Holistic, conditional or strategic support? The ambivalent interplay of Norwegian migration policy and development aid

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Introduction

The overall goals of Norwegian aid policy are to fight poverty, save lives, alleviate suffering, and support economic development and welfare.[42] Providing assistance and protection to displaced populations is the most prominent arm of the migration-aid nexus, supported by Norway's leading norm-setting role in global displacement debates.[43] In addition to addressing the humanitarian needs of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), aid is understood to reduce migratory push factors by supporting conditions for political stability and by enabling viable livelihoods. Less prominently, migration is recognised as a facilitator of development; in this regard, the Norwegian aid budget has supported both regional mobility initiatives in Africa and diaspora engagement in countries of origin.

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[42] These are set out in government White Papers including Meld. St. 24 (2016-2017), p. 29; Meld. St. 27 (2018-2019), p. 50.

[43] For example, Norway sponsors the biannual UN General Assembly resolution promoting assistance and protection to IDPs, it promotes uptake of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in national law, and it funds the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement. Already in 1998, the Norwegian Refugee Council (with government funding) established the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) – now the leading global provider of data and analysis on internal displacement. With regard to climate- and disaster-related displacement, Norway launched and co-chaired the Nansen Initiative in 2012 (together with Switzerland), a state led consultative process that produced the Protection Agenda on cross border disaster displacement and shaped emerging policy on climate and disaster related mobility.

Interests in domestic migration control have also, over the years, influenced development aid policy. Already in the 1980s rising asylum claims submitted by 'spontaneous' arrivals prompted efforts to link domestic reception with humanitarian and preventive measures abroad. In line with debates elsewhere in Europe and within UNHCR circles, Norwegian policymakers began to explore a 'holistic approach' that tied refugee protection to assistance in countries of origin and, implicitly, to future returns once protection was no longer needed (Bølstad et al. 1995; Brekke 2001). This global perspective, set out in a government White Paper *On Refugee Policy* (Meld. St. 17 (1994-1995)), introduced the logic that since refugee status is not meant to be permanent, promoting the returns of refugees who no longer need protection would preserve Norway's capacity to receive new arrivals (NOAS 2013).

During the past two decades, migration-related aid has expanded and diversified - particularly in response to growing political attention to the challenge of irregular migration from Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa, and the increasingly important role of EU return policies. The active use of aid to facilitate the return of migrants without authorised stay and to deter future arrivals has been promoted in government coalition platforms on both sides of the political spectrum since 2009 (see Annex 1). At the same time, and in contrast to some EU-level approaches, Norway has generally approached these linkages with caution and without fully embracing aid conditionality tied to migration control. Migration – especially since 2015 – has nonetheless been recognised as a security issue and therefore increasingly – although not without significant resistance - the subject of a 'whole-of-government' approach involving different ministries and directorates.

This chapter offers a bird's-eye view of Norwegian migration-related development aid[44] focusing particularly on return, reintegration, mi-

[44] For the sake of simplicity, we use the term 'development aid' to encompass the 'triple nexus' approach including humanitarian, development and peacebuilding support and cooperation.

gration management and efforts to address the 'root causes' of irregular migration. The next section outlines the evolution of migration-related objectives in Norwegian aid spending, policy frameworks, and focus areas over time. Thereafter we examine the key actors in the institutional landscape, and organisational shifts surrounding migration-related aid spending. This is followed by an analysis of aid flows and reporting practices, highlighting how migration-related activities are identified and classified. This primarily covers aid spending in *low- and middle-income* recipient countries in Africa and the Middle East, as well as Afghanistan. As such, it does not include refugee-related aid in Norway or to migration-related funding in other European countries, provided for example through EEA grants.[45] The next section presents case studies from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan to illustrate how migration and development objectives intersect in practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of dilemmas and future developments.

Methodology

Our methodology combines three complementary components: 1) a review of Norwegian development aid statistics and budgets; 2) a review of strategic and policy documents outlining various priorities of relevance; and 3) semi-structured expert interviews with thirteen institutional actors involved in the planning and implementation of migration-related development cooperation in Norway, representing different ministries and directorates. Together, these methods were applied to map the institutional architecture, financial flows, and political framing of migration-related aid in Norway, and to assess how this field has evolved and been implemented in practice.

[45] EEA grants aim to reduce social and economic differences in Europe and constitute a significant percentage of overall aid spending on migration in Norway. For example, between 2014-2021, Norway provided 33 million Euros in support to asylum management in Greece (Utrop 2019). Poland is currently the largest beneficiary of Norwegian aid, with 925 million Euros allocated for the period 2021-2028 (MFA 2024). A significant portion of these funds (46.8 million Euros) are allocated to help deal with the consequences of Russian's invasion of Ukraine, including the reception of refugees.

First, the review of aid flows and budgets covers publicly available statistics on aid, as gathered in the official portal for statistics on and results of Norwegian development aid, as well as the annual budget proposals for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Justice and Security (MoJ), which have responsibility for different dimensions of the migration-related aid budget. While Norway has collected aid statistics since the 1960s, there are key challenges in specifying the migration-related aid flows, as discussed later. Rather than reviewing all available ministerial budgets, we focused on selected budget years to confirm and elaborate on insights gained from the policy review and expert interviews.

Second, the review of strategic and policy documents includes all government platforms *(regjeringsplattformer)* from coalition governments after 2005, as well as relevant strategic frameworks, such as the National Return Strategies, government policy documents ('White Papers'), and, where available, country partnership strategies. Taken together, these documents, along with the annual budget proposals, form the basis for tracing how migration has been articulated, prioritised, and institutionalised within Norwegian aid policy.

Third, we conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews with key actors from the MFA, the MoJ, the Immigration Directorate (UDI), Norad, and the National Police Immigration Service (NPIS), including former and current Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs, also referred to as migration officers or return officers) stationed at Norwegian embassies in key partner countries. The interviews were conducted mostly online, with some in-person meetings, and lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. Most were carried out jointly by Schultz and Talleraas. The interviewees included individuals currently or formerly responsible for managing or coordinating migration-related aid, providing in-depth institutional knowledge and first-hand experience. Several had held multiple positions across agencies or embassies, while others had long-standing experience in a single role.

The evolution of Norway's migration-focused aid

As described in the introduction, the first voices in Norwegian policy discourse linking migration management with development aid emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to changing patterns of displacement, geopolitical developments such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Balkan wars, and the increasing numbers of 'spontaneous' refugees who were less likely to be political dissidents than victims of war and widespread rights violations. The emerging holistic approach centred on humanitarian aid to refugees and support in countries of origin, and the facilitation of voluntary returns for those with legal residence in Norway (Meld. St. Nr. 17 (1994-1995)). The first repatriation programme, managed by the UDI in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), was introduced in 1990 for Chilean refugees. By 1992, this initiative had broadened to include individuals from other countries granted asylum or humanitarian residence.

