KIRKENS BYMISJON

The Church City Mission

The invisible children

Observation report on paperless children and children of paperless migrants in Norway

Nobody knows how many of them there are. But we know that they exist.

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Preface

Some children in Norway go completely under the radar. They are invisible and unable to access the rights every child is entitled to.

They live in hiding. In poverty and substandard housing. With little food on the table and limited access to healthcare. Maybe unable to go to school and participate in leisure activities. They are children who do not have the right papers. Children who we adults describe as paperless.

The Church City Mission insist that everyone experiences respect, compassion and fairness. You should not have to show a piece of paper in order to experience that. Yet we know that every single day the Norwegian society breaches the rights of children without the correct papers.

We may have our opinions on why they are here and on what the parents' responsibilities are. Whether they should be here at all. While the political debate goes on, important years in a child's life pass by. Without the security and opportunities most of us take for granted. Because we have the correct papers. These are formative years and prepare the children for adult life. In this report the children and their parents talk about what it is like being a child and having your life put on hold. About what it does to their mental health and hopes for the future. Their stories are all different. What these children have in common is that they are at the mercy of the rules set by us adults.

Nobody knows how many of them there are. But we know that they exist. Our health centres for paperless migrants are seeing children living in unsustainable conditions. We have long been concerned about the plight of these children. We therefore decided to document the lives of paperless children. The report shows that we need to acquire knowledge, disseminate information and give the children relevant, accessible services. Paperless children are independent individuals and cannot be held hostage to their parents' status in the country.

When a group of people is invisible, someone needs to point them out so that they can receive what they are entitled to. Too many people have been closing their eyes. Now it is time to look.

Adelheid Firing Hvambsal
General Secretary, The Church City Mission

«All those thoughts... where am I tomorrow? How will my life turn out?»

Paperless youth

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Summary of key findings

- Their parents' legal status affects every aspect of the children's lives. The children's legal position is in parts weak and unclear, something which impacts the services they receive.
- Children of paperless migrants are not treated as independent legal persons.
- Paperless children and children of paperless adults in Norway are a highly vulnerable group who are made vulnerable because of their circumstances.
- There is insufficient knowledge about the predicaments of paperless young families and the rights of paperless children. This lack of knowledge is evident both amongst the paperless families themselves and amongst public sector employees.
- They lead marginalised and difficult lives, and many are in great need of help.
- Paperless young families are completely reliant on their networks and on organisations and charities working to support them.
- There are numerous barriers to accessing services because many parents are impoverished, are afraid of accessing public services, or do not know where to turn for help
- Where the children have been given leave to remain but one of the parents is paperless, families and organisations often find that these children still end up being marginalised with limited access to services.
- Experience shows that it is down to coincidence whether the family receives help. This involves obtaining information, advice and guidance on their rights and helping the children and families seek out services that they can benefit from.
- Unpredictability, uncertainty and isolation blight the lives of these families. This has consequences for the children's health, schooling, play and social life.
- Many of the children and most of their parents suffer from mental health issues and need help and support.
- One consequence of living such marginalised lives is that the children do not receive help and that some of them go entirely under the radar.

Every single day the Norwegian society breaches the rights of these children.

1

A cartoon made by *Leon*

Paperless youth

1. Det var en gang en gutt som het Leon. Han har en familie. Han har lillebror og lillesøster, og en mor og en far. Leon går på videregående skole og han er 16 år gammel. Han liker Marvel og han har alltid ønsket seg å bli en superhelt. Hver gang han ser på Marvel, da liker han Spider-man, Hulk, Thor, Captain America og Iron man. Han og familien har ikke pass, så de hadde noe problemer med kommunen, og det er trist for Leon. Han har en venn som heter Alex. Alex vet om at Leon ikke har pass, men de andre vet ingenting. Leon bor i et fint nabolag der er det butikk og alt man ønsker seg. Nabolaget ligger i skogen. Han hadde et veldig fint hus som har tre etasjer.

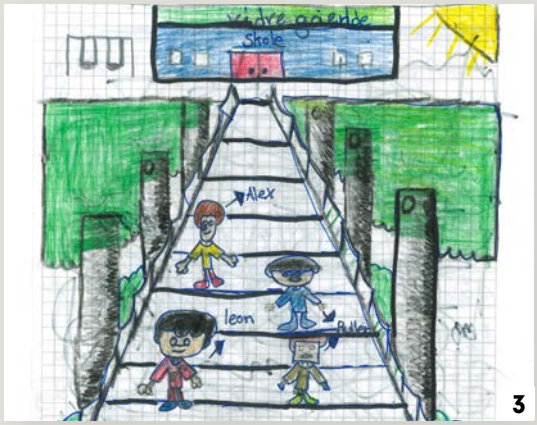
2. En dag etter skolen gikk Leon til skate-parken. På vei dit så han en fallende meteoritt. Han fulgte etter den og så at den var i den dypeste skogen i nabolaget. Han løp til den dypeste skogen, fordi han var nysgjerrig på hva det var. Han fant en meteoritt som glødet grønt. Leon rørte på meteoritten, og følte seg som om han var sterkere, smartere og skarpere. Etter det så han at hendene hans glødet. Han fikk panikk og løp så fort han kunne. Da han var hjemme gikk han på badet og vaska hendene sine så han ikke hadde glødende hender. Så gikk han opp på rommet sitt og følte seg trøtt, og sovnet.

3. Etter det som skjedde, da det ble morgen, var Leon litt svimmel og varm. Han spiste frokost og pusset tenner og kledde på seg. Leon gikk ut og på veien møtte han Alex. De gikk hele veien til skolen. På veien møtte de to bøllene. Leon hadde glemt å gjøre leksene til den ene bølla. Men bøllene gjorde ingenting, så han gikk til spansktimen. Etter spansk var det matte og etter det spising, så alle gikk til kantina for å spise. Mens de spiste, begynte de to bøllene å plage Leon og Alex, og den ene bølla slo Leon i øyet. Leon begynte å få blåmerke og løp til doen og gråt. Så begynte hånda hans å skyte grønn laser ut av hånda, og den sikta mot dørhåndtaket. Han ble sjokkert og skremt og gikk ut av doen og til timen.

4. På veien møtte han Alex som spurte om det gikk bra. Leon svarte ja, som om ingenting hadde skjedd. Det som var dumt, var at Leon ikke hadde kontroll på superkreftene, så han lovte seg selv at han skulle trene hver dag etter skolen helt til han ble profesjonell. Så en dag ble han profesjonell. Superkreftene hans var superstyrke, lasere ut av hånda, han kunne fly, han var supersmart og han kunne svømme under vann. Fra den dagen lovte han at han skulle beskytte alle de som ikke hadde pass og de som var fattige.

Etter den lange dagen på skolen gikk han hjem mens han var lei seg. Han gikk til rommet sitt og var lei seg. Lillesøstera kom inn og spurte om det gikk bra, og Leon sa ja for han ville ikke si hva som hadde skjedd. Etterpå kom lillebroren inn og spurte «går det bra?». Leon sa ja igjen. Så gikk lillebroren ut av rommet, og så kom foreldrene. De spurte om det samme, om alt gikk bra.

2



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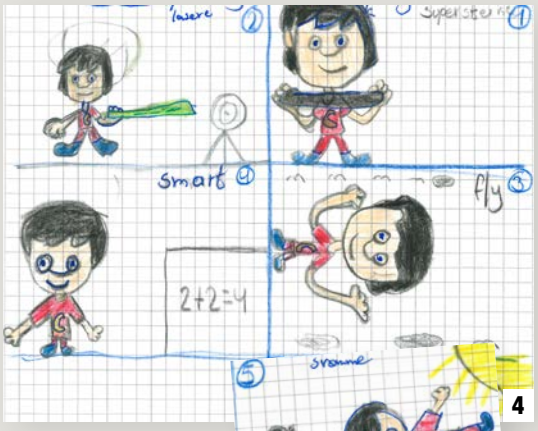


4

5

Etter det kom hele familien inn på rommet og ga ham en stor klem. Faren sa «vi kommer til å få pass snart, sønn». Alle gikk ut av rommet hans. Etter det skjønte Leon hvorfor de kom til rommet hans, de tenkte at han var lei seg på grunn av passet, men det var ikke det, det var på grunn av han ble slått på skolen. Men han følte seg bedre. Han begynte å nyse og følte at han svevde oppi lufta. Andre gang han nøs, fløy han helt opp i taket. Han tenkte han kunne fly, så han gikk opp på taket. Han kunne fly, og ble så glad at han mistet kontrollen og falt ned på bakken. Nede på bakken tenkte han at han skulle bli en superhelt.

Etter de sprø dagene tenkte Leon å få seg en ny superheltdrakt. Han tok pappa sin motorsykkeldrakt som han ikke brukte lengre. Skaffa seg en maske, og puttet en C på den, fordi på t-skjota hans var det en C. Og så tenkte han at han skulle putte teknologi inn i drakten, men han visste ikke hvordan han kunne gjøre det. Så kom han på at Alex kunne hjelpe ham. Så han gikk til huset hans, banka på døra og forklarte alt til ham, og så sa Alex ja til å hjelpe. «Jeg trenger også vinger, for jeg sliter når jeg flyr», sa Leon. Alex sa ja til det og.

5. Så kom den store dagen. Leon var klar med alt, nå. Han visste hvordan han kunne kontrollere superkreftene og hadde en drakt med teknologi. Han gikk ut med den nye drakten. Fløy opp i lufta og prøvde å finne noen tyver. Han lette og lette helt til han fant to tyver som rana banken. Han fløy ned til dem og da de så Leon begynte ranerne å gå til bilen og kjørte så fort de kunne. Leon fløy helt til bilen, fikk ut laserne av hånda og sprakk det ene bilhjulet, så det andre bilhjulet, helt til bilen stoppa. Da den stoppa brukte han superstyrken sin på å ødelegge døra. De to tyvene gikk ut av den andre døra. Leon fløy helt opp i lufta for å finne dem, og så at de prøvde å gå til havna. Han fløy til dem. En av tyvene hadde en laserpisol, og sikta mot vingene hans. Han falt ned men han ga ikke opp. Han kom seg opp og begynte å løpe. Tyvene fant en båt de kunne kjøre på havna. Tyvene brukte den og kjørte så fort de kunne. Leon hadde svømmekreftene sine, så han brukte dem. Han svømte under vann helt til han fikk tak i dem. Han hoppet opp i båten og følte at drakten hans hadde en superkraft eller noe, men han kunne ikke tenke på det akkurat nå. Så tenkte han at han måtte stoppe den båten før den kjører for langt, og stoppe tyvene.

Så kom den følelsen igjen, han tenkte det kom fra midten av drakten. Han tenkte at det var faktisk en superkraft så han slapp den løs. Båten stoppet helt. Leon tenkte han kunne kontrollere all slags teknologi. Han tenkte at båten skulle kjøre, og så gjorde den det. Det eneste han trengte å bekymre seg over nå var tyvene. Så han brukte superstyrke for å slå dem ned og snudde båten. Så ga han tyvene til politiet og pengene til banken. Og fra den dagen ble han kjent som Captain Marvel.

CHAPTER 1

Project background

1.1 Paperless migrants in Norway

Paperless migrants[1] are persons staying in Norway without a valid residence permit. Paperless people are a heterogeneous group, and there are different reasons why people end up without papers. Most paperless people are asylum seekers whose applications have been ultimately rejected but who remain in Norway because they cannot be returned by the authorities for various reasons or because they themselves do not deem it safe to return to their country of origin.

