vastly tentative (Castles, 2004).

Boswell (2007, p.80) along with others (Hollifield, 1992; de Haas et al., 2019) argue that liberal democracies increasingly adopt a “restrictionist” approach, seeking to maintain legitimacy by prioritizing citizens’ privileged access to welfare. Yet, in liberal democracies there is an inevitable relationship between the state and those constraining its pursuits. For instance, human rights obligations ratified under international cooperation. Within this environment, migration governance does not operate as a singular, unified system. Rather, it consists of multiple agencies with varying degrees of autonomy and diverging interests (Boswell, 2007, p.79). For instance, institutional responses to migration often fluctuate based

on immediate demands, such as the opening or closing of reception centers in response to changing migration flows.

In both Norway and the Netherlands, there is a fundamental contradiction between strengthening the integration institution, concurrently with strengthening the return institution. This duality reflects broader institutional tensions on safeguarding security, legitimacy and equality (Boswell, 2007, p.93). As Castles (2004) notes, such contradictions can lead to unintended consequences, where policies intended to control migration instead contribute to irregularity or legal limbo. Boswell (2007) further argues that a state faced with multiple tasks and well-defined conflicts of interest, may find it necessary to maintain a degree of deliberate “malintegration” among its various policymaking aims (Boswell, 2007; de Haas et al., 2019; Hollifield, 1995). This is particularly evident in migration policies, where states publicly commit to restrictive goals while tacitly tolerating continued immigration through “low-profile” regulations, or fragmented enforcement practices.

Migrant Trajectories

The incongruity of the stated objectives and actual practices may have profound implications on migrant trajectories for rejected UAMs. Migrant journeys refer to the long-term pathways that shape an individual’s movement, legal status, and socio-economic integration. These trajectories are not linear (Snel et al., 2020), instead, they are formed by institutional frameworks, individual agency, and structural constraints (Elder, 1994; Schapendonk et al., 2020). Institutional contradictions, including fragmented governance, shifting policy priorities, and discretionary practices, create unpredictable, and contradictory trajectories, obstructing the aspired pathways. Consequently, Elder (1994, p.5) notes that the stated “problems have much to do with the impact of changing societies on developing lives.” Affecting how paths evolve, are produced, facilitated, slowed down, blocked, and ultimately experienced (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014).

By enforcing restrictive return measures while simultaneously maintaining integration mechanisms, authorities create a policy environment where UAMs are caught in liminal spaces of governance – neither fully included nor entirely excluded (Meloni, 2019). This institutional ambiguity allows for selective enforcement and discretionary navigation, leading to varied outcomes depending on how authorities interpret and apply policies.

Thus, the institutional contradictions in Norwegian and Dutch migration governance do not just reflect policy friction but actively structure and constrain migration trajectories.

This thesis examines how institutional tensions influence the migration and integration trajectories of rejected UAMs.

Methodology

This thesis employs a qualitative comparative case study to examine how Norwegian and Dutch authorities construct institutional tensions between integration and return policies, and to what extent this shapes the integration and migration trajectories of rejected UAMs.

Relevant subquestions are:

- *What are the main characteristics of the integration and return policies for rejected unaccompanied minors in Norway and the Netherlands?*
- *How is there a tension between integration and return policies?*
- *How do these policies influence the integration and migration trajectories for unaccompanied minors?*

Qualitative research is interested in people's beliefs, experiences and meaning systems, and the phenomena is viewed in its social context (Lim, 2024). This approach is particularly well-suited to explore complex social phenomena in depth, making it a valuable method for this study's objectives. Building on this foundation, incorporating a comparative design further strengthens the research by enabling a systematic examination of similarities and differences across cases. As Ragin (1980, p.1) asserts "thinking without comparison is unthinkable," highlighting that comparison lies at the heart of social scientific methodology. By comparing cases, this study adopts a holistic perspective that not only deepens contextual understanding but also enhances the validity and generalizability of findings. Comparative studies systematically analyze patterns across two or more cases with a shared focus or goal (Goodrick 2014, p.1), producing richer insights than single-case analyses alone.

Moreover, comparative case studies are particularly useful when there is a need to understand or explain how features within the context influence the success of the policy initiative (Goodrick 2014, p.1). As the aim of this thesis is to examine and compare the policies implemented for rejected UAMs, and its outcomes on migrant trajectories, in the respective countries, the method is well-suited.

The selection of Norway and the Netherlands is grounded in both analytical and practical considerations. Analytically, this thesis employs a most similar system design, which seeks to compare countries that are alike in relevant structural and societal factors but may differ in specific policy outcomes (Anckar, 2008). This allows for a more controlled comparison of

how institutional tensions between integration and return policies shape the trajectories of rejected UAMs.

At the same time, the case selection is also guided by the aim to contribute to policy learning and potential policy transfer. In policy transfer literature, it is well established that meaningful transfer is most feasible when the sending and receiving contexts share similar socio-political, economic and institutional characteristics (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; 2012; Williams & Dzhekova, 2014). Norway and the Netherlands are both high-income welfare states with comparable migration regimes, democratic governance structures, and commitments to international child rights. These similarities enhance the likelihood that insights from one country can be relevant and adaptable to the other. Thus, the comparative design not only strengthens internal validity by controlling for background conditions but also enhances the external policy relevance of the findings by focusing on comparable systems where cross-national learning is plausible.

Data Collection

To explore these institutional tensions, the study relies on grey literature, including policy documents, reports, and scientific articles to research the Norwegian and Dutch strategies aimed at UAMs, as well as to assess common trajectories. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with key informants were conducted. The analysis draws on insights from semi-structured interviews with 10 diverse informants found relevant to this study. To gain a holistic understanding of the situation, key informants, such as reception center employees, governmental officials, researchers, and former UAMs, were included. Their perspectives offer a multifaceted view across the different levels of the migration management system.

