

# Losing the Right to Stay: Revocation of Refugee Permits in Norway

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JAN-PAUL BREKKE

*Institute for Social Research,*  
jpb@socialresearch.no

SIMON ROLAND BIRKVAD

*Institute for Social Research and University of Oslo*

MARTA BIVAND ERDAL

*PRIO—Peace Research Institute Oslo*

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Following the record number of asylum seekers to Europe in 2015, Norway intensified its practice of revoking migrants' residence permits and citizenships, which primarily affected refugees and their families, and reflects a broader international trend of increased use of temporary protection. This article explores the effects of revocation on individuals, their families and wider communities by analysing how revocation is experienced and its consequences for integration processes. Drawing on the concepts of deregularisation, temporality and integration, our analysis builds on interviews with migrants from Somalia and Afghanistan living in Norway. We find severe consequences for individuals affected by revocation processes and discuss spillover effects, most notably what we refer to as disintegration. Our conclusions point to the need for further analytical scrutiny of both the consequences of intensified revocation practices and their purported effectiveness as a measure to regulate immigration.

Keywords: refugees, revocation, integration, policy, deregularization, permits

## Introduction

Following the record number of asylum seekers coming to Europe in 2015, receiving states introduced a list of restrictive measures to regain control and deter further arrivals (Brekke and Staver 2018). In Norway, a key measure included intensifying the practice of revoking migrants' residence permits and citizenship. This measure primarily affects refugees and their families (Ministry of Justice and Public Security 2016) and reflects a broader international trend of increased use of temporary protection.

According to (lately intensified) Norwegian revocation practices, persons with immigrant backgrounds may lose their permits because their original permits were based on faulty premises (revocation, Immigration Act § 63), such as false identity, or because conditions in their country of origin have improved sufficiently to allow for return (cessation, Immigration Act § 37). Persons who have achieved permanent residency or citizenship can have their permits revoked, while cessation pertains only to individuals with temporary permits (Brekke et al. 2018).

While processes of regularization and naturalization of refugees and other migrants are well covered in the literature (e.g. Bloemraad 2006; Griffiths 2014; Aptekar 2016; Menjivar and Lakhani 2016; Bassel et al. 2018), the reverse process—deregularization—has received less attention (e.g. Menjivar 2006; Menjivar 2014). The concept of deregularization denotes the process of immigrants' gradual formal decoupling from a host society. Stricter immigration regulations may contribute to more migrants experiencing deregularization and their permits being challenged, and, as a result, consigning them to liminal spaces (Menjivar 2006; Abrego and Lakhani 2015).

Revocation of citizenship has begun to receive scholarly attention in terms of its legal implications (Hofhansel 2018; Irving 2019), normative foundations (Macklin and Bauböck 2014; Joppke 2016; Macklin 2018; Boekestein and de Groot 2019), theoretical ideas (Fargues and Winter 2019) and historical and empirical perspectives (de Groot and Vink 2010; Herzog 2011; Gibney 2013; Fargues 2017; Troy 2019). Similarly, there is literature examining the practice of cessation of permits for refugees, distinct from the broader body of work on temporary protection (Kingston 2017; Yotebieng et al. 2019). Other research focuses on return and onward migration among former asylum seekers (e.g. Klinthäll 2007; de Hoon et al. 2019), although this is not linked to permit revocation in particular. Parts of the 'cimmigration' literature look at deportation of non-citizens, due to criminal conduct (e.g. Kanstroom 2007; Aas and Bosworth 2013). Meanwhile, empirical studies of those affected by the cessation of refugee permits and the revocation of residence permits and citizenship on non-criminal grounds generally are lacking. Later in this article, we find empirical grounds for analysing 'deregularization processes' (revocation and cessation) as closely connected types of experiences, in contrast to the letter of law, and to some extent scholarship to date, which would approach the two as unrelated matters.

In this article, we contribute to filling this gap by describing and analysing how revocation is experienced and how it affects the coping and integration processes of refugees and migrants in the settlement context of Norway. The study is primarily based on interviews with 27 refugees with Somali and Aghan backgrounds living in Norway. All of the interviewees were either 1) directly affected by revocation, 2) had themselves been notified that they might lose, or had already lost, their permits (or citizenship), 3) were close friends or family of those directly affected or 4) representatives of the Somali and Afghan communities. For additional context, we interviewed seven civil servants within the Norwegian immigration authorities and the police. To round out our analysis, we also employed statistical data that describes the patterns and development of the practice of

deregularization in Norway. Based on this empirical material, we seek to answer the following questions:

*How is the process of revocation experienced by those affected? And how does this experience affect integration processes and the life strategies of those subject to the practice of revocation?*

We aim to analyse how (possible) revocation of a permit disrupts the lives and integration processes of refugees. We place our data in dialogue with the concept of ‘deregularization’, which allows us to study how revocation challenges the assumed linearity of integration processes.

