

Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration

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Insight from the research project *Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration (PREMIG)*, funded by the Research Council of Norway and led by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

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What is return migration?

All people who migrate have the prospect of going back to where they came from sooner or later. Whether or not they do, the possibility of return sets migrants apart from those who never left.

This report examines the implications of that distinction. With a wide-angle lens, we view return migration in the form of refugee repatriation, deportation, retirement return, temporary return and other scenarios of moving back to one's country of origin.

Return migration has many faces: for some it is a dream, for others, a threat, and still others, a duty.

Realities and possibilities

Return migration is a phenomenon that pervades life in two significant ways. First, the *reality* is that many migrants do go back. In Norway, where much of our research is based, half of all immigrants leave within ten years of their arrival, many returning to their country of origin. The realities of return migration concern *who* returns, how they *experience* it and what *impact* their return has on others.

Second, all migrants can relate to the *possibility* of return. For many, it touches on deeper existential issues. Considerations about return are perhaps most pressing for individuals who actively plan, wish for or fear its realization in the near future. But even among those who see return only as a distant prospect—as well as those who have decided against it—the question of return is closely linked to feelings of belonging and identity.

Scholars sometimes study return intentions in hopes of predicting migration behaviour. In this situation, it can be frustrating that many migrants say they will return but end up staying. Our view, by contrast, is that engagement with the possibility of return can shape people's relationship with the society in which they live and the ties they maintain to their country of origin, regardless of whether they eventually go back.

In transnational social fields, the *realities* of return for some individuals are connected to the *possibilities* of return for others. Returnees share their experiences with friends and family who remain abroad, thus shaping imaginations and decisions about return in diaspora communities.

Force and choice

The traditional distinction between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration is increasingly being abandoned for more nuanced understandings of choices and constraints. For instance, researchers acknowledge that people in situations of extreme insecurity exercise judgement and execute decisions about whether, when and how to migrate. At the same time, contemporary return migration is at times 'forced' in a brutally literal sense: deportees can be detained and physically transported to another country against their will.

Return migration, however, can also be a smooth experience in bureaucratic terms for those who desire it. Migrants who hold their original citizenship can repatriate on short notice without all the paperwork that may have accompanied their initial migration.

Despite such clear-cut divides, return migration plays out along an intricate spectrum of agency, oppor-

tunity and coercion. Asylum seekers whose applications are rejected have few options, but still they must make strategic choices: whether to sign up for assisted return, whether to keep pursuing appeals and how to manage relations with one's family in the country of origin, to name a few.

Labour migrants and their family members who are legally free to stay or to return may nevertheless face constraints that are largely invisible to outsiders. For some intra-European migrants, for instance, the blessing of free mobility actually becomes a curse; they feel imprisoned by the economic needs that compel them to remain mobile. Other invisible forms of coercion emerge in the family sphere. Children and spouses in some cases return to their country of origin against their will, though their migration differs fundamentally from what is generally considered 'forced return'.

It has been a point of confusion and contention that programmes for 'voluntary assisted return' target

Policy Point Academics and policymakers may have differing vocabularies to describe conceptual frameworks. We use 'return' as shorthand for 'return migration', referring to all relocations of migrants back to the country of origin. This includes deportation, removal and assisted return, as well as return on an individual's own initiative. Policymakers usually use 'return' to mean specifically the return of individuals lacking the legal right to stay. Variations in labelling are not only about vocabulary, but also about how we make sense of a complex reality. Academics can provide perspectives that complement a logic shaped by policy objectives.





individuals who do not wish to return, primarily rejected asylum seekers. Norwegian authorities have made an innovative and sensible move by dropping the word ‘voluntary’, now referring to ‘assisted return’. While migration policy has profound influence on the opportunities and the limitations migrants face, there is no straightforward correlation between administrative categories, their names, and the scope for agency.

The myths of return

Most international migrants move with an intention to return to their country of origin, though actual return typically occurs at a much lower rate. The ‘myth of return’, as it is known, has been an established concept in the study of migration for the past three decades. It emerged from a pattern that was prominent in post-war labour migration to North-Western Europe, and holds true in other contexts, too.

This, however, encompasses more than demographic patterns. The myth of return embodies the psychological, cultural and political processes through which migrants sustain the idea of a future return even as it becomes increasingly unlikely.

It is unsurprising that many migrants remain in their country of settlement even if their intention had been to return; they establish new attachments and identities, and the social environments that migrants left behind might have changed dramat-

ically in their absence. Understanding the myth of return necessitates understanding why so many migrants are reluctant to rule out return.

This well-established notion is accompanied by a second myth of return: the idea of ‘return migration’ as a clear-cut concept. The notion of migrants moving back to where they came from appears straight-forward, but gets undermined from several directions. Going against the logic of living in one place, some migrants are more fluidly mobile. Others have moved back and forth several times, having established a firm foothold in both countries, and do not see a move in one particular direction as ‘return’. Still others do return to their country of origin after living many years abroad, but settle in urban environments that are new and unfamiliar, thus defying the literal understanding of coming ‘back’.

There is a major discrepancy between the conceptual simplicity of return migration and its real-life complexities. Although a stumbling block for policy formation, this gap is an inspiring starting point for scientific research.





How to read this report

The research project *Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration (PREMIG)* has resulted in over 50 scientific publications, completed or in the works, written with a range of themes, perspectives and audiences in mind.

This report highlights points that have particularly fascinated us, sampling from a field of diverse insights.

We zoom in on particular issues and cases, and we zoom out to invoke the big themes that inspired the project and cut across the ensuing journal articles, book chapters and policy briefs. Since we have aimed to cover a lot of ground, the observations we make do not offer the same level of technicality or detail as is found in our other publications. This report can nevertheless be used and cited as a stand-alone document.

An enumerated list of publications begins on page 44. The numbers correspond to the superscript numbers we give throughout the publication to refer readers to sources of documentation or elaboration. The points in this report are not, however, simply lifted from the references; our accumulated experience from the project and its publications has allowed us to formulate additional new insights that are being published here for the first time.

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Project design

PREMIG set out to explore the following broad questions:

1. How do immigrants in various situations reflect on and decide about return migration?
2. How does the possibility of return interact with their (a) integration in the country of residence and (b) transnational relationships?
3. How can we understand and explain the patterns of actual return among immigrants?
4. How is return migration experienced by return migrants and the communities to which they return?

A thorough literature review conducted in the first year of the project ensured that our efforts would build upon the work of others and make valuable contributions to existing research.^{12, 15}

Our studies analysed return migration from two countries: Norway and the United Kingdom. The bulk of data collection consisted of five ethnographic case studies that examined return migration to Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraqi Kurdistan, Pakistan and Poland. We selected these countries in order to work with diverse circumstances: return migration within and out of Europe, among

labour migrants and refugees, in large and small migrant populations and to countries with various degrees of insecurity and prosperity.

The five case studies were based on data collection through fieldwork in Norway, the UK and the country of origin. In Norway, we also conducted a sixth case study referred to as the super-diversity case. This sample of migrants from diverse origins helped us see beyond the influence of particular national backgrounds.³⁶

The design aimed for 15 semi-structured interviews and four focus groups for each case in each country, or 240 interviews and 64 focus groups in total. We exceeded the target for interviewees in half the settings, and interviewed a hundred individuals more than originally planned. Focus groups, by contrast, proved unexpectedly demanding to organize, often for purely logistical reasons. We com-

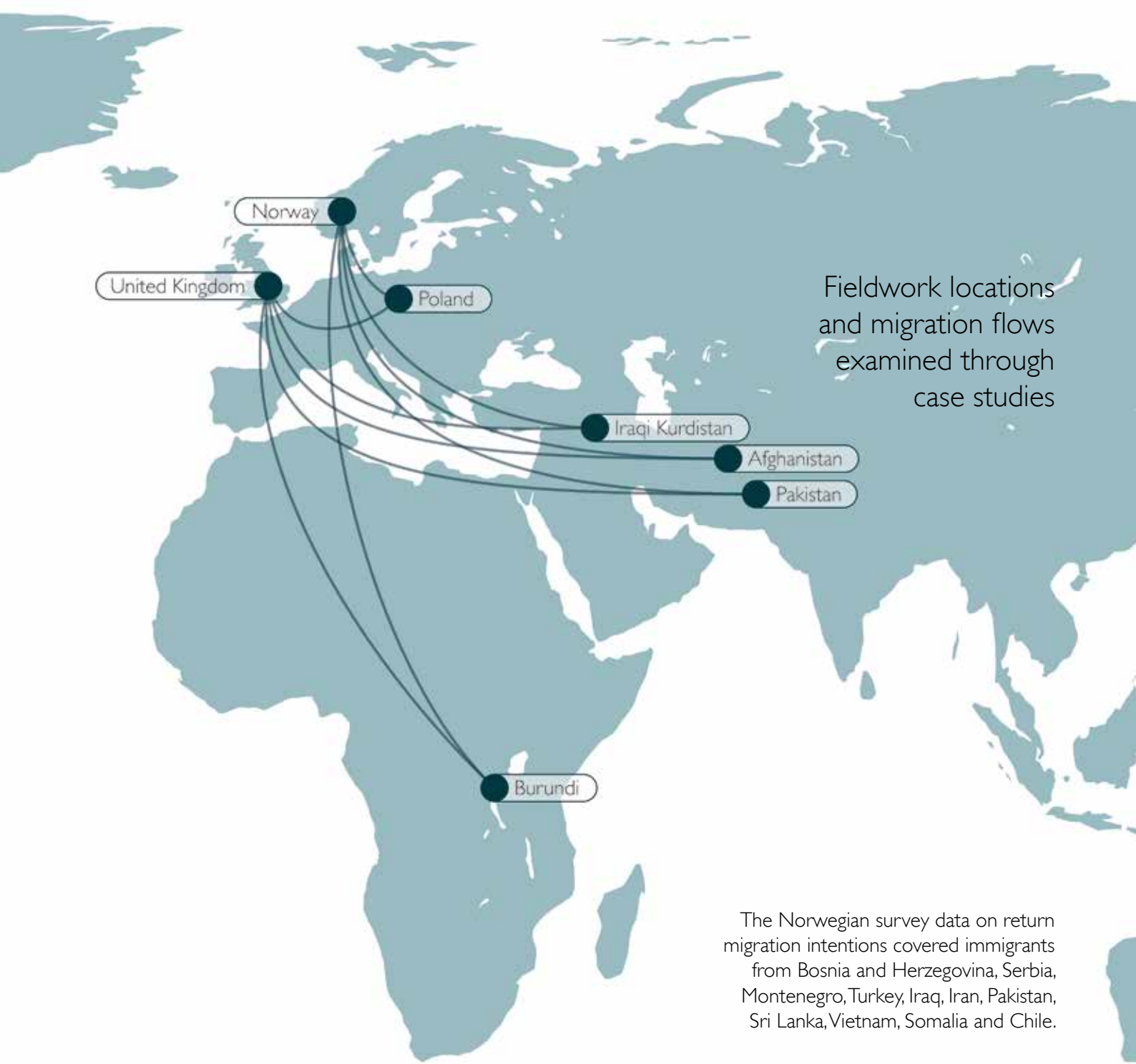
pleted 51, which was slightly below the target. In total, the qualitative data collection encompassed face-to-face interaction with 596 individuals through interviews or focus groups.