To access informants, the study used purposive and snowball sampling. Starting with key contacts in relevant institutions and organizations. Access to Norwegian and Dutch informants was gained through academic networks and professional connections. While this approach limits generalizability, it allows for the identification of knowledgeable participants who may not easily be accessible through formal channels (Knott et al., 2022).

Furthermore, key informant interviews as a qualitative method is particularly suited for capturing in-depth perspectives on policy implementation and experiences (Kibuacha, 2024). Moreover, key informant interviews involve in-depth discussions with individuals possessing specialized knowledge of the subject matter. The value of key informant interviews is that they enable the researcher to tap into the expertise in specific fields, which

is especially crucial to understand complex issues (Kibuacha, 2024), like the one outlined in this thesis.

One of the primary strengths of key informant interviews is the ability to capture the context and nuances around the subject, revealing the why and how behind observable trends. Kibuacha (2024) notes that this depth is vital in fields like policy analysis, where understanding the rationale behind decisions can advise more efficient policy development.

The design of the interviews was semi-structured, as this format provides a balance between structure and flexibility (Kibuacha, 2024). A prepared set of open-ended questions ensured that key topics were covered while allowing the experts to elaborate on their perspectives. This approach is particularly useful for identifying patterns across cases while capturing context-specific nuances. The main topics explored in the interviews included:

- Main characteristics of migration policies for UAMs
- The extent to which integration and return policies conflict in practice
- The perceived impact of these policies on minors' decision-making in relation to migration and integration trajectories
- The role of institutional actors in shaping minors' trajectories
- Future policy suggestions to improve the situation for UAMs

Interviews were conducted in person or via secure online platforms. With permission all interviews were recorded, and later, transcribed, and anonymized following ethical guidelines. I read and coded the interviews one-by-one in Atlas.ti according to recurring themes (Appendix I).

Ethics

Ethics in research involves the concerns, dilemmas, and conflicts that arise over the correct way to conduct research (Neuman, 2007, p.48), often leading to moral predicaments. Conducting research about a vulnerable group, like UAMs, requires delicate ethical considerations, particularly in terms of consent and the sensitivity of the subject matter. In this study, interviews with rejected UAMs and UAMs themselves were not conducted due to governmental restrictions on access to classified information, which necessitated a prolonged ethical approval process before permission could be granted. Furthermore, rejected UAMs belong to the category of hard-to-reach populations (Gasana, 2012; Grift, 2022), and researcher face challenges related to identification, access and recruitment of participants (Gasana, 2012; Øien & Sønsterudbråten, 2011). Making direct engagement challenging within the time and resource constraints of this thesis. Given these complexities, this study instead

focused on professionals and former UAMs, whose perspectives provide valuable insights while respecting ethical boundaries and institutional limitations.

Professionals are not per se considered a vulnerable group, yet ethical concerns still arose, particularly regarding professional risks and reputational concerns. Professionals may face constraints or institutional biases due to their role. Whereas interviewing former UAMs required sensitivity due to their past vulnerabilities and the potential risk of retraumatization (Weiss, 2021), and privacy. Hence, to mitigate potential harms, participants were fully informed about the research objective, and their rights under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). An informed consent form (Appendix I) was prepared to explicate what participation entailed and was entirely voluntary to sign. Additionally, anonymity and confidentiality were safeguarded through the use of a secure data collection software. Transcribed interviews were deleted after analyzing and coding them.

Data Analysis

The data analysis follows a thematic coding approach using Bryman's framework for qualitative coding. A combined inductive and deductive coding approach was applied. Meaning that the data was derived from identified types and mechanisms narrated from this research, as well as through predefined theoretical themes related to integration, return and institutional contradictions. The coding process involved; 1) initial coding, identifying recurring themes and patterns in the interview data, 2) thematic categorization, grouping data into categories aligned with the research framework, and 3) comparison, comparing responses across the two cases to identify similarities and differences between Norway and the Netherlands.

Due to the iterative approach of qualitative coding, the identified theme "liquid integration" was initially done inductively, but with a secondary search the term was found to already exist in the integration literature, and thus, became deductive. Therefore, my coded theme builds on Skrobanek and Jobst (2019) understanding of liquid integration and further tests its applicability in this case study. While the two other identified themes "governed non-deportability" and "reactive secondary migration" stem from inductive coding.

Consequently, the comparison of the Dutch and Norwegian policies led to the exposure of distinguishable trajectories for rejected UAMs based on the practices employed by the authorities.

Validity

Validity in research relates to the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings (Brink, 1993). Thus, a valid study should demonstrate what exists and a valid measure should measure what it is supposed to measure. Validity is found particularly vital in qualitative research, where subjectivity can bias the findings.

Moreover, validity is divided into two categories: internal and external. Internal validity refers to the extent to which research findings are correct reflections or representations of reality (Brink, 1993). In qualitative research, internal validity is to some extent easier to ensure than external validity. To ensure internal validity in this research, interview questions were designed to align with the research objectives. Consequently, efforts were made to minimize interviewer bias by using neutral, non-leading questions. Which is one of the potential pitfalls of interviews as a data collection method. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews can lessen validity, as it may be challenging to compare the findings afterwards depending on the interview experience and expertise.

External validity, on the other hand, addresses the degree to which such representation of reality is legitimately applicable across groups (Brink, 1993). In small-N studies like this one, external validity is difficult to guarantee, since comparative case studies often consists of a small number of participants or cases but many variables. Rather than statistical generalization, one aims for theoretical representativeness (Knott et al., 2022). In this study, theoretical saturation was not achieved due to its explanatory nature and limited number of key informants, however, the data collected is regarded sufficient to capture key institutional logics and contradictions relevant to the research question. The findings aim to provide in-depth insights and contribute to theory development, rather than to achieve saturation or broad generalization.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency, stability and repeatability of the study, as well as the researchers' ability to gather and record information precisely (Brink, 1993). While qualitative research does not aim to replicate specific findings, it instead seeks to ensure dependability through transparent and systematic methods. In this thesis, reliability was enhanced by grounding the analysis in a robust theoretical framework and employing triangulation of multiple data sources, such as policy documents, grey literature, and interviews with diverse informants. Triangulation strengthens the consistency of the findings by cross-validating evidence from different perspectives (Brink, 1993), thereby supporting a thorough and credible analytical foundation.