The Norwegian practice of revocation affects the individual migrant and their social surroundings from the point at which they become aware that their permits are being reviewed by the immigration authorities and throughout the process, regardless of the outcome of the process. The disruption occurs on three levels: the individual, their family and closest friends, and their wider immigrant community. In Norway, Afghan and Somali communities were among those most severely affected, but in different ways, which we shall discuss. The main focus in this article is on individual experiences of disrupted integration and the life strategies that individuals undertake when facing this uncertainty. However, we also acknowledge that deregularization has implications for the society as a whole, in terms of disrupted integration processes, and onward migration patterns, either as intended by the state (return to the migrants’ country of origin) or unintended, as displacement to another European country. All of our interviewees had either at some point been granted asylum in Norway or allowed family reunification with someone already living in Norway with refugee status.

Previous research has documented and analysed the variety of ways in which precarity has been experienced among refugees and other migrants (Menjivar 2006; Griffiths 2014; Menjivar 2014). More recently, however, precarity among migrants holding presumably secure statuses, most prominently naturalized citizens but also permanent-residence holders, has become a reality and a theme of scholarly attention (Birkvad 2019; Ellermann 2019; Gibney 2019). Our analysis suggests that these processes of ‘deregularization’ require further theorization. Although we focus on the empirical findings of our research (Brekke et al. 2019), we seek to contribute to the development of an analytical framework for understanding the dynamics and effects of revocation and deregularization.

In the following sections, we discuss existing theory on deregularization processes. We use this basis as a frame for our empirically driven analysis. Then we present the Norwegian context in terms of revocation and revocation statistics from the Norwegian case, followed by our methodology and data. Next we analyse the experience and consequences of Norwegian revocation based on interviews with Afghan and Somali migrants. In the conclusion, we argue that, as receiving states increase their use of temporary permits, further study of the

consequences of revocation and deregularization, from multiple angles, will be needed.

### Conceptualizing Processes of Deregularization

Regularization—the process by which migrants legalize their status in their country of residence—has proven to have enduring and transformative positive effects on migrants' wellbeing and integration (Menjívar and Lakhani 2016). Deregularization—the process of gradually or suddenly losing regular legal status as a resident or citizen of a given nation state—has only recently started to receive some attention (Abrego and Lakhani 2015; Midtbøen *et al.* 2018; Menjívar 2014). Arguably, deregularization is related to a trend in the US and EU towards 'internalizing' border controls (Menjívar 2014). Internalization includes policing of immigrants and enforcement controls within the territorial borders of the state. Detection, detention and deportation are examples of such measures (Menjívar 2014) that target migrants already settled in the country. These measures are fuelled by the 'securitization' of migration management (Menjívar 2014) and a political desire to assert state control by distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate members of the nation state. As such, revocation policies, like policies generally (Edelman 1985) and immigration policies specifically (e.g. Leerkes and Broeders 2010), work at a symbolical level; they signal restrictiveness towards prospective asylum seekers in order to deter future inflows (e.g. Brekke and Aarset 2009) and simultaneously send a message to the electorate, namely that the state is able to control its borders. Integration is a much-debated concept. On one hand, integration refers to the relatively mundane processes of adaptation for migrants settling in new contexts and for the contexts into which they integrate (Kivisto 2003). On the other hand, integration also refers to normative, nation-state-based programmes such as formal citizenship (Midtbøen *et al.* 2018; Favell 2019). Both aspects of integration have relevant theoretical and empirical foci. However, in this article, our concern is with the experiences of refugees and other migrants with losing their right to stay, based on the withdrawal of existing permits. The individuals we refer to here all, to some degree, had already established lives in Norway before receiving notification of possible revocation. In order to make sense of their reactions and responses to this experience, we choose to mobilize the concept of integration—or, in this case, disintegration—but also foregrounding the role of time.

We highlight the multidimensionality of integration, as experienced by migrants themselves (McPherson 2010; Brekke *et al.* 2019). This is in contrast to studies of integration that often focus on the gradual inclusion of a minority individual within a majority society. In our analysis, we include the effects of revocation on the integration of a minority individual within his or her immigrant community, as well as the majority society. We also comment on the potential risk of the disintegration of whole minority communities from the majority society.

The literature on integration covers a range of different phenomena and variations of what can be described as a two-way adaptation between immigrants and host societies (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016; Castles 2017). We approach the concept of integration as both *process* (e.g. motivation, increasing language skills, social networks) and *outcome* (e.g. attained levels of qualification, labour market, participation rates, income assimilation). We also acknowledge the process of integration to be multidimensional, including what might be called systemic, social and value integration.