Among the paperless are also people not engaged in the asylum process: people who have not applied for asylum and who have never been registered with the Norwegian authorities. They can be people who are being exploited in the labour market, victims of human trafficking or minors drifting through Europe. This group also includes persons who have remained in Norway after their visa has expired. There is no reliable data on how many paperless people are presently in Norway, and the figures vary from a few thousand to around 18,000.[2] PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (in Europe)) estimates that around one in ten paperless migrants are minors.[3]

No comprehensive count or identification process has been carried out of paperless children and their circumstances in Norway, but it has been concluded that paperless migrants and their children can be classed as one of the ten most vulnerable groups in society with significant, unmet needs.[4] For several years The Church City Mission has been seeing the need to gain more knowledge about these children and to highlight their circumstances in the public discourse. This is why we have conducted this study.

1.2 Definitions and delimitation of target group and focus

By «paperless migrants» we mean people without valid leave to remain in Norway. These people have also been described as «undocumented», «irregular» or «illegal» migrants.

In this report we are using the terms «paperless children» and «children of paperless migrants». By that we mean:

- **Paperless children** are children (0–18 years of age) without a residence permit / leave to remain in Norway.
- **Children of paperless migrants** are children who have a residence permit or are Norwegian citizens, but one or both of their parents do not have a residence permit or leave to remain. Some of the issues covered in the report also concern the unborn children of paperless pregnant migrants.

The report distinguishes between these two groups – paperless children and children of paperless migrants – where it is appropriate to do so. This is especially important in relation to rights and perceived access to services. Yet we have seen how paperless children and children of paperless migrants are facing many of the same challenges and consequences of being paperless or being part of a «paperless family» when it comes to access to services, rights and living conditions. We use the term «paperless children» when describing lived experiences which can be seen as congruous. We have made a point of distinguishing between the two when discussing issues specific to one of the groups.

Although our primary focus is on the aforementioned target group, in part 3.8 we will also be looking at some of the challenges encountered by another group of young people without leave to remain: children arriving along in Norway as asylum seekers,

i.e. unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. We have not included any informants from this group in the report, but many of the experts we spoke to highlighted experiences and severe challenges amongst this group of young people.

The Church City Mission's recommendations and proposed measures are mainly aimed at the primary target group, namely paperless children and children of paperless parents.

1.3 The Church City Mission's work with paperless migrants

The Church City Mission has been working with paperless migrant for some time, including at the health centres for paperless migrants in Oslo and Bergen, PMV (multicultural resource centre), The City Mission centre in Oslo, the Nadheim centres (support for sex workers) and a range of easy-access schemes for drug addicts, homeless people and impoverished migrants. In 2014–2015 Home-Start Familiekontakten conducted the project «Growing up in NowHereLand» where paperless young families were invited to take part in activities and events and volunteers provided support.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from these projects – and then especially from the health centres for paperless migrants run by The Church City Mission and Red Cross in Oslo – is that paperless young families find themselves in a vulnerable and marginalised situation. We have found that paperless children and children of paperless migrants are not given access to fundamental rights and services that require Norwegian citizenship or a residence permit.

We have seen children being affected by their parents' limited rights and that the children are not being treated as independent individuals with their own rights. Their parents' legal status is thus the deciding factor in which help and support the children are given.

We have also seen paperless families not having their basic and essential needs met, including housing, food, clothing, medication and toys. Some families have gone into hiding and are afraid to contact the authorities or other organisations for fear of being reported and deported. The only place they dare to visit is the health centre. This way of living forces the children and their families to move frequently, they can become isolated at home, and they have few networks.

The health centres for paperless migrants

- Run by The Church City Mission and The Red Cross. Launched in Oslo in 2009 and in Bergen in 2013.
- The target group is paperless migrants, people without the legal right to stay in Norway.
- Offers primary healthcare, consultations with specialists, support when needed, lab testing, medication and onward referrals. All services are free.
- The healthcare is provided by volunteer health workers (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, psychologists, bioengineers, physiotherapists, dentists etc.). Staff organise, co-ordinate and run the centres.
- Objectives: Provide healthcare and health information, document the patient group's health problems. The aim is to close down the centres in the long run because paperless migrants are having their basic healthcare needs met by the ordinary health service.
- The health centre in Oslo has seen between 550–900 unique patients every year in the past few years. In Bergen the figure is between 100–150 unique patients per year.

Against this backdrop, combined with our concern for the children's legal status and living conditions, The Church City Mission launched the study project «Paperless Children» in 2022 in order to gain a more systematic insight into the situation.

1.4 Purpose of the project and report

The aim of the project has been to obtain more knowledge about the plight of paperless children in Norway and to use the knowledge that already exists to better support the children by reinforcing their rights and providing access to services that can improve their living conditions. We have identified concrete changes we believe need to be made in chapter 4.

The project has collected and collated information and knowledge about paperless children and children of paperless migrants as well as their parents. We have examined their living conditions and circumstances and looked at the specific challenges of being a paperless child in Norway. We wish to shine a light on what makes their circumstances unique and what it is like to be a child and a family in such a marginalised situation. Another key theme we wanted to explore was whether the informants on the project feel that that paperless children and/or children of paperless migrants can genuinely access services if they ask for help. What barriers and opportunities affect paperless children's right and access to services?

The report is primarily an observation report. The rights perspective has been included because the informants find that it plays a major role in the lives of paperless children. The report is thus not a legal/rights analysis, but since the topic is residency rules and rights, we will inevitably also touch on legal issues and challenges. The report is just as much about the experiences of those working with paperless migrants as it is about the paperless migrants themselves. You can read more about this in section 1.5 below.

To take action to protect the children's rights and needs, we need to look at the circumstances and needs of the children and those of their carers. This holistic family perspective is based on the fact that children are entirely dependent on their carers and that it is necessary to see the family as a unit. The Church City Mission also takes into account that children are often granted more robust rights and services by the authorities than adults. Also, the parents' circumstances must not be an obstacle to the children being able to access this type of services. A child is an independent legal person with their own rights, including on account of being a child, cf. the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This need for balance between the children's independent rights and the holistic family perspective is reflected in some of the recommendations made in the report.

The report is in four parts. Chapters 1 and 2 provide an account of the background, purpose and knowledge of the target group. Chapter 3 summarises observations and findings from the project. Chapter 4 lists The Church City Mission's recommendations for authorities and organisations on improvements and measures to meet the children's needs.

1.5 Methodology and project execution

1.5.1 Ethical considerations and delimitation

To learn more about the target group and throw light on key themes for the project, we conducted interviews with parents and children who are or have been paperless and with

«I knew we didn't have money. Mum wasn't allowed to work»

Paperless youth

leading specialists in the field. In other words, the project did not exclusively seek to learn about the paperless children and paperless parents' personal experiences. Professionals working with and for paperless migrants were also invited to share their experiences and observations. In the report we try to distinguish between the children's own stories and the parents and adults' interpretations of and stories about the children's situation and emotions.

Charting the lives of paperless migrants is an ethical and methodological challenge. It is difficult to interview people living such marginalised lives. The families' circumstances, experiences and encounters with the authorities and organisations are in principle sensitive information to share with others. The project occasionally felt the dilemma of relying on the families sharing their experiences without being able to give something back. It was therefore essential to talk through the premise for the project with the informants.

During the first phase of the project we made a few key decisions and set some delimitations:

- The Church City Mission and other organisations working with paperless migrants have found that most of the young families they speak to have one parent without leave to remain and one with leave to remain. It was therefore important to include these families in the project as well, as they are facing many of the same challenges as the children without residence permits. We have therefore included the term «children of paperless migrants (cf. definitions 1.1). At the same time it is important to distinguish between the two groups when making our recommendations, since they have different rights in the first place.
- Reports from organisations such as NOAS[5] provide more information about the lives of young families without leave to remain living in reception centres than about those not living in reception centres. The project has therefore deliberately sought to recruit families not living in reception centres. In terms of recruiting children and young people, we deliberately chose to interview informants who are no longer paperless, as these themes are sensitive and difficult for children and adolescents to talk about. It can also be easier to talk about it retrospectively.

1.5.2 Interviews and document reviews

The reason for conducting interviews with paperless parents and children was to get an idea of how they feel about everyday life and what kind of experiences they have had with various agencies when they have sought help from the authorities. The informants in the target group were primarily recruited via the health centres for paperless migrants in Oslo and Bergen along with a few other charities and organisations.[6]

A total of 18 target group interviews were carried out. We interviewed 12 parents who are or have been paperless. Eight of the 12 affected families are in a situation where one of the parents and one or more of the children has leave to remain. These parents without leave to remain are predominantly persons who cannot be returned to their country of origin. All of them have lived in Norway for between ten and 20 years. In four of the families both parents and children are paperless. They have not had leave to remain for between two and 15 years. With the exception of one family, all those in the latter category are single parents/carers. With the exception of two families, all the families we interviewed had refugee backgrounds.

In these two families the mothers stayed on in Norway on expired visas as a consequence of the pandemic.

We interviewed a total of six children, adolescents and young adults who are or have been paperless for all or parts of their lives – three of either gender. One of the parents was always present when we interviewed the children. The interviews were carried out in the families' homes or at the health centre so that the children would feel safe. We often spent several hours with the children in order to make them feel safe. We talked about things they enjoy doing in their spare time and other everyday subjects before moving on to more sensitive topics. Both before and during the interviews we told them that they could decline to answer if we raised topics they did not want to or were unable to talk about. They were also told that they could bring up issues we had not asked them about if they so wished.

The interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews with the help of an interview guide. The topics we discussed are sensitive and difficult to talk about, so it was important to let the parents and children steer the conversation on the topics we raised.

A further 19 interviews were conducted with specialists working with paperless migrants in the public sector and on behalf of organisations and charities.[7] Staff and volunteers at the health centres in Oslo and Bergen have been an especially valuable source of knowledge about the target group.

The literature review was important in order to contextualise our findings. As a backdrop and supplement to the interviews, the project reviewed relevant literature, reports and research on paperless migrants.

Resource group

- Linnea Næsholm, Kirkens Bymisjon.
- Frode Eick, researcher UIO.
- Hilde Rhoden, Oslo Røde Kors.
- Line Ruud Wollebæk, RVTS Øst.
- Camilla Scharffscher Engeset, Redd Barna.
- Siril Berglund and Jon Ole Martinsen, NOAS.
- Rune Berglund Steen, Voksne for barn.

1.5.3 Project structure and funding

The project appointed a project manager from the department of childhood and volunteering at The Church City Mission in Oslo along with a steering group comprising two advisors also from The Church City Mission in Oslo (one from the department of childhood and volunteering and one from the department of inclusion and diversity).

The project owner is the department director for childhood and volunteering at The Church City Mission in Oslo. The project manager was tasked with ensuring the progress of the project in accordance with the adopted schedule, budget and resources.

The project manager reported to the steering group throughout the project period. The project also appointed a resource group to oversee the quality of the work and co-operation with other organisations. The group consisted of specialists with knowledge and experience of the issues in question. The project was conducted in the period April 2022 to January 2023.

The Church City Mission received funding for the project from Scheiblers Legat.

CHAPTER 2

Paperless children and children of paperless migrants:

What do we know?

2.1 How many are they?

As mentioned initially, PICUM estimates that around 10 per cent of undocumented migrants in Europe are minors. This corresponds with figures from the registration forms of new patients[8] at the health centre in Oslo from 2018, where 25 in 280 people said they were living with children under the age of 18. In Sweden the number of paperless children was estimated to be 2,000–3,000 in 2014.[9]

In 2008 Statistics Norway estimated that 18,000 persons were staying in Norway illegally. Findings from the project, information from organisations working with paperless families and other factors such as the fall in asylum arrivals and the departure of many people from the country could suggest that there are significantly fewer paperless migrants in Norway today than this estimate suggests.