Positionality

Lastly, in qualitative research, the data-gathering instrument is often the researcher himself (Brink, 1993). Hence, questions of researcher bias and positionality need to be addressed. As a Norwegian student embedded in the Dutch academic system, I was uniquely positioned to access insights from both contexts, and hence to conduct a comparative study like this. However, it should be acknowledged that my Norwegian nationality fostered a predisposition towards the Norwegian context. Moreover, as I do not read nor speak Dutch, this limited the access to certain aspects of the Dutch case. Dutch literature was translated to English, and interviews were conducted in English. Creating a bias since access to the Norwegian case was greater. Yet, this did not color the comparability of the study, as the chosen design helped ensure that the findings reflect structural and institutional dynamics rather than preconceived assumptions about the cases.

To sum it up, by integrating these methodological choices, this study ensures a rigorous, ethically responsible, and analytically robust approach to understanding the experiences of rejected UAMs in Norway and the Netherlands.

Analysis

It is important to note that the findings presented here represent only a part of the broader story. Due to the constraints of this thesis, such as limited time, resources, and access to participants, the analysis primarily exposes general patterns rather than capturing the full range of nuances and complexities inherent in the experiences of rejected UAMs. The reality on the ground is undoubtedly more complex than what can be explored in this study. Nevertheless, the patterns identified offer valuable insights that can inform both future research and policy development in the field.

The results section will follow the structure of the subquestions outlined above. Under each question different themes and patterns have been identified through thematic coding. Moreover, three main themes have been clustered and shape the thesis discussion. These themes are 1) *Governed Non-Deportability*, 2) *Liquid Integration* and 3) *Reactive Secondary Migration*.

Results

What are the main characteristics of the integration and return policies for unaccompanied minors in Norway and the Netherlands?

Asylum Procedure

Norway and the Netherlands are both established welfare states with developed asylum systems, and in terms of the asylum procedure, the two systems share multiple commonalities. For instance, that the responsibility of this vulnerable group falls to the asylum institution rather than the childcare institution. However, their treatment of UAMs also differs in key areas, as reflected in the interview data.

First, there is a notable difference in the number of UAMs each country receives. In 2024, 3935 UAMs applied for asylum in the Netherlands (CBS, n.d.), compared to only 1306 in Norway (UDI, n.d.). Although most UAMs eventually receive protection in both countries, informants noted that procedures have become more restrictive, following broader European trends. A Norwegian reception center employee said, «the system takes better care of them today, but the problem is that it has become far more bureaucratic.”

Though both countries follow established legal procedures for handling UAMs claims, several informants emphasized how prolonged waiting times, bureaucratic complexity, and the “shrinking of legal spaces to contest an asylum procedure”, influence the experience of minors during the process. A former UAM explained the asylum procedures as “a bit tiring and a bit of a panic to suddenly get legislation that could let me wait longer.” These procedural shifts, while seemingly administrative, are part of a broader institutional logic that shapes the partial integration and deportability of UAMs, as will be elaborated below.

Policies for Rejected UAMs

A key point of divergence between the two countries lies in how they treat UAMs whose asylum claims are rejected.

Return Practices and Access to Education

In the Netherlands, rejected UAMs are generally not returned before turning 18, due to EU legal requirements mandating a safe and dignified return arrangement. As one Dutch governmental official explained:

“Minors are not being sent back to the country of origin, at least until they are 18, because in the European Union, as a country you are obliged to make sure that when you send back the minor to the country of origin, they are arriving in a place which is safe. And in the case of minors that never really happens. Like, you cannot show evidence that they will be safe to an extent which is sufficient.”

Consequently, many rejected minors remain in the Netherlands until adulthood, often staying in reception centers and attending school during this period. The Dutch governmental official elucidated that “when the asylum request has been rejected, the minor is still entitled to education.” While this allows for some integration, informants noted that the ambiguous legal status and prolonged uncertainty create a difficult situation for both the minors and the institutions supporting them.

In contrast, Norway’s approach has varied over time. Norway is also obliged to undergo strict assessment procedures for UAMs, however there has been no consistent practice of refraining from returning rejected UAMs before they turn 18, except if they specifically got a time-limited permit that allowed for a legal stay until 18. This was widely used for minors from Afghanistan during the “migration crisis”. The practice has later been scaled back. So far in 2025, only two minors have been granted a time-limited permit (UDI, n.d.). Therefore, in Norway, minors can be returned before 18, however such returns occur mostly in theory rather than in practice.

In cases where return is mandated, one report provided by KPMG, and commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the Immigrant Appeals Board (UNE) pointed out that return decision for minors, are often based on vague assumptions of proper care in the country of origin rather than verifiable guarantees (KPMG, 2024, p.7). A reception center employee emphasized this point by stating that he considered the decisions to be "arbitrary" since he was familiar with the backgrounds of many of these young individuals, and it appeared relatively inconsistent as to who was granted a stay and who was not.

Nonetheless, the complexity of assessing minor’s asylum claims and potential return, lead to return rarely being realized in practice. One Norwegian governmental official said, “we did not have a return center in Afghanistan to deal with them, so I do not think that many unaccompanied minors were sent back to Afghanistan.” While a reception center employee said it like this, “of those who got a time-limited permit, I meet a lot of them today, so I think they got a permit in the end.” Aligning with the theoretical expectation of non-deportability. Even though the institutional framework authorizes return, the complexity of the return apparatus, prevents actual enforcement.