The Norwegian component of the project also made use of existing statistical data. A survey of living conditions among more than 3000 immigrants in Norway allowed us to analyse patterns in return migration intentions.^{17, 18} Population register data were used to examine determinants of actual out-migration among immigrants in Norway.⁵²

Return migration is a field rife with conflicting interests. We were therefore cautious about endorsing specific policy objectives. Instead, we sought to bring out diverse perspectives and contribute to a better understanding of how return is thought about, under what conditions it takes place, and how it is experienced.

Project funding

PREMIG was funded by the Research Council of Norway's research programme *Welfare, Working Life and Migration (VAM)*. One of the programme's objectives is to promote analyses that link together areas traditionally separated by institutional and sectoral divides.



Leading a large-scale project

PREMIG is a large-scale endeavour, being two to three times the size of typical research projects funded by The Research Council of Norway.

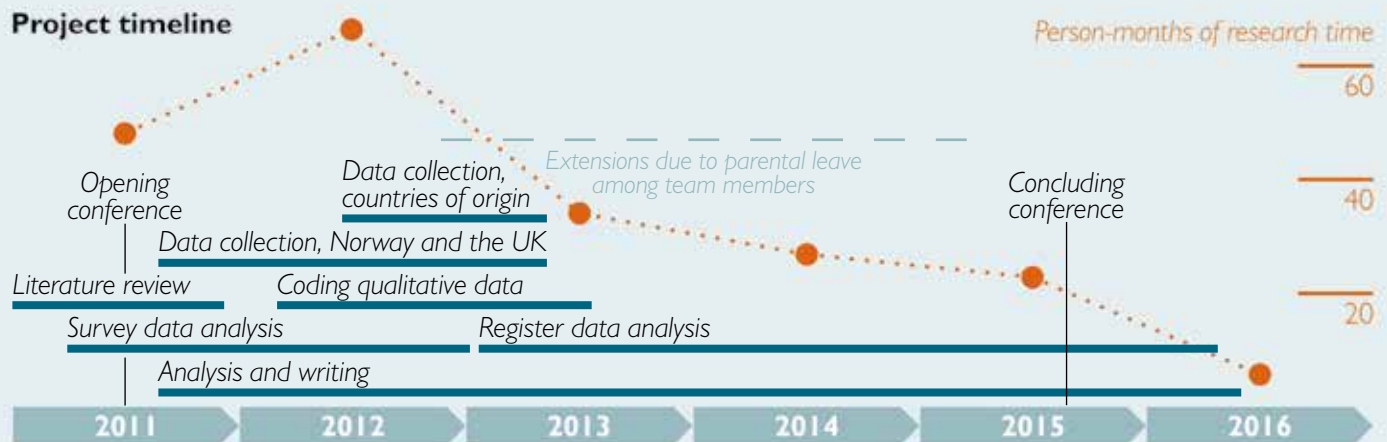
I believe we have succeeded in collecting rich and extensive data, generating new insights about return migration, and engaging with relevant user groups. One sign of success is that the project's publication record far exceeds our original commitments. Still, there are always lessons to take away.

Looking back, I see two areas in which we have not yet made full use of the project's potential. First, the qualitative and quantitative components could have been more closely integrated. So far, none of our publications draws substantially on both. Having said that, working on a team that uses both methodologies strengthened each component. Second, I believe we could do more comparative analysis across the case studies. At present, we do have publications that

draw on multiple cases, and this report makes general observations across them. However, we wish to exploit our data further in this respect.

An integral part of our learning experience was about project management itself. Leading a large-scale research project is a balancing act between, on the one hand, streamlining and coordinating the research, and, on the other hand, encouraging internal diversity and individual ownership. The latter is crucial because it helps develop careers and because the project's success fundamentally depends on individuals' creativity and devotion.

Our project relied heavily on electronic collaboration between team members in different locations, sometimes by pioneering the adoption of new solutions. For qualitative data analysis, we used NVivo Server, a version of the well-established software that allows for simultaneous analysis by multiple users. For compiling findings from across the project, we developed a customized interface in Microsoft SharePoint. We



also pioneered the use of web-based newsletter management at PRIO.

In all these areas, the benefits were mixed with challenges. Too often, researchers who were working under pressure and wanted to focus on content were obstructed by technological hurdles beyond their control. Even when new systems worked as intended, it became clear that they might only benefit researchers if used frequently.

Whilst electronic interaction is useful, we also benefitted tremendously from having regular face-to-face meetings. In the early stages, these intensive two-day project workshops were essential for collectively defining interview questions and analysis tools. In later stages, they provided a forum for sharing analytical ideas and draft outputs. The workshops also offered opportunities to build a strong, supportive international network of researchers who will no doubt continue to collaborate across their shared interests.

The scope of PREMIG allowed us to do more research than an average project would afford. But it also heightened the quality of research. Our critical mass of resources afforded investments in research communication, for instance, and the flexibility to pursue new leads along the way.

The eight researchers comprising the core group were able to spend, on average, about one third of their working time on PREMIG over the project's lifespan. This level of cooperation encouraged us to learn from each other in ways far more profound than we have experienced in smaller projects.



Jørgen Carling
Project leader



Selected findings

From across the case studies and statistical analyses, we have made ten general observations. Over the following pages we add substance and nuance to each one.

1. Return intentions are shaped by multiple attachments
2. Return migration is not simply a personal issue
3. Potential returnees grapple with uncertainties and distrust
4. A secure status abroad creates opportunities for return
5. Return migration is an engagement with time as well as with place
6. Return migration creates intersections of the social and the economic
7. Gender relations affect return migration in contradictory ways
8. Return visits play a crucial role in migration trajectories
9. Return experiences are shaped by more than tangible outcomes
10. Reintegration can be as challenging as integration



1. Return intentions are shaped by multiple attachments

Considerations about returning or not are shaped by multiple and sometimes competing attachments to people, communities, and countries. The *balance* of attachment is particularly important. But it can be challenging to draw comparisons when attachments concern different spheres of life.

- Considerations about return reflect attachments in **diverse spheres of life**. The different elements cannot neatly be summed up to reach a verdict on what is best ‘all things considered’. For many, return is laden with existential meaning; returning or not has to do with livelihoods, family, identity, ambitions, ideology. For some, issues of risk and security are also prominent.^{5, 23, 41}
- Emigration challenges ideas about **home, belonging and identity** in ways that can be quite painful.^{40, 41} Migrants’ considerations about return are typically ambivalent. They change over time and often have little to do with actual return plans. Rather, they have more to do with negotiations of belonging in the transnational social field, and in relation to multiple societies.²³
- The **discursive possibility of return**—the idea that ‘going back’ is possible—affects experiences of belonging, inclusion, and exclusion. A feeling of alienation in the destination society can keep the possibility of return alive. But alienation can also be promoted by anti-immigrant rhetoric calling for immigrants to ‘go back to where they came from’.⁹
- Integration in the country of settlement and transnational ties to the country of origin both affect return intentions. Specifically, return intentions are shaped by the **relative strength** of integration and transnationalism. The highest likelihood of return intentions is found among individuals who are both weakly integrated and strongly transnational.¹⁷
- Integration and transnationalism can **cancel each other out** and produce intermediate odds of intending to return. This is the case with individuals who are both strongly integrated and strongly transnational as well as those who are neither strongly integrated nor strongly transnational. These two

POLICY POINT A popular assumption in policy debates is that stronger immigrant integration implies weaker ties to the country of origin, and vice versa. Recent social-scientific research increasingly challenges this assumption on both theoretical and empirical grounds, showing that integration in the country of settlement can coexist perfectly well with strong transnational attachments to the country of origin.^{17, 18, 21, 23}

Changing perspectives on return among British Pakistanis

Research among second- and third-generation British Pakistanis in 2002–2003 showed that the idea of return served as a rhetorical device for symbolically and politically negotiating a place in British society. The underlying argument was that if the UK did not want them anymore, notably in the wake of 9/11 and extensive riots in northern England, they would move to Pakistan. By a decade later, however, the argument of going ‘home’ had progressively disappeared. Relations between the UK as a state and Pakistanis as an ethnic group may have not improved on many counts, but Pakistan has become a much more difficult place to think of as an oasis.^{5,9}

groups have strikingly similar likelihoods of return intentions.¹⁷

■ Transnational ties to the country of origin are important for making decisions about return as well as for ensuring reintegration. For some migrants, however, transnational ties are motivated in part by the **impossibility or undesirability of return**. When moving back is not an option, active transnationalism becomes all the more important for maintaining a sense of belonging and passing it on to the next generation.