By the late-1990s, in connection with the limited collective protection regime for Kosovars, the idea of "forced repatriation" took root, for refugees who no longer had a need for protection (Brekke 2010). An effective return policy was understood to grease the revolving door of asylum, permitting a better reception of new refugee arrivals with presumably more urgent needs for protection. It was also during this period (1994) that OECD's DAC regulations permitted the first year of refugee reception expenses to be included as development aid (Bølstad et al. 1995: 93).

Taken together, these early developments illustrate how shifting policy rationales were accompanied by the gradual introduction of new instruments—ranging from assisted return programmes to changes in aid reporting rules—that would later become more systematically embedded in Norway's migration-related aid architecture.

2000–2008: Migration as a positive force for development

In the early 2000s, events such as 9/11 and emerging concerns about irregular migration and security prompted new reflections not only in Norway but globally, on how to restrict and control migrant arrivals. At the same time, debates on remittances, diasporas, and transnational engagement created new openings for framing migration as a potential driver of development.[46] With the Soria Moria I government platform (2005-2009), there was a notable if short period during which migration was framed positively in Norwegian foreign policy and aid discourse.

Against this backdrop, a joint working group appointed by the Norwegian MFA and the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID) delivered a report, titled "Migration and development – better coherence and coordination" in 2006, the same year as the first global summit on this topic (MFA and AID 2006; discussed in Horjen 2020). The group, composed of representatives from the ministries, Norad, and the Immigration Directorate (UDI), recommended measures related to expanding circular migration pathways and temporary labour opportunities, the prevention of brain drain, leveraging diaspora communities in development efforts, increasing the development effects of remittances, the strategic use of resettlement quotas, and the strengthening of migration administration in partner countries using development aid. The report also suggested drawing on MFA and Norad expertise to better connect assisted return with reintegration support for refugees and IDPs in neighbouring countries. These ideas were supported also in Norwegian research environments (interviewees 01;02;09). Different aspects of the 2006 report were developed further during the next few years in various policy documents and in diaspora-oriented initiatives, includ-

[46] This corresponds to the international discourse on migration and development, which can be seen to have "swung back and forth like a pendulum", from the 1970s and 1980s "neo-Marxist optimism", swung back to more optimistic views, highlighting the developmental potential of migration, in the 1990s and early 2000s (de Haas, 2010).

ing efforts to reduce remittance costs and to increase immigrant representation in international aid organisations (Horjen 2020).

2008–2014: A sharper focus on return policy

The priority given to refugee returns was sharpened in 2008, when an unexpected increase in asylum seekers led the Stoltenberg government to propose thirteen measures restricting access to asylum and facilitating returns to third countries.[47] The centre-left coalition's platform from 2009 (Soria Moria II) was the first government platform to mention a direct connection between aid spending and migration, saying it sought to "use development aid and cooperation policy to support efforts to facilitate return and reintegration". Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs) based at Norwegian embassies, who had previously supported authorities making decisions on asylum, family reunification or other bases of residence, were now deployed in some countries primarily to work on return. The first platform under a conservative and right-wing coalition, Sundvolden (2013), redoubled on the efforts of its predecessors to use "Norway's position to secure more (return) agreements" and make "more active" use of Norway's diplomatic missions.

2015–2020: Crisis mode and the mainstreaming of migration management in development aid

The Norwegian approach to migration-related concerns, and its links to development cooperation and aid, shifted significantly following the asylum crisis[48] in Europe in 2015. A harder line on deterrence

[47] These were published as a Press Release, 'Instramming av asylpolitikken', available at: Innstramming av asylpolitikken - regjeringen.no. The number of asylum seekers rose from 6500 in 2007 to ca 15000 in 2008.

[48] We adopt the term 'asylum crisis' to describe the political and institutional response to the arrival of approximately 1.3 million asylum seekers, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, in Europe during 2015. Norway received approximately 31,000 applications during this time (MoJ 2015).

and returns was fronted by the right-wing Progress Party, which led the Ministry of Justice from 2013-2020.

Norway participated in the Valetta Process to strengthen migration governance coordination between Europe and Africa, and supported the European Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) to address root causes of irregular migration (see Box 1). By 2023 Norway's contribution to EUTF totalled more than 260 million NOK.[49] In response to political pressure, the Foreign Minister also established a Section on Migration within the Department for Regional Affairs in 2016, to coordinate the work within the MFA (European, bi- and multilateral affairs, legal affairs, development, and humanitarian support) as well as to liaise with the Ministry of Justice on migration control (section 3). The MFA led the Norwegian delegation which negotiated the UN Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees in 2017-2018. The Ministry of Justice advocated strongly for language reflecting the duty of states to cooperate in the readmission of their own nationals, and a state's right to return migrants without a legal basis for residence (interviewee 03). This became established Norwegian policy before the final adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in December 2018.

The return focus was reinforced by the development of 'return action plans' for a number of partner countries,[50] and by a series of restrictive measures introduced in late 2015 targeting different phases of the asylum process: from early verification of identity to accelerated procedures for people unlikely to qualify for protection, and enhanced collaboration with IOM on assisted return (MoJ 2015). The policies introduced also expanded the scope of exceptions from refugee status in Norway and mandated the revocation of residence permits after the need for protection is deemed to have

[49] Skriftlig spørsmål - stortinget.no.

[50] Currently there are eight return action plans, for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Morocco, Ethiopia and Somalia (interviewee 11).

ended.[51] These changes meant that fewer people qualified for protection to begin with, and those who did were subject to withdrawal of their refugee status as soon as conditions in the country of origin changed. Norway became a regional leader in returns, implementing for example 65 percent of all forced returns from Europe to Afghanistan in 2016 (NOAS 2020). This period marked renewed discussions on conditionality, and, specifically, whether and how aid might be used as an incentive for cooperation on returns. The threat of leveraging aid for returns and even denying aid to countries that do not comply was explicit in the political discourse, fronted strongly by the Minister of Justice Sylvi Listhaug from the Progress Party (Kveinå 2017). Other actors, including in the MFA and Norad, resisted this line, worrying that conditionalities would compromise other Norwegian interests (see section 3; Paasche 2022).