Despite the difference in return practices, Norway also provides UAMs with access to education within three months after arrival. However, as explained by a governmental official, the implementation of this is uneven “because primary school, is both a right and an obligation, so the municipality is obliged to provide an offer, while it is not the same for upper secondary school. This means that some unaccompanied minors between 15 and 18 do not

receive school offers.” Additionally, access to education typically ends at the point of formal rejection. Some municipalities allow schooling to continue until the date of departure.

Underscoring a stricter and more incoherent approach in Norway. Apart from this, Norway and the Netherlands do not differ significantly in their legal frameworks regarding the rights and return standards of rejected UAMs. The stricter approach observed in Norway is thus primarily a matter of policy implementation rather than legal distinction.

How is there a tension between integration and return?

Institutional Contradiction

Derived from the theoretical framework and the interview data, the institutional contradiction inherent in the migration apparatus was acknowledged by all informants. This was explained with the intricacy of the system and the different spaces to maneuver for migrants, but also for the ones working within the system. A migration scholar said it like this “migration governance brings inherent tensions, and also with state apparatuses there are a lot of conflictual insights about what’s best in terms of how to manage migration.”

Governed Non-Deportability

When asked about whether they see a tension between integration and return, a legal migration scholar said, “the tension is more between integration and the possibility of return or deportability because what you see happening is the introduction of all sorts of obstacles to permanent residence and just predictable stay in general.” The aspect of deportability was linked to the “temporariness” in migration governance. The Dutch migration scholar explained the tension like this,

“The tension is of course if people from let’s say age of 15 enter [...] the Netherlands in this case. He or she, no matter what policies are around him or her will ground socially, economically, politically in some way. So, there is a kind of embeddedness in the making in these three years before he or she turns 18. So, in that period of time, there is a lot of grounding, a lot of, well what policymakers would frame as integration or, yeah, being part of society, being part of a social environment. And in the worst case scenario for the migrant in question, the coin flips around the age of 18 and he or she turns into a not so deserving migrant, because of the age then that will cause a rupture, a rupture of taking somebody out of a social environment where he or she

invested in so much for three years or four years and then be thrown out or kicked out of the country in some ways.”

Displaying “a very clear tension between the integration aspect of education and the return policy” in the Dutch case, as return is not enforced until reaching adulthood. Here, informants explained that both the long waiting time before receiving the final claim, and the expected return at 18 if rejected, gave room for “rooting” or “grounding” within the Dutch society.

The conflict was less evident in Norway, as practices have changed to focus on enforcing return before age 18. Still, a reception center employee experienced it as a “living problem at the reception centers. Because it was minors who got rejected, and it caused some ethical dilemmas, and I mean, the subject is what I know, the law is what I am allowed to do, and ethics is what I should do.” Thus, he found himself “always working in the triangle between conflict, cooperation and dilemma.” Noting that he sometimes took some “unconventional” choices when he encountered injustice.

Furthermore, in asylum cases for minors, the time spent in Norway play a pivotal role in the final decision. Hence, UAMs cases are prioritized to limit the time spent and potential rooting in society before acquiring the claim (KPMG, 2024, p.8). Yet, the application process was acknowledged by informants to take longer than wanted, which resulted in access to education and some degree of integration.

Although the Norwegian government aimed at return for these UAMs, especially in the case of Afghans, the lack of a return center in Afghanistan obstructed this. Meaning that, even though Afghan minors were rejected there was little prospect of return. Multiple informants noted this, and a governmental official said “we did not have a return apparatus in Afghanistan to receive them. Even though it was a political determination to establish a return center.” Underscoring the constructed deportability through the time-bounded inclusion in these cases.

Thus, across both cases, the uncertainty and temporality embedded in return policies produce a condition I term *governed non-deportability* for rejected UAMs. To capture the complexity of the return apparatus, the concept of governed non-deportability builds on deportability (de Genova, p.2002; Leerkes & Van Houte, 2020) but adds an important nuance: it recognizes that the threat of return does not always culminate in actual removal, and that the state, aware of these barriers, develops governance strategies to manage the presence of non-deported individuals. Governed non-deportability thus refers to the institutionalized and, to

some extent, acknowledged outcome that many rejected UAMs will remain un-retuned. These measures do not regularize status but reflect a pragmatic response to the persistent gap between return policy objectives and practical outcomes.

How do these policies influence the integration and migration trajectories of UAMs?

Liquid Integration

Differences in how Norway and the Netherlands handle rejected UAMs produce distinctive integration outcomes, as seen in informant insights and policy consequences. In both cases, *liquid integration* emerges as an outcome, though to different extents. Liquid integration is introduced to describe the unstable and mobile nature of integration (Skrobanek & Jobst, 2019) experienced among rejected UAMs. Drawing on Bauman's (2000) notion of "liquid modernity", this term captures how integration is enabled through temporary access to education, however undermined by the lack of durable legal and social rights. These minors are included through conditional access to key domains yet excluded from long-term belonging, resulting in a non-linear, mobile trajectory of integration that often leads to onward migration. Their lived experiences reveal that integration, when untied from legal status, becomes flexible, fractional, and ultimately, dissolvable.

The primary focus in the interviews with Dutch informants was on the challenges faced by minors during the waiting-period from rejected application to reaching the age of 18. Dutch informants noted that minors aware of their likely return often felt demotivated and reluctant to attend Dutch school. Due to the fact that education is "solely focused on integration", they did not see the point of attending school when they must leave anyways - "[t]hey don't want to go to school. Why? Because, that is, in their perception, very inconsistent with return."

Furthermore, a former UAM explained how the lack of an ID during the application process limited his ability to attend school trips abroad. Leaving him with a "bad feeling" of "missing out." He also highlighted the lack of "social contact with peers of Dutch origin" during this process. An experience that is prolonged if rejected and left in a legal limbo until reaching adulthood.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Norwegian informants, though the structure and consequences of liquid integration differed slightly. Norwegian informants observed that while policies are framed as promoting integration and social cohesion, "what we see in practice is that a number of groups will just remain excluded for a long period of time." The informant also added that access to education functions as a way for authorities to

demonstrate compliance with legal or humanitarian obligations, but only conditionally: “look we’re trying to balance this humanitarian impulse that we have to maintain or even our legal obligations under human rights and refugee law but we’re going to put conditions on.” This approach then becomes more “exclusionary than intended” and push rejected UAMs into the margins of society, as they lose their one access point to the Norwegian integration system - education. Revealing a more liquid way to include this group than in the Dutch model.