Time is a key aspect of a migrant's adaptation, learning and integration in a host society (Griffiths 2017; Mavroudi *et al.* 2017). Although there is no necessary causal link between time and integration, they will be correlated (Brekke 2004). More time spent in Norway will on average present a migrant with increasing opportunities to integrate.

The disruption in the individuals' lives caused by notifications of revocation and revocation decisions (re)introduces the phenomenon of temporary existence (O'Reilly 2018). In the US, an increasing number of migrants hold temporary, rather than permanent, legal status (Chacon 2015). This position might be referred to as 'liminal legality'—a temporary and tenuous legal position with more protection than undocumented status, but still short of the stability offered by permanent residency, or all the more so by citizenship (Menjívar 2006; Abrego and Lakhani 2015).

The Norwegian government established individual temporary protection as a core principle of Norwegian asylum regulations when they forwarded section 37 of the Immigration Act after the 2015 record number of asylum arrivals, opening for cessation of refugee permits during the first 3 years of residence due to improvement in home countries. This type of liminal legality, characterized by enduring uncertainty about one's legal status, may severely influence and potentially limit the outlook, activities and life strategies of those affected (Menjívar 2006).

In tandem with increasing policy attention on revocation of citizenship in recent years, scholars have begun scrutinizing revocation from normative, legal, theoretical and empirical angles (De Groot and Vink 2010; Herzog 2011; Gibney 2013; Joppke 2016; Macklin 2018; Boekestein and de Groot 2019; Fargues 2017; Fargues and Winter 2019; Troy 2019; Winter and Previsic 2019).

Policy aims may centre on citizenship being the end point of integration or, by contrast, a motivation at some stage of the process (Brochmann and Seland 2010; Bloemraad and Sheares 2017). Revocation of citizenship may be understood as one extreme on a continuum of insecure statuses, in which the loss of a permanent residency permit is another point, the loss of a temporary long-term permit another and the lack of renewal of a short-term permit yet another. Deregularization through revocation of citizenship illustrates that even migrants holding the secure legal positions experience legal uncertainty. Put differently: migrants at the 'privileged' end of the legal status hierarchy no longer enjoy the assumptions of permanence and security—which are among important reasons why migrants choose to naturalize in countries of settlement (Nunn *et al.* 2015; Aptekar 2016; Birkvad 2019). Revocation disrupts the assumed linear link between integration and

citizenship through the process of naturalization (Brubaker 2010; Joppke 2010; Goodman 2014; Aptekar 2016).

Research among migrants, including refugees, finds that uncertainty and experiences of precariousness are common, depending on legal statuses and future prospects (Zieck 2008; Kingston 2017; Ilcan *et al.* 2018; Yuval-Davis *et al.* 2018). It is important to note that many of the dynamics increasingly coming under scrutiny in European countries today are familiar and well studied in other contexts globally, including among urban refugees in Africa, for instance (Yotebieng *et al.* 2019).

Facing possible permit loss and deregularization, migrants need to develop new life strategies to cope with this uncertainty. Like migrants without a regular status, they have to evaluate their opportunity structures and the resources that are available to them (Meeteren *et al.* 2009). They have to ask themselves what their options are if they are being allowed to stay in the host country and in case they have to return to their country of origin. Both the concept of life strategies and integration are closely related to the psychological concept of coping (Kuo 2014), although take more into account future and societal consequences.

### **The Process and Institutionalization of Deregularization in Norway**

During the autumn of 2015, a record number of people applied for asylum in Norway. In the media, the government was accused of having lost control over immigration. A list of measures was quickly compiled and supported by a broad alliance of political parties. The list was entitled ‘Suggested Restrictive Policy Changes that Will Make Norway Less Attractive to Asylum Seekers’ and presented in a draft document that was submitted for public consultation the following month. One of the measures was to ‘secure that the immigration authorities could start the cessation of residence permits if the grounds for temporary protection were no longer there due to changes in the political, social or humanitarian conditions in the home country’ (Ministry of Justice 2016: 15, authors’ translation).

The stated political rationale behind the intensified revocations includes protecting the legitimacy of the asylum instrument: for security reasons, for legitimating verified protections offered and for upholding the principle that all persons in Norway should operate under their correct identity.

The rationale behind invoking the cessation clause was that protection should, in principle, be for as long as it is needed. These reasons are in line with the letter of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, although they diverge from the rather liberal asylum-granting practice in much of Western Europe in recent decades. Exceptions to this liberal asylum-granting practice exist, for instance, in the response to the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s, when several countries, including Norway, offered temporary protection on a collective basis (Altamirano *et al.* 1998).

As the number of asylum seekers in Norway dropped to record low levels in 2016 (3460) and 2017 (3560), the Directorate of Immigration was instructed to



prioritize revocation cases (Brekke *et al.* 2018). A separate section was established within the department dedicated to revocation cases and revocation was registered as a separate category for the internal case-processing system starting from March 2017. The increased political attention to revocation coincided with the surplus institutional capacity, paving the way for a strengthened effort.