Box 10. Norway and the 'Root Causes' approach: limited uptake in practice

Following the 2015 asylum crisis, the European development and migration agenda became increasingly marked by the so-called 'root-causes approach', i.e. the idea to use development aid as a tool to influence migration drivers and hence deter irregular migration. The increased reliance on the root-causes approach occurred even though academic research – both before and after – largely questions the assumption that aid will effectively reduce migration. While a handful of studies finds that aid may be able to decrease migration in specific cases, most studies suggest that increasing aid in low-income countries will initially raise migration, as higher income levels enable people with the means to move (see e.g. Nyberg-Sørensen et al. 2002; Agenda 2019; Talleraas 2025).

[51] One measure was the expanded scope for applying the 'internal protection alternative' as a basis for refusing asylum, in which the reasonableness of relocation within a person's country of origin would no longer be a consideration for returns.

Interestingly, the root-causes agenda did not fully filter into Norwegian policy or practice. A comparative study found that Norway, unlike Poland or the EU, never fully embraced the root-causes framework (Kugiel et al. 2019). Yet, in 2016 there was some interest in the approach, as reflected in an MFA-funded study examining its relevance. However, the resulting report (Carling and Talleraas 2016) highlighted that the logic of the approach was empirically and conceptually weak, and highlighted the complexity of migration 'drivers', aspirations and capabilities.

The requested report was received with mixed reactions within the MFA, and some rhetorical and political support for the approach existed in the first years after 2015, as e.g. visible in the government platforms in 2018 and 2019, stating that the government would 'intensify efforts for development and democracy', in order to 'address the causes of migration' (emphasis added). Yet, despite this, many of our interviewees said that Norwegian aid practices were not substantively shaped by the approach (Interviewees 01, 02, 03, 03, 07, 09). While some individual projects may contain elements consistent with this reasoning – such as vocational training or livelihood programmes – there is little evidence that they have been guided by a deterrence rationale. Through its contributions to EU initiatives such as the EUTF for Africa, Norway has supported projects within the root-causes framework, but it does not appear to have initiated such programmes on its own, even despite the continued popularity of the root-causes approach also in newer EU frameworks, such as NDICI Global Europe (Talleraas 2025).

Recent developments

Following the parliamentary elections in 2021, a new government – a coalition of the Labour Party and the Centre Party – was formed under Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre. The government platform (Hurdal) built on earlier return-oriented strategies by committing to "maintaining trust in the asylum system through effective return work". At the same time, it introduced a stronger emphasis on supporting durable solutions for displaced persons in their countries and regions of origin (as opposed to in Norway), through the establishment of a targeted 'Solidarity Fund' (see Box 2) within the MFA budget. Interestingly, the 'Solidarity Fund' was described in the chapter of the platform regarding the Ministry of Justice, not Foreign Affairs or development. However, the establishment of the Fund would be within the mandate of the MFA and the development budget. A post as Special Representative for refugees, displaced people and host comunities *(Spesialrepresentant for flyktninger, fordrevne og vertsammfunn)* was established in the Section for Humanitarian Affairs in MFA in 2022 to oversee the creation and use of the fund.

The current Labour-led government plan (2025–2029) similarly promises "strengthened return work" and "increased international cooperation on new solutions and measures", including to ensure a more "sustainable immigration to Europe". This includes close cooperation with the EU in implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which opens the door for extraterritorial processing and 'return hubs' outside the country of origin.

Box 12. The Norwegian Solidarity Fund

The Labour Government's 2021 Hurdal Platform introduced a new initiative under the theme of 'immigration and integration' aimed at fostering sustainable solutions for refugees, IDPs, and host communities abroad. Through this Solidarity Fund *(Solidaritetspotten),* 5 billion NOK would be spent over four years to support displaced populations and to enhance

host societies' capacity to accommodate them together with non-displaced citizens. By improving conditions in origin and host countries, the intention was to reduce drivers of onward movement and mitigate irregular migration. The Fund would be managed by the Special Representative in the MFA, through an MFA-MoJ working group.

Instead of creating new funding, the initiative compounded existing projects and budget lines which supported the UNHCR, the World Food Programme and projects related to stabilisation and reduced vulnerability. Funding came from both the humanitarian and the development budgets to underscore a more holistic approach to durable solutions.

Momentum behind the initiative fizzled out especially with the invasion of Ukraine and the reallocation of funds and attention. The Fund's 2024 portfolio included however earmarked funding to UNHCR for projects in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and its neighbours; IOM activities in Yemen, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh; UNRWA programs in the West Bank and Gaza; Norwegian Refugee Council interventions in Sudan, Gaza, Lebanon, and Afghanistan; and contributions to the UN's Special Adviser on durable solutions (MFA 2025). From 2026, the Fund will no longer have a distinct budget line; its mandate for holistic management of migration-linked development aid will be incorporated into the humanitarian and regional aid budgets.

While the Fund did not generate sustained political momentum, some of our interviewees found that its working group to set priorities provided a useful forum for the MFA and MoJ to discuss their distinct interests and to identify countries where interests converged, such as with Syria and Somalia. Hence the entire budget of the Fund was ODA eligible, but focussed in many cases on countries where the MoJ had a particular interest. They also noted that the Fund's ambiguous aims and the absence of clear outcome benchmarks allowed

for a more open dialogue and dampened potential conflicts. While it is not clear that this ambiguity was intentional, the consequences resonate with research on the EU Trust Fund revealing how the emphasis on "root causes" served to depoliticise migration control and provide a consensus-oriented middle ground among EU institutions and member states (Anderson 2024).

The institutional landscape

The MFA has overall responsibility for development policy, which is implemented and administered by Norad and the embassies. In addition to providing aid oversight, the MFA leads on multilateral and regional processes on migration, through its Special Representative for migration, and plays a key role in negotiating and collaborating on bilateral return arrangements in close collaboration with the MoJ and the relevant embassies. The MoJ and its subsidiary agencies are responsible for immigration administration, including voluntary, assisted and forced returns.[52] Since 2016, MFA and MoJ have developed joint country return strategies for specific origin states (interviewee 11); there are also currently 12 ILOs placed at various embassies to assist with immigration cases, and to collaborate with partners on the ground on returns. Seven of these are deployed by UDI while the others are recruited by the National Police Immigration Services (NPIS) (interviewee 11).

Since 2023, UDI has been responsible for implementing the approximately 20-25 million NOK per year allocated to 'international cooperation' in support of returns (Post 76 in the MoJ budget). Other government ministries (Education, Children and Families, and

[52] The government's immigration and asylum/refugee policies have been positioned within different ministries over time, from the (then) Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (2001-2005) to the new Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (October 2005-2009) before being moved to the Ministry of Justice where it remains today.