Thus, while access to education offers a semblance of integration, its temporality and conditionality render it liquid. A state of partial belonging that is ultimately dissolved by looming deportability. This sets the stage for reactive secondary migration as a rational counter adjustment to the institutional constraints of integration.

Reactive Secondary Migration

In terms of migration trajectories, a recurring pattern that emerged in the interviews, especially in the Norwegian case, was what I term *reactive secondary migration*: the decision of UAMs to move onward in response to anticipated rejection or a lack of viable prospects as undocumented migrants. While all informants acknowledged this dynamic, it was particularly emphasized by those working in Norway. This pattern relates to the transition from liquid integration in the country of destination, to the reactive choice of moving onwards, creating a pan-European migration flow.

All Norwegian informants recognized that most of these minors migrated to countries perceived to have better legal or social opportunities, like France and Spain. As one reception center employee stated: “It was a percentage that disappeared from the reception centers. I know that a good share of them went to France and got accepted there.”

Two common explanations were given for this pattern. First, remaining in Norway without a residence permit is difficult: “I mean it’s very hard to stay in Norway without, so I would assume they’re moving on.” Once rejected, minors lose access to education and have almost no legal path to employment, pushing many to seek alternatives elsewhere.

Second, and more frequently highlighted in the interviews, was the psychological burden tied to family expectations. Many minors, particularly from Afghanistan and Syria, had been sent to Europe with the hope of supporting or later reuniting with their families. When their asylum applications were rejected, returning to their country of origin was rarely seen as an option. Instead, they sought new routes to fulfill the expectations placed on them. As a governmental official noted: “There are expectations and hopes from home, and it is a

great psychological burden for many, and they feel that those expectations of the family then lie of their shoulders.”

These decisions are not made in isolation but are responses to changing social, legal and geopolitical landscapes. One informant encapsulated this complexity: “people navigate temporalities, they also navigate new geopolitical situations, and all these social relations attached to that.” In this sense, secondary migration is not just a reactive movement, but a calculated response to “shifting grounds.”

In contrast, Dutch informants spoke less frequently, and less specifically, about secondary migration. This suggests that rejected UAMs in the Netherlands may be more likely to remain in the country until they turn 18, despite their uncertain status. This can be linked to the fact that minors are provided with education until return is mandated. When asked, several informants acknowledged that some minors do disappear, but were unsure of their trajectories: “Well, a part of them leaves and we don’t know where.” Additionally, the practice of sending minors first to initiate family reunification, was not emphasized to the same extent as by the Norwegian informants. It was acknowledged as a phenomenon but “not necessarily in a large scale.” However, it was mentioned by multiple informants that the observed pattern when reaching 18, was either irregularity in the Netherlands or reactive secondary migration to somewhere else in Europe. This demonstrates a similar pattern as seen in Norway. When the uncertainty of adulthood closes in, these minors counter the “shifting grounds.”

Conclusion and Discussion

This study was set out to answer the question: *How do Norwegian and Dutch authorities construct institutional tension between policies that foster host country integration and policies that promote return for rejected unaccompanied minors, and with what outcomes for these minors’ migration and integration trajectories?* By focusing on the broader dynamics of exclusion and inclusion to the specific practices of return and integration, this study has addressed the research question through key informant interviews.

Moreover, the aim of the research was to help bridge the sociological gap identified in the VULNER-project; a more nuanced exploration of how legislation and institutions shape ambiguities, rights dilemmas and precarity (Lidén et al., 2021, p.16). Consequently, to highlight the voices of rejected UAMs, a group often left aside in the migration debate, like rejected asylum-seekers in general. Lastly, the comparison of Norway and the Netherlands was meant to contribute to knowledge-sharing about policy practices in similar contexts.

The findings underscore that both countries construct an institutional tension between integration and return. For rejected UAMs, this results in liquid integration and reactive secondary migration, driven by the structural use of non-deportability. This situation places minors in extended legal uncertainty, offering no long-term resolution and limited opportunities for stable inclusion.

This thesis reveals that while return is the structural end-goal, its implementation is far more complex. The Netherlands is addressing some of these policy gaps, whereas Norway appears more reluctant to acknowledge the flaws and consequence of the return system. In both countries return operates as a formal institutional norm (Parsons, 1990), while its employment is often deferred or fragmented, producing a state of governed non-deportability. Within this void, countries remain obliged to provide limited services, such as education or postponed return. Even though education is widely recognized as a key domain of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Castles et al., 2002; Heckmann, 2005), it is insufficient on its own. Castles et al. (2002) argue that integration also requires access to housing and employment, while Ager and Strang (2008) emphasize that true integration depends on legal and political rights. Without these, integration remains precarious, and these minors are left unable to plan for the future.

Although there are differences in the practice towards rejected UAMs, these minors are treated as deportable subjects rather than developing individuals (Elder, 1994), embedding them within the asylum system rather than the childcare system. This supports Boswell's (2007) argument that liberal states implement restrictive measure to preserve the benevolent welfare state for its citizens (Weiss, 2013).

The liquid integration observed aligns with Ager and Strang's (2008) multidimensional view of integration, showing that legal status underpins all. This can be explained by the fact that "temporality as it was constructed included return as a given component" (Karlsen, 2016, p.47), less so immigrant incorporation. Hence, many minors find themselves simultaneously included and excluded. They may attend school but remain excluded from political and legal membership or denied long-term welfare or housing options. As Elder (1994) noted, children's development is highly sensitive to social structures and stability. Subjecting them to temporariness and deportability during formative years undermines their psychological well-being and ability to prepare for what lies ahead.