Although the legal bases are different for the three categories of migrants affected (temporary-permit holders, permanent-permit holders and naturalized citizens), our research shows that these legal distinctions are blurry to the migrants themselves. The interviewees all shared a sense of deregularization, of losing their right to stay in Norway, in some instances after living in the country for 5, 10, 20 years or more. Our analysis reflects that we similarly consider revocation as being one practice, only occasionally distinguishing between revocation (faulty premises) and cessation (safe home country).

Norway is at the forefront in Europe for using revocation and cessation in its immigration regulation (Ministry of Justice 2018; EASO 2019). In particular, Norway's activation of the Immigration Act, paragraph 37 (cessation), reflects a broader European trend. This paragraph states that positive changes in the home country that allow return (or reconnecting with the home country) shall result in cessation of existing permits. The Norwegian practice of cessation was conceived independently but still resonates with the 2016 EU Commission proposal, which was based on the same premise (EU 2016, June). The proposal included an obligation for member states to routinely review protection permits in light of possible improvements in home countries, opening the way for an increased use of cessation. The Norwegian experiences with revocation and cessation may therefore contribute to the wider discussion on reforming the common European asylum system.

A revocation decision does not necessarily mean that the person in question has to leave the country, although this is usually what happens. The revocation of one permit can, in some instances, lead to residence permits being granted on new grounds. For example, in cases in which the first decision is revoked due to incorrect information, the foreign national can then acquire a residence permit on the basis of corrected information. For people who do not engage with this area of the law on a daily basis, the multitude of legal authorities makes it challenging to understand how revocation is regulated. The concepts alone can be confusing (revocation, cessation, dismissal and cancellation). Furthermore, the different bases of the legal documents (Immigration Act, Nationality Act, regulations, instructions, verdicts and letters) can be difficult to locate, and some are only available in Norwegian. For those affected by revocation, there is the additional challenge of understanding how cases are processed and the division of roles between the Directorate of Immigration (UDI), the Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) and the police at different stages of the process (see Figure 1).

There are three main government institutions involved in the processing of cases of revocation: the UDI, the police and the UNE. The role of the UNE is to review appeals of the UDI's decisions. The UDI and the police are the two main government actors in cases of revocation. Within the UDI, two separate departments

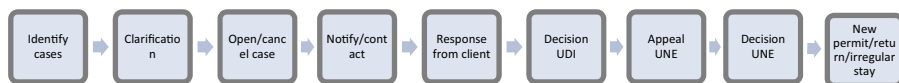


Figure 1.

**Stages of the revocation process (Brekke et al. 2019).**

handle these cases (Asylum Department and Managed Migration Department), organized by a coordinating section. Within the police, revocation cases are handled primarily by the police districts. The districts are supported by a specialized section within the National Police Immigration Service.

**The Volume of Revocation in Norway**

Between March 2017 and December 2018, more than 8000 revocation cases were opened in Norway. Of these, 3000 pertained to persons of Somali (2500) and Afghan (500) origins. About half of the Somalis were affected by cessation in which the authorities reviewed permits belonging to persons with convention refugee status, due to what was considered to be improved conditions in Mogadishu. Most of these persons had stayed legally in Norway for 3 years. The Afghan group were all reviewed due to suspicion of having provided faulty information in their asylum applications. These persons had either temporary or permanent permits or citizenships.

Prolonged processing time makes the revocation process especially challenging for those affected. The Somalis and Afghans interviewed in this study had often waited a year or longer for a decision in their cases. Meanwhile, all citizenship cases had been put on hold at this time for more than 2 years awaiting a political decision on whether they should be processed by the Directorate or the courts. Only a fraction of these cases had been processed by the end of 2018 and a clear majority of these cases were dismissed (eight out of 10). Three years after the initiative was taken to intensify revocations, most of those affected were still left in limbo.

Statistics on processing outcomes show that, despite the intense focus that the immigration authorities have put on revocation and cessation, few revocation processes have been finalized and that most of those affected have been allowed to stay in the country.

**Methodology and Data**

For this study, we interviewed 27 individuals from Afghanistan and Somalia, two of the three groups with the largest number of pending revocations. While we were primarily interested in persons who were *directly* affected by revocation, we also aimed at interviewing persons who were *indirectly* impacted by revocation, such as relatives, friends and other members of the Afghan and Somali communities in Norway.



We recruited interviewees through gatekeepers in the Afghan and Somali communities in Oslo, community associations and our own wider networks. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, it was necessary to obtain an introduction from a trusted third party to gain access to interviewees. Two researchers were present during interviews and most interviews were recorded. All three researchers participated in the analysis of the data.