■ Many **children of immigrants** in Norway express a wish to move to their parents’ country of origin. According to survey data, 22 per cent of people who were born in Norway or spent at least some of their childhood in the country intend to return, compared to 26 per cent among those who immigrated as adults.¹⁷ Our qualitative interviews with children of

immigrants further nuanced the picture: many wished to spend some time in their parents’ country of origin, though hardly any expressed the desire for permanent return.³³

■ For Afghans and Pakistanis, **notions of freedom** and the relative liberties of Europe were important for considerations about return. Besides the more obvious freedoms related to human security, it was clear that day-to-day freedom from social control was important. For youth, especially, not being closely monitored by relatives was an appreciated freedom, even though many missed their family.⁹

■ **Religiosity** has a significant effect on return intentions. Survey data showed that immigrants in Norway who regard religion as ‘very important’ in their lives are more likely to intend to return to their country of origin. This pattern



could reflect greater possibilities for letting one's faith shape daily life in the country of origin, or it could reflect a more diffuse orientation towards traditional values that correlate with religiosity.¹⁷

- Fieldwork among British Pakistanis revealed more **complex connections** between Islamic identity and considerations about return. A common inferiority complex linked to village origins dismisses such orientations as backward; adopting an internationally oriented Islamic identity counterbalances this shame. This form of Islamic identity and practice is perceived to be more compatible with life in the UK than life in Pakistan.^{4, 5}
- Different destination countries can represent different forms of **labour market attachment**. For Polish migrants, the UK and Norway seem to offer distinct socioeconomic opportunity structures: many young and highly educated individuals have found work in the

UK, while a greater proportion of skilled professionals entered the Norwegian labour market. Highly skilled Poles are more likely to speak English, and may see greater opportunities for developing careers in the UK.³⁵

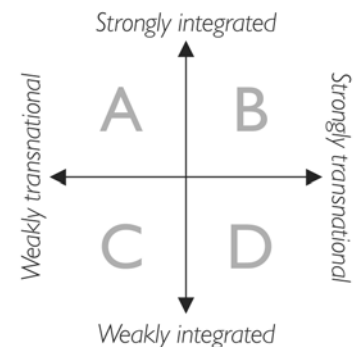
- Dreams about return—even to societies in turmoil—can be sustained by **uncertainties and hardships** in the destination society. Young Afghans precariously situated in the asylum system expressed hopes that life would be better in Afghanistan.
- Considerations about return migration are affected by migrants' **citizenship status** not only in the country of settlement, but also in the country of origin. Increasingly, emigration states are developing policies to target their emigrated populations. It makes a difference to these efforts whether or not migrants can retain their original citizenship if they acquire citizenship in the country of settlement.^{24, 25}

POLICY POINT Migrants' engagement with their countries of origin can encompass mixed contributions to armed conflict, peace-building, and development. In Norway, migrants' promotion of peace and prosperity in their countries of origin is important to their experiences of being seen and heard within Norway. Moreover, their efforts partly overlap with the Norwegian government's international agendas. This dual reality links the policy areas of immigrant integration and foreign affairs, though would benefit from better coordination between ministries and other governmental institutions.³¹

The matrix of attachment

Migrants have weak and strong attachments to both their country of residence and country of origin. Strong attachments to where they live are a manifestation of integration. Conversely, strong attachments to the country of origin are expressions of transnationalism.

In our analysis of return migration intentions, we developed a simple conceptual framework for studying the intersection of the two dimensions. In a simple but effective way, the matrix highlights the four different possible combinations of integration and transnationalism. It reflects the argument that integration and transnationalism are neither correlated in a predetermined way nor independent of each other.^{17, 18}



2. Return migration is not simply a personal issue

Decisions about return migration are complicated because they have implications for other people. Not only are family members affected; return decisions are made in social and political contexts where they can be seen as statements of identity or allegiance, and they affect the life choices of others.

- For migrants who have left relatives behind in the country of origin, family considerations often exert **conflicting pressures** on the idea of return. On the one hand, the prospect of uniting the family is a strong incentive for return. On the other hand, the family's needs are a push to remain abroad so as to continue earning the money that secures their quality of life.^{22, 37}
- Afghans who did not succeed in obtaining asylum in Europe were sometimes open to returning to Afghanistan. However, they were frequently **advised by family members** in Afghanistan not to do so, even if they did not have a legal residency status in Europe.
- Living abroad in what are relatively individualistic societies can change attitudes towards **privacy and individual freedom**. Afghans in Europe feared that the loss of privacy and independence would be a challenging aspect of returning to Afghanistan. Among returnees, the same issue was brought up as a difficult aspect of reintegration.^{43, 56}
- When immigrant integration affects reflections about return, it is not necessarily the migrants' individual integration that matters most, but that of their **children**. If they are of school age, this is often a major factor shaping the possibility of return.^{30, 33, 50}
- Some Iraqi Kurds in Europe saw return to Kurdistan to be particularly challenging for **young women and girls**. Return and reintegration was therefore thought to be easier for girls if it happened before they reached puberty. For socially conservative families, especially, the age of a family's eldest daughter has great importance for the timing of return.⁵⁰
- Among immigrants in Norway, having **family** in the country is a strong predictor of staying, rather than returning or migrating elsewhere. This was evident from analysis of actual migration patterns, and it held true for male and female immigrants alike.⁵²
- Immigrants who were admitted to Norway **on the basis of family ties** are significantly more likely to have return intentions than those who entered as workers, students or refugees. Among the groups included in the survey data, family ties were usually with other immigrants, not native Norwegians.¹⁷
- Possibilities for short-term return can depend on **family in the country of origin**. Young Afghans, both male and female,

who held European passports were often keen to spend time in Afghanistan, for instance, doing work for non-governmental organizations. However, their parent typically only supported the idea if there were family members in Afghanistan who could keep an eye on them.

- Denying the possibility of return is a central component to **asylum claims**. If other migrants from the same country are in fact returning, asylum seekers may fear that their claims about fear of persecution will be undermined.^{40, 41}
- The question of returning or not sometimes gets charged with a **political or ideological dimension**. This may occur whether return is a free choice or it involves resisting deportation. Among Zim-

babweans in the UK and Burundians and Ethiopians in Norway, the question of return was embedded in divided opinions within the diaspora. Regarding return as either feasible or not was the equivalent of making politically charged statements about the situation in the country of origin.^{20, 40, 41, 47, 53}

- **Political discourses** within societies of destination can affect immigrants' thoughts and feelings about return migration. The consequences for actual return might be marginal, but the possibility of return is kept alive. In particular, we found that public discourses on immigration control and on immigrant integration and social cohesion affected migrants' sense of belonging and feelings about return.⁹

Not simply insider or outsider

Our research led to several new insights on methodology. One that we decided to pursue and document dealt with the relationship between researchers and the people with whom they do research. In migration research it is common to distinguish between 'insider' researchers who are part of the migrant group under study and 'outsider' researchers who belong to the majority population. We used our experiences with PREMIG fieldwork, coupled with our previous research, to develop a more nuanced approach to the identities of researchers and research subjects in relation to each other. We examined how a range of visible and invisible markers – including gender, parenthood and religion – are at work in processes of establishing multifaceted relational positions. Greater awareness of such processes can strengthen research methodology and avert reproduction of stereotypical 'us versus them' logic. Now used in research methodology courses is the article in which we presented the analysis, 'Beyond the insider-outsider divide in migration research' published in *Migration Studies*.¹⁴



3. Potential returnees grapple with uncertainties and distrust

The future is always uncertain, and a future in a different place, even more so. Information to help anticipate the outcome of return migration is often scarce, untrustworthy or biased. Individuals who contemplate return can have a hard time knowing what to believe and whom to trust.

- Potential returnees rely primarily on **family and friends** for information about conditions in the country of origin. They communicate with people who remain in the country of origin, returnees, and other migrants who have recently visited and can share updated impressions.^{2, 25}
- **Social media** plays an important role in spreading impressions about life in the country of origin.² Among Afghans, for instance, Facebook was regularly used for sharing photos of visits to Afghanistan and news stories about events there. Private channels, including free communication services such as Skype and Viber, were used to discuss the local situation with family.
- Notably in refugee diasporas, **optimistic or pessimistic portrayals** of developments in the country

of origin often reflect political positions. Among Burundians and Zimbabweans, for instance, sharply contrasting discourses were couched in optimistic and pessimistic terms. Narratives from return visits were used to support one of the two positions.^{41, 53}

- When it is difficult to decide what to believe about conditions in the country of origin, a large and diverse **social network is valuable**. The Burundian case exemplified how a cultural tradition of oral communication, combined with the uncertainties of armed conflict, induced potential returnees to trian-

gulate information from separate sources before acting upon it.⁵⁴

- A **history of armed conflict** introduces particular uncertainties about a country's future. In the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, a booming economy attracted considerable return migration at the time of fieldwork in 2012–2013, but some emigrants remained abroad specifically because they feared future armed conflict. Their fears were justified, as war broke out in 2014.⁵⁰ Similarly, Burundian migrants' concerns about the possible re-eruption of violence proved valid.

POLICY POINT Pakistan's strategies for engaging with the diaspora are hampered by inherent distrust of the state among many Pakistanis abroad. Policies that target transnational practices with minimal government involvement, such as the Pakistan Remittance Initiative, are better positioned for success.²⁵



POLICY POINT The often lengthy asylum process—sometimes including spells in detention and threats of deportation—has been conducive to a negative experience for asylum seekers as they engage with institutions and officials concerning their immigration status. They have little reason to trust such parties, usually because they themselves are the object of distrust. Their cases are regularly referred to as ‘stories’ and they must prove a well-founded fear of persecution in a culture of disbelief. It is unsurprising, then, that Afghan research participants expressed distrust of the advice and help offered through assisted return programmes. Many doubted, rightly or not, that they would receive the in-country assistance promised upon return. This was accentuated by transnational communications from previous returnees about delays, among other difficulties, in accessing assistance once back in Afghanistan.

- While many migrants maintain a strong sense of national pride and identity, they often **distrust the government** of their countries of origin. This is not necessarily caused by political differences or conflicting ideologies, but by profound misgivings about the political system, its institutions, and the people who hold positions, as well as distrust in the government’s ability to support those in need.^{10, 25, 42, 47, 48}
- Whether or not to move back to one’s country of origin is a high-stakes decision with substantial uncertainty. Consequently, the ground is fertile for **rumour**. Analysing rumours provides insights into the information gaps, hypotheses, collective sense-making and conflicting truth claims that affect migration processes.¹⁹
- Many countries of origin have launched **government campaigns** to engage with diaspora populations and, in some cases, to encourage return. Even where there are state-run websites and other information resources about return migration, such as in Pakistan and Poland, potential returnees seem inclined to obtain information elsewhere.²⁵

4. A secure status abroad creates opportunities for return

The uncertainty of return migration makes *irrevocable* return an intimidating prospect. Having the possibility to reconsider makes return much more appealing. For this reason, the ultimate form of structural integration in the destination—acquiring citizenship—can facilitate return to the country of origin.