In March 2022 there were just over 1,800 persons on the National Police Immigration Service's list of people staying illegally in Norway. Among those were around 1,650 persons whose asylum applications had been ultimately rejected.[10] The figures do not include persons who have never registered in Norway or persons with expired visas.

Based on the above figures, it is not possible to estimate how many paperless children there are in Norway at any given time. Nor has putting a number on it been an objective for this project. However, it is difficult to take steps to help paperless children and their families when we do not know where they are or how many of them there are. We will return to this topic in the recommendations in chapter 4.

2.2 Rights

This part of the report describes the legal rights of paperless migrants, including paperless children and children of paperless migrants, in Norway. It does not address whether these rights are being fulfilled or how they are working in practice. This will instead be discussed in chapter 3 of this report and in the recommendations in chapter 4.

Rights in general

- Paperless migrants have very limited rights to healthcare, housing and financial support in Norway. Paperless migrants are not permitted to work.
- The rights of paperless migrants vary somewhat depending on whether they have applied for asylum and been ultimately rejected and on whether they have registered with the authorities. Those who have not registered with the authorities are not entitled to accommodation in a reception centre and associated financial support, for instance.[11]
- Paperless children enjoy a few more rights in law than do paperless adults. Children of paperless migrants who have leave to remain have the same rights as other children in Norway.

What rights do the children have?

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children enjoy the same rights regardless of residency status.
- The convention grants special legal status to children. It stipulates that children have the same human rights as adults but that they are also entitled to special protection. The convention gives every child and young person under the age of 18 the right to a safe and good childhood, regardless of who they are and where they live. Each state is responsible for upholding the rights of children under the convention. Norway ratified the convention in 1991, which means the government is responsible for complying with the convention and reporting regularly to the UN. Since 2003 the convention has been part of Norwegian law, and it enjoys particular status in that it overrides Norwegian legislation in the event of conflicting provisions.[12]

The best interests of the child is an overarching principle in the convention and must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children in Norway. Article 3.1 states: «In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.»[13]

Child Welfare Act

The Norwegian Child Welfare Act aims to «ensure that children and young persons who live in conditions that may be detrimental to their health and development receive the necessary assistance and care at the right time» and that children and young people can grow up in a safe environment (Section 1-1). Every child in Norway under the age of 18 is covered by this act.[14] The Child Welfare Act also has the best interests of the child as a fundamental principle.

Right to schooling and kindergarten

- All children aged 6–16 who are likely to be staying in Norway for longer than 3 months have a right and a duty to enrol in primary or secondary education.[20] Children of asylum seekers retain this right even if their parents' asylum application is rejected and they are ordered to leave the country. Because this right and obligation ceases to exist when the child turns 16, paperless children over the age of 16 are not entitled to an upper secondary education. Nor are paperless children entitled to attend kindergarten.
- Sweden has been giving paperless children the right to primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education since the 2013–2014 academic year.

Right to healthcare

- Paperless migrants are entitled to «necessary healthcare which cannot wait».[15] This means they can receive healthcare at a walk-in clinic but are not entitled to register with a GP. Pregnant women and children are entitled to healthcare over and above «healthcare which cannot wait»[16] but are still not entitled to register with a GP.
- On children, the regulations on the right to health and social care of persons without permanent residency in the realm states that: «Persons under the age of 18 who do not meet the criteria according to Section 2 are, in addition to urgent care as described in Section 3, entitled to necessary health and social care from the local authority under the Patient and User Rights Act Section 2-1 a (ii) and necessary healthcare from the specialist health service under Section 2-1 b (ii first clause) unless the interests of the child mean that such care should not be provided. Sections 2-3 to 2-5 of the Patient and User Rights Act also apply.»[17]

Payment for healthcare: Healthcare for paperless children is in principle not free because, in the same way as paperless adults, they are not covered by national insurance.[18] A memorandum from the Ministry of Health and Care Services to the health trusts states that if the patient is unable to cover the cost themselves, the cost must be met by the health institution in accordance with the Specialist Health Services Act Section 5-3 (i) second clause. This is primarily relevant when providing urgent care and other «healthcare which cannot wait», cf. above. The cost should be charged to the institution if payment cannot be obtained from the patient.[19]

Social services and financial support

- Section 4 of the regulations on social services for persons not domiciled in Norway concerns persons who are in the country illegally: persons not lawfully resident in the realm are not entitled to individual services under the law, with the exception of information, advice and guidance. It also states that if a person is unable to sustain themselves or obtain government accommodation, the person is entitled, in an emergency situation, to financial support and help to find temporary accommodation in accordance with the law for a short period. Help will be given until the person is in practice able to leave the country.[21]
- Paperless migrants are not entitled to financial support except in an emergency. Paperless families with children are entitled to a basic benefit if they are staying in a reception centre after having their asylum claim rejected. The basic benefit for adults is reduced if they lose or are not granted residency status. Children retain their basic benefit irrespective of status. The rates for children and the additional amounts for single parents/carers without leave to remain are therefore the same as for those who are legally resident. The basic benefit for children is between NOK 1,500 and 2,000 a month depending on the child's age.[22]

CHAPTER 3

Main findings

Marginalised lives – living conditions and access to services

In this part of the report we look at the experiences of paperless families with children living without leave to remain in Norway and at what specialists in the public and private sectors are observing. To shine a light on how paperless families get on in day-to-day life and the challenges they encounter, we started by looking at factors affecting their living conditions and personal circumstances: finances, housing, health, kindergarten, school and leisure activities. Certain issues were also raised repeatedly in the interviews with the target group and specialists and are therefore analysed separately. The issues are: vulnerability to exploitation, concerns over residency status, the need for help and dependency on others, and being a carer in limbo– the feeling of being in a «non-state», excluded and forgotten. We briefly also look at some of the serious concerns expressed by the specialists about unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.

3.1 Financial hardship and precarious living arrangements

Most children of paperless migrants live marginalised lives with financial hardship and precarious living arrangements. Parents without leave to remain are unable to seek work in the regular labour market. Those who do work often have to endure degrading working conditions. In families where only one parent has leave to remain, the person who does work often works very long hours. This has an impact on family life. The families have to rely on others in order to survive for shorter or longer periods. On the registration forms from 2018, every single person living with children stated that the family has to survive on less than NOK 15,000 a month.

Fafo divides paperless migrants into different financial categories: The «visible» – who continue to live in reception centres after their asylum application has been ultimately rejected but who are still entitled to a place to live and financial support from the Directorate of Immigration. The «dependants» get by because they know someone who is legally resident and can provide for them, e.g. a partner, co-habitant or a person with whom they have a sexual relationship, or they live with or receive help from relatives, friends or acquaintances. The «working» support themselves by working illegally, and the «marginalised» live off various forms of crime or prostitution. Then there are those who are in «free flow» and do not have a survival strategy.[23]

Paperless parents in the families we spoke to primarily fall into the «dependants» category. They rely on a partner's earnings, benefits if they live in a reception centre, and help from their network. Those who are or have been single parents/carers are at times particularly dependent on their network in order to survive. Since they are not permitted to work, some of the parents have been working in the irregular labour market or carried out odd jobs for private individuals in order to provide for their children. Parents say they are spending all their time and energy providing food, clothing and a roof over their children's heads.

> One parent said: ***«It was the only thing I could think about, how we were going to cope ... I went on Finn [.no] and found things that people were giving away, picked them up, fixed them and tried to sell them again. I was given free second-hand clothes for the children and tried to sell them again when they outgrew them ... and I sold my own clothes.»***

> Another mother living in a reception centre showed me some of the jumpers she had knitted for her child: ***«The sleeves are a bit short, so I unravel them and knit them again to make them longer, so that it will***

fit for longer. I plan and shop for food once a week. I don't need much food, but my child does. What we get from the directorate isn't enough to live on.»

Children of paperless migrants are often aware of their family's financial difficulties from an early age, and they often do their bit to improve the situation. Families and professionals describe children and young people taking on responsibility for their family's situation. Some are working in the irregular labour market to add to the family's income, others look after younger siblings so that one of the parents can go to work.

One young person speaks of the years living without leave to remain: ***«I never asked for things or clothes until I knew mum had some money, I didn't nag because I knew we didn't have money. Mum wasn't allowed to work.»***

«My mum and brother had to work illegally ... in the evenings and stuff. So I spent a lot of time at home with my little brother», said another.

The fact that the mother or father is unable to work is often a difficult topic for the families as the children grow older and become more conscious of what they want in terms of shoes and clothes.

One parent said: ***«I've never bought new clothes for my youngest daughter ... she's now ten. Sometimes when she asks, I say we can't afford it. But now she's started asking why I don't work.»***

Another said: ***«My son is a teenager, he wants Nike, Adidas and all that. He didn't use to ask why. Now, when I say we don't have money, he'll reply: Mum, you need to get a job!»***

The health centres and others working with paperless migrants confirm that paperless families suffer deprivation.

A volunteer social worker at one of the health centres said: ***«We ran a project at the health centre a few years ago, a kind of partnership with Refugees Welcome to deliver clothing and equipment. We started asking those with children what they needed ... They needed everything: prams, nappies, clothes for the children ... football boots, those kinds of things.»***

Reports from Norway and Europe on the living conditions of paperless children and children in families with unsettled status corroborate the findings from the project: families are completely reliant on the help of others to survive, and children often go hungry and lack basic things such as decent shoes and clothes.[24] Stockholms Stadsmission writes that most paperless families they deal with are living in severe poverty. Their income is precarious, and many of the parents are dependent on other people's goodwill and financial help to meet their children's most basic needs. Single mothers are the worst off of all.[25] All of the families we interviewed are or have been completely reliant on help in order to make ends meet. This can be help from networks and friends, support groups, religious communities or organisations.

Because the parents of paperless children lack the necessary resources, finances and access to housing, they tend to live in substandard accommodation. Many live very densely and in environments unsafe for children. This is harmful to the children in both the short and long term: the risk of suffering poor mental and physical health increases by 25 per cent when children grow up in such conditions.[26] Numerous reports from Sweden and Norway show that many of the families live in neighbourhoods with a large proportion

of people with immigrant backgrounds and rely on their own network to find a place to live. This also means that the families move frequently, and many are forced to live for shorter or longer periods with people they know from the same country background.[27]

One mother said: «***My son and I have stayed in many different places, at a reception centre and sometimes with people from the same country as me. I've also lived with my Norwegian family. My son has attended four or five different schools, and he's only 12»,*** said one mother without leave to remain.

On the registration forms from the health centre in 2018, only two of the 25 registrants with children said they lived in a reception centre, eight lived in their own flat (of whom five had been in Norway for more than ten years), and 15 said they were staying with friends or family.[28] Of the families we interviewed, only a few lived in reception centres, but around a third had continued to stay in a reception centre even after being given a deportation decision or date – most of them stayed with family and friends.

Parents say their children do not want to bring friends home because they are embarrassed to be living the way they do or because there is simply no space to receive visitors.

One mother spoke about her daughter who had a friend living nearby: «***They always play outside, they never enter the reception centre. She wants a home, like everybody else, we've never had a home.***»

A social worker affiliated to one of the health centres said: «***Many of them live incredibly cramped, some I've been in touch with would live two families, eight people in all, to a one-bedroom flat.***»

Difficulties in finding housing can also be an issue for families where one of the breadwinners has leave to remain. Many say it is difficult to find a place to live because they are not Norwegian.

«***It's hard to find something ... we live in a cramped basement flat ... we just have to take what we can get, many people don't want to rent to us because I look the way I do»,*** says one mother and points to her skin.