The final sample (see [Supplementary Appendix, Table 1](#)) displays a wide variation in terms of gender (15 men and 12 women), age (from 18 to early 60s) and years of residency in Norway (from 3 to 24 years). Most of the interviewees came to Norway as asylum seekers or refugees, while a few arrived on the grounds of family reunification. Eighteen of the interviewees were *directly* affected by either revocation (15) or cessation (3) (and 1 was uncertain). Four persons were *indirectly* affected by specific cases and the remainder were community representatives. With regard to the interviewees' *self-reported* formal status, nearly half held temporary permits, more than half held permanent-residence permits, while only one interviewee held Norwegian citizenship.

Self-selection and strategic self-presentation may have influenced our findings in two ways in particular. First, we only spoke to persons who had stayed in Norway after the revocation case was opened and did not interview persons who had left Norway permanently or persons who may have been hiding from the authorities. Second, the persons we actually interviewed may have an interest of not disclosing certain strategies to us, such as staying in Norway illegally. This means that the list of life strategies we present is not exhaustive.

During our fieldwork, we were faced with several ethical dilemmas. Most of the interviewees faced possible revocation, loss of rights and deportation. For this reason, we obtained consent and informed them of the purpose of the project. We also underscored that, while participating would not have a negative impact on their ongoing cases, we could not help them legally with their cases.

By extension, the question of whom we are 'helping' by conducting this type of study—the authorities or the interviewees—was raised. The interviewees asked us: How can you help us? Will this study change the revocation practice? The questions point to the asymmetrical power relations between researchers and interviewees—an asymmetry that may be exacerbated if there are structural inequalities in terms of social class and majority/minority background (Carling *et al.* 2014). In this instance, we have communicated findings to the authorities and the media in Norway, believing that information can contribute to due process in the Norwegian system and shed light on the implications of the policy for both integration and the lives of those affected.

## **Disrupted Integration Processes**

### *Disrupted Integration*

Across our data set, we find that revocation affects integration, through the uncertainty that is introduced and perpetuated. This uncertainty directly affects integration processes and outcomes, with specific articulations and concrete implications, which we turn to now. We divide our discussion on the effects on integration processes into the following sections, based on themes that were central in interviewee accounts: 1) exclusion and self-exclusion, 2) stigma and rumours, 3) social media and 4) the erosion of belonging and sustained commitment to Norway.

### *Exclusion and Self-Exclusion Leading to Disintegration*

The effects of (possible) revocation on integration, beyond the moment of notification, are clear in how people change their participation in society. Whether working or studying, we see patterns of disintegration. This feeling is driven by self-exclusion and formal exclusion, either as permits are put on hold or in the form of experiences of social exclusion.

Ibrahim (pseudonym, Somali, 20s, 6 years of residence) reflects on the contrast between his everyday life now and in the past, before his revocation case was opened:

I was a student, but during the two past years with the revocation, I don't have a meaningful everyday life. I do nothing. I don't know what I'm doing. The days are difficult, hard. I am not able to go to school and to concentrate anymore. I can summarize it like this: I do nothing . . . that I see as meaningful. [Before this happened] I was very happy and content both with the teachers, my fellow students, and with the environment at school.

He goes on to explain how his disintegration is limited not only to his schooling, but also in his social relations:

I used to be very active and social, I played football. Most of my friends were ethnic Norwegians. There aren't that many Somalis in [this town]. When this happened, I just stayed at home. I stopped going out; I stopped playing football with friends. I stopped visiting friends. Friends and acquaintances in my social circle have come to my place . . . and asked: 'What is going on with you? Why are you like this? Why are you shutting yourself in your apartment?'

Self-exclusion and isolation are common patterns of behaviour in our data set, often paired with distress and anxiety due to both the inherent uncertainty of the situation and the uncertainty connected with an unforeseeable future.

For Ayaan (Somali, 30s, 7 years of residence), formal exclusion affected her ability to acquire a driver's licence due to problems with identity documents. This limitation can also be viewed in the broader context of her everyday life, where disintegration becomes visible:

Yes, it has implications . . . because I had the aim of completing primary school . . . and this has affected my capacity to concentrate . . . so that's a pity. I had a dream to get a permanent job, but now I am less motivated to apply for a job . . . it's hard. And I had ambitions about getting a driver's license, but that's difficult without a residence permit.

Changing opportunities, changing motivations and changing frames of what is possible all affect how processes of integration in the present, and future outcomes of integration, are being affected by the revocation practice.

### *Stigma and Rumours*

The group-level dynamics of disintegration discussed above are composed of both internal dimensions (among Somalis) and external dimensions (within Norwegian society), but also have individual dimensions. Despite openness among many Somalis to share information about their revocation processes and a shared experience of the risk of revocation at some level among many Somalis, there are also instances where stigmatization occurs: ‘

They don't say your name, but her with the revocation, so then you become reduced to the problem’ (Maryam, Somali, 20s, 5 years of residence).