The data provided a more comprehensive understanding of how migratory journeys are frequently interrupted by waiting periods and unpredictability. Moreover, these trajectories are interconnected with various dimensions of individuals' life courses and

transient legal statuses, resulting in a stressful countdown towards the transition into adulthood (Uzureau et al., 2024), where protection often ends and deportability intensifies. The transition to adulthood can potentially disrupt their legal trajectory and settlement in a new country. This was particularly evident in the Dutch case, where UAMs are granted education and care until 18 but live under the constant shadow of return. As my findings show, this form of precarious integration leads to disengagement from school and limited social ties.

Moreover, this legal and psychosocial liminality drives reactive secondary migration: onward migration driven by the absence of durable solutions and the fear of removal. Rather than protecting this group, current institutional practices push them toward invisibility and deeper structural marginalization. This dynamic somewhat resembles the concept of segmented assimilation, which posits that social structures determine where and how individuals integrate or assimilate into different segments of society.

The academic contribution of this thesis extends immigrant incorporation theory by introducing the concept of liquid integration, highlighting the central role of temporality and legal status in shaping integration trajectories. It builds on segmented assimilation theory by acknowledging not only multiple pathways of incorporation but also the transitional, temporal, and uncertain dimensions of integration in contemporary societies. Rejected UAMs live in a state of governed non-deportability, where their futures are suspended. This profoundly shapes both how they view their own integration and how institutions engage with them. Liquid integration, then, reflects the instability, contingency, and non-linearity of their social incorporation, offering a theoretical lens better suited to account for their liminal and often interrupted trajectories.

Furthermore, it also refines migration governance theory, showing how ambiguous institutional regimes create new forms of marginalization and uncertainty, and expands on Boswell's (2007) framework by demonstrating how institutional contradictions drive precarious mobility patterns.

Moreover, the emergence of reactive secondary migration also bridges human geography and migration studies. Reactive secondary migration reflects not only structural constraints but also the agency, aspirations, and sense of responsibility that these minors carry – particularly towards supporting their families. Restrictive policies and enforcement practices may redirect or delay migration, but they rarely stop it. The failure of states to acknowledge and support these capacities within legal and integration frameworks risks exacerbating the very outcomes they seek to avoid, reinforcing exclusion and onward movement across the European migration landscape.

Beyond academic contributions, this study highlights how migration control logics override childcare imperatives, pointing to an urgent ethical and political dilemma. Rejected UAMs remain governed without durable outcomes. The absence of a European regularization framework, despite having a Return Directive, reveals a critical policy gap.

The conceptual lens of liquid integration, reactive secondary migration and governed non-deportability applied in this study could guide longitudinal and comparative studies. Future research should examine alternative regularization strategies, and the long-term outcomes of youth who engage in reactive secondary migration. For instance, comparative studies that include Southern European countries, where many of these minors reappear. This could deepen the understanding of intra-European governance for this group. Additionally, literature would gain from engaging in longitudinal research on how liquid integration is shaped by agency, and further shape identity, belonging, and life chances beyond initial exclusion.

In conclusion, rejected UAMs must not remain overlooked in migration debates. Policy reforms should seek to reconcile integration and return objectives by developing durable solutions that acknowledge the complex realities of rejected UAMs. This may include alternative regularization pathways, enhanced access to social services regardless of legal status, and greater coordination between migration and child protection agencies.

Bibliography

- Anckar, C. (2008). On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(5), 389–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401552>
- Bauman, Z. (2000). Living in the era of liquid modernity. *Cambridge Anthropology*, 1-19.
- Berry, J. W. (2011). Integration and multiculturalism: Ways towards social solidarity. *Papers on social representations*, 20(1), 2-1.
- Blitz, B. K., Sales, R., & Marzano, L. (2005). Non-voluntary return? The politics of return to Afghanistan. *Political Studies*, 53(1), 182-200.
- Boswell, C. (2007). Theorizing Migration Policy: Is There a Third Way? *International Migration Review*, 41: 75-100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2007.00057.x>
- Brink, H. (1993). Validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Curationis*. 16. 35-8. 10.4102/curationis.v16i2.1396.
- Burawoy, M. (2005). For Public Sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70(1), 4-28. DOI 10.1177/000312240507000102
- Castles, S. (2004). The factors that make and unmake migration policies 1. *International migration review*, 38(3), 852-884.
- Castles, S. (2010). Understanding global migration: A social transformation perspective. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 36(10), 1565-1586.
- Castles, S., Korac, M., Vasta, E., & Vertovec, S. (2002). Integration: Mapping the field.
- Coleman, J. S. (1990). Commentary: Social institutions and social theory. *American sociological review*, 55(3), 333-339.
- Convention on the Rights of the Child. (November 20, 1989). UNICEF. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/media/52626/file>
- Dahinden, J. (2016). A plea for the ‘de-migrantization’ of research on migration and integration. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 39(13), 2207-2225.
- De Genova, N. P. (2002). Migrant “illegality” and deportability in everyday life. *Annual review of anthropology*, 31(1), 419-447.
- De Genova, N.P. & Peutz, N. (2010). *The Deportation Regime. Sovereignty, Space and the Freedom of Movement*. Duke University Press.
- De Haas, H., Czaika, M., Flahaux, M. L., Mahendra, E., Natter, K., Vezzoli, S., & Villares-Varela, M. (2019). International migration: Trends, determinants, and policy effects. *Population and Development review*, 45(4), 885-922.
- Dolowitz, D. P., & Marsh, D. (2000). Learning from abroad: The role of policy transfer in contemporary policy-making. *Governance*, 13(1), 5-23.
- Dolowitz, D. P., & Marsh, D. (2012). The future of policy transfer research. *Political studies review*, 10(3), 339-345.
- Elder, G. H. (1994). Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57(1), 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786971>
- Elder, G. H. (1998). The Life Course as Developmental Theory. *Child Development*, 69(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1132065>
- EMN. (2022). Norway 2021. Main developments in migration and international protection, including latest statistics. European Migration Network.