Another says: «***We just have to take what we're offered, many people don't want to rent to foreigners, and many demand ID from both (parents), which I don't have.***»

Paperless parents have many concerns when it comes to housing. Many of them are at risk of being deported and are afraid to be visible. This makes many of them think it is better to live in a big city.

Many of them also point out that building a network over time is the key to all sorts of help.

One parent points out: «***Where I lived before, I knew many people, it was a small place. I got to know people in the congregation, but here in Oslo people aren't friendly, there are so many people, the whole world is in Oslo.***»

3.2 Barriers and lack of access to healthcare

Paperless children are at greater risk of and more exposed to health problems than other children due to living conditions such as poor housing and limited access to various health and care services.[29] The families and health workers participating in the project find that

pregnant women and children have limited access to healthcare, both in the primary and specialist health services.

Paperless women attending the health centres for paperless migrants describe how the centres serve as an entry point to the health service.

> ***«I didn't know what to do when I became pregnant, someone I knew helped me find the health centre online. The health centre helped me so I could go to check-ups and find a place to give birth»,*** says one mother.

Many Norwegian and international studies show that pregnant paperless migrants receive inadequate support. They start antenatal care later and attend fewer appointments, and children born to paperless mothers are at higher risk of premature birth and emergency caesareans.[30] Midwives working as volunteers at the health centres speak of women who are anxious about accessing public services because they are afraid to disclose their address. They do not know about the confidentiality rules, and they do not trust the authorities. The health centres also say they are often contacted by other health institutions because they are not familiar with the rights of pregnant paperless migrants. Norwegian studies of how paperless pregnant women navigate the health service confirm that there is a need to raise awareness of their rights both amongst the women themselves and in the health service.[31]

Access to antenatal care is severely restricted by the paperless migrants' lack of knowledge about their rights and their fear of seeking medical care. They are also afraid of being charged or receiving bills they are unable to pay. Paperless pregnant women are usually not in a position to pay, but the mothers and the health centres have both found that they are being charged for antenatal care by the specialist health service and risk receiving big bills afterwards. It is interesting to note that health trusts across the country have varying practices in this respect, and women who are pregnant and giving birth are treated inconsistently depending on where in the country they live.

Paperless children are at greater risk of and more exposed to health problems than other children.

The families interviewed by the project describe very different experiences with the Norwegian health service. Most of them have had experiences showing that it is difficult for them to get healthcare for their children. Some of the children have received the help they need and are entitled to, while other parents say they are afraid to seek healthcare for themselves or their children, leaving their children without help. Some are scared because they think the clinic might report them to the authorities. Others say they are very anxious to live near a hospital so that they can access healthcare for themselves and their children. This is to make up for not being entitled to a GP or antenatal support while pregnant. One mother said:

> ***«We need to live close to a walk-in clinic since the children are not entitled to a GP. I received good help here when I was last pregnant, they know me, so it's important to live here now that I'm pregnant again.»***

There are GPs who choose to provide healthcare to paperless migrants. The existence of these doctors spreads through the grapevine, but distance and cost are barriers to contacting them. A few parents have had GPs refusing to help them once they understood that they did not have leave to remain:

> ***«My husband's doctor has been kind and offered a consultation. But then he found out that I was paperless and didn't want our child on his list either, even though she has a Norwegian father and a national ID number ... He turned around and said he had no more places, but we could see online that he had available capacity»,*** one parent explained.

Even though people who cannot afford it should not pay for healthcare, the paperless families and health centres have found that parents are sometimes charged for treatment of their paperless children. One mother said she had visited the walk-in clinic several times with her children when they did not have leave to remain:

> ***«We were treated like tourists ... I was asked to pay and got a bill for NOK 24,000 which then became NOK 32,000 as well as a bill for several thousand for examining my five-year-old. There have been many times that I didn't seek help because I was afraid of those bills.»***

Attitudes amongst health workers can also be a barrier. Some have had health workers turn them away from reception.

> ***«At the clinic I was told to go back to where I came from together with my child»,*** one mother said.

In an interview a volunteer midwife at one of the health centres also described attitudes as a problem:

> ***«Sadly, I know of several [staff in children's clinics] who don't want to treat paperless migrants. They often live in areas with many migrants, and I've heard colleagues say they are dealing with enough migrants as it is and don't need paperless patients as well.»***

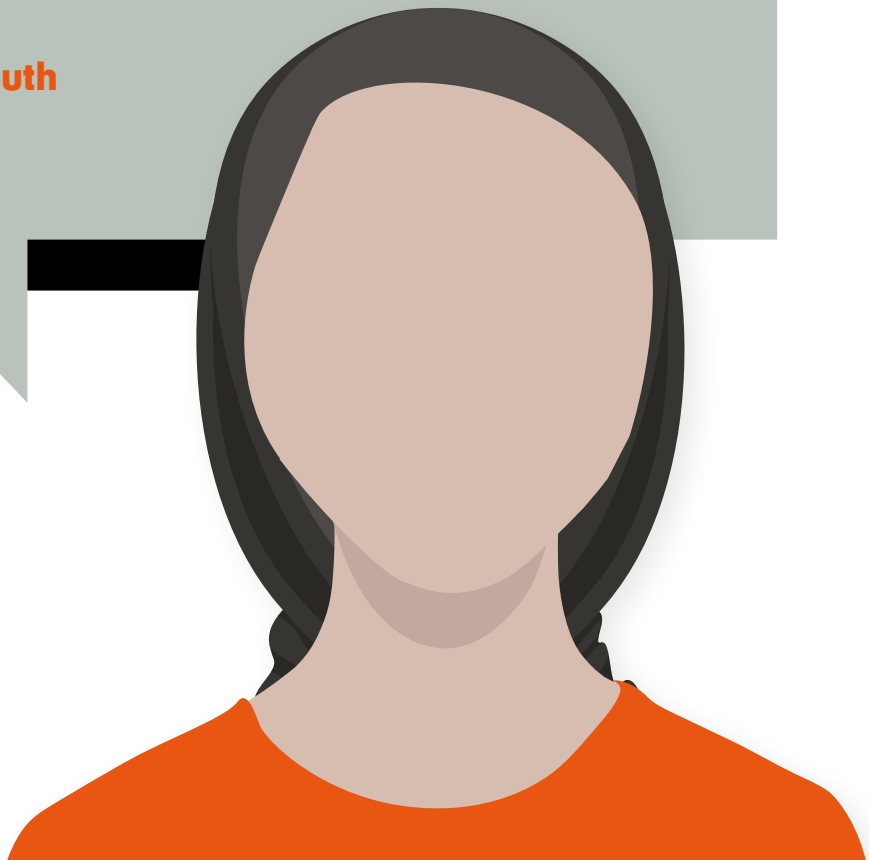
In families where one parent has leave to remain we are also seeing access to healthcare being restricted due to the parents' legal status even if the children have full rights and leave to remain. Many of these parents have been turned away when attending a walk-in clinic with their children because they are unable to identify themselves and prove that they are the children's father or mother.

> One father recounts: ***«My daughter was really ill, she was around 2–3 and couldn't explain, she just lay on the floor screaming. We spent hours at the walk-in clinic, but they refused to treat her because I didn't have an ID card. My wife was at work, so we couldn't reach her on the phone. They said they would call the police if I didn't leave ... Just call them, I said, I'm going nowhere until you examine my daughter. In the end I got a Norwegian man I know to come down and confirm that I'm her dad ... Afterwards, when I was picking up medicines at the pharmacy next door, it was exactly the same thing, because I didn't have an ID card.»***

The project findings show how both paperless children and resident children of paperless migrants have very limited access to healthcare, even though they have some rights. The absence of the right to a GP is a barrier to accessing the specialist health service. Limited knowledge about the children's rights amongst the families and the authorities is another obstacle. The parents

«The right to an upper secondary education. That is the most important thing»

Paperless youth



are also afraid of being reported to the authorities and of receiving bills they cannot pay. Attitudes amongst health workers can be another explanation for why children are not receiving the healthcare they need.

One good example of how to ensure equitable and necessary help is found in Trondheim. The refugee health team at the local authority has organised the healthcare system so that the target group can access services in the same way as everyone else. The arrangement is working well and helps provide paperless children with genuine access to services while upholding their rights to a much greater degree than other places in the country. Members of the team stress the importance of paperless migrants being defined as part of the target group as it makes it possible to offer them equitable healthcare.

3.3 Mental health – a challenge

Most of the children and young people we spoke to struggle with their mental health. The children themselves, their parents and professionals working with the families all point to how the family situation affects the children's health.

It is also difficult to be a good carer when life is this uncertain. The children and parents in all of the families we interviewed spoke of how the parents are both tired and upset. The parents are worried and frightened about what the future may bring, and in many of the families one of the parents has been the victim of violence and abuse during their flight or in close relationships. Many of the parents struggle mentally and are facing a number of practical day-to-day challenges. The families often live in isolation, and the parents say they find it difficult to parent.

> «***It obviously affects your mental health and ability to care for them when you don't know anything about the future, don't receive the help you need, always worry about money, and don't know where you'll be tomorrow»,*** said one psychologist affiliated to one of the health centres.

Many of the specialists say the system is wearing these parents down because they do not receive the help they need.

> «***These children have got off to a bad start in life»,*** concludes a volunteer psychiatrist at one of the health centres.

Many of the parents in the families we interviewed suffer from traumas and other mental health issues and are supported by psychologists and health workers at the health centres. Most of the parents we interviewed described spells of depression, struggling to cope or serious mental illness. Many of them have felt suicidal, and almost half of the mothers have been admitted for mental health treatment. Mental health issues manifest themselves in different ways: parents who say they forget things because their «head is full», parents who do not manage to go to the shops because they feel lethargic or sad. This impacts the children and affects the relationship with their parents.

Parents also describe periods of feeling mentally unwell and how their children respond to that.

> One mother said: «***My daughter can see it. She says: 'I know you're not happy, mum, I know that you cry a lot when you talk to people'.***»

> One of the mothers described it as if her son «became a baby again» when he was around 4–5: «***We were staying in***

a reception centre and had been rejected. I was very tired at that time and often depressed. He became scared of everything, he didn't want to use the toilets in the centre because they were dirty and disgusting. He started wetting himself ... and ... well, you know. He was like a little baby, I didn't know what to do.»

The parents, teenagers and young adults interviewed by the project talked about mental health and issues such as nightmares, anxiety, stress, depression and hopelessness. One of the young adults said he had spent one year longer completing upper secondary school because his home life was so difficult. He was unable to sit the exams in his final year because of their residency court case and had to retake a year.