The individualization of the issue, whereby revocation becomes a primary way in which you are seen by others, is experienced as extremely stigmatizing by individuals and close family members. This individual-level experience of stigmatization from within the Somali community is, however, then paired with group-level dynamics of standing together as Somalis in other instances. Among the interviewees, a sense of closure from society at large was expressed, often involving suspicion of monitoring and a distinct distrust of Norwegian authorities:

Many in the Somali community close themselves off to each other. People believe they are spied on, that their phones are tapped, tapped by the UDI. It is very difficult. You cannot trust anyone. I find that terribly hard. And . . . who is listening to you? The police or someone else? Maybe fellow Somalis are listening. It's difficult that you can't trust anyone . . . (Halima, Somali, 30s, 5 years of residence).

While stigmatization was primarily an internal, and limited, problem, the effect of rumours was substantial and, as such, is closely affiliated with information and communication trust. Arguably, rumours arise easily in contexts of uncertainty, where there is limited information and lack of trust. In particular, we noted the impact of limited knowledge and information about revocation. Both stigma and rumours were outcomes of revocation, which in turn affects integration.

### **Social Media and Disintegration in the Digital Society**

Almost all interviewees discussed social media somehow in relation to the revocation cases. For most, social media emerged in connection with the discussion of

information that the UDI was using to support revocation cases, which was harvested from open Facebook profiles. Often, the interviewees were surprised at having to comment on printouts from their own Facebook accounts or from those of other family members. For the UDI, social media represented a valuable source of information in cases of disputed identities, countries of origin and family relationships (Brekke and Staver 2019). Some of the interviewees reacted by shutting down their Facebook accounts:

A number of people have closed their Facebook-accounts due to fear. They don't have a case [yet], but they know they might be targeted . . . exactly the same thing could happen to them (Halima, Somali, 30s, 5 years of residence).

As Halima explains, fear is an important dimension of the generalized ways in which integration processes are affected—sometimes with direct actions as a result, but most of the time as a subtle brake put on involvement with society and integration.

Knowing that social media are an integral part of life—of maintaining contact with friends, family and extended networks for many people in Norwegian society—it should not be surprising that receding from social media, whether partly or completely, is likely to have an effect on individuals' and families' wellbeing, social integration and links with others in society (locally and abroad). For migrants, social media are important platforms on which to stay in touch with family and friends, both in their countries of origin and in the wider transnational diaspora across the world. If self-censorship of social media use hampers the social contact with relatives and friends abroad, this will affect the individuals and families concerned.

### *Erosion of Belonging and Sustained Commitment to Norway*

Processes of integration—as well as outcomes—are highly related to length of residence in a country, especially during the first 5–10 years, during which much of the basic 'integration work' is undertaken, such as learning the language, acquiring knowledge of the labour market and entering children into school. While the labour-market participation of Somalis as a group in Norway is an oft-lamented area due to relatively low employment rates for men and women, Somalis in Norway express relatively high degrees of attachments to Norway and Norwegian society (Vrålstad and Wiggen 2017). Arguably, one's own sense of belonging in the society of settlement is a salient way to approach integration processes, especially considering the degree of socio-economic deprivation that Somalis face. When we consider the group's feelings of vulnerability, Islamophobia and discrimination, these high rates of reported sense of belonging are remarkable. Amal (Somali, 30s, 6 years of residence) stresses how such attachments are currently being weakened by the practice of revocation, and not just among those directly affected:

when [other Somali refugees] got citizenship, it was really a great joy for many. But now people interpret the situation [such that] if those with temporary residence lose

it and there is some consideration of revocation, then they believe there are degrees. First, they will get the temporary ones, then those with permanent residence, and then citizens . . . they love Norway—so many Somalis that I know love Norway, they are very fond of Norway, and they have strong attachment to Norway, but that attachment is being weakened.

Amal seems to be making the point that citizenship used to be a substantial shift from outsider to insider. After the increased pressure of revocation, formal attachment has become one of degrees—a continuum from temporary permits at one end to citizenship on the other. And now, all of these could be lost. As a result, the group's attachment is being weakened.

### **Changing Life Strategies in the Face of Revocation**

When immigrants acquire a legal status, this acquisition has lasting transformative effects on wellbeing and integration (Menjivar and Lakhani 2016). Having this regularization reversed by a revocation constitutes a turning point in the interviewees' legal and social-integration process in Norway. They experienced the prospect of revocation as a fundamental disruption in their everyday lives, which they described as stable and predictable up to that point. Not knowing whether or not they would be allowed to stay in Norway produced feelings of temporariness and altered their future-making.

Faced with (possible) revocation and substantial uncertainty, the interviewees developed different coping and life strategies, depending on how they perceived their opportunities in Norway and elsewhere. We find five distinct life strategies in the face of (possible) revocation: carrying on, preparation, dual orientation, exit and reorientation. For some individuals, these strategies may overlap, whereas others might switch strategies over time.