Labour and Social Inclusion) also play important roles, e.g., in the reception of refugees in Norway.

The 'asylum crisis' as a catalyst for a whole-of-government approach

While there were previous coordination mechanisms for migration and refugee policy within the MFA, the creation of a dedicated Migration Section within the MFA and its Department of Regional Affairs in 2015 marked a watershed in attempts to advance a 'whole-of-government' approach. The Section consisted of five staff members, and its mandate covered negotiations on the Global Compacts for Refugees and Migration, engagement with the EU's Valletta/EUTF framework, general coordination within MFA. It also collaborated with MoJ and UDI on migration governance and issues such as the allocation of quotas for resettled refugees, and it negotiated bilateral return agreements with countries such as Ethiopia and Morocco. Although the Section was meant to 'show action' in response to pressure during the crisis, no new budget lines accompanied it work which continued through existing foreign, development and humanitarian allocations. The MoJ was, however, drawn into MFA's policy planning through regular consultations, with a view to aligning MoJ country priorities with MFA policies and tools (interviewee 07).

The closer collaboration between the MFA and MoJ clarified some tensions in terms of policy priorities. The MoJ, led at the time by a minister from the Progress Party, pursued a stricter control-oriented line, while MFA officials sought to preserve diplomatic balance (interviewee 03). Internally, the Section faced *"berøringsangst"* – reluctance to engage openly with migration control agendas for fear of damaging Norway's international reputation, especially during Norway's UN Security Council candidacy (interviewees 03; 07). Some embassies were hesitant to collaborate on return-related tasks, although there was a push from this at the time, even directly from the Prime Minister Erna Solberg (Conservative Party) (interviewee 03). Efforts to use aid to secure return cooperation also met resistance

within other parts of the MFA (interviewees 01; 03; 12). Yet, while differing institutional logics persisted, collaboration between MFA and MoJ improved gradually. The Section had little cooperation with Norad at that time, as relevant funding was managed by the MFA (interviewee 03).

Ultimately, the Section was disbanded in 2019, primarily due to resource constraints. Positions were reallocated to support the UN Security Council position process, leaving too few posts to maintain the section's formal structure (interviewee 03).

2019 onwards: shifting priorities and coordination models

After the Section's dissolution, tasks and work responsibilities were returned to their original MFA departments' mandates, such as the UN department, the Humanitarian Section and European department. MoJ lost a clear MFA contact point and found collaboration increasingly difficult (interviewees 07; 12; 11One of the responsibilities of the Special Representative for refugees, displaced people and host communities created in 2022 was hence to head inter-ministerial coordination, with a focus on MoJ in addition to coordination within the MFA. (interviewee 07). The Solidarity Fund working group (2022-2025) provided a specific arena for dialogue between the two ministries (interviewee 07).

The MoJ developed a new National Return Strategy (2023-2029) which proposed greater collaboration between the MoJ and development actors to support the "reintegration ability" of specific return countries. This strategy was published unilaterally, triggering political pushback within the MFA and, to some extent – self-censorship: migration language was weakened or removed from subsequent MFA strategies (especially the Africa Strategy and Humanitarian Strategy) to avoid being seen as endorsing conditionality (interviewee 07). A reworked Return Strategy 2025–2030 was subsequently developed with MFA inputs (interviewees 07; 12). This

document reiterates the importance of sustainable return and reintegration, emphasising that grants and other forms of support to achieve this must comply with principles on development aid and guidelines on ODA spending (MoJ 2025).

So far, there is limited collaboration on the return and/or reintegration agendas. Norad has provided training to UDI in the management of international cooperation grants, but it is not involved in the design or evaluation of such projects. There is still significant fragmentation of aid in this area, as both the MFA and MoJ provide support to the same institutions (for example IOM) for work related to return and/or reintegration, but they do so through separate contracts (interviewee 01). In terms of current collaboration, interviewees from Norad noted a continued lack of coordination between return projects funded through the MoJ and broader development efforts in return communities. Several interviewees stressed that effective cooperation with partner countries – in the field of migration and development aid, but especially in terms of return – depends on individual expertise, continuity, and diplomacy/language/cultural competence, while frequent turnover among staff and weak local knowledge may undermine progress. Coordination within Oslo also depends on functional ties between regional and other departments (within the MFA), and between the MFA and MoJ and UDI.

Overview of aid flows

Norwegian migration-related development aid comprises a wide range of objectives, sectors, and implementing channels. It spans from humanitarian and emergency assistance to longer-term development cooperation, and includes activities implemented through a variety of partners, including Norwegian and international NGOs, such as DRC and NRC, partner governments, and multilateral organisations such as the EU, UNHCR and IOM.

The scope of migration-related aid is therefore broad: it covers different types of migration and displacement, from forced and volun-

tary migration to internal displacement, transit, return and reintegration. The overview excludes ODA allocated to hosting refugees within Norway, aid provided to EU countries according to EEA – Norway grant agreements, and aid spending on the budget chapter 153 on refugees, IDPs and host societies.[53]

However, it is important to note that migration-related spending within Norway –particularly expenditures spent the first year on the reception and integration of refugees – has accounted for a substantial share of Norway's total ODA. In 2015, Norway spent 18.3 percent of its aid budget in 2015 on supporting refugees in Norway, making itself the single largest recipient of Norwegian aid that year (Agenda 2019). This trend intensified the year after with refugee-related spending in Norway rising from 3.7 billion NOK in 2015 to 6.7 billion in 2016. After a few years of a steady decrease, it rose again following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to 5 billion in 2022, and has since decreased to 4 billion in 2024.[54] In 2022, refugee related spending accounted for 10 percent of the total aid budget, with 83 percent of the support for Ukrainian refugees (OECD 2024).

Migration-related aid: difficult to map

A key challenge with the available data is the difficulty of identifying and mapping migration-related projects beyond costs related to refugees. Such efforts would need to include, for instance, mobility-oriented initiatives, labour-migration programmes, or projects addressing migration-development linkages in different ways (basically any other expenditure on humanitarian aid and long-term develop-

[53] While aid for refugees represents a key aspect of migration-related assistance, it is excluded from this overview since the purpose of the chapter is to examine migration initiatives beyond refugee support - that is, programmes explicitly aimed at managing migration, facilitating return and reintegration, or addressing the challenge of irregular migration. By focusing on migration-related aid beyond refugee support, the analysis highlights the less visible but increasingly important areas where migration and development intersect within Norway's aid portfolio.