One young adult talks about her teenage years as paperless: «***I promise you ... for the parents the most important thing is the financial situation. They're thinking about it all the time. But for us ... it's the mental bit ... all those thoughts, where am I tomorrow, how will my life turn out? There have been times when I haven't slept or eaten and I've been very depressed. I used to see a psychologist towards the end of lower secondary. I was two different people, really. At home I was Lisa, who thought about residency status and family and finances, and then I was Maja away from home. I decided that all those difficult thoughts I had at home would not come with me when I left the house ... I'll be honest with you, I've thought about suicide ... but I'm not like that, I won't give up.»***

Another mother described how her teenage child would not want to go on class trips or sleepovers with friends because of nightmares and severe mental health issues: «***I know a doctor elsewhere in the country from when we used to live there who wrote a prescription for something that helped. The doctor wrote the prescription for my husband, since neither I or my child have leave to remain. It helped. I'm telling you this so that you can understand what it's like when your child doesn't have a GP – imagine if we could've seen a GP when the child was much younger instead of her sleeping badly and being so poorly.»***

Professionals working with children of paperless migrants describe children who suffer, who are anxious and stop sleeping and eating, and who sometimes withdraw from their struggling parents. Several reports describe paperless children suffering chronic stress, which can increase the risk of different conditions such as anxiety and depression.[32] The authors of the research article «Parenting while undocumented» conclude that children of paperless migrants experience increased stress, anxiety and a fear of being separated from their parents. Symptoms of trauma have also been detected in children who have had their parents taken away or arrested by the authorities. Paperless parents are particularly vulnerable to mental health conditions which can impact their parenting skills.[33]

With the exception of the services provided by the health centres for paperless migrants and the refugee health programme in Trondheim, there are no talking therapies aimed specifically at paperless children and their families. There are a few schemes offering family support and easily accessible counselling provided by organisations, all depending on where in the country the paperless migrants live. Many of the families on the project are familiar with and have used these services, but others did not know about them or live too far away. In terms of accessing mental health services, another

obstacle is that the children are reluctant to talk about their situation with the adults they meet, such as teachers and the school health service. Some of the young adults and teenagers have been offered to see a psychologist, but have had to rely on help from others to be able to do so.

Poor mental health amongst both children and parents has a severe impact on their lives. Parents, young adults and professionals we interviewed all say that children and young people have a need to talk to someone about the situation they find themselves in. Many of the children are witnessing and experiencing difficult and traumatic events but do not receive the help that they need. One of the young adults described how the only people they can talk to are often school or child protection staff, and they struggle to open up to them because they do not know whether they can trust them. Health workers and others working with paperless children and young people are especially concerned about their lack of access to easily accessible counselling and mental health treatment.

3.4 Limited access to kindergarten and inconsistent school attendance

Paperless children do not have a statutory right to attend kindergarten, but in practice we have seen many children still being given a kindergarten place. Amongst the families we interviewed, some children have periodically attended kindergarten, while others have not been to kindergarten at all. Some paperless families make use of the open kindergarten scheme, which exists in the major cities. A fear of moving about in public and a lack of money are both barriers that make it difficult for many families to access such services. Many of the parents have not heard about open kindergartens. None of the open kindergartens we spoke to confirmed having dealt with paperless migrants, although that could also be down to the families not telling anyone about their residency status.

When paperless children are given a kindergarten place, a lack of money still continues to be a challenge.

> A mother describes the period when they did not have leave to remain: «***I switched kindergartens several times when we lost our leave to remain. I spoke to the kindergarten head, who said I could wait to pay, they were kind, let me keep the place for a few months without paying, but then she couldn't stay in kindergarten unless I paid.***»

The health centres have found that many of the families, including those where one of the parents has leave to remain and the children are entitled to a kindergarten place, need help with registering their children in the national population register in order to apply for a kindergarten place. One of the mothers explained that she did not dare to visit the population register office to register her child because it was close to the offices of the police immigration service. Another mother said she did not dare to provide her child's address because she was scared that the authorities would come and take her away.

The parents rely on the help of others to obtain a kindergarten place. The health centres for paperless migrants and the refugee health team in Trondheim have on several occasions assisted families with obtaining municipal kindergarten places for paperless children by arguing that it is in the best interests of the child. The refugee health team believes the main reason their argument is accepted by the local authority is that the team is itself part of the public services and that as a multidisciplinary team it holds greater sway than if it had

represented an individual health and care service or organisation.

Resident children of paperless migrants are entitled to a kindergarten place, while children of two paperless parents do not. The lack of knowledge about services and rights and the fear of registering the children and risk being deported explain why parents are reluctant to accept even if the children are entitled to a place. We are also seeing that many of them suffer financial hardship but do not know that they may be entitled to financial support.

A lack of access to kindergarten or other childcare has major consequences for the children. Children in vulnerable situations need stabilising factors in their lives, something which was highlighted by several mental health experts we interviewed. Kindergarten and interaction with other children are important to a child's development, and children who miss out on this are less prepared to start school. The literature on paperless children in early childhood describes numerous undesirable and potentially harmful consequences of families not being entitled to or not attending kindergarten. These families generally experience an accumulation of challenges around living conditions. This means that many of the children are growing up in circumstances that are causing chronic stress. Kindergarten can serve as a balancing factor in a chaotic situation and counteract the effect of a difficult home life.[34]

All of the children in the families we interviewed go to or have gone to school. The young adults who grew up paperless have completed primary and secondary school. School plays an important role in feeling a sense of belonging, stability and predictability for the children. However, we also see how unpredictable personal circumstances with frequent relocations and unsettled home lives can make their schooling unstable.

Paperless children do not have a statutory right to attend kindergarten.

Many of the parents described how their children rush home from school out of fear that mum or dad may have gone and how they are unable to function socially at school as a result of the family's situation:

> «***Children talk to each other ... our children have seen people being taken away by the police in the reception centres we used to live in. They are scared that they will come for me as well and that I'll be gone when they come home from school»,*** said one paperless father.

Many of the parents as well as the children themselves say it is sometimes difficult or impossible for the children to concentrate and keep up at school. The children can experience strong reactions to their family's situation:

> «***One time when I'd been turned down for permanent residency, my son was very angry at school the next day. He destroyed everything, tore paper to pieces and things like that»,*** said one paperless dad.

The children often change schools many times during their compulsory education, and that can be difficult.

One parent speaks of the time when they were paperless and their daughter was in primary school: «***When we were moving to yet another reception centre my daughter said she couldn't cope with moving and changing school. She often sleeps badly, has nightmares and finds it difficult to keep up at school. She is slow to make friends because she knows she might lose them again.***»

One young person said he continued living with his father for a while when they lost their leave to remain even though things at home were not good just so that he did not have to change schools again.

The experiences of the families and those working to support them show that it is difficult to ensure that paperless children are given the schooling and support they need and are entitled to because they move frequently and because school staff and friends do not always know that the children or their parents do not have leave to remain:

«***My children didn't want the others at school to know we didn't have leave to remain and were different»,*** said one mother about the years without residency.

The children and young people explained that they often had one or two close friends who know about their situation but that they generally did not speak to people about it. One young girl felt unable to talk about the situation with her closest friends and teachers.

«I didn't tell my friends or teachers that we no longer had leave to remain ... when I did tell them towards the end of lower secondary they were shocked, I'd only told them that our application was being processed.»

Although changing school is difficult for the children, it remains their most important social arena. As well as learning and socialising, they also find security in the adults. One young adult describes how important their form tutor was when they were a paperless teenager.

«My teacher in lower secondary was wonderful, I would often fall asleep in her lap when I was exhausted, she really cared about me.»

One young person who lived in a different European country for a while talked about how good it was to return here at the end of primary school.

«I didn't speak the language in the country we were staying in, so I was bullied and had no friends. It was nice to come home, everyone in class remembered me even though I'd been away for several years, and all my friends were there and the teacher was soooo happy to see me.»

Although paperless children go to school, there are many factors that impact the quality of their learning. Many of them have not attended kindergarten and are less prepared than other children when starting school. Frequent relocation, worries, uncertainty around their home life and poor mental health are other barriers to learning. One obstacle to receiving the right support and adapted tuition in school is that the families do not always tell the school about their situation. Financial hardship and a fear of moving around mean that the children and their families are less able to participate in school events and school trips. These obstacles exist even in families where the children have leave to remain.

Paperless children above school age

«All the others go away (on vacation) and do things... we can't»

Paperless youth

do not have a statutory right to an upper secondary education, but we have seen many of them still being given a study place because someone in their network is able to arrange it. The young adults we interviewed had attended upper secondary and are anxious to stress how important that opportunity was to them.

As one of them said: ***«We need to be given the right to an upper secondary education. That is the most important thing for a young person.»***

Knowing that you may not be able to hold on to your place is a major obstacle to the young people managing to focus on their studies, developing and living as normal a teenage life as possible. Their experience of upper secondary is often that they are studying on borrowed time and that it is difficult to stay motivated.

One young person described it thus: ***«It's like living with future X ... You don't know what is going to happen, you can't plan anything. You lose your motivation for everything. Sometimes I wondered what's the point of upper secondary or higher education, I don't know if I'll still be here in a few months ... But I never give up, I decided that education would be my weapon.»***

The family's situation affects both learning opportunities and the social aspects of upper secondary.

One young paperless boy said: ***«I always felt different, the other boys talked about passing their driving test, but I wasn't allowed to. Coping with school was difficult, I had to work illegally for crap pay to help out at home. I almost never had money and worried about the future. The fact I didn't turn to crime is ... the opportunity was right there in front of me all the time, but I chose school.»***

The administrative process of getting an upper secondary place is challenging when you are paperless and unable to apply electronically or you do not have identification documents. The families are reliant on help. Some of the people we interviewed did not know that they were not entitled to an upper secondary education or financial support for education until they lost their leave to remain:

«I already had a place ... maybe that's why I was allowed to keep it when we lost our leave to remain ... but what I remember the most was that I suddenly lost my study grant. I was in shock. It's only a few thousand a month, but that's a lot of money when you have nothing», said one young adult.

Findings from the project suggest that school is the single most important social arena for children outside the home, even though changing schools is difficult. School can be a refuge where they can just be children and have a social life. School is particularly important when they reach the upper secondary stage. These young people take on a great deal of responsibility at home, and as well as securing their future, school has a normalising and stabilising impact. And irrespective of whether the families will remain in Norway, it adds to the young people's quality of life that they are offered schooling right now. We also see how important education is in reducing the risk of being exploited in the labour market and being forced into the irregular labour market in the longer term.

3.5 Exclusion and lack of participation in play and social life

Children of paperless migrants have very limited opportunities to participate in leisure activities, and holidays or ordinary social family activities are difficult or even impossible for many. The families rarely go on holidays, and the children are less likely to participate in leisure activities and social events organised by sports clubs and local groups.

Just as in certain other areas, these families face the same challenges as other poor young families when it comes to participating in organised activities: a lack of money. However, children of paperless migrants also face a barrier that other children do not: because of their legal status and lack of identification documents, both the children and their parents are prevented from participating in certain activities or going on holiday.

A conversation between a mother and son went like this: «***C and his mother are talking about what they will be doing in the summer, and C says he is going to a football cup in Sweden after the holidays. 'That's not for certain,' his mum says, 'we don't know if you'll have the papers to do that'.***»

Children, young people and their parents describe feeling different and excluded during holidays:

«***It's a bit boring in the summer. All the others go away and do things, we can't, mum and I don't have those documents. Last summer I practised football by myself when the others were away. It's better during the autumn break, when not everyone goes away***», said one paperless teenager.

The families find day-to-day life difficult to cope with. They talk about their children wondering why mum or dad can never join them for activities on weekends and during holidays; children wondering why their parents cannot accompany them to sports events elsewhere in the country; children wondering why they cannot do the things other families do.

«***It's difficult ... We celebrate Christmas, we do it for the children, they want to be like everyone else ... they look forward to it, and they have a long wish list. They get presents from some people we know, but we don't have family here, and it's not the same as their friends' Christmas***», says one paperless father.

Leisure activities are often expensive and time-consuming. Many of the children in the families we spoke to still participate in such activities, and again we are seeing friends or networks making an effort to organise it and make it possible. They mostly receive financial support from child protection or help from friends. Although equipment can be borrowed through a range of different schemes, the families are often unaware of this option or the facilities are geographically inaccessible. Transport to and from activities can also be a challenge.

Some schemes are only available in certain parts of the country, and it seems to be random factors that determine whether the families know of their existence in their local community. In the families where one of the parents do not have leave to remain, the person who does have leave to remain will go on holiday alone with the children if the family can afford it.