■ Decisions about return migration are fundamentally affected by whether or not return is **reversible**. Citizenship in the country of destination best guarantees a possible way out of an unsuccessful return. People who stand to lose their right to live in Europe may rule out return—even if they are otherwise inclined to do so—because the stakes are too high.^{5, 24, 30, 40}

■ The dynamics of **intra-European return migration** are fundamentally different from those of return migration from Europe to other parts of the world. Provisions for free mobility make return more easily reversible. However, the legal freedom is often coupled with economic or social constraints that increase the threshold for attempting to return.^{10, 22}

■ Restrictions on **dual citizenship** can complicate return migration.

Citizenship abroad makes it easier to attempt return migration since an exit option remains intact, provided the individual has dual citizenship. But if migrants must give up their original citizenship, they may lose rights that could otherwise facilitate return and reintegration. Some countries of origin issue documents to emigrants to help prevent these obstacles. For instance, many Norwegian Pakistanis hold a Norwegian passport and a National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis. This document grants visa-free travel and the right to own property in Pakistan but not to vote.²⁵

■ For Iraqi Kurds with dual citizenship, holding a foreign passport was a **mixed blessing**. It was instrumental as an insurance mechanism, but it was also used against them, being mentioned by non-migrants as a marker of difference. Negotiating membership upon return can be difficult as a returnee and a ‘foreigner’. At the same time, holding a foreign passport is not uncommon among the ruling elites.

POLICY POINT Dual citizenship allows for formal and legal ties to accompany social, cultural or familial attachments to two countries. Such ties may be important in providing opportunities for sustained mobility and transnational living, or testing the ground for what may become more permanent return migration.

5. Return migration is an engagement with time as well as with place

Migrants' thoughts about possible return migration are shaped by the temporal dimensions of their own lives, especially concerning migration histories and life stages. Moreover, return migration is about shaping one's future and re-engaging with one's past.

■ The factors that encourage return have differing **relationships with time**. Missing faraway relatives can be a long-term factor in life abroad, but is often insufficient to prompt return. A sudden family crisis at home, however, can trigger return because of the sense of urgency. Examples include serious illness, fear of family breakdown, fear of divorce, or the death of a relative caring for young children.^{22, 23, 30, 37, 50}

■ Concepts of home and **nostalgia** also figure in return reflections. They do not usually feature in short-term plans, but nevertheless have significance for the ways in which migrants manage negotiations of belonging both over time and across space.^{23,33}

■ **Commonalities in temporal dimensions**, such as age at migration, length of stay in the country

of settlement, and current stage in life, can diminish differences between countries of origin. For instance, Poles and Pakistanis with similar migration histories were found to have similar notions of home and belonging.^{23, 32, 33}

■ Social scientists typically distinguish between migrants (the first generation) and their children born in the country of destination (the second generation). But considerations about return and settlement vary along a continuum, and the **distinction between**

generations is often blurred. Memories and attachments to country of origin may matter more than birthplace.^{32, 33}

■ Many Polish migrants who live in Norway with their families have **completely changed their perspective** on return migration over the course of a few years. A typical trajectory was coming to test the ground in Norway in 2004, relocating family in 2006 and, by the time of interview in 2012, seeing return migration as a distant retirement prospect.^{22, 28, 29}

POLICY POINT Where people come from retains its own unique meaning over the life course. Yet, experiences of being a long-time immigrant or growing up as a child of immigrant background may have similarities across national origins. Furthermore, particular life stages and transitions can create shared experiences among migrants and non-migrants alike. Social arenas that are connected to such stages and transitions therefore hold promising prospects for building bridges across national origins.

- For migrants who fled political oppression, **transitional periods** in the country of origin can evoke vexing questions about return. The fall of a regime or the introduction of multi-party democracy, for example, can suddenly lift the impossibility of return that has underpinned migrants' lives abroad. Such transitions generate new considerations about identities and attachments.^{40, 41, 47}
- Considerations about return are heavily influenced by **life stages and transitions** not only of the

migrants, but of their family members. For instance, ageing parents requiring care back in the country of origin can incentivize return.³³

- The **temporariness of migration** can be sustained for years when families are split. This is the case for many male Polish labour migrants in Norway. They have a clear intention to return—they want to go back and say they are going back—but have no plan for making that possible in the short term.^{22, 28}

Return migration and aspects of time

Five aspects of time influence considerations about return migration:

- *Time since migration*: Migrants' thoughts about return can change as time passes. Many labour migrants initially had firm intentions to go back, but ended up postponing return indefinitely.
- *Age at migration*: The meaning of 'return' is shaped by migrants' experiences in their country of origin before leaving. For those who migrated as children or youth, return would mean a first-time encounter with daily life as an adult in the country of origin.
- *Biographical time*: Considerations about return are shaped by age and life stage, and the corresponding circumstances of close family members. Reaching retirement age or seeing children through secondary school, for instance, can be major factors for postponing return.
- *Bureaucratic time*: For many migrants, the issue of return is entangled in administrative procedures with their own temporal framework: waiting for decisions, launching appeals and facing deadlines for leaving the country.
- *Historical time*: Societal changes in the country of origin and the country of destination can shape migrants' attitude towards return migration positively or negatively. Such effects can result from decisive historical moments or from the perceived direction of social change, in general.



6. Return migration creates intersections of the social and the economic

All migration has both social and economic dimensions, but the intersection of the two takes particular forms in the case of return migration. Potential returnees usually have first-hand experience from both origin and destination countries and face expectations in both places.

- In some cases, social and economic considerations exert **opposing pressures** on decisions to return. Most commonly, migrants may have to endure the social hardship of family separation in order to provide economically.^{22, 23, 37}
- Return ambitions can **enhance economic integration**. Migrants save money, send remittances, make short-term visits and invest in their country of origin all as part of their preparation for return. These practices require income, usually stemming from the labour market in the country of settlement. Moreover, some migrants pursue education that they expect to be valuable upon return.
- It can seem as though economic factors matter more for the initial emigration, while **social factors matter more** for the decision to return or not. In time, as migrants become accustomed to a new social model and way of life abroad, there is often tension. It arises between ‘the good state’ abroad—with its transparent, democratic institutions—and ‘the good society’ back in the country of origin—with its strong social relations.⁵⁰
- Family and livelihood considerations appeared to **play out in contrasting ways** among both Polish and Pakistani migrants. In the family sphere, return was commonly triggered by crises; in the economic sphere, return was triggered by emerging opportunities.^{10, 22, 28, 30}
- **Return visits**—which frequently inform return decisions—are points of high social and economic stakes. Not only is a trip to a distant country of origin costly, but return visitors are expected to spend additional money on bringing gifts, buying items for family and friends, and sometimes contributing to expenses for events, such as weddings. Meeting these economic expectations affects the social outcomes of the visit.^{2, 6, 23, 49}
- The balance between social and economic considerations can **shift over time and across generations**. Pakistani migration to the UK has been driven primarily by an economic logic, which remains prominent in the older generation’s thoughts about return migration. The younger generation, however, shows a more confident capacity to aspire beyond the economic and tie migration decisions more to lifestyle considerations.⁵
- Return migration is both facilitated and complicated by economic growth in the country of origin. An oil-fuelled economy in Iraqi Kurdistan has provided econom-

ic opportunities for returnees. However, rising prosperity among the people who stayed behind has also raised the bar for what being a successful returnee means.^{47, 49}

■ **Corruption** in the country of origin is an influential factor that cuts across social and economic spheres. Corruption may stand in the way of economic reintegration. Moreover, it can produce a feeling of social alienation in returnees who have become accustomed to norms and standards of low-corruption societies.^{27, 47, 48}

■ Like corruption, **education** is a factor that merges social and economic spheres. Education was a recurrent motivation for return to Pakistan, being for many as much about the cultural Pakistani, or religious Islamic dimensions, as about purely academic objectives. In Pakistan and Kurdistan alike, possibilities for sending children to prestigious private schools also encouraged return.^{30, 50}

■ Work-related influences on decisions about return migration include the basic issues of having a job and earning a decent salary. But the **sphere of work** also includes important non-economic factors. The culture of work, relations between management and staff, and opportunities for career development all played central roles in Polish labour migrants considerations about return.^{10, 22, 29}

■ Analysis of Norwegian survey data showed that **economic resources have no clear effect** on return intentions. This finding is unsurprising since economic resources can either strengthen or weaken return intentions, depending on the circumstances. The absence of a general correlation thus coexists with important effects for individual migrants.¹⁷

■ The notion of **capital conversion** is valuable for understanding the interplay between social and economic aspects of return. Migrants spend economic capital on transnational practices that strengthen their social capital. Upon return, this capital can be decisive for securing an economic foothold. For example, it can determine whether returnees succeed in applying their skills and savings to the creation of a viable business.⁵⁴

Four-way considerations

When people consider migration, the often cited *push* and *pull* factors are only part of the story. Equally important are what circumstances *retain* migrants, keeping them put in the origin, or *repel* them from the destination. These four sets of factors shape considerations about return migration, too. Selected examples from PREMIG case studies provide an illustration in the table. The specific factors vary between communities and individuals, and can change over time.^{5, 9, 22, 41, 47}

	Country of settlement	Country of origin
Positive aspects	Retention factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rule of law• Employment conditions• Opportunities for sending remittances	Pull factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relaxed pace of life• Social relationships• Availability of potential spouses
Negative aspects	Push factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anti-immigrant politics• Lack of discipline for children• Absence of family networks	Repulsion factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corruption and nepotism• Social control• Expectations placed on returnees

7. Gender relations affect return migration in contradictory ways

The literature on return migration has found that men, more often than women, are inclined to return to their country of origin. The reasons partly have to do with gendered notions of status and belonging. Nuances and contradictions, however, modify this overarching pattern.