#### *Carrying On*

Most of our interviewees were working, going to school or participating in Norwegian courses when they became aware of their own revocation process. Some people chose to carry on with their everyday lives while coping with the ever-present threat of revocation and a possible future deportation. Their lives were suspended and put on hold while they awaited a decision, either positive or negative; simultaneously, they had to cope with this uncertainty and try to carry on with living their lives as best they could. Abshir's comments (Somali, 40s, 24 years of residence) reflect this feeling:

I have to get up tomorrow morning. I have to make a lunch box for the kids, how am I supposed to do that [now]? I was completely shaken . . . it disrupted everything about my life.

Abdirahim (Somali, 30s, 9 years of residence) had appealed his revocation and his remarks underscore the duality between the ever-present fear of deportation and going on with everyday life:

you live in uncertainty. You never know when you will be deported from Norway. I have to live with that uncertainty. But I think it is very good that while I hold legal residency in Norway [appeal], I can live safe, go to the doctor . . . live free. I can work, do my daily errands, and finish meaningful workdays without fearing that the police will get me. On the other hand, I think that it is not permanent, the police can come and get me anytime.

Besides going on with his everyday life, Abdirahim also tried to reinforce his ties with Norway to strengthen his case for staying. This type of active coping suggests that revocation may also motivate individuals to strengthen their attachment to Norway.

### *Preparation*

In our data, we also find people making preparations in case the revocation stands and requires exit from Norway. These interviewees disregarded long-term plans and instead invested in short-term projects that could yield mobile capital, such as monetary savings.

Parwais (Afghan, 20s, 6 years of residence) came to Norway as a minor and was in upper secondary school, aiming to become an engineer when he was notified of his revocation case. After the case opened, however, he changed his strategy and opened a pizza place as a short-term investment, giving him a place to work and the opportunity to save money should he be forced to leave the country in the future.

Abshir (Somali, 40s, 24 years of residency) also prepared for the (possible) revocation of citizenship. At his place of work, Abshir and his co-workers were currently talking about pensions. Given the nature of his open-ended case, however, he was incapable of engaging in these discussions since he was uncertain about how long he and his family would be able to stay in Norway. Instead, Abshir put money aside regularly to prepare for possible revocation and future deportation.

### *Dual Orientation*

As the possibilities of staying in Norway seemed to narrow down, some developed a dual orientation by pursuing options they could capitalize on in Norway and abroad.

Amina (Afghan, 20s, 8 years of residence) was in nursing school when we spoke to her. As a consequence of her revocation case, she had trouble concentrating in school and even missed an exam. However, she said finishing school in Norway would be her goal no matter the result of the revocation:

I managed to focus in school, to finish this part [of school] before I start with this [revocation] case. It's a very burdensome, disgusting feeling, but I can't stress all the time, because school is very important to me and my future, whether it lies here in Norway or if . . . if other things [i.e. revocation] happen. I need education and that job anyway.



Despite the possible revocation, she tried to focus on school and viewed this education as a long-term investment providing her with opportunities both in Norway and abroad.

### *Exit*

Several interviewees simply decided to leave Norway—to exit—either as a preemptive action or as an option to pursue at some later point.

Mohamed and Mona (Somali, both 30s, 6 years of residence) and their two children tried to escape revocation by fleeing to Germany after their appeals to the UNE were denied. This was a preventive measure—trying to escape their situation and find stability. They were returned from Germany after 8 months and interviewed by the Norwegian police upon return. In Mohamed's and Mona's subjective scope of action, exit was the only reasonable strategy, as revocation and deportation to Mogadishu meant persecution and returning to the danger they originally tried to escape.

As the case of Mohamed and Mona suggests, the exit strategy was tried by some, but often resulted in their return to Norway as a result of the EU Dublin regulations. For others, the exit strategy was an idea contemplated but not acted upon. Finally, others saw leaving Norway as a long-term strategy, should they lose the right to remain in Norway.

### *Reorientation*

Some interviewees were actively planning to leave Norway, regardless of the outcome of their case. In light of increasing revocations, they no longer believed Norway could provide a secure life for them in the future. Because of this unease, they saw it as necessary to reorient themselves towards alternative futures in other countries.

Halima (Somali, 30s, 5 years of residence) had received a revocation decision. Although there still existed legal avenues for retaining her residence permit (appealing the case to the UNE), she did not want to stay in Norway: 'I don't think I will stay in Norway for a long time. No matter what happens, I want to move to another place.'