[54] These statistics are available here: https://resultater.norad.no/bistands-tall/sektor/kostnader-i-norge-og-uspesifisert/flyktninger-i-giverland Accessed 24.10.2025.

ment). However, these are not tied to a specific code, recipient, or budget post. In the Norwegian statistics which follow OECD DAC reporting guidelines, there is therefore no explicit overview or systematic way to capture migration-related projects. Many potentially relevant activities are instead classified under other sectoral categories, such as "governance, civil society and conflict prevention," "environment and energy," "health and social services," or "education." These may include projects on "agriculture," "life skills for youth," "disaster risk reduction," or "education facilities and training" – all of which could hypothetically be migration-relevant without being registered as such. Consequently, it is impossible to estimate the total volume of migration-related ODA, as relevant projects are reported under other thematic headings.

While a new code for migration management was introduced later (as discussed below), OECD guidelines explicitly note that "activities addressing the root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration should not be coded here, but under their relevant sector of intervention." This means that these types of migration-related objectives are still embedded – and thus reported – under a wide range of sectoral codes.

Yet, one way of identifying migration-targeted projects is to sort data by relevant recipients, such as with IOM as implementing partner. Doing so reveals that IOM has been a major channel for migration-related funding, deriving from different ministries, since 1995. Thematically, IOM-administered projects have covered a wide range of objectives. In the early years, most projects focused on humanitarian support to refugees and returnees, counter-trafficking, and reintegration assistance, gradually expanding into migration and border management, governance capacity building, protection of vulnerable migrants, and support for regional cooperation. The total amounts allocated through IOM have risen from a few million NOK annually in the 1990s to well over a hundred million NOK per year after 2015, reflecting a broader Norwegian engagement with migration and

IOM's growing role as an implementing partner for humanitarian and development-oriented migration assistance (Pécoud 2018.

Migration-management spending since 2017

An important milestone occurred after 2015, when migration was explicitly included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 10.7). This legitimised migration management as a field of development cooperation and paved the way for its inclusion in international ODA reporting (see e.g. McGregor 2020, Martens et al. 2020, Talleraas 2025).

In line with this, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) adopted a dedicated sector code for migration-related assistance in 2018, which allowed donor countries, including Norway, to report some migration-related spending more systematically as ODA. For Norway, the new sector code was introduced in 2018 (code 151.90), with retroactive effect for 2017, with some projects also registered for 2015 and 2016. Older agreements with disbursements in 2017 were recorded for their entire duration to reflect this change. However, as noted by Norad[55], reporting remained incomplete these first years, since the ministries managing funds under budget chapter 179 – Refugee costs in Norway (particularly MoJ) continued to report aggregated data. More detailed reporting was introduced from 2019, following a government decision establishing a revised methodology for classifying refugee-related ODA.

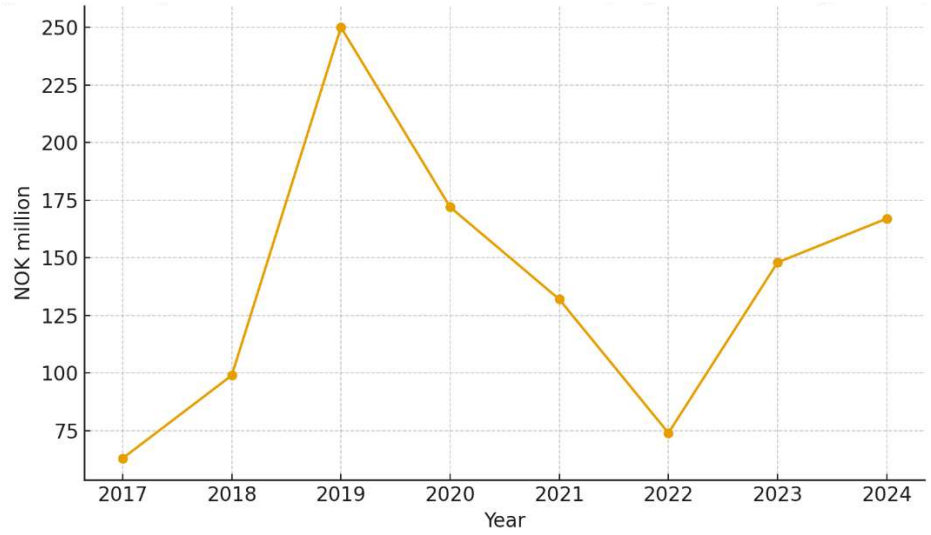
From 2019 onward, the MoJ began distinguishing between projects implemented in developing countries and refugee-related costs in Norway, reporting the former under sector 151.90 rather than as domestic refugee expenditures. This change has enabled a more systematic approach to identifying migration-related development spending in Norwegian aid statistics since 2019, and Norad has or-

[55] Email correspondence with the Section for Statistics and Analysis in Norad, in October 2025.

ganised training sessions for the MoJ and UDI on the DAC eligibility criteria.

Since the new code was introduced, Norway has spent a total of 1.1 billion NOK on 107 different migration management initiatives under the code, in the years from 2017-2024 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Total allocations for code 151.90 on "Facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration"



The sharp increase in 2019 is partly explained by the inclusion of agreements managed by the MoJ and UDI, but also by projects administered by MFA, including a sharp rise in spending at the Norwegian embassies. Disbursements from the EU Trust Fund for Africa, managed by the MFA, continued until 2020 and help explain the subsequent decline. The MFA, which had dominated spending in earlier years, assumed a more limited role after 2019, while Norad only has contributed smaller and more sporadic amounts. It should also be noted that these figures cover ODA-eligible countries in all geographical regions, and thus not only low- and middle-income countries.

To get a more detailed understanding of the projects supported by the MoJ and the UDI in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, since 2019, we can see that total allocations under the migration management

sector have increased from NOK 36.2 million in 2019 to NOK 52.5 million in 2024. Among the 34 projects reported during this period, several have focused on return and reintegration assistance – particularly in Afghanistan, Algeria, and Morocco – alongside migration management and institutional capacity building in Somalia and Iraq. Other projects have addressed information-raising on migration, counter-trafficking and prevention of irregular migration, for example through initiatives in Sudan (in 2019 only), Djibouti and Pakistan. Geographically, the projects have targeted nine specific countries, and Somalia, Afghanistan and Morrocco have been recurring priority countries throughout the period.

A brief look at the MFA supported projects for the same regions, in the same period of time, reveal that the MFA in Oslo supported two EUTF projects in the Horn of Africa and one IOM project for Afghan returnees, while the Embassies supported two projects on reintegration for IDPs in Iraq, and two projects related to the construction of a headquarters for the Directorate of Immigration in Somalia.