- Afghans in Norway and the UK were often most influenced by their **mothers** in considerations about return. Mothers would frequently encourage their sons to remain abroad, even if they did not want to. In other instances, they would encourage sons to return if the male head of the household in Afghanistan had since died.
- Societies of origin perceived to oppress women sometimes also offer women **social freedoms** that they lack in Europe. In the diaspora, the women often live without the networks and mechanisms that provide social opportunities in the country of origin. Some of the Kurdish interviewees, for instance, referred to depressed and isolated women in Europe who were overly dependent on their husbands and not allowed to work. Back in the country of origin, they may have had greater liberties through social networks, to the extent that uncles and cousins could vouch for them.⁵⁰
- Elderly migrant women who would typically be seen as **'poorly integrated'** in European societies might nevertheless enjoy the freedoms they would otherwise lack in the country of origin. Several Pakistani women in Norway who were not working and did not speak Norwegian very well still saw their social freedoms as a significant factor discouraging return.⁹
- Among Pakistanis—who have a long history of migration to Norway and the UK—gender differences take on particular forms when the **third generation** is born. The women who have become grandmothers are usually reluctant to return to Pakistan, and the grandfathers tend to return on their own but only temporarily.
- The gender implications of return migration are intertwined with issues of **class and social mobility**. Men's desire for social status is sometimes seen as a motivation for their greater desire to return. But women from several countries of origin also pointed to the advantage of social mobility upon return, namely in the appealing possibility to hire domestic help.



8. Return visits play a crucial role in migration trajectories

Shorter visits to the country of origin play a role that should not be underestimated. Such visits are important for making informed decisions about return as well as for maintaining transnational ties while living abroad. Return visits can become focal points for conflicting experiences of difference and attachment.

- Return visits have a **dual effect**. On the one hand, they can strengthen emotional ties to the country of origin, while, on the other hand, dampen the appeal of return. For migrants who have lived abroad with the dream of returning to the homeland, visits serve as a reality check. Frustrations with corruption, governance failures, and power outages, for instance, can be disheartening reminders of what they left behind.^{1, 23}
- Many migrants communicate closely with people in the country of origin and regularly engage in its online media. Even so, the experience of being back can be full of surprises and **differ from expectations**, positively or negatively. There is a clear, commonly acknowledged value in ‘seeing it for yourself’ rather than relying on others’ accounts and impressions.⁵⁰
- In migrant communities with a large second generation, trips to the parents’ country of origin occupy a unique place in the lives of **children of immigrants**. Among second- and third-generation British Pakistanis, such visits were important because of their frequency, their resilience to go beyond the first generation and the economic commitment involved.^{3, 6}
- Return visits are important not only for the very migrants who travel and their family and friends in the country of origin, but also for **others in the diaspora**. Within migrant communities in Europe, those who visit their country of origin often bring gifts or remittances on behalf of others and then return with updated information and impressions. Such indirect insights contribute to reflections and debates about return within the diaspora community.^{40, 53}
- The return visits of emigrants who live in Europe also fuel **migration aspirations** in the country of origin. Together with their remittances and resources to build new houses, the visits feed into local imaginations of Europe.⁴⁷
- In societies of origin where corruption is endemic and **informal networks** determine success, returnees depend on ‘friends in high places’. Without such connections, it can be difficult to secure a job or develop a business. Return visits in the years preceding return play a key role in maintaining social visibility and cultivating relationships with influential individuals. Moreover, visits serve to preserve good relations with family and friends, who frequently have superior social capital that migrants may tap into upon return.^{50, 54}



■ Migrants' return visits can be a mixed experience for **family in the country of origin** who host the visitors. There are many positive aspects. For example, nieces, nephews and other children regularly get a lot of attention and gifts from their returning family members. But there are also practical difficulties. In Afghanistan, families sometimes struggled to provide space for returnee visitors who had grown accustomed to European standards of privacy. Moreover, there were challenges related to visitors getting ill from the food, the water, and dust.

The seven connections between return visits and return migration

Across the various case studies, we found that shorter visits to the country of origin offered seven functions that all relate to return but produce disparate outcomes.

- Return visits provide first-hand information for making decisions about return.
- Return visits enable investment in social capital that can underpin successful return.
- Return visits offer inspiration for business development.
- Return visits facilitate practical preparations, such as construction of a house.
- Return visits remind migrants that the realities of return might be intolerable.
- Return visits sustain transnational ties when return is not feasible or desirable.
- Return visits maintain the myth of return as a vague future possibility.

9. Return experiences are shaped by more than tangible outcomes

Just as considerations about return are multi-faceted, so too are return experiences. The circumstances of return affect not only the tangible outcomes for individuals, but also whether they see the glass as half-empty or half-full. Making sense of one's own experience is a process in its own right.

Returnees simultaneously enter **different contexts**, or levels, of reintegration: the family, the community, the society, the state. Processes of reintegration differ across these levels, and the overall experience thus depends on where one chooses to focus.⁴³

In the Polish case, 'returnees' often did not **identify** as return migrants at all. This was because they did not perceive their migration as 'migration' in the first place. They had worked abroad, thus spending some time away, but they did not identify as migrants. Many Pakistani returnees also did not consider themselves as returnees, albeit for a different reason: they saw themselves as living transnationally, with the option of going back to Europe, not having returned to Pakistan for good.^{10, 27, 28, 30}

Migrants, like other people, tend to form **narratives** about their own choices that can be reconciled with their everyday existence and broader life projects. Returnees might therefore present similar challenges differently depending on, for instance, whether their return was wanted or unwanted. Accounts of return experiences are likely to change over time and depend on returnees' future plans, desires and opportunities.^{22, 36, 42, 49, 56}

Migrants' **legal status abroad** shapes not only considerations about return, but its actual experiences, too. Returnees who had the option of going back to Europe were more likely to present their return as a positive, enjoyable experience, even in very challenging settings. While deportees experienced shame, European passport holders viewed their return with pride.^{43, 49, 57}

POLICY POINT Rejected asylum seekers often resist the legal obligation to return. Consequently, European policymakers tasked with migration management have turned to programmes of assisted return and reintegration. Such programmes are seen as less politically costly, more humane, simpler, and cheaper than deportation. But with very limited monitoring and evaluation, we have insufficient information about how well the programmes work and whether returnees are given the promised assistance. Comprehensive evaluations of such policies are costly, but for the sake of formulating evidence-based policy, key questions could be singled out for special attention.^{42, 46}



10. Reintegration can be as challenging as integration

It can be enlightening to compare reintegration after return with integration after the initial migration. On the one hand, reintegration seems more straightforward since an individual is re-entering an apparently familiar social environment. On the other hand, expectations, suspicions and invisible differences may loom large.

- Returnees typically face great expectations from people in their community of origin and risk being **regarded as failures**. Worst of all is being deported, as some interpret that as a sign of having done something criminal (beyond illegal residence) in the country of destination. Migrants who have the ability to choose sometimes feel they cannot return because the pressure to prove successful is too strong.^{37, 49, 56}
- While migrants on return visits typically come bearing gifts, those who return against their will often are empty-handed and are a potential **burden on their families**. They need accommodation and food, and it can take a long time before they are able to start contributing to the household budget. If the migrant was working abroad and sending remittances, their untimely return also represents an income loss for the family.^{22, 28, 37, 42}
- In some countries of origin, returnees face **particular dangers**. Because they are assumed to have money, they risk being targeted for extortion. Moreover, in the Afghan case, some originally left because of blood feuds and are vulnerable to reprisal attacks. Assumptions that returnees had become ‘Westernized’ or ‘anti-Islamic’ could also endanger their security.^{42, 44}
- Some return migrants are motivated by a desire to help **develop their homeland**, especially in post-conflict situations. That said, experiences of corruption, nepotism and sometimes kleptocracy can alienate idealistic returnees and undermine the sense of patriotism that spurred their return in the first place.⁵⁰
- A key obstacle to reintegration in Afghanistan—apart from obvious challenges such as security threats and unemployment—was that many returnees were not focusing

POLICY POINT Return and reintegration programmes prioritize return over reintegration. The term ‘reintegration’ thus risks becoming a rhetorical device that serves to justify the return of migrants to societies in turmoil and allows development funding to be used for migration management. Most reintegration assistance for returnees from Europe is short-term, fails to strengthen returnees’ social capital, and is rarely subjected to longer-term monitoring.^{42, 43, 46}



POLICY POINT ‘Sustainable return’ is an established, by now influential term in policy circles. In practice, its effect is narrower than the word ‘sustainable’ implies: the return is sustained in the sense that returnees remain in place. When this is the outcome, it may have more to do with returnees’ deprivation, which leaves them with no other option, than with social or economic sustainability.^{43, 46}

their **attention** to reintegration. First, their gaze was directed towards Europe and the possibility of leaving Afghanistan again. Second, they were focused on just staying safe, leaving little capacity to be proactive in reintegrating beyond the family.⁴²

- Social pressures on returnees tend to be greater in **rural areas**. The performance of migration-related success is more visible in smaller communities; migrants build prominent houses, make philanthropic contributions, and are major local investors. The more transparent village life is, the more evident the failure to meet expectations.
- Returnees can affect local communities and economies in ways not welcome by all. **Attitudes towards returnees** differ between those who stand to gain—say, through employment—and those who stand to lose—through competition from returnee businesses or employees with superior qualifications, for example.

■ Many returnees re-enter societies where emigration is a common desire and successful migrants garner prominence through their visits, houses or investments. Returning prematurely and empty-handed then easily gives rise to **suspensions and gossip** about how the migrant wasted the opportunity abroad.^{19, 49, 54, 57}

■ Returnees are sometimes faced with the challenge of rebuilding social networks and earning the trust of others. **Lack of trust** can be a key obstacle in the reintegration process. Not only has the social landscape usually undergone considerable changes since the migrant departed, but migration itself has changed the power dynamics of relationships.^{25, 48, 54}

Unforeseen themes

Scientific work sometimes takes unexpected turns. Our research on return migration led to several original observations that we were able to explore further despite their going beyond the initial plan.