- FAiR Project. (2025, April 14). *Between voluntary and forced return: Erasmus University Rotterdam research project looks at deportation policy in the Netherlands*. Science Business. Retrieved from <https://fair-return.org/between-voluntary-and-forced-return-erasmus-university-rotterdam-research-project-looks-at-deportation-policy-in-the-netherlands/>
- Gasana, F. (2012). *Irregular migrants' structural vulnerability and survival strategies-a case study in Bergen area* (Master's thesis, University of Stavanger, Norway).
- Goodrick, D. (2020). *Comparative case studies* (Vol. 9). Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: SAGE Publications Limited.
- Goerdat, A., Oost-Gerholt, A. & Stegink, M. (2021). Children in Migration. Netherlands national contribution to the EMN study on 'Children in Migration'. European Migration Network.
- Government of the Netherlands. (n.d.). *Unaccompanied minor aliens (AMV)*. Government of the Netherlands. Retrieved from <https://www.government.nl/topics/asylum-policy/unaccompanied-minor-foreign-nationals-umfns>
- Government of the Netherlands. (n.d.). *Return policy*. Government of the Netherlands. Retrieved from <https://www.government.nl/topics/return-of-foreign-citizens/return-policy>
- Grift, R. V. D. (2022). *'Becoming Adult' in the Netherlands as a Refugee. Experiences and Expectations* (Master's thesis, Utrecht University).
- Hajer, M., Vasileiadi, C., & van Liempt, I. (2024). *The Legal and Policy Infrastructure of Irregularity: Netherlands*. I-CLAIM. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10966079>
- Heckmann, F. (2005). Integration and integration policies: IMISCOE network feasibility study.
- Hollifield, J. F. (1992). *Immigrants, markets, and states: The political economy of postwar Europe*. Harvard University Press.
- Karlsen, T. B. (2016). *The Norwegian Regime of Returns: A governmentality-perspective on the development of return practices in Norway*. (Master's thesis, Malmö University).
- Kibuacha, F. (2024). Key Informant Interviews: An In-Depth Guide for Researchers. GeoPoll. Retrieved from <https://www.geopoll.com/blog/key-informant-interviews/>
- Klaassen, M. (2022). No perspective for unaccompanied minors: The wrong implementation of T.Q. Leiden Law Blog. Retrieved from <https://www.leidenlawblog.nl/articles/no-perspective-for-unaccompanied-minors-the-wrong-implementation-of-t-q>
- Knott, E., Rao, A., Summers K., & Teege, C. (2022). Interviews in the social sciences. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers* 2, no. 1 (2022): 73.
- KPMG AS. (2024). *Barnets beste i asylsaker: Undersøkelse av utledningsmyndighetenes vurderinger av hensynet til barnets beste i asylsaker* [Report]. Utlendingsdirektoratet (UDI). Retrieved from <https://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/aktuelt/20240315-kpmg-rapport---barnets-beste-i-asylsaker---uu.pdf>
- Leerkes, A., & Van Houte, M. (2020). Beyond the deportation regime: Differential state interests and capacities in dealing with (non-) deportability in Europe. *Citizenship Studies*, 24(3), 319-338. DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2020.1718349
- Lidén, H., Schultz, J., Paasche, E., & Wessmann, H. (2021). Vulnerable Protection Seekers in Norway: Regulations, Practices, and Challenges. DOI: 10.5281/ZENODO.5518575

- Lim, W. M. (2024). What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619>
- Lijphart, A. (1975). II. The comparable-cases strategy in comparative research. *Comparative political studies*, 8(2), 158-177.
- Lillevik, R. (2019). *Experiences with assisted return from Norway – a research review*. Project Brief.
- Lillevik, R., & Tyldum, G. (2021). Irregulær bistand. *En kartlegging av norske storbyers møter med irregulære migranter. Fafo-report*, 15.
- Valenta, M., & Thorshaug, K. (2011). Failed asylum-seekers' responses to arrangements promoting return: Experiences from Norway. *Refugee survey quarterly*, 30(2), 1-23.
- Meloni, F. (2019). The ambivalence of belonging: The impact of illegality on the social belonging of undocumented youth. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 451-479.
- Moshe, N., & Miodownik, D. (2024). Social Navigation of Asylum Seekers: Journeying through Host/Transit Countries amid Changing Political Conditions. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 22(4), 714-726.
- Neuman, W. (2007). Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.
- NOAS. (2017) En gjennomgang av midlertidig opphold til enslige mindreårige asylsøkere. Norsk Organisasjon for Asylsøkere. Retrieved from https://www.noas.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/EMA-notat_web.pdf
- Parsons, T. (1990). Prolegomena to a theory of social institutions. *American sociological review*, 55(3), 319-333.
- PICUM. (2022). *Turning 18 and undocumented: ensuring a safe transition into adulthood*. PICUM. Retrieved from <https://picum.org/blog/turning-18-undocumented/>
- Portes, A., & Zhou, M. (1993). The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and its Variants. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 530(1), 74-96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716293530001006> (Original work published 1993)
- Ragin, C. C. (1982). Comparative sociology and the comparative method. In *Comparative Sociological Research in the 1960s and 1970s* (pp. 102-120). Brill.
- Schapendonk, J., & Steel, G. (2014). Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104(2), 262–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2013.862135>
- Schapendonk, J., Van Liempt, I., Schwarz, I., & Steel, G. (2020). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes. *Geoforum*, 116, 211-216.
- Schultz, J. (2022). The temporary turn in Norwegian asylum law and practice. *CMI report*.
- Skrobanek, J., & Jobst, S. (2019). Liquid integration. Thinking beyond conventional understanding. In *Миграция как ресурс социально-экономического и демографического развития* (pp. 307-321)
- Tazzioli, M. (2020). Governing migrant mobility through mobility: Containment and dispersal at the internal frontiers of Europe. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38(1), 3-19.
- Utlendingsdirektoratet. (n.d.). *Beskyttelse (asyl)*. Utlendingsdirektoratet. Retrieved from <https://www.udi.no/har-fatt-svar/beskyttelse-asyl/>