Taken together, these developments illustrate how migration management has become a distinct and increasingly institutionalised area of Norwegian development cooperation over the past ten years. While the total volumes remain modest compared to humanitarian or sectoral aid for refugees, the growth and diversity of activities under the migration management code reflect how Norway's approach has been affected by evolving political priorities, and the institutionalisation of the topic within the DAC reporting framework.

Does the strategic priority of return come at the expense of "traditional" aid?

The evolution of migration-related ODA in Norway reflects broader international and domestic trends: a growing emphasis on migration, including return, management, expanding reporting practices under DAC rules, and continuing ambiguity over what constitutes devel-

opment-relevant spending. The inclusion of aid spending by the MoJ (reimbursed by MFA) contributes to sustaining the Norwegian government's 1 percent aid target, albeit to a modest degree At the same time, the expansion of ODA-eligible migration spending – which in Norway has centred on hosting refugees, return, reintegration and capacity-building in partner countries to facilitate return – raises questions about the boundaries between external humanitarian, development and migration control objectives.

Interviewees from both Norad and the MFA underscored that determining ODA eligibility for migration management remains challenging. Indeed, when the OECD/DAC reviewed activities reported under sector code 151.90, they also highlighted one project reported by the MoJ as difficult to assess against the ODA criteria due to an incomplete project description. However, this project was not removed from Norway's ODA statistics, as the MoJ confirmed that it complied with ODA regulations. Indeed, no MoJ-reported projects have been excluded from Norway's ODA reporting.[56]

Lessons learned from efforts to facilitate migrant returns

In this section we move from aid flows to implementation experience. The focus is on three countries where Norway has had particularly strong interests in return cooperation: Afghanistan, Somalia, and Ethiopia. While the limited scope of this study precludes an evaluation of their 'success' over the medium or long term (e.g., through an increase in the number of assisted returns and/or forced returns; the reduction in the number of new arrivals without valid grounds for residence; or positive outcomes in terms of reintegration), these snapshots give a sense of how different strategies have been leveraged and what factors may have shaped the partner countries' cooperation incentives.

[56] Email correspondence with the Section for Statistics and Analysis in Norad, in October 2025.

Somalia: Aid to migration management for return cooperation

Cooperation with Somali authorities on returns was initiated in 2012, when conditions in Somalia after decades of civil war had improved with a new government and a new constitution. This meant that more Somali asylum seekers in Norway received a negative decision, and were quartered in reception centres pending return. An information campaign in 2014 was launched through IOM to inform potential migrants about Norway's changed asylum policies *(Utrop 2014),* and the Danish Refugee Council came on board as a partner to UDI for assisted return and reintegration support. A return agreement covering forced returns, meanwhile, was signed in 2016.

In 2012, the ILO with responsibility for Somalia needed a stronger return partner in the Somali Immigration and Citizenship Agency (ICA), which was tasked with broad federal responsibilities for migration under the new Constitution (interviewees 07; 10). Funding was provided to the agency under MFA's humanitarian budget at first, before becoming part of the MoJ's portfolio several years later. In the beginning, just knowing who worked at the different offices was a priority, so support to human resources was a first step. In the years since, both MFA and MoJ have funded the Somali migration authorities for various purposes, including training on identity management (together with UDI, the NPIS and the National ID Centre) and a new headquarters building (through UNOPS, together with Denmark, Finland and the UK). Because ICA also issues Somali passports, the Norwegian National ID Centre visited to verify that the identity systems in place meet international standards. This meant that even if a person's identity from birth was unknown, receipt of a passport provided a fixed identity which could not be subsequently changed. Since 2024, Norway has accepted Somali passports as valid identity documents, whether issued in embassies or at the regional level. The cooperation was highly valued on the Somali side, with partners expressing how important it was to travel on their

own passports even if, as dual nationals, many had an alternative (interviewees 6;12).

While the number of Somalis claiming asylum in Norway has reduced, Somalis comprise a significant percentage of the individuals affected by the increased focus on revoking residence permits that has characterised Norwegian immigration policy since 2016. The 'Somali project' from 2016 to 2020 involved the review of refugee status for Somalis from Mogadishu on the grounds that they may no longer have a need for protection. In addition, strengthened ID controls mean that a number of Somalis have faced revocation of their residence rights on grounds of fraud (i.e. by giving false information about their identity and/or area of origin).[57] Compared to people refused asylum, revocation cases are more challenging to accept for Somali authorities; from their perspective it is hard to understand why the Norwegian government wants to deport a head of family who has lived in the country for decades (interviewee 12). Despite the reluctance on the Somali side in some cases, the return of people who made false claims in their asylum application - even if considerable time has passed – remains an important priority. The complexity of revocation cases may explain why the return and reintegration programme in Somalia cost 4.4 million NOK in 2024 and facilitated seven returns (MoJ 2025).

According to our interviewees, the long-term presence of an immigration liaison officer helps give credibility to the return agenda and enables a better understanding of the practical barriers to repatriation. As in other countries, the topic is still politicised, with authorities facing backlash for permitting particular returns. All in all, how-

[57] As part of the Asylum Agreement in 2015, the government mandated UDI to withdraw refugee status when conditions in the country of origin had improved, in accordance with the cessation provision in §37 of the Immigration Act. 1600 cases involving Somali refugees were opened, but only a small number resulted in return. Most Somalis who had been in Norway for some years received residence on other grounds, i.e. their family attachments to Norway or the risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) for girls upon a potential return. Hundreds of cases were set aside in 2020 because of the long processing time and because they were unlikely to result in a revocation decision (Schultz 2025). Since that time, the focus of revocation has been on cases of fraud.

ever, cooperation on migration in Somalia is considered a positive case in both ministries; the country was also singled out as an example of a 'whole-of-government' approach in the Solidarity Fund (interviewee 11).

The MFA is a major contributor to the UN's multi-donor fund which has enabled the national ID authority, NIRA, to expand the population registry. This is seen as an "important step in development work, the state building process, and the implementation of elections" (MFA 2025). Further, Norway supports the World Bank's multi-partner fund to improve financial management and to provide basic services, including education and health. Improved governance and living standards, as one interviewee said, "make Somalia a place where people want to stay and contribute" (interviewee 9).

While initiatives to engage the diaspora in local investment initiatives (e.g. the Nordic Horn of Africa Opportunities Fund) were not considered successful from a development perspective (Horjen 2020), members of the Somali diaspora including those with Norwegian citizenship have had important roles in the Somali government as well as in major NGOs receiving Norwegian development aid. The Somali case shows the potential of closer alignment between migration management, state-building support and return cooperation through durable partnerships with the relevant authorities.