Child welfare services

Lack of trust in government institutions was a recurrent theme in emigration, immigration and return settings across the case studies. Among Polish immigrants in Norway, particularly great concerns emerged around child welfare services.³⁵ Fears of children being taken from their parents were reflected in extensive media coverage in Poland. Polish television viewers have followed a private detective who removes children

from the custody of the child welfare service in Norway and takes them to Poland. Several Polish newspapers have featured interviews with Norwegian defence counsel and parents involved in child welfare proceedings. The unforeseen salience of this issue points to the particular complications of ensuring children's welfare in a transnational setting. It also epitomizes more general issues relating to trust in government institutions and its impact of return considerations.

POLICY POINT Norway's child welfare services have been hard-pressed to gain trust among immigrant populations. While the organization has put in place trust-building measures and is seeking to address the problem, migrants' scepticism is symptomatic of more widespread distrust in the Norwegian state's ability to cater to their best interests. Even if such distrust is not founded in discriminatory practices, it is in itself a sign of failing communication.



Corruption

In the case study on Iraqi Kurdistan, corruption emerged as a major concern for migrants who contemplated return as well as for those who had returned. Widespread corruption not only obstructs economic reintegration, but also alienates returnees from the Kurdish nation-building project, undermines a sense of belonging, and creates an insecure environment.⁴⁸ Connections between migration and corruption turned out to be prevalent elsewhere too.²⁵ They are often mentioned in passing in the literature on migration, but research that examines such connections in-depth remains embryonic. Since most migration to countries with higher income levels is also migration to countries with lower corruption levels, it is important to incorporate corruption into the study of return and reintegration. As a foundation for an emergent research field, we sought to map how migration and corruption are connected.¹⁶

Rumour

Our research among Burundians in Norway and the UK revealed how, in the absence of verifiable information, rumour had a tremendous impact on considerations about return. Unsurprisingly, there were rumours about future developments in Burundi's fragile political field—especially surrounding the likelihood of a coup d'état that could dramatically alter conditions for return. But rumours also flourished around the 'true' functioning of the asylum system. As with corruption, we found that rumour is an influential, albeit understudied, aspect of migration dynamics across different contexts. The migration literature often mentions how migrants relate to various rumours, but the mechanisms at work are rarely examined in-depth. This observation inspired us to draw from research on rumour in social psychology and other disciplines and develop a foundation for studying the role rumour plays in migration processes.¹⁹

Ten links between migration and corruption¹⁶

- Corruption facilitates illegal migration.
- Corruption enables humanitarian protection.
- Corruption impedes the development benefits of migration.
- Corruption stimulates migration desires.
- Corruption promotes the transnational ties of elites.
- Corruption discourages return migration.
- Social remittances reduce corruption.
- Migration upends corrupt social structures.
- Migration sustains corruption.
- Corruption undermines assistance to migrants.



Research communication

PREMIG Update newsletter

Our quarterly project newsletter provided a regular channel for us to communicate with an international audience of academics, practitioners, collaborators, and others. *PREMIG*

Update contained news about project activities and events, and as the research progressed, announced new publications. In addition, team members wrote brief research reflections on various aspects of their work within the project.

What makes for a successful newsletter?

Our experiences with *PREMIG Update* taught us lessons to carry into the future as well as some unresolved dilemmas.

- Specific groups of recipients—policymakers, research participants, activists, journalists, students—can have diverging interests and perspectives, none of which are perfectly matched by a general-purpose newsletter.
- Committing to a regular publication schedule is good for consistency in communication. However, the nature and volume of news varies over a project's lifespan.
- A web-based newsletter platform, such as MailChimp, which we used, provides opportunities to map and understand our audience and what is catching attention. We could make better use of such knowledge to further improve research communication.
- Text and images, layout and formatting, headings and photo captions all come together to determine how effectively the newsletter communicates.
- Producing a newsletter is contingent on team efforts as well as a committed editor. Following through, systematically, on a commitment to regularly produce a quality newsletter demands substantial time and resources.





PRIO Policy Briefs

Policy briefs within the *PRIO Policy Briefs* series have been an essential complement to academic publications. These briefs do not necessarily make policy recommendations, but present research-based insights to make our findings more accessible and relevant to policymakers and practitioners. We solicited valuable

advice from the project's advisory board on how to make the most of the policy brief format, based on a participatory evaluation exercise. The feedback was implemented in our policy briefs beyond the PREMIG project. (Policy briefs that draw on PREMIG research are included on our list of publications.)

Research reflections published in PREMIG Update

- *Where is my home?* by Marta Bivand Erdal, 2014/4
- *Iraqi Kurdistan: From out of sight to the media limelight* by Erlend Paasche, 2014/3
- *Capturing dynamic life experiences* by Rojan Ezzati, 2014/3
- *The unintended consequences of education among Pakistani migrants to the UK* by Marta Bolognani, 2014/2
- *Complexities and challenges in Afghan migration* by Ceri Oeppen, 2013/2
- *'Maybe someday I'll return...'* by Rojan Ezzati, 2013/2
- *Trust matters* by Tove Heggli Sagmo, 2013/1
- *Politics of labelling (in) a semi-independent state* by Erlend Paasche, 2013/1
- *Return intentions* by Silje Vatne Pettersen, 2012/4
- *Approaches to activism in policy-relevant research* by Ceri Oeppen, 2012/4
- *Ambivalence with regard to returnees* by Marta Bolognani, 2012/3
- *'Labour migration': What's in a label?* by Marta Bivand Erdal, 2012/3
- *Communicating through policy briefs* by Jørgen Carling, 2012/2
- *Working with focus groups* by Marta Bivand Erdal, 2012/2
- *Fieldwork and security* by Tove Heggli Sagmo, 2012/1
- *How to define the 'super-diverse'?* by Rojan Ezzati, 2012/1
- *Why are visits to the country of origin so important?* by Marta Bolognani, 2011/3
- *The EU Returns Directive* by Ceri Oeppen, 2011/3
- *Organizing a collaborative literature review* by Jennifer Wu, 2011/2
- *Voluntary return and reintegration programmes: 'volition' and 'sustainability'* by Erlend Paasche, 2011/2
- *Is 'return migration' a meaningful concept?* by Jørgen Carling, 2011/1

Seminars and workshops

We engaged with various user groups in workshops and seminars throughout the project. Breakfast seminars at PRIO attracted migrants from our case study groups, fellow researchers, students, journalists, diplomats and other practitioners. We also brought insights from the project directly to policymakers through other events.

Training Afghan officials on return migration

In 2013, Ceri Oeppen was asked by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy to give a training workshop on migration for Afghan government officials. She shared preliminary findings about how our Afghan research participants had experienced return and the reintegration challenges they had faced. It was a fascinating opportunity to gauge reactions to PREMIG findings and to discuss how people in Afghanistan felt about the Afghan diaspora. Almost all the officials had been refugees at some point in their lives, and most had relatives still living abroad in the wider diaspora. They expressed disapproval of those who had left Afghanistan, claiming asylum, but not returned; they felt such individuals were an embarrassment to the post-Taliban government.



Return migration and transnationalism

The relationship between return migration and migrants' transnational ties was a core PREMIG theme. In 2012, we organized an international workshop at which 19 research papers were presented around this connection. Over the following year, we worked with a group of the authors to develop a special section of the journal *International Migration* 52(6), 2014, guest edited by Jørgen Carling and Marta Bivand Erdal. Like the project itself, the articles spanned over divides between different forms of migration.

In the introductory article, we argued that there is often a blurred boundary between mobility as a transnational practice, for instance in the form of return visits, and purportedly permanent or long-term return migration. We also explored how migration trajectories, involving various forms of 'return' moves, create different forms of transnationalism. Examples include the 'reverse transnational' practices of returnees and the 'residual transnationalism' of migrants who, after an unsuccessful return experience, decide to settle permanently abroad.³⁵

- 'Return migration and transnationalism: How are the two connected?' by Jørgen Carling and Marta Bivand Erdal
- 'Return migration intentions in the integration–transnationalism matrix' by Jørgen Carling and Silje Vatne Pettersen
- 'The emergence of lifestyle reasoning in return considerations among British Pakistanis' by Marta Bolognani
- 'Post-return transnationalism and the Iraqi displacement in Syria and Jordan' by Vanessa Iaria
- 'Split return: Transnational household strategies in Afghan repatriation' by Kristian Berg Harpviken
- 'Double return migration: Failed returns to Poland leading to settlement abroad and new transnational strategies' by Anne White
- 'Second-generation "return" to Greece: New dynamics of transnationalism and integration' by Russell King and Anastasia Christou
- 'The rise and fall of diasporic bonds in Japanese-Peruvian "return" migration' by Ayumi Takenaka



Conferences

The PREMIG project began with an opening conference in August 2011 entitled 'Dream threat duty: The many faces of return migration'. The following year, we hosted a conference specifically on the connections between return migration and transnationalism. The closing conference came in August 2015, under the title 'Thinking about going "home": Engaging with scenarios of return migration.' In addition to drawing conclusions from PREMIG research, the conference convened academics from a dozen countries who presented papers on how migrants relate to the possibility of a future return.

The media

Mass media played an important role in communicating about the project. At times, we took the initiative to disseminate findings, for instance through writing op-eds. In other instances, we engaged in current debates or provided commentary to events in the news. Insights from the project helped us contribute expertise on topics related to PREMIG research as well as regional expertise on the countries that our case studies covered.

Navigating languages

PREMIG is an international research project hosted at a research institute with English as its working language. However, many of our audiences have another preferred language. Further, the project is funded by a research programme that seeks to strengthen policy-relevant knowledge in Norway. Some of our policy briefs are therefore published in Norwegian versions alongside the English. While most of our academic publications are in English, the project also produced an article in the leading Polish scientific journal in migration studies, *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*.