- Utlendingsdirektoratet. (n.d.). *Retur*. Utlendingsdirektoratet. Retrieved from <https://www.udi.no/retur/>
- Uzureau, O., Lietaert, I., Senovilla Hernández, D., & Derluyn, I. (2024). Multi-layered mobilities: unaccompanied minors' trajectories, decision-making and mobility after arrival in Italy. *Children's Geographies*, 22(3), 431–446.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2024.2302107>
- Walters, W. (2002). 'Deportation, Expulsion, and the International Police of Aliens.' *Citizenship Studies* 6 (3). Taylor & Francis: 265–292.
- Weiss, A. (2021). *Retraumatization and Social Sciences Research*.
- Weiss, N. (2020). 11 The trauma of waiting: Understanding the violence of the benevolent welfare state in Norway. In D. Abdelhady, N. Gren & M. Joormann (Ed.), *Refugees and the violence of welfare bureaucracies in Northern Europe* (pp. 195-209). Manchester: Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526146847.00020>
- Williams, C. C., & Dzhekova, R. (2014). Evaluating the cross-national transferability of policies: a conceptual framework. *Journal of developmental entrepreneurship*, 19(04), 1450022.118. ISSN 1793-706X <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1084946714500228>
- Zijlstra, E., Rip, J. A., Beltman, D., Van Os, C., Knorth, E. J., & Kalverboer, M. (2017). Unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands: Legislation, policy and care. *Social work & society*, 15(2), 1-20.
- Øien, C., & Sønsterudbråten, S. (2011). *No way in, no way out? a study of living conditions of irregular migrants in Norway*. Fafo.

Appendix I

Ethics and Privacy Checklist

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed before commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: *Caught Between Inclusion and Exclusion: Liquid Integration and Reactive Secondary Migration among Rejected Unaccompanied Minors*

Name, email of student: Andrine Aam Strand, 738798as@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Dr. Prof. Arjen Leerkes, leerkes@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 20.01.2025 – 22.06.2025

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES - NO**

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. **YES - NO**

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? **YES - NO**

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) must first be submitted to an accredited medical research ethics committee or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations

that will not involve identification of participants. YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO

Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? ` YES - NO

6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO

7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO

8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO

9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO

10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

I interviewed key informants within the return and integration field. This entailed data collection about professional perspectives rather than personal details, however this might be deemed as identifying information. Additionally, I interviewed former unaccompanied minors, where ethnic origin was an important factor for the research objective.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

An informed consent form was sent out beforehand, and no information about the study was withheld from the participants. Given that the participants are professionals, ethical concerns of professional risks and reputation are safeguarded through anonymity and confidentiality.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants. The interviews were recorded using the researcher's phone.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

10 interviews.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

The population includes key informants found relevant for this study. However, it is difficult to quantify the exact size of this population.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

The interviews were stored on the researcher's phone before being transcribed. Transcribed interviews were stored on the researcher's laptop hard drive. Data was transferred as soon as possible after each interview to ensure security and prevent loss.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I, Andrine Aam Strand, am solely responsible for the day-to-day management, storage and backup of the research data.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Data will be backed up on an USB drive weekly to ensure data security.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Interviews were pseudonymized when necessary, especially if participants requested anonymity. Directly identifying details (participants names) were kept in a separate document, which was not accessible to anyone but the researcher.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus

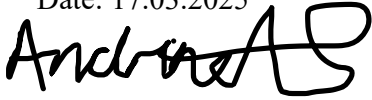
University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Andrine Aam Strand

Name (EUR) supervisor:

Date: 17.03.2025

Date:



Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Caught Between Policies: Navigating Integration and Return

Researcher: Andrine Aam Strand

Affiliation: Erasmus University Rotterdam, Department of Sociology and Human Geography

Contact: andrineaamstrand@gmail.com

Supervisor: dr. prof. Arjen Leerkes, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Introduction

This study looks at how conflicting policies in Norway and the Netherlands affect the lives and future paths of unaccompanied minors. By focusing on the rules and decisions made by governments, it explores how young people are caught between two systems – one that helps them become part of society and another that prepares them to leave. The goal is to understand how these contradictions shape their migration journeys and what consequences they might have.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to learn more about the influence of institutions on unaccompanied minors, focusing on how these institutions shape their trajectories. Additionally, the study seeks to share insights between Norway and the Netherlands about how to balance the need for integration and return, while also expressing the consequences this have for unaccompanied minors.

What Participation Involves

- A confidential interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes.
 - Discussion on your role, experiences, and perspectives regarding the practice.
 - Interviews will be recorded (if consent is given) and later transcribed for analysis.
-

Confidentiality and Data Protection

- All personal data will be anonymized. Your name and identifying details will not be included in any reports.
 - Data will be stored securely and only accessible to the researcher and supervisor.
 - The recordings and personal data will be deleted once my Master thesis has been approved. The anonymized transcripts will be stored at the University of Rotterdam for a period of 10 years and then deleted.
 - Your rights under the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** include:
 - The right to access your data.
 - The right to correct or erase your data.
 - The right to withdraw consent at any time.
 - The right to lodge a complaint with the Norwegian Data Protection Authority (Datatilsynet) or the EUR Data Protection Officer.
-

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question and withdraw from the study without providing a reason. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be deleted.

Consent Declaration

By signing below, you confirm that:

1. You have read and understood the information provided.
2. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
3. You consent to the processing of your data as described.

☐ I agree to participate in the interview.

☐ I consent to audio recording of the interview.

☐ I consent that the anonymized transcript can also be used for future scientific publications that are related to my Master thesis

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Illustration of Coding Process