Ethiopia: When aid to migration management is not enough

While a return agreement was signed with Ethiopia in 2012, the path to effective return cooperation has been considerably bumpier than in Somalia. For years authorities in Ethiopia refused as a matter of principle to accept citizens who did not return of their own will; this was problematic for Norwegian authorities because Ethiopians comprised one-fifth of the population of long-staying migrants without a right to remain. As part of the bilateral dialogue to secure an agreement on forced returns, the carrot of development aid was leveraged

in the form of a 5 million NOK contribution channeled from the MoJ through IOM to the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) to provide advice, education, job referrals and reintegration assistance (Zachrisen 2019).

However, this institutional support has not had the hoped for effects; until recently only a handful of Ethiopian nationals were returned from Norway. According to one interviewee, arrangements for cooperation made during negotiations on the return agreement between Ethiopia and the EU, which Norway was obligated to follow, have made implementation more challenging (interviewee 06). In contrast to the Somali Immigration and Citizenship Agency, the ARRA is not a constitutionally mandated interlocutor on return issues, and the role of IOM created more distance between partners. Research also points to deeper conflicts in terms of norms and interests between the two states (Kefale et al. 2025).

While Norwegian authorities emphasise the duty of countries to readmit their nationals and the sovereignty of states to deport those without a lawful right to remain, Ethiopian authorities strongly defend mobility rights including the decision by their own nationals not to return. Forced returns from Europe can also face opposition in Ethiopian communities, where migration has long been a way to earn income and status; remittances are important for both families and for the state (ibid.). The government has therefore been mindful of how domestic and diaspora audiences view its migration policy, including returns from Europe which seem like a marginal issue compared to the dire circumstances facing far larger numbers of Ethiopian migrants in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Libya. During the last two years, cooperation has improved, motivated by the visa restrictions imposed on Ethiopian nationals in April 2024 by the EU as a sanction for non-cooperation on returns (interviewees 04 and 06). In this case, then, aid-based incentives and institutional support have proven insufficient in the face of deeper normative, political, and societal constraints on return cooperation.

Afghanistan: Prolonged, multi-pronged efforts to deter (youth) migration

Afghan youth have historically been the largest group of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) seeking asylum in Norway, representing 45 percent of the UAMs who received residence between 1996-2022 (SSB 2024). Concern about the high representation of UAMs among asylum seekers in Norway in 2008 led, in addition to the generalised measures to deter new arrivals to specific tactics targeting youth.[58] The Soria Moria II government platform of 2009 included provisions for *"care and education"* of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in their countries of origin. Plans to open reception facilities for minors had been floating in European policy circles for several years; despite unsuccessful pilot initiatives by the Dutch government in Angola and the DRC since 2004, the idea was indirectly endorsed by the EU Returns Directive (Art. 10.2, see Lemberg-Pedersen 2015). In 2011, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Belgium launched the European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors (ERPUM), supported by funds of the European Commission. The ERPUM project, which ran between 2011 and 2014, was meant to enable the deportation of unaccompanied Afghan minors from Europe either to their families or to an 'adequate' reception facility in Kabul. The idea was that such facilities would be a stopgap measure only until families were located, and children's right to family reunification and therefore a 'durable solution' to their displacement was realised.

However, insurmountable problems ensued. First, the family tracing element proved impossible due to a deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, poor communications infrastructures, and the limited resources of ERPUM governments' embassies (Lemberg-Pedersen 2015). Minors themselves were unwilling to assist in identifying

[58] In a reply to the Committee on the Rights of the Child concerning Norway's Fourth Periodic Report, the government referred to a "massive influx" in applications from unaccompanied children in the last three years (from 403 UASC in 2007 to 1647 by 30 September 2009). CRC/C/NOR/C/4/Add.1.

their families, perceiving such cooperation to undermine their chances to receive asylum. Second, there were no reliable partners on the ground. The Afghan authorities were less than enthusiastic about the return project (Schuster 2013), perceiving it as a politically sensitive issue. One European official remarked that their interlocutor from the Ministry for Return and Repatriation (MoRR) showed "no interest" in ERPUM (ibid.: 13), while the Deputy Minister of MoRR responded in a more pragmatic manner, noting that "we cannot spoil our relationship with Norway for the sake of a 100 children, when we have millions here that need their help" (ibid.: 14). However, disputes about which ministry would control how much of the budget derailed the Afghan involvement. Meanwhile, potential implementing partners outside the government withdrew due to security concerns (IOM) or were dropped because they lacked an understanding of the legal responsibilities involved, including those regarding children's rights. Eventually, in June 2014, the pilot was discontinued.

Following the asylum crisis in 2015 and the relatively large number of unaccompanied minors (ca. 5300) among these new arrivals, return centres reemerged on the political agenda. The Asylum Agreement reached by six of the eight parties represented in Parliament mandated the government to renew efforts to establish 'care centres' for UAMs in their countries of origin (Norwegian Government 2015). The aid budget for 2017 indicated that "large parts of Norwegian aid to Afghanistan in 2016 and 2017 will continue to prevent migration and children from being sent on a dangerous journey through Europe by contributing to the goal of stabilisation and development of the country" (MFA 2016: 166). Discussions around an institution in Kabul relaunched in 2016, and by 2018 Norwegian authorities, together with their Danish colleagues, were reportedly in the final stages of talks with Afghan authorities (Foss and Olsen 2018). The aim was to serve both local youths as well as those refused residence in Norway and Denmark. Two of the activities potentially supported by the project, education and vocational training, were consistent with Norway's existing priorities. These renewed ef-

forts met similar challenges faced by the earlier ERPUM endeavour: rumours of corruption among potential institutional partners, difficulties meeting requirements regarding child protection, and travel restrictions for Embassy staff in Kabul making it difficult to physically evaluate proposed sites (interviewee 05).

Meanwhile, from a high of 7000 applications in 2015, far fewer asylum seekers from Afghanistan, including UAMs, sought protection in Norway during the following years even though elsewhere in Europe they remained the second biggest applicant group (Afghanistan Commission 2025). The importance of migration, and return cooperation, placed by Norwegian authorities is illustrated by the fact that while aid personnel at the Norwegian Embassy were sent home in 2015 on security grounds, two new ILOs joined the staff in Kabul (ibid.). Besides having on-the-ground officers, former embassy employees attribute the success of return policies to the deliberate use of low-key tactics to avoid too much public attention and potential escalation of pressure on Afghan authorities (i.e. the use of private flights rather than chartered jets, and the deployment of an Afghan staff member to quietly facilitate returns at the airport). An information campaign in Afghan newspapers and Facebook warned of Norway's stricter asylum regulations. Finally, in dialogue with Afghan counterparts, Norwegian officials emphasised that the aid budget spent on Afghanistan included asylum reception costs in Norway; less cooperation on migration would likely mean less funds to initiatives in-country (ibid., referring to a conversation between President Ghani and Prime Minister Solberg, and a visit to Kabul by state secretaries from MoJ and MFA in 2015). Despite facing occasional resistance (especially concerning families) on the part of Afghan authorities, Norway was able to return more Afghans than other countries in Europe.