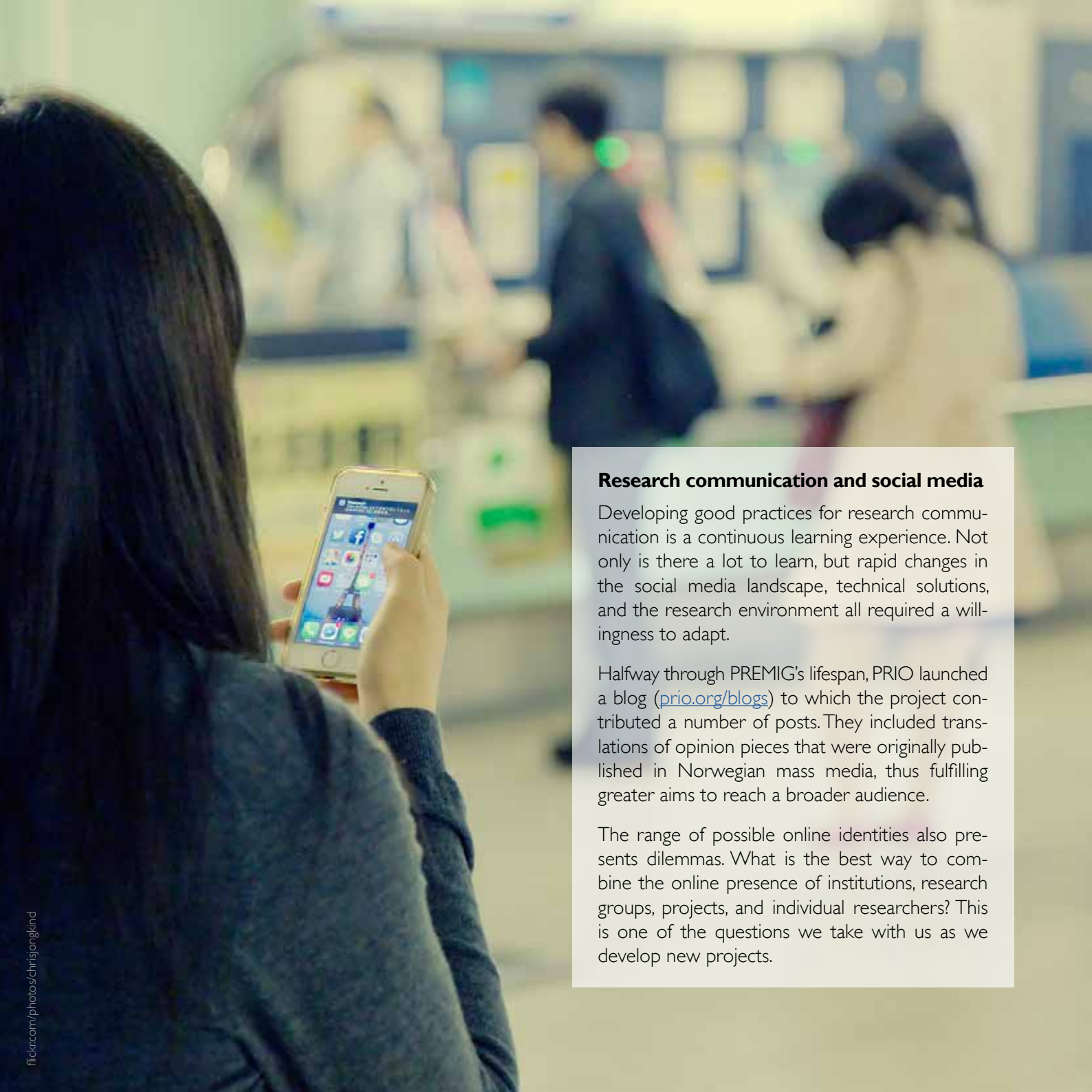
Debating dual citizenship

Marta Bivand Erdal and Tove Heggli Sagmo drew on their PREMIG research to enter the public debate on citizenship legislation in Norway. Unlike its Nordic neighbours, Norway does not permit dual citizenship, and the scholars wrote two op-eds advocating for a change in this policy. One op-ed led to a televised debate with political leaders.



Analysing conflict in Kurdistan

Research on return migration can produce in-depth country knowledge. Drawing on PREMIG interviews with over 100 Iraqi Kurdish migrants and returnees, Erlend Paasche provided commentary to Norwegian and international media on the state of affairs in Iraqi Kurdistan during attacks by the extremist group that calls itself the Islamic State.



Research communication and social media

Developing good practices for research communication is a continuous learning experience. Not only is there a lot to learn, but rapid changes in the social media landscape, technical solutions, and the research environment all required a willingness to adapt.

Halfway through PREMIG's lifespan, PRIO launched a blog (prio.org/blogs) to which the project contributed a number of posts. They included translations of opinion pieces that were originally published in Norwegian mass media, thus fulfilling greater aims to reach a broader audience.

The range of possible online identities also presents dilemmas. What is the best way to combine the online presence of institutions, research groups, projects, and individual researchers? This is one of the questions we take with us as we develop new projects.

Project team



Jørgen Carling (Research Professor at PRIO, PhD in human geography) is the PREMIG project leader and has overseen the research. Apart from leadership and coordination, his work within the project concentrated on the analysis of return migration intentions. Alongside the conclusion of PREMIG, he now leads a new project called *Transnational Lives in the Welfare State (TRANSWEL)*, which examines the experiences of people who simultaneously lead their lives in two countries.



Marta Bolognani (Research Associate at the University of Bristol, PhD in sociology) carried out research in the project's Pakistani case study, including fieldwork in Pakistan and the UK. She was recruited into the project with extensive research experience on British Pakistanis and, more generally, on Islam in Europe. Following her PREMIG work, she joined a project team researching marriage migration and integration in the UK.



Marta Bivand Erdal (Senior Researcher at PRIO, PhD in human geography) led the work package 'Experiences of return', including coordination of data collection in countries of origin. Her research within PREMIG concentrated on the Pakistani and the Polish case studies. She currently leads two new projects: *Negotiating the Nation: Implications of ethnic and religious diversity for national identity (NATION)* and *Governing and Experiencing Citizenship in Multicultural Scandinavia (GOVCIT)*.



Rojan Tordhol Ezzati (Researcher at PRIO, PhD candidate in sociology) led the work package 'Possibilities of return', including coordination of fieldwork in Norway and the UK. Her own research within the project concentrated on the super-diversity case study in Norway, which endeavoured to transcend the traditional focus on national origins in migration research. She is currently conducting doctoral research within the project *Negotiating Values: Collective Identities and Resilience after 22/7 (NECORE)*.



Ceri Oeppen (Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Sussex, PhD in migration studies) carried out the Afghan case study within PREMIG, including fieldwork in Afghanistan, Norway and the UK. She joined the project with previous research experience among Afghan Americans in the United States and Afghanistan. She is a member of the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information, which works to quality-assure the country of origin information used in UK immigration procedures.



Erlend Paasche (Researcher at PRIO, PhD candidate in sociology) conducted research towards a PhD within PREMIG. He carried out the Iraqi Kurdish case study and conducted fieldwork in Norway, the UK and Iraqi Kurdistan. Before joining the project, he did research on Iraqi refugees in Syria. Alongside doctoral research within PREMIG, he has been engaged in several evaluations of assisted return and reintegration, covering Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kosovo, and Nigeria.



Silje Vatne Pettersen (Senior Adviser at Statistics Norway, MA in demography) led the work package 'Patterns of return', which is based on analysis of Norwegian register data on population movements. She also worked on the analysis of return migration intentions. Alongside her PREMIG work, she serves as coordinator of migration-related statistics and analysis at Statistics Norway and conducts research on emigration from Norway and on acquisitions of Norwegian citizenship.



Tove Heggli Sagmo (Researcher at PRIO, PhD candidate in human geography) conducted research towards a PhD within PREMIG. She carried out the Burundian case study and conducted fieldwork in Norway, the UK and Burundi. She was recruited to the project with background experience from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. After completing her PREMIG work, she undertook new research on the relationship between citizenship and integration in Scandinavia.



Collaborators

Besides the core group of researchers, the following individuals made substantial contributions to the research:

- Shawkat Abdullah
- Anum Amjad
- Justyna Bell
- Qamar Zaman Bodla
- Grant Ennis
- Refik Gefur
- Zaheer Khan
- Vejin Jaffer
- Ali Kurdistani
- Aleksandra Lewicki
- Nassim Majidi
- Elin Berstad Mortensen
- Shaima Noor
- Baseer Omaid
- Jasmin Osman
- Maria Piechowska
- Justyna Pokojaska
- Asma Rubab
- Amina Shadab
- Cathrine Talleraas
- Fatma Wakil
- Jennifer Wu
- Ajmal Attak Yousafzay

Institutional partnerships

The PREMIG project benefited from institutional partnerships under the auspices of key individuals, as follows:

- Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, University of Bristol: Paul Statham
- Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw: Marek Okólski and Paweł Kaczmarczyk
- Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad: Hafeez ur Rehman
- Department of Social Statistics, Statistics Norway: Elisabeth Nørgaard
- International Relations Office, University of Dohuk: Dawood Atrushi
- Oslo Office, International Organization for Migration: Antonio Polosa
- School of Global Studies, University of Sussex: Richard Black
- School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London: Laura Hammond

Advisory board

The PREMIG advisory board met every six months and provided an arena for discussing and reflecting on the research in progress. Members were recruited from outside academia and contributed with diverse personal and professional experiences. The following individuals were members of the advisory board for shorter or longer periods during the project:

- Karin Afeef
- Bente Scott Amundsen
- Chro Borhan
- Valéry Buzungu
- Norunn Grande
- André Johansen
- Julian Kramer
- Margareta Tumidajewich Hauge
- Eva Haagensen
- Mujtaba Mastoor
- Johan Kristian Meyer
- Stine Münter
- Ghazala Naseem
- Sylo Taraku
- Espen Thorud
- Chalank Yahya



What does it take for an advisory board to work well?