One paperless father says: «***My wife and children are going on holiday with the Red Cross this summer,***

but I can't join them. It's not easy for the children to understand that I can never travel anywhere, but they are getting used to it.»

The project has found that children of paperless migrants have limited access to organised leisure activities, including after-school clubs / AKS[36] and other schemes run by the authorities or organisations. The main barriers are the parents' finances and inability to travel. Many parents are anxious about travelling and are unable to go on holiday either in Norway or abroad. Staff and volunteers at the health centres and others who are in contact with the families have found that it is very difficult to help the families because there are so few programmes available to them.

3.6 Need for help and reliance on networks

Paperless parents do not have the same opportunity to participate in society as others, which in itself restricts their ability to lead normal lives and form networks. At the same time, having networks is very important in their marginalised situation. All the families we interviewed where the entire family do not have or have not had leave to remain have at times been entirely reliant on help from their personal network in order to survive. As well as supporting the families in navigating the world, networks also provide basic things such as housing, food, clothing, equipment for the children, money for activities for the children, passing on casual work, medication and transport to activities.

The families themselves and health workers at the health centres both speak of how difficult it is for the families to create and maintain networks, partly because they move frequently and because they are ashamed of the situation they find themselves in. Many families say they find it difficult to use their network because they feel they are a burden and «use it up».

One single mother who has been living without leave to remain for more than ten years says: ***«I know people who can ... who help me, but ... It's embarrassing, isn't it, borrowing money, I thought ... they also thought I'd get leave to remain and pay it back when I could start working.»***

One person says it is difficult to meet other people, because everyone asks what they do for a living.

One father without leave to remain said: ***«For a while I worked as a volunteer for an organisation ... It wasn't for me, it was a bit ... you know, difficult. People always ask what you do the rest of the time, for work and things ... it doesn't feel great.»***

The ethnic networks are often fairly transparent, and some parents have found themselves excluded from them if people they know learn that they do not have the legal right to stay.

As one of the parents put it: ***«I spoke to the media a few years ago ... big mistake ... many people in my community no longer wanted anything to do with me.»***

The family's network is thus vital to how they cope. Yet a network can only do so much, and that feeling of «using up» the goodwill of the people around them limits how much help the families are willing to ask for. Many of the families on the project have themselves sought help from both child protection and the Norwegian labour and welfare administration while they were paperless in order to survive

and look after their children. More than half of the families participating in the project say they have been in contact with child protection. Every participant who is or has been a single parent/carer has been in touch with child protection and has had some form of child protection measures put in place. The families who have needed help from child protection have received such help, but the road to getting it has often been long and precarious. Some had to ask for help multiple times before they received it. Paperless families who have received help from child protection did so because of the child's best interests. Those who did receive support have been reliant on their network and school and health workers in order to obtain help. The parents are worried about seeking help because they fear that child protection could take their children away. The kind of help the families received, and how they view this help, depends on the knowledge, expertise and capacity of the different child protection offices.

The families themselves, the health centres and professionals all find that it is very difficult to obtain help from the labour and welfare administration for paperless children and their families.

One single mother speaks of the years living without leave to remain:
«I got into big trouble when I lost my leave to remain ... we lost all our rights: no benefits, no doctor, no job ... We got nothing from the labour and welfare administration, I went there several times, look at me, I'm a single mum, you have to help me ... I went there many times during those years.»

A volunteer at one of the health centres spoke about a process with the labour and welfare administration to find suitable housing for a mother and daughter:

Many of the families have themselves sought help from both child protection and the welfare administration.

«The daughter had leave to remain, so the administration wanted to put her in a bedsit by herself, she was 15–16. It took a long time to convince them to find housing where she and her mother could live together since the mother didn't have the right to stay.»

Professionals and the families themselves have found that the labour and welfare administration will not consider paperless family members not covered by national insurance – not when interviewing the family about their lives and needs, nor when calculating financial support or child benefit. None of the families we have interviewed received emergency financial support from the labour and welfare administration when they could not provide for themselves, even though they have children to care for.

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Norwegian Child Welfare Act, it is the government's duty to help ensure that the interests and rights of all children are upheld and to protect children if the parents are unable to look after them. Findings from the project suggest that the government is failing to adequately protect these children's right to care and protection.

3.7 Concerns over residency and the family's situation

Paperless children worry about things in life that other children do not have to think about. Some of the children in the families we have interviewed have written to the king and the prime minister wondering why «Norway does not want them», or why mum or dad have not been given leave to remain. A psychiatrist affiliated to one of the health centres spoke about a boy who stayed up at night googling to try to find «kind countries where mum can stay». From they are very young, many of the children know that something is different about their family compared with other families.

> One paperless young person says: ***«I didn't think about it when I was little ... or I didn't know ... but then, when we had to go to a different country, my mother had to tell me everything ... That made me very sad. And angry ... I kept asking why we couldn't stay in Norway ... My parents just said: we're waiting, maybe tomorrow, every day. I got a bit angry because I thought they weren't doing much to get those documents.»***

> Another young person remembers when she was about eight years old: ***«The first time I remember ... it was when I overheard my mum and brother talking about residency in the living room after I'd gone to bed. My brother said we'd get residency, and then I thought things will be fine, insh'allah, we'll get to stay.»***

The parents we have interviewed say their children often ask about gaining residency.

> One father of three says: ***«They ask and they ask, every single day, why don't you have leave to remain, dad? ... I've said that when they turn 18 I will explain everything to them, but not now, they're too young, they won't understand.»***

The children often worry that they or one of their parents could be sent out of the country:

> ***«When my son won family reunion with dad and not me, he just got angry. 'What good is residency for me when you don't have it, mum?' I said I might get it soon, he kept asking every single day: 'Today, mum, have you got it today?' I kept asking why I didn't get it when others did ... We lived in reception centres during that period»,*** explained a paperless mother.

Parents use different strategies to talk with their children and others around them about their situation. The strategies depend on factors such as how old the children are and whether the parents are able to shield them.

> One young adult talked about his time as paperless in his late teens: ***«Mum and I had to work so we could put food on the table for the family. We didn't get any help from the labour and welfare administration or anything. And the future ... It's like this: all windows are shut ... And if you manage to open one window and jump out, what happens with the train you're jumping from, your family, how would they cope? As the oldest brother, it's my responsibility when my father is not here.»***

As described above, the children often do not want others to know about their family's situation, something which can be a dilemma both for the family and for their supporters. The children and young people need support and someone to talk to while simultaneously not wanting other people to know.

«What good is residency for me when you don't have it, mum?»

Paperless youth

«***Many of these children need someone to talk to about their lives – that's what they need the most. One family I worked with ... That child really could've done with talking to a psychologist or the school health service, but she didn't want anyone at school to know, she refused. Her parents let her decide, so it never happened.***» (Interview with social worker affiliated to the organisation «Mennesker i Limbo».)

Findings from the project show that uncertainty and worries about the future affect the children's lives from they are very young. Their family's legal status impacts all aspects of the children's lives, so it is not possible for the parents to shield the children from the uncertainty and other consequences of being paperless. Many of the children and young people need someone to talk to in order to get help to understand and deal with the situation but are often not able to because there are no services available or because they do not want people around them to find out about their predicament.

3.8 On unaccompanied paperless minors under the radar

We know little about unaccompanied minors who disappear from reception centres or about minors «drifting» through Europe who have not applied for residency in Norway. Nor has the project been able to contact any of these children. In our interviews with the Uteseksjonen and the child protection emergency line in Oslo we learnt that for a number of years they have been dealing with young boys originally from Syria, Afghanistan and North Africa who are living without settled status in Norway and who are in a highly vulnerable situation.

Building trust and relationships with these young boys takes time.

One RVTS employee, formerly of the Uteseksjonen in Oslo, says: ***«I think it'll be difficult for the project to make contact with these boys. When I was working for the Uteseksjonen we only had a small window if we ran into them in the street ... It was very difficult to make appointments and gain their trust. If we were able to build trust, we usually had to meet them away from the office for appointments.»***

Public agencies working with this group find that the children often become lost in the system if they try to get help for them.

One employee of an outreach service says: ***«If we contact the reception centre they claim to be living in or have lived in, we are often told that staying there is voluntary and that there is nothing they can do. If we contact child protection where we meet them, we are told that it's not child protection's responsibility and that we need to contact their reception centre. If we contact the reception centre, they say it's voluntary ... In the reception centres they are treated as adults even though they are children.»***

At an RVTS workshop in 2022 the Uteseksjonen in Oslo summed up the challenges they see in this group: they are unable to go to school or work legally, they have no family in Norway, they often have severe mental health issues and they are likely to be using drugs. They are highly vulnerable to exploitation due to exclusion, housing issues, drug use and debts to criminal networks. They are in acute need of money and a place to live.[37] In interviews with the few agencies working with this group, there

is general concern over these young people who are extremely vulnerable to being exploited or subjected to human trafficking. Many of them support themselves by selling or exchanging sexual services, while others spend shorter or longer periods living with adult males or females in return for sexual services.

Those who have had dealings with this group point out that there is generally a high threshold for them to seek healthcare, both because they are living a tough life on the streets and because seeking help can pose a risk.

> An Uteseksjonen employee voices his concerns: «***They are used to living on the streets and only seek healthcare when they have to ... if they've broken an arm or had a knife plunged into them ... then you have to go, then they'll probably go the walk-in clinic ... They don't want to be found by the authorities or others, many of them are in a situation where they are forced to live off various forms of crime. They know or assume that if they are discovered by the authorities, they will be deported, and that's why they often don't want help.***»
>
> He continues: «***They often owe people both services and money. One young person we met after child protection had helped him find accommodation had lost his flat because the place was always full of people and the neighbours complained. The police found weapons and drugs in the flat. The guy had been forced to look after them because he owed people services and was in debt.***»

The findings made by the project show that there are few services available to this group, and they often do not know what their rights are. The Church City Mission shares the informants' concerns and believes that we need more and better knowledge about the lives of these young people and about their access to basic, necessary help. We are worried that many of them go under everybody's radar and live undignified lives – something the state of Norway should not accept. We believe that another study into this target group should be considered with the aim of actually speaking to these young people.

Paperless migrants are vulnerable to exploitation and other violations.

3.9 Vulnerability to exploitation

All migrants who are paperless or have tenuous links to Norway are vulnerable to exploitation and other violations. Some paperless mothers live in asymmetric relationships where they are dependent on the man they are living with. Many of the mothers who have a child with a man with leave to remain have described how their own lack of residency status has been used against them by the man. They might say things like: «You just do as I say, you have no rights, and if you don't do what I want, I can report you [to the authorities], and then you don't get to see the child/children» or «You have no rights to the child, you're not registered in Norway». Some women are being actively isolated by their partner.

One of the women we interviewed had overheard her partner speaking to a friend who advised him to move to a smaller place where she would be less likely to build her own network. Concerns over the lives of these women and their children are great, both amongst health centre volunteers and staff and amongst professionals in the public sector who work with paperless families.

A former employee of the labour and welfare administration and child protection said: «***If you have a family where one has leave to remain and the other not, then the labour and welfare administration will not take this into account when calculating financial support. Nor do they speak to the person without leave to remain or with their children in order to establish what the family needs. The administration should systematically identify and speak to everyone in the family in order to uncover any violence suffered by the mother and/or children so that they can be referred to the right place in the system and get the help they are entitled to.***»

A school counsellor explains: «***I'm currently working with a family where the mother doesn't have leave to remain. I'm helping her provide relevant information to the Directorate of Immigration that has not yet been disclosed so that she can appeal against her rejection. She and the child are living with the father, she has no other option. The father isn't good for them ... The child has to live in the middle of this and witness it, something which affects their sense of security and schooling.***»

The consequences for children who grow up in asymmetric relationships and who are exploited or isolated are grave. They are growing up in unsafe conditions with mothers who live very isolated lives. Few support services are able to make contact with these mothers, and it is therefore very difficult to understand the children's plight and give them help. We are very concerned that these children are living in unsafe homes without being identified.