Meanwhile, anchored by an action plan against migration developed by the MFA, *("handlingsplan mot migrasjon"),* support in rural villages was geared towards dampening the desire to migrate, and efforts were made to direct multilateral funds towards job creation pro-

grammes (ibid.). The conclusion from a review of Norway's engagement with Afghanistan suggests that the coordination between MoJ, MFA, UDI, NPIS and the Norwegian Embassy was effective in deterring migration (ibid.). However, it is worth noting that between 2018-2023 Afghans still comprised the majority of UAMs who received residence in Norway (SSB 2024), unseated from this top position only by Ukrainians in 2022. In the absence of forced returns following the Taliban takeover, efforts to deter youth migration have returned to the domestic sphere, with proposals to limit family reunification and other restrictive measures making asylum in Norway less attractive.

Lessons from the country cases

The important role of remittances to individual families as well as communities, political pressure not to cave to a seemingly marginal European agenda, and the lack of capacity to support returnees have posed considerable challenges for return cooperation. Where efforts to secure return cooperation were successful, interviewees highlighted the importance of relationship building by immigration liaison officers to identify and address specific barriers to readmission and reintegration. This work was embedded in dedicated 'return action plans' for the countries in question, which are updated every two years. In Afghanistan, the threat of reduced aid was part of a larger deterrence strategy which also included vocational support, information campaigns, and efforts to establish a care centre for minors. A final observation is that mobility-related benefits (i.e. passport verification in Somalia) facilitated cooperation on returns, as did mobility-related sanctions (i.e. visa restrictions in Ethiopia).

Conclusions

In addition to providing humanitarian support to refugee and IDP populations, the facilitation of returns has been an increasingly visible objective in Norwegian development cooperation – particularly in the countries from which migrants to Europe tend to originate.

The MoJ has been the main driver of the returns agenda, while the MFA has played a more ambivalent role, balancing development-policy integrity and foreign policy priorities with growing expectations in the field of migration management. Several of the bureaucrats we talked with underscored the traditional divide between the altruistic goals of development aid and strategic, migration and return-related mandates. One interviewee referred to this as "the elephant in the room," (07) capturing the bureaucratic and political discomfort surrounding how far development cooperation should be used to advance domestic objectives.

Views on this differed across the administration. Norad staff emphasised the importance of a clear boundary between aid and domestic objectives, and adhering to the OECD-DAC principles that require development to be the primary objective, stating e.g. that there is "no development-policy argument for limiting migration," and that "return should not be an aid objective", while noting that reintegration support in return areas could be relevant (interviewees 01; 05; 07; 08; 09).

In contrast, representatives from MoJ and UDI stressed the practical need for cooperation on return and underscored targeted support - such as capacity building and identity systems - as legitimate instruments as long as they were aligned with partner-country priorities. The views of MFA officials tended to straddle both camps. In practice, country-level partnership strategies and return action plans focused on leveraging "all of our portfolio to create a favourable environment for [partner countries] to take back their own citizens" (interviewee 07). Positive incentives which may or may not be aid-related were favoured over explicit conditions or sanctions. As many also noted, positive incentives tended to work best in contexts where Norway had long-standing relationships and institutional trust, such as Somalia.

While there are certain advantages to maintaining clear boundaries between the MoJ and the MFA's work on migration there are also opportunities for greater cooperation. One area of work concerns

aid to enable the "sustainable reintegration" of returnees, anchored in the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) as well as the National Return Strategy. Here, collaboration across government entities could support local and national development plans in countries such as Syria and Ukraine, and ensure that aid-funded programmes in returnee communities are implemented in an impartial way in keeping with humanitarian and development principles. Meanwhile, using aid to support asylum externalisation measures (e.g. through extraterritorial processing centres for asylum claims or 'return hubs' in third countries), as foreseen in the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, would likely intensify existing tensions between development principles and migration control interests.

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Annex 1

Table 1. Overview of migration- and development-related shifts in the Norwegian government platforms 2005–2025

Platform	Relevant shifts in migration-related aid priorities
2005 Soria Moria 1 (The Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party)	Committed to "strengthening the work on deportation of foreigners with illegal residence and intensifying efforts to secure return agreements with more countries", while also calling for closer European cooperation on visa, border control, and asylum issues.
2009 Soria Moria 2 (The Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party)	Pledged to "use development aid and cooperation policy to support efforts to facilitate return and reintegration of persons without legal residence in Norway" and to "strengthen return cooperation and identity verification". Emphasised addressing the "causes that force people to flee," and providing support for displaced populations in regions close to their home countries, and stated that the government would "establish care and education services for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in their countries of origin".
2013 Sundvolden (The Conservative Party and the Progress Party)	Committed to "work for more return agreements, and use Norway's position to secure more agreements", "strengthen return efforts, and identity work in the Police", and "make the foreign affairs services more active in regions with the highest numbers of unfounded asylum seekers to inform about limited opportunities for residence"

Platform	Relevant shifts in migration-related aid priorities
2018 Jeløya (The Conservative Party, the Progress Party and the Liberal Party)	Framed migration and integration as "challenges facing Norwegian society, regardless of their causes," noting that "population movements put the welfare state's sustainability to the test." It called for "a foreign policy that safeguards Norway's interests and promotes international cooperation on cross-border challenges […] such as people on the move," and pledged to "conclude more return agreements to prevent individuals from staying in Norway without legal residence." To "address the causes of migration," the government would "intensify efforts for development and democracy.
2019 Granavolden (The Conservative Party, the Progress Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party)	Reiterated the aims to "conclude more return agreements" and to "address the causes of migration". It also pledged to "continue work to establish care centres in countries of origin," to "link Norway more closely to European processes toward a common asylum system, including the possible establishment of joint asylum centres outside the EU," and to "use Norway's position, including as a donor, to secure more return agreements and promote acceptance of the principle that all countries must receive their own citizens".
2025 The Government's Plan for Norway (The Labour Party)	Prioritises a more effective immigration administration, strengthened return work and increased cooperation on "new solutions and measures". Norway to take an active role in European migration cooperation to ensure a more "sustainable immigration to Europe".