It has become the norm for large research projects to have an advisory board including policymakers or representatives of other potential user groups. Deciding to have one is easy; making it a useful and rewarding setup for everyone involved is less straightforward. We used the PREMIG experience to identify the following observations to implement in future work with advisory boards:

- Advisory board members should be approached as individuals with multifaceted personal and professional experience, not simply as representatives of organizations or particular perspectives.
- The interaction between researchers and advisory board can benefit from excluding other researchers as advisory board members.
- Work with the advisory board can benefit from having one member of the research team dedicated to communicating with the board.
- Researchers should identify specific concrete needs for input from advisory board members; these needs should concern choices the team must make.
- Maintaining an advisory board requires a substantial investment of time by researchers and board members; careful planning is needed to make the investment pay off for everyone.
- The sequence of planning by researchers, input from the board and impact on research should be monitored and reported back to the advisory board.
- Advisory board meetings can successfully be divided between presentations by researchers, work in breakout groups and plenary discussion.
- A relatively small advisory board is generally effective, but more members might be needed to ensure continuity in light of scheduling conflicts and member loss due to relocations or job changes.
- Advisory board members cannot be expected to remember all the details of the project plan and schedule; researchers should help provide an overview at regular intervals.
- Meetings should be something board members can look forward to. Key factors are learning something interesting, feeling useful, and sharing meals together in a friendly environment.
- Advisory board members can be approached individually or in smaller groups, based on their interest and expertise; interaction does not have to be limited to the meetings.

Publications

These are publications that are based on research within the project. As this report goes to press, they are in various stages of completion; about half have been published and the remainder fall into three categories:

In preparation: has been drafted and is undergoing revisions.

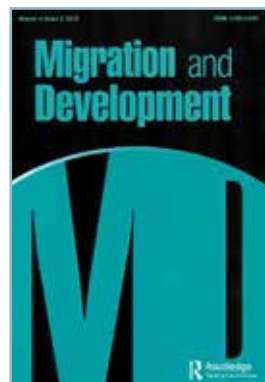
Under review: has been submitted to the publisher and is being evaluated;

In press: has been accepted for publication and is being prepared by the publisher;

Some of the publications draw upon insights from several projects. Those in which PREMIG research plays a minor role are marked with an asterisk (*).

Publications that are freely available online are marked with an Open Access logo and accompanied by a direct link to the full-text document.

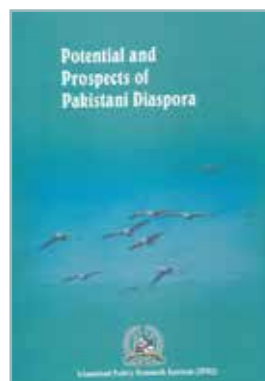
Titles of articles that have not yet been published may change in the course of the review and publication process. Updated information about final publications can be found at www.prio.org/premig.



- 1 Abdin, Zain Ul and Marta Bivand Erdal (In press) 'Remittance-sending among Pakistani Taxi-Drivers in Barcelona and Oslo: Implications of Migration Trajectories and the Protracted Electricity Crisis in Pakistan.' *Migration and Development*.*



- 2 Bell, Justyna and Marta Bivand Erdal (In press) 'Limited but Enduring Transnational Ties? Transnational Family Life among Polish Migrants in Norway.' *Studia Migracyjne - Przegląd Polonijny*.



- 3 Bolognani, Marta (2013) 'Changing Perceptions about Home: The Life of Second and Third Generation.' in Anwar, M. (ed.) *Potential and Prospects of Pakistani Diaspora*. Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 17-34.



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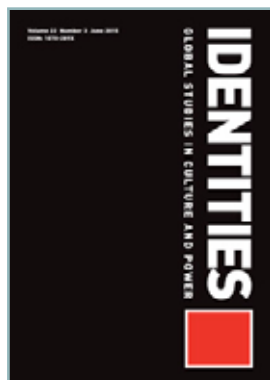
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- 7 Bolognani, Marta (2015) *Unintended Consequences of Education for Pakistani Immigrants and their Descendants in the United Kingdom*. PRIO Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.



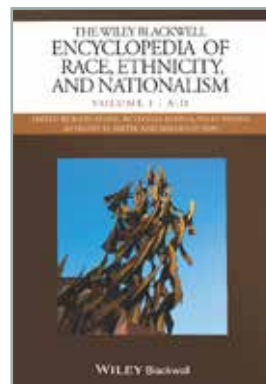
- 8 Bolognani, Marta (In press) 'From Myth of Return to Return Fantasy: A Psychosocial Interpretation of Migration Imaginaries.' *Identites*.



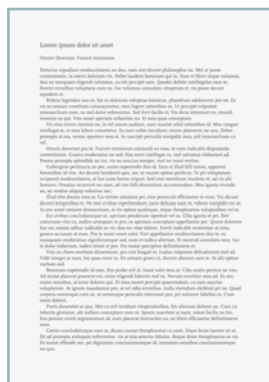
- 9 Bolognani, Marta and Marta Bivand Erdal (Under review) 'The Discursive Possibility of Return: How Does Political Context Affect Belonging among British and Norwegian Pakistanis?' *Journal article*.



10 Bygnes, Susanne and Marta Bivand Erdal (In preparation) 'The Quest for a Normal Life: Return Considerations among European East–West and South–North Migrants.' *Journal article*.



11 Carling, Jørgen (In press) 'Myth of Return.' in Stone, John, Rutledge M. Dennis, Polly Rizova, Anthony D. Smith, and Xiaoshuo Hou (eds) *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism*: Wiley-Blackwell.



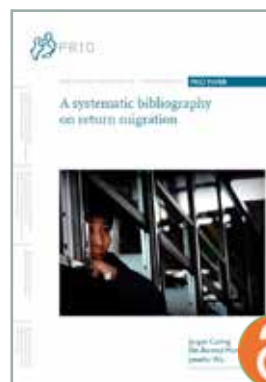
12 Carling, Jørgen, Marta Bolognani, Marta Bivand Erdal, Rojan Tordhol Ezzati, Elin Berstad Mortensen, Ceri Oeppen, Erlend Paasche, Silje Vatne Pettersen, and Tove Heggli Sagmo (In preparation) 'Return Migration: an Inquisitive Review.' *Journal article*.



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- 19** Carling, Jørgen and Tove Heggli Sagmo (Under review) 'Rumour and Migration.'



- 20** Eide, Cathrine (2014) *The Unintended Effects of Norway's Readmission Agreement with Ethiopia*. PRIO Policy Brief, 03/2014. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.



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- 21** Engbersen, Godfried, Linda Bakker, Marta Bivand Erdal, and Özge Bilgili (2014) 'Transnationalism in a Comparative Perspective.' *Comparative Migration Studies*, 2(3): 255-260.*



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- 22** Erdal, Marta Bivand (2014) 'Praca i rodzina: Rozważania o powrocie wśród Polaków mieszkających w Norwegii.' *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny*, 2: 41-64.



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- 25** Erdal, Marta Bivand (Under review) 'Juxtaposing Pakistani Diaspora Policy with Migrants' Transnational Citizenship Practices.' *Journal article*.



- 26** Erdal, Marta Bivand (In preparation) "You Meet Them at Church": Polish Migrants in Norway and the Diverse Roles of the Catholic Church as Institution, Community and Faith.' *Book chapter*.



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- 30** Erdal, Marta Bivand, Anum Amjad, Qamar Z. Bodla, and Asma Rubab (2015) 'Going back to Pakistan for Education? The Interplay of Return Mobilities, Education and Transnational Living.' *Population, Space and Place*. (Early view.)



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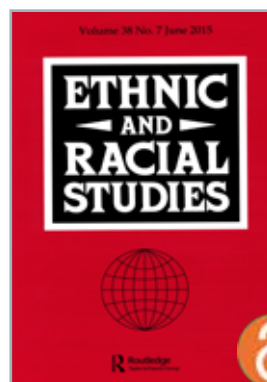
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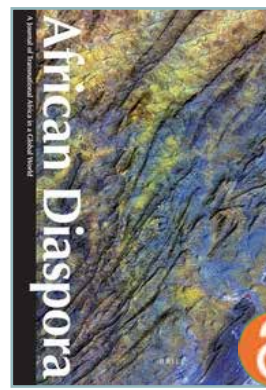
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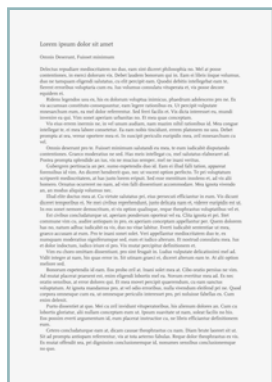
- 42** Oeppen, Ceri and Nassim Majidi (2015) *Can Afghans Reintegrate after Assisted Return from Europe?* PRIO Policy Brief, 07/2015. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.



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- 43** Oeppen, Ceri (In preparation) 'What does reintegration mean? The "return and reintegration" of rejected asylum seekers.' *Journal article*



- 44** Oeppen, Ceri and Nassim Majidi (In preparation) 'Where's the reintegration in the return-and-reintegration of Afghans "assisted" to return from Europe'. *Journal article*.



- 45** Paasche, Erlend (2014) *Iraqi Kurdistan: Partner Under Pressure*. PRIO Policy Brief, 04/2014. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.



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- 50** Paasche, Erlend (In preparation) *Return Migration from Europe to Iraqi Kurdistan: Challenges, opportunities and the role of corruption*. PhD Thesis, Oslo: Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo.

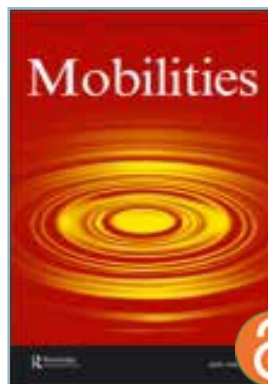


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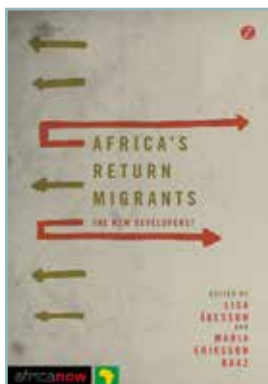


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Focus group in Afghanistan.

We are grateful to all the individuals who shared their thoughts and experiences through interviews or focus groups and thereby made this research possible.

- How do migrants think about the possibility of returning to their country of origin?
- Why are short return visits so important for migrants' lives and migration trajectories?
- Why is it often so difficult to reintegrate in the society of origin after return?

This report presents insights from the research project *Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration (PREMIG)*, funded by the Research Council of Norway and led by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). Over a five-year period, a core group of eight researchers in Norway and the United Kingdom studied return migration from multiple perspectives. They drew upon statistical analyses and face-to-face interaction with more than five hundred migrants and returnees in seven countries.



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