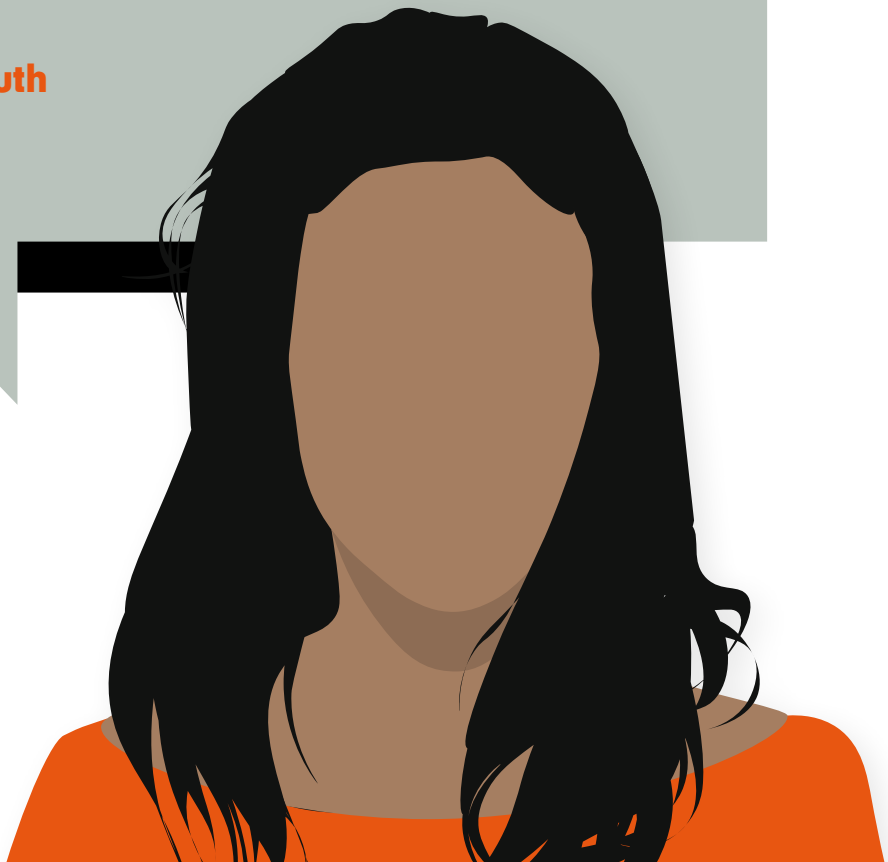
3.10 The best interests of the child when determining residency status

In the past three years 156 deportation orders have been issued, affecting 276 children of which 106 are Norwegian nationals.[38] One frequently recurring issue is whether or not the principle of the child's best interests is adequately upheld by the Directorate of Immigration when considering applications for residency and by the Immigration Appeals Board when considering appeals. The politicians have amended the Immigration Act several times in the past 25 years,[39] as experience has shown that the legislation has not sufficiently safeguarded the best interests of the child when attempting to regulate immigration.[40] Several reports and articles are critical of current practices for that very reason.[41]

Two of the families we interviewed have lost their leave to remain as a consequence of uncertainties around one parent's identity or because the mother has divorced without having lived long enough in Norway to be able to apply for residency. These families have been granted leave to remain again because it is in the best interests of the children and due to their affiliation with Norway. They have been wholly dependent on networks and organisations in order to have their case considered. This could involve NOAS, child protection, school staff, health centre staff or lawyers helping them

«The parents... the financial situation. But for us... it's the mental bit»

Paperless youth



to document and argue in favour of the best interests of the child.

The general experience of the families and their supporters is that the child's best interests are not sufficiently protected in residency cases.

> ***«They show no consideration for children ... they (the Directorate of Immigration) asked me why I hadn't left Norway when my application was rejected ... Why?! I was rejected two weeks before I was due to give birth, and I became so ill and stressed out that they decided I needed a caesarean. I had a newborn, where would I go? I couldn't travel anywhere, they thought I should take the child and leave my husband ... I could never have coped on my own in the country I come from ... Now they say I should leave the country, while my child, who has been living with me for ten years, can stay here with her dad, even though he says he is not a good enough carer. They are showing no consideration for my child, she has no rights even though she has leave to remain. She's illegally legal.»***

One young person talks about their experiences: ***«It said black on white that we shouldn't stay with dad, that it wasn't good for us, and still they (the Directorate of Immigration) wanted me to live with him and for mum to be sent out of the country.»***

Specialist psychologist and a member of the Norwegian Psychological Association's human rights committee Heidi Wittrup Djup describes how damaging it is to the children to be separated from one of their parents in cases where a carer is deported from the country.

> ***«There are numerous examples of the damage caused to the children by a dramatic relationship breakdown ... Children become ill with eating disorders, anxiety and depression. Children who have to look after both younger siblings and the remaining parent because their ability to provide care collapses because of the crisis Norway inflicts on them. Children who develop deep anger against the state because it took away the thing that was the most important to them as children ... The immigration authorities need to change the way they process cases, and they should consider introducing a statute of limitations and alternative sanctions against the parents. And last but not least, the child's best interests must be given more weight.»***[42]

Hardly any children and young people have the opportunity to have their voices heard directly by the immigration authorities when one of their parents is being deported or their case is being processed. In the few cases where children and young people have made statements or given evidence, it feels like a big burden to some of them. The children are interviewed by child protection and other agencies in relation to residency cases, and this is difficult for them even if it is a way of having their voices heard.

One paperless mother said:
You can see it in her eyes, she is trying to keep it to herself, but she was scared to talk to them (child protection) about me, afraid she'd say the wrong thing, she still has nightmares from (country X) about the police coming to take us away.»

Many of the young people described not being listened to or that they did not understand what a court case entails:

«It was ... really scary to be in that court case when we lost our leave to remain ... Nobody told me what I was doing there, why I needed to be there ... I didn't know anything ... Why am I here, I thought, I haven't done anything wrong ... It isn't me who have a fake ID, it's one of my parents. Nobody listened to me.»

The majority of the Baumann commission, which in 2022 evaluated current legislation and practices in deportation cases involving children, recommends that «the immigration authorities should use other methods than deporting parents who have breached the Immigration Act, e.g. fines». The commission also recommended that the Directorate of Immigration conduct interviews with the children:

«NOAS's interview and guidance documentation is the best developed material we have identified. The documentation places guidance for the children at the heart of further interviews with the children. NOAS has found that sufficient time and specialist skills can ensure that interviews with the children can provide useful information in the case and be conducted in a way that protects the child's best interests in the process.»[43]

Just like in numerous other areas, the families in the project appear to be dependent on help from networks and organisations when it comes to upholding the children's rights in residency cases. The findings also suggest that the immigration authorities' current practices in residency cases involving children do not sufficiently protect the children's right to a private life and family life, nor their right to be heard. The experiences of the families and their supporters indicate that curbs to regulate immigration play a key role even in cases where the children's affiliation with the realm suggests that the family or one parent should be granted residency. This is consistent with the majority of the Baumann commission:

«The review of the cases that ended in deportation leaves the impression that the child's best interests are not adequately considered as a fundamental consideration that should form the basis, be especially addressed and remain in the foreground ... Instead the state's interests appear to be granted decisive weight in many of the cases reviewed, irrespective of whether deportation would clearly infringe on the child's best interests.»[44]

3.11 Summary – main findings from the project

Paperless children and children of paperless migrants experience an accumulation of challenges around living conditions. The families are unable to look and plan ahead. Everything is uncertain. At least one of the parents is not permitted to work and is not entitled to financial benefits. Carers are often mentally broken or depressed, or even seriously mentally ill in periods. Paperless mothers and unaccompanied minors who have gone to ground are especially vulnerable to exploitation and violence in close relationships.

Financial hardship, overcrowded housing and parents struggling with their mental health are everyday experiences for the children and families we met during this project. What is unique to children of paperless migrants is that they and their parents' legal status affects every aspect of the children's lives and prevents them from participating in social arenas in society. It

is impossible to function as a normal family since many of the parents are scared to move around or are unable to travel anywhere. They are prevented from doing things together as a family. The ability of paperless parents to be good carers suffers, and they often have limited opportunity to shield and protect the children.

The main explanations as to why the children are not having their rights upheld or are not able to access services are:

- Their or their parents' legal status. As we have seen, this affects every aspect of their lives.
- That paperless children have weaker rights in areas such as kindergarten and upper secondary education and do not have access to a GP, for example.
- The parents' unease about moving around out of fear for being deported from Norway.
- A lack of knowledge about children of paperless migrants and their rights both amongst the families themselves and in public services.
- A lack of services and a lack of knowledge amongst the parents about available services.
- Financial hardship.
- Poor mental health amongst parents and children.

Even though paperless children have more rights than adults due to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and various laws and regulations, the project findings show that this does not necessarily translate into genuine access to services such as healthcare. This limits the opportunities for the children to achieve optimal health. The children have limited access to protection and care in periods, both because of their parents' situation and because it is a difficult and complicated process to obtain financial or other support from the authorities if you are paperless. The right of paperless children and children of paperless migrants to an education and learning is curtailed by limited access to kindergarten, inconsistent school attendance and the absence of the right to an upper secondary education.

The project has found that paperless children and children of paperless migrants:

- Are prevented from participating in society on the same terms as other children.
- Have limited opportunities for a family life and private life.
- Often find that they are not being heard and that the best interests of the child are not sufficiently protected in residency cases or when the families are having to deal with public agencies.
- Are not having their rights – as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Norwegian law – sufficiently protected in a number of areas.

Observations and findings from the project show that there is room for improvement, however. It is possible to provide support for the children and their families, including in the form of access to services that the children and parents are not entitled to by law, such as kindergarten and upper secondary education. In order to access rights and services, the families are wholly reliant on help from personal networks, campaigners and organisations and on the expertise of agency professionals. This report has revealed how it is often down to chance whether a child is able to access services and exercise their rights.

Although these children have the same rights as other children, at least in theory, they are less able to access those rights. We found that there is often a big difference between being entitled to a given right and actually having it fulfilled. In some areas we are also seeing the children's rights being curtailed. While other Norwegian children are entitled to a kindergarten place and upper secondary education, paperless children are cut off from these rights and from vital arenas for learning and socialising. We deem this to be a problem for the children in question, and it is a highly inappropriate and discriminatory form of exclusion of a vulnerable group of children.

CHAPTER 4

Recommendations

4.1 Recommendations – introduction

Children who are paperless or live with parents who are paperless generally have the same rights as other children, because the Convention on the Rights of the Child is universal and applies to all children. The convention stipulates that all children on Norwegian soil must be treated as equal individuals. In many areas, the children of paperless migrants are more dependent on their parents' legal status than other children, and the children are being discriminated against compared with other children in Norway.

The recommendations made by The Church City Mission are aimed at different levels. Some involve ensuring that the children and their families are able to access the services they are already entitled to but which for various reasons they are prevented from accessing in practice. Other recommendations describe what needs to be done to strengthen the children's rights in instances where Norway has chosen to curtail those rights. The recommendations aimed at paperless adults are linked to their role and responsibilities as parents and are deemed necessary and appropriate in order to meet the children's needs and fundamental rights.

4.2 The Church City Mission's recommended measures

The Church City Mission proposes the following recommendations and asks that the following measures be taken:

1. Children has individual rights

- **The Norwegian state is obliged to observe the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** when processing any case involving paperless children and children of paperless migrants.
- **The children's right to be heard and the best interests of the child principle**, cf. sections 12 and 3 of the convention, must be given particular emphasis.

2. Finances and living conditions

- **Steps must be taken swiftly to create an arrangement or solution to resolve the financial situation of paperless families with children.** Paperless parents must be able to provide for their children so that no child in Norway goes hungry, lacks clothing, is not given necessary healthcare, is unable to attend kindergarten or prevented from participating in leisure activities.

3. Health rights and access to healthcare

- **The right to a GP**. Paperless children must be given formal access to primary health services.
- **Access to necessary specialist healthcare**. Paperless children must be granted genuine access to specialist health services when they need it.
- **Personal finances must never be a barrier to necessary healthcare for children**. According to the Specialist Health Service Act, children in families who are unable to pay should not be charged for healthcare. This exemption should not have a retroactive effect if their residency status changes.
- **Easily accessible counselling**. The circumstances of paperless children seriously affect their mental health. It is important to create easily accessible preventive and supportive services with social and medical expertise.

- **Ensure healthcare during pregnancy.** The right of pregnant paperless women to antenatal care from the municipal health service (health centre or GP) must be upheld.

4. Kindergarten, school and participation

- **Equitable access to kindergarten**. Kindergarten can compensate for the vulnerable and precarious home lives of paperless children and have a positive effect on their sense of security and development. Barriers to obtaining a kindergarten place must be removed, the inability to pay must be compensated for, and challenges around applying/ registering must be mitigated.
- **The right to an upper secondary education**. Paperless children's right to go to school ceases to exist when they complete lower secondary. School is important for learning, but it also has a normalising effect in difficult personal circumstances. Education improves the young people's prospects regardless of where they end up living, and interruptions to their schooling are highly detrimental.
- **Paperless children must be able to participate in leisure activities and social arenas just like other children**. This will require financial support and local adaptation.

5. The right to be heard and the best interests of the child

- **Children's right to a family life and private life must be protected** by considering other sanctions than deporting parents who are found to have breached the Immigration Act.
- **The children's right to be heard must be ensured in cases where deportation is being considered**. The government is obliged to take children's opinions into account and ensure their best interests are upheld.
- **When children have one parent with leave to remain and one without leave to remain, the children's rights must be tied to the parent with leave to remain. This includes unborn children.**

6. Improved expertise and better information at supporting agencies

- **We must ensure that paperless migrants are aware of their rights**, especially the rights of paperless children and children of paperless migrants, and of which services are available to the children and how to access them.
- **We must ensure that public agencies such as the labour and welfare administration, child protection and the health service are familiar with the plight and rights of paperless migrants**. A skills boost is required amongst those working in supporting services so that they are better aware of the target group's needs and rights.
- **We must ensure access to parental and family counselling** with counsellors who are familiar with the lives of paperless migrants.
- **The biggest cities should consider transferring responsibility for training and guiding** agencies working with paperless children and families to relevant institutions, as we have seen how a lack of knowledge is a barrier to receiving necessary help.

7. Need for more knowledge and research

- **A study and census of paperless children and children of paperless migrants should be carried out**. As long as we do not know how many they are or where they live, we will not be able to help them or take appropriate measures.
- **Similar, a study to identify and learn about unaccompanied paperless minors should also be conducted**. Unaccompanied paperless minors are in a very vulnerable situation, and we need to know more about this group of children and young people.

Note references

1. Also referred to as irregular migrants, see e.g. «Outside the social safety net», Red Cross 2021 and «Irregular assistance – a study of Norwegian cities' encounters with irregular migrants», Fafo 2021.
2. Estimate of 3,000–5,000, NOAS 2015. An estimate from Statistics Norway commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration in 2008 indicates a figure of around 18,000. «Developing methods for determining the number of unauthorized foreigners in Norway», L.C. Zhang, 2008.
3. «Access to healthcare for undocumented adults and children in Europe; rights and reality», PICUM 2021.
4. «Sosial puls», Red Cross 2022.
5. «Life on hold: The experiences of long-staying young families with limited leave to remain», NOAS 2020. «Every year I have to make another claim. Unaccompanied minors granted limited leave to remain because they are unable to produce a passport to prove their identity», NOAS 2020.
6. Some also recruited themselves, i.e. they contacted the project manager having heard about the project from other paperless parents.
7. E.g. staff at agencies such as RVTS (regional resources centres specialising in violence, traumatic stress and suicide prevention), child protection, Uteseksjonen in Oslo, school counsellors.
8. These registration forms include questions on family relations, housing, networks, needs other than healthcare needs, other agencies they are in contact with etc.
9. «Report on children and young people» (p. 17), Stockholms Stadsmission 2014.
10. «How many people are staying illegally in Norway?», politiet.no
11. See exhaustive information about the rights of persons without leave to remain in the book «Social work with vulnerable migrants» (p. 108–118), Line Ruud Wollebæk 2022.
12. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, regjeringen.no
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14. Child Welfare Act, Lovdata.
15. Regulations on the right to health and social care of persons without permanent residency in the realm, Lovdata.
16. lovdata.no/dokument/sf/forskrift/2011-12-16-1255
17. Regulations on the right to health and social care of persons without permanent residency in the realm, Section 4. Children's right to health and social care.
18. Red Cross 2021, Wollebæk 2022 (p. 108).
19. Memorandum I-3/2017: Paying for the cost of healthcare at health institutions under the public specialist health service for persons not resident in Norway etc., regjeringen.no
20. The obligation comes into force when a child of school age has been in the country for more than 3 months.
21. Wollebæk 2022.
22. lovdata.no/pro/#document/rudi/rundskriv/rudi-2008-35/Chapter_11
23. «Irregular assistance: a study of Norwegian cities' encounters with irregular migrants», Fafo 2021.

24. See e.g. PICUM: «Navigating irregularity, the impact of growing up irregularly».
25. «Report on children and young people», Stockholms Stadmission 2014.
26. «Access to health care for undocumented adults and children in Europe; rights and reality», PICUM 2021.
27. See e.g. Fafo report from 2021.
28. It is not clear from the forms whether this refers to the registrant's own family and thus means «own home».
29. «Navigating irregularity», PICUM 2021.
30. «Maternal health care utilization and the obstetric outcomes of undocumented women in Finland», Tasa: 2021. «Use of non-governmental maternity services and pregnancy outcomes among undocumented women: a cohort study from Norway», Frode Eick m.fl. 2022.
31. See «Public health nurses' encounters with undocumented migrant mothers and children», Kvamme and Volder 2022.
32. «The impact of growing up undocumented in Europe», PICUM 2021.
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33. «Parenting while undocumented», Nayeli and Chaves Duenas 2022.
34. «Access to early childhood education and care for undocumented children», PICUM 2022.
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35. E.g., schemes such as The Church City Mission's «Skattkammeret» or the municipal BUA programme.
36. From the 2022/2023 academic year AKS is free for 20 hours a week in the first year of school but not in subsequent years.
37. From the Uteseksjonen's presentation «Utnyttelse i rusmiljøet i Oslo sentrum», RVTS workshop in 2022.
38. NOAS 2022.
39. Immigration Act Section 38, cf. Immigration Regulations Section 8-5.
40. «Church asylum families», 1996. «One-off solution for children who have lived 3 years in reception centres», 1996, 2004. «Suspension of cases involving children who have stayed longer than 3 years», 2006. «New regulations on long-staying children», 2007. «Children in flight» white paper, 2012. «Change to regulations, one-off solution for particular groups of long-staying children from countries with return agreements», 2014.
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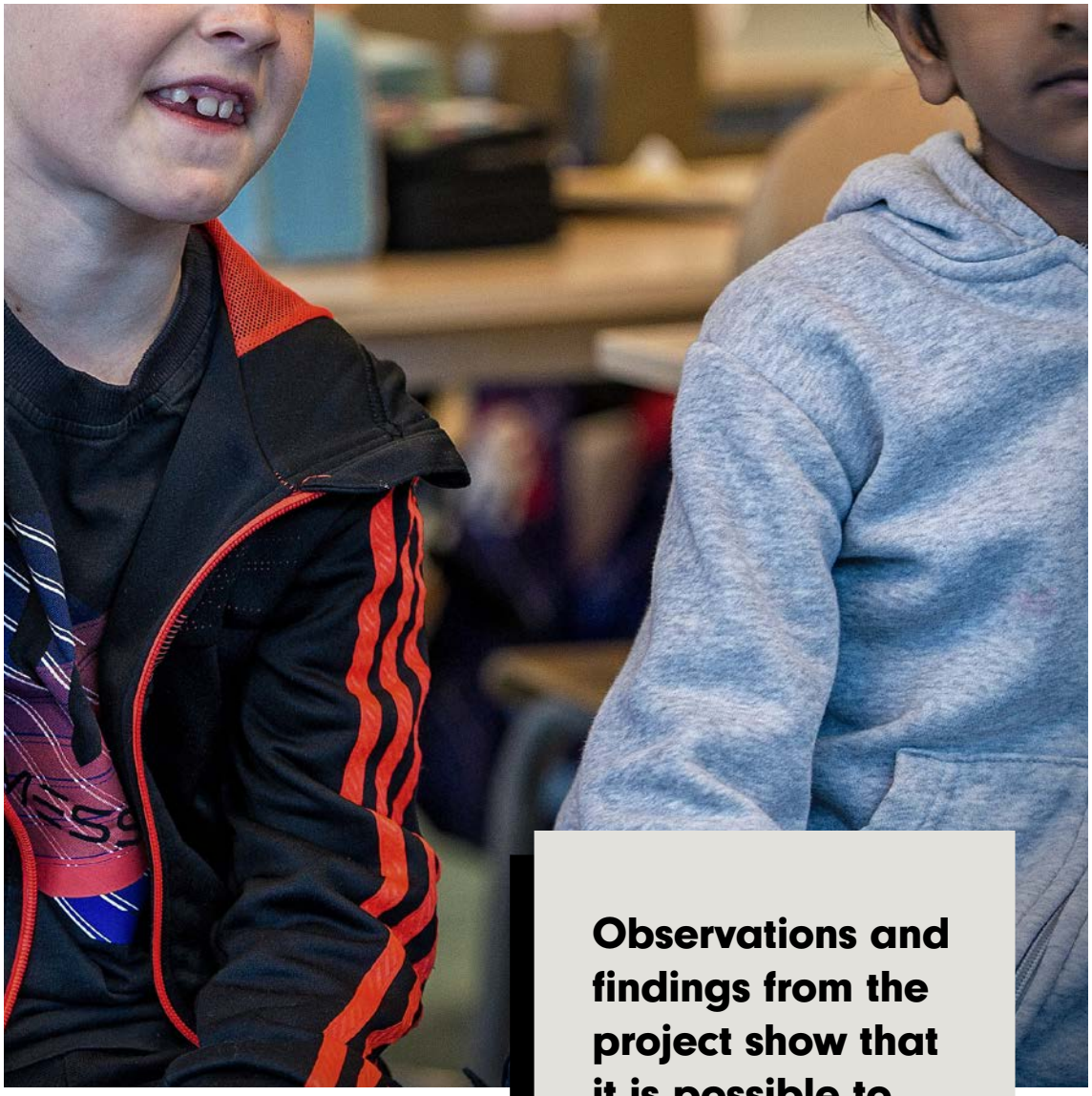

Observations and findings from the project show that it is possible to provide support for the paperless children.

Room for everyone

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