Persons who were not (yet) affected by revocation also employed the life strategy of reorientation. Moving from Norway to another European country was a way of avoiding the risk of facing possible revocation sometime in the future—whether or not the fear was legitimate. Ayaan (Somali, 30s, 7 years of residence) told of widespread unease among Somali immigrants in Norway over revocation and deportation, regardless of their legal status and having an open case: '[People think that] first they [the immigration authorities] take away temporary [permits], then permanent residence permits, and lastly citizenship.' Further, Ayaan claimed that people in the Somali community had left Norway out of fear of possible future revocation:

several of the people I know have moved. They love Norway—most Somalis I know love Norway . . . [and] feel a strong sense of belonging to Norway. Now that sense has weakened. Many of those I know who have moved to other countries, such as England. Maybe they'll change citizenship. But they move away from Norway to avoid experiencing revocation of citizenship or other permits.

According to Ayaan, the sense that Norwegian immigration authorities were 'coming after Somalis' in general forced people to move from Norway, thereby cutting their formal ties, by changing citizenship, and emotional ties, in terms of weakening their sense of belonging to Norway.

## Conclusion

We set out to describe and analyse how the process of (possible) revocation is experienced by those affected, and how it affects integration processes and the life strategies of those subject to the practice. The data presented clearly shows that revocation had disruptive effects for those affected. Revocation cases put individuals in a prolonged state of temporariness, in turn affecting their integration efforts and experienced inclusion. In sum, revocation constitutes a *process* of deregularization but the *outcome*, however, is not necessarily actual deregularization. The statistics showed that most cases ended without permits actually being revoked. As a result, the experience of deregulation was in many cases temporary.

The interviews demonstrated how time and temporality took centre stage for those affected by revocation. The statistical data confirmed the experiences of those affected by prolonged processing times and open-ended waiting, and thereby a prolonged period of uncertainty. Many interviewees felt as though they were left in 'limbo' or liminal legality (Menjivar 2006). Prospects of revocation, and the sense of temporariness it engendered, forced the interviewees to undertake new life strategies in order to deal with this temporal uncertainty. Some chose to simply move on with their everyday lives simultaneously, fearing that they could be deported at any time (*carrying on*), while others lost a sense of direction in life—a situation characterized by stasis rather than progress. The temporal uncertainty was also dealt with either by actively preparing for permit loss, by developing a dual orientation towards a possible future abroad or by simply leaving the country, for either the short (exit) or long (reorientation) term. The strategy of reorientation illustrates that sentiments of legal and temporal uncertainty are confined not only to those directly affected by revocation, but also to wider communities of migrants (cf. Chacon 2015).

The experiences of (former) residence holders interviewed in this study resemble the sense of liminality and temporal uncertainty experienced by asylum seekers waiting for initial asylum or immigration decisions and persons in detention waiting to be deported. However, there are also differences between these different legal positionalities, depending on how time is experienced, employed and negotiated in these processes. Asylum seekers and detained individuals are often assumed to be 'stuck' in the present, unable to imagine any foreseeable future (Brekke 2004). In contrast, revocation, either actual or expected, did alter the

interviewees' future-making and forced them to produce new life strategies—but it did not necessarily leave them stranded in the present. Shifting focus from a long-term future in Norway to a shorter-term horizon because of possible revocation and deportation is one example of such an active future-making.

The perception of time also broke the assumed connection between the passing of time and increased opportunities for integration. The interview material suggests that revocation affects integration processes negatively in a range of ways. These effects were noticeable on individuals, on their immediate social surroundings and in wider migrant communities. Drawing on our empirical data to describe and analyse the experiences of what may be seen as deregularization processes among refugees in Norway, we find strong evidence of far-reaching implications of the practice of (possible) revocation on migrant integration.

In terms of policy, governments should weigh the shown negative effects of strict revocation practices against the intended, positive effects. While securing immigrant identities and strengthening the legitimacy of the asylum system through firmer controls can provide security for migrants and nationals alike, officials need to understand how the processes can affect larger communities beyond their immediate intentions. Here, the symbolic aspect of (restrictive) immigration policies (e.g. [Leerkes and Broeders 2010](#)) may serve conflicting goals: on the one hand, they signalize restrictiveness towards potential asylum seekers, 'asylum cheaters' residing in the country and anxious members of the majority population. On the other hand, targeted immigrant groups, such as the Somali, may interpret this message as a sign of state distrust, inhibiting their sense of belonging.

Meanwhile, at a theoretical level, we urge scholars to engage further in the theorization of deregularization. Deregularization and the life strategies that individuals undertake to cope with this situation have implications for migration patterns, both intended (return) and unintended (displacement to other European countries), and thereby for immigrant reintegration in the country of return or displacement.

While the profound negative effects of deep-seated uncertainty on the individual migrant are well documented here, we argue the broader implications of integration processes deserve further scrutiny. There is a need to establish under which circumstances revocation practices contribute to weaken rather than strengthen the social fabric of our societies.

## Supplementary Data

[Supplementary data](#) are available at *JRS* online.

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