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The Bright Side of Recurrent Reorganisations – Increased Coordination, New Policy Tools and Bottom-up Agenda Setting: The Case of Recurrent Ministerial Transfers of the Integration Field in Norway

Tilda Persson¹ and Vilde Hernes²

Abstract

Over the past 20 years, the Norwegian department responsible for immigrant integration has been relocated seven times within the ministerial structure. Yet we know little about how such organisational changes impact policy development, whether *recurrent* changes produce specific effects, and the role of organisational culture in the processes. The article explores how changes in organisational structure affect three mechanisms in the political process: 1) agenda-setting, 2) policy instruments, and 3) coordination. We find that the main goals for integration have remained stable, but the ministerial affiliation and frequent shifts have influenced the use of policy instruments and interorganisational coordination. Contrary to theoretical expectations of negative effects and resistance to recurrent reorganisations, we find an organisational culture that accepts, nurtures and exploits the opportunities these changes bring about, including greater interorganisational coordination, utilisation of different sectoral toolboxes, and the possibility of putting integration on the agenda in new ministries.

Practical Relevance

- The study contradicts previous assumptions in institutional theory and public administration literature, which often focuses on resistance to change and negative consequences of (frequent) reorganisations.
- The article highlights potential benefits for wicked policy issues to “be on the move” in the ministerial structure, such as building cross-sectoral networks, the possibility of learning about and adopting new sectoral policy instruments, and the ability to put the respective policy issue on the agenda in different ministries.
- The article demonstrates how organizational culture could be an essential moderating factor for recurrent re-organisations to be constructive.

¹**Tilda Persson**, holds a master degree in Political Science from the University of Oslo. She has wide experience working in international and national public administration and bureaucracy, including the UN delegation for the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, the Norad - Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, and the Norwegian Police.

²**Corresponding Author: Vilde Hernes** , is a Research Professor at the Oslo Metropolitan University and an associate professor at the University of Oslo. Hernes holds a PhD in Political Science, and studies policy and administration, with an empirical focus on immigration and integration multi-level governance, policy development and effects.

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Introduction

The integration field touches so many ministries, so it makes sense that we are “on the move”.
(Informant 4)

Over the past 20 years, Norwegian governments have transferred ministerial responsibility for the integration field, by moving the subdepartment responsible for this policy field seven times in the ministerial structure. This Department of Integration has been organised under the ministries responsible for local government and development, labour and social inclusion, children and families, justice, public security, and education and research (Hernes, 2021). This article explores how such organisational changes affect policy development, whether frequent changes produce specific effects and the role of organisational culture in the processes.

Changes in horizontal organisation—specifically, how tasks and responsibilities are distributed at the same hierarchical level (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018)—is not only a political and administrative tool part of the governance of an field, but could also influence political processes and outcomes after its implementation (Lægreid & Rolland, 2017; Vestlund, 2015; Hernes, 2021). As the highest political and administrative level of governance, the horizontal organisation of the ministerial structure can particularly contribute to ensuring (or hindering) targeted policy development within the respective sectors and fields (Mortensen & Green-Pedersen, 2014). A large research literature has focused on various drivers for changes in ministerial structure (such as political ideologies and constellations, types of government, agenda-setting) where the ministerial structure is the dependent variable (Davis et al., 1999; White & Dunleavy, 2010; Mortensen & Green-Pedersen, 2014; Lægreid & Rolland, 2017; Hernes, 2018; Kuipers, Yesilkagit, & Carroll, 2021). However, the organizational structure may not only be studied as an outcome, but also as an independent variable affecting policy development (Hernes, 2021). Although we see a growing interest in this latter approach (Vestlund, 2015; Hegele, 2021; Durrant & Tetlow, 2019; Heppell, 2011; Kuipers, Yesilkagit, & Carroll, 2021), there is still limited knowledge about the various effects of such ministerial changes. Furthermore, previous studies have often focused on the impact of a specific change from one sector to another, whereas none have specifically analysed how horizontal changes at ministry level affect policy development in cases where changes are recurrent and frequent. This is theoretically relevant since the frequency of changes can also influence the process and actual effects of horizontal changes. Recent research indicates that recurrent and frequent organisational changes may have (most often negative) consequences on various outcomes, such as increased organisational absenteeism rates (Wynen et al., 2019), higher degree of fear of speaking up, such as sharing ideas and opinions on the execution of tasks or on the organization itself (Wynen et al., 2020a), and increased risk of political influence on agencies that were designed to operate impartially (Wynen et al., 2020b). These recent studies echo Pollitt’s (2007) call for research to adopt a more holistic view of the long-term processes and effects of reorganisations. This study answers this call by investigating the impact of recurrent reorganisations at ministry level on policymaking processes and outputs.

The relocation of the integration field in the Norwegian ministerial structure is an interesting case in this context. Integration is a classic example of a “*wicked issue*”, defined as a problem characterised by complexity and a lack of easily definable solutions, often spanning multiple administrative areas and hierarchical levels (Nesheim et al., 2019). Because integration encompasses many different policy areas (employment, education, schools, children, health, housing, immigration etc.), it may be potentially coupled with and organised under different sectors and ministries (Hernes, 2018). Horizontal changes—and often frequent changes—of the integration field in the ministerial structure is not uncommon in European countries (with the Scandinavian countries being among those countries with most frequent changes). However, the Norwegian case is particularly interesting for studying frequent changes, as a comparative analysis of the organisation of the integration field in ministerial structures in 16 European countries shows that Norway is the country that relocated the field the most times over a 20-year period (Hernes, 2021).

This article will firstly present a literature review on horizontal organisational and ministerial structure before using instrumental and institutional theory to develop hypotheses on how changes in organisational structure produced by recurrent reorganisations might affect policy

development. The study builds on document studies of policy development in the integration field from the past 10 years, supplemented by interviews with leaders and employees who have experienced multiple relocations between ministries. We find that the main goals for integration have remained stable, whereas ministerial affiliation and frequent shifts have influenced the use of policy instruments and interorganisational coordination. Contrary to existing theoretical expectations of negative effects and resistance to recurrent reorganisations, the interviews show that the affected actors have developed an organisational culture that accepts, nurtures and exploits the opportunities these changes produce. In the conclusion, we discuss the parallels between recurrent reorganisations of departments and interorganisational mobility at the individual level, and how recurrent reorganisations may be a political and administrative tool for “wicked policy issues”.

Horizontal organisation and changes in ministerial structure

The literature on horizontal organisation focuses on how organisational structure is not merely an administrative arrangement but can be a decisive factor in overarching governance dynamics (Schattschneider, 1975), as it determines which issues are prioritised and how they are handled (Hammond, 1986). Furthermore, the horizontal organisation of various policy fields contributes to defining and coupling (or decoupling) different interests and goals (White & Dunleavy, 2010; Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). Thus, the structure affects which actors have influence, which information channels are used and how different interests and goals are integrated into the decision-making process. In this way, horizontal organisation becomes a tool for influencing policy (Hammond, 1986), as it may significantly shape which interests and goals are pursued, which areas are prioritised and which issues reach the top level of the decision-making process (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018).

The ministerial structure is a classic example of horizontal organisation where different sectors and fields must be prioritised and distributed among a limited number of ministries. Governments decide which policy fields will be assigned to a dedicated ministry and/or how various fields (such as integration) will be coupled with or decoupled from other fields in line with their political objectives (Trein, 2016; Hernes, 2018). In this way, the ministerial structure becomes a political tool, and previous studies document that governments indeed use changes in ministries as a strategic tool for political decisions (Tosun, 2018; Sieberer et al., 2019; Bertels & Schulze-Gabrechten, 2020; Lægreid & Rolland, 2017). Furthermore, several studies have examined various drivers for changes in ministerial structure (such as political ideologies and constellations, types of government, agenda-setting) where the ministerial structure is the dependent variable (Davis et al., 1999; White & Dunleavy, 2010; Mortensen & Green-Pedersen, 2014; Lægreid & Rolland, 2017; Hernes, 2018; Kuipers, Yesilkagit, & Carroll, 2021).

Studies examining the impact of ministerial changes, with organisational structure as the independent variable, have been relatively limited but have increased in recent years. This includes research on horizontal organisation at both the national level and within the EU Commission. Vestlund (2015) reveals in a case study how the reorganisation of the pharmaceutical unit in the EU Commission shifted policy focus from industrial interests to public health. Hegele (2021) examines the effects of reorganisations in ministries and finds that ministries develop preferences and goals and allocate attention based on their portfolio combination. Other studies have focused on the more negative effects of such changes. Durrant and Tetlow (2019) conducted an evaluation of the economic consequences associated with reorganisations, highlighting that such changes can often result in disruptions and reduced efficiency. Heppell (2011) focuses on the political and practical consequences of ministerial changes and illustrates how reorganisation (negatively) affects long-term efficiency.

The aforementioned studies share the commonality of using ministerial structure as the independent variable to examine various effects or mechanisms (in line with the purpose of this study). Previous research either investigates the impact of a specific change or how the general portfolio composition influences policy formulation. Our contribution to the existing literature is therefore not only an addition to the growing body of research on the effects of changes in horizontal organisation in general, and ministerial structure in particular, but also a more specific examination of how frequent changes within a field affect policy development. The few studies

that specifically investigate effects of frequent organisational changes have also mainly focused on and found negative consequences. Wynen et al. (2020a) show that successive structural reforms affects employee engagement in the strategy of “defensive silence”, implying that employees withhold ideas and opinions on the execution of tasks or on the organization itself in fear of conflict or controversy. Wynen et al. (2020b) demonstrate how frequent reorganisations may affect how public employees balance different values and considerations. They find that frequent structural reforms may increase the risk of political influence on agencies that were designed to operate impartially. Lastly, Wynen et al. (2019) employ organizational absenteeism rates as an indicator for “repetitive change injury”, and find that intense reform sequences disproportionately increase organizational absenteeism rates.

Theoretical framework

We employ two organisational theoretical perspectives: the instrumental and institutional perspectives. These perspectives help understand (1) how organisations are shaped through (frequent) structural changes and how this can affect agenda-setting, the policy instruments used, and coordination in policy development, and (2) how organisational culture may function as a moderating factor in response to these structural changes over time.

An instrumental-structural perspective

The instrumental-structural perspective theorises how structure shapes behaviour in organisations and how this influences the organisation’s objectives and processes (March, 1996). Organisational structure dictates who should do what and how specific tasks should be performed, and provides clear direction on which interests, values and goals should be prioritised (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018; Schattschneider, 1975). Thus, changes in organisational structure (independent variable) may influence policy development (dependent variable) and may be used as an important design tool to enable (or hinder) the desired policy development of a democratically elected government (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018).

Policy development, however, is a broad concept and must be operationalised more clearly. We focus here on three aspects of policy development: 1) agenda-setting (main goals), 2) policy instruments, and 3) coordination. *Agenda-setting* is an essential part of the policy process, where goals are prioritised: some issues are addressed by public authorities, while others are ignored (Vabo, Klausen, & Askim, 2020; Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009). The political leadership of each ministry helps determine which issues and goals are prioritised for their political agenda (Vabo, Klausen, & Askim, 2020, p. 94). In the empirical analysis, agenda-setting is operationalised to study the main goals for the integration field under different ministries. *Policy instruments*, on the other hand, focuses on the specific measures prioritised to achieve political goals (Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009). Policy instruments are concrete tools to ensure that political objectives are realised, intended to address and solve the issues identified in the agenda-setting (Vabo, Klausen, & Askim, 2020,). Finally, Hegele (2021) and Egeberg (2012) also argue that *coordination* is an essential part of the political process. Coordination in government involves how different actors collaborate with the aim of shaping and implementing policy, where discussion, persuasion and negotiations take place to reach common decisions (Peters, 1998; Hegele, 2021). The analysis of coordination as a mechanism focuses on which actors the integration department interacts with when it comes to both formal and instructed collaboration, as well as more informal cooperation.

Using the integration field as an example, the instrumental perspective posits that when the integration field is organised under, for instance, the Ministry of Education and Research (KD), policy development will focus more on goals and instruments that emphasise education and skills building, in line with the ministry’s general expertise and sectoral responsibility. Conversely, if integration is organised under the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID), the assumption is that the focus will shift more towards goals and measures aimed at labour inclusion and employment, utilising instruments from AID’s toolkit, such as job training programmes and wage subsidies, in accordance with this ministry’s core areas. Organisation is

also assumed to affect coordination, as the integration department is more likely to collaborate with other specialised departments and agencies under the same ministry.

Theoretically, from an instrumental perspective, the frequency of changes should not change the fundamental logic that the organizational structure will affect policy development through goals, instruments and coordination. However, it may be plausible to hypothesise that transition costs—the time and resources reorganisations entail—may affect efficiency (White & Dunleavy, 2010) or have other (unintended) negative consequences, in line with earlier studies (Wynen et al., 2019 and Wynen et al., 2020a).

An institutional-cultural perspective

The institutional-cultural perspective posits that organisations are more than just structures and (formal) processes (Selznick, 1957; Vestlund, 2015) and focuses on how cultural norms and values can either facilitate or hinder the effects of structural changes. Organisational culture is central, and members of the organisation are indoctrinated into the organisational culture through active or passive socialisation (March & Olsen, 2006). Once informal norms, values and traditions are established, they can determine and potentially limit how the organisation responds to changes. Thus, this perspective underscores the importance of the organisation's cultural identity and how it relates to, responds to and manages changes and new challenges (Selznick, 1957; Krasner, 1988; Christensen, 2019).

Institutionalism as a theory, based on path dependency and established organisational cultures, argues that organisations will resist change, which can diminish or prevent the potential effects of structural changes. In this way, the cultural resistance may hinder or moderate a wanted new policy direction for a policy issue (Selznick, 1957; March & Olsen, 2006). However, the organizational culture may also dampen potential negative effects of particularly frequent organisational changes and ensure continuity. Based on the institutional perspective, our expectation is to find cultural resistance to reorganisations, and particularly to frequent changes among employees. Still, it remains an open question how the frequency of changes affects the organisational culture—and thus the effect of organisational culture as a moderating factor on structural changes during repetitive reorganisations.

Case and research design

The study analyses recurrent reorganisations by examining a case of what White and Dunleavy (2010) define as “responsibility transfers at the ministerial level”, by studying the transfer of the subdepartment (and directorate) responsible for the integration field between ministries in Norway. In practice, such a change involves two elements. First, when the government decides on a change in the ministerial structure, the political and administrative responsibility is usually immediately transferred to the new ministry. In our case, this means that the Department of Integration (INA) and the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) are transferred to a new political (minister) and administrative leadership. The directors of INA and IMDi then join the new ministry's leadership team. Second, a ministerial transfer often involves a physical relocation. In our case, IMDi has its own premises outside the ministry and has not had to change location when switching ministerial affiliation. However, INA has physically moved to the new ministry's offices, a process that often takes longer (to prepare office spaces etc.). INA's employees must also be given new email addresses and digital equipment, in addition to a significant archiving task where cases are transferred to the new system.

The study is based on document analyses of 1) propositions concerning legislative changes in the integration and immigration fields and 2) allocation letters from the responsible ministry to IMDi, to examine the relationship between changes in organisational structure and policy development. Additionally, we have conducted six interviews with employees and leaders in INA and IMDi to gain the perspectives of those affected on how organisational structure influences policy development, and how culture may function as a moderating factor.

Document studies of propositions and allocation letters

The document analysis examines policy development during the period 2010-2024 by studying relevant 1) policy propositions to parliament and 2) allocation letters from the responsible ministry to the subordinate agency for integration (see appendix 1 with the full list of analysed documents).

Propositions to the Norwegian parliament (*Stortinget*) are excellent examples of *policy output*, describing the background of proposed changes (including contextual factors) and the main goals and instruments to be prioritised. We analysed all propositions from 2010 to 2024 related to integration (linked to the Integration Act) and immigration (the Immigration Act). Propositions that only addressed administrative changes, such as corrections, automation and the processing of personal data, were excluded, leaving us with 33 propositions.

We have also analysed the annual allocation letters to IMDi during the same period. Allocation letters are a crucial part of the governance dialogue between ministries and agencies in public administration, as they define the underlying agency's main objectives, dictate coordination activities with other agencies and establish financial frameworks, performance targets and reporting requirements.

The analysis was organised into four periods during which four different ministries were responsible for integration from 2010 to 2024:

- Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (2010-2015)
- Ministry of Justice and Public Security (2016-2018)
- Ministry of Education and Research (2019-2021)
- Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (2022-2024)

Building on the operationalisation in the theoretical section, we documented (changes in) policy development by mapping the 1) policy goals, 2) instruments and 3) dictated coordination activities (the latter in the allocation letters) for each period.

Interviews with staff and leadership

While analyses of propositions and allocation letters document formal processes, interviews provide insight into informal processes and the experiences of those affected (Petintseva, Faria, and Eski, 2020). The interviews conducted in this case were also a crucial way of examining assumptions from the institutional-cultural perspective, which emphasises how organisational culture can moderate or influence the effects of structural changes.

We conducted six semi-structured interviews with current or former employees or leaders of the integration department or IMDi. The sample comprised individuals who had experienced at least one transfer between ministries, with the majority having been involved in multiple transfers. Since many of the interviewees had extensive experience also prior to 2010, the interview material is not limited to changes post-2010. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Challenges in isolating the impact of organisational structure

Hegele (2021, p. 435) describes how “the effects of bureaucratic structures on policymaking prove difficult to test empirically”. Events such as the refugee influx in 2015, the COVID-19 pandemic and the refugee flow from Ukraine after 2022 have significantly influenced the prioritisation of integration policies. Crises, party politics and the composition of governments are obvious variables that influence the prioritisation of primary goals and measures, but also challenge the attempt to isolate the effect of organisational structure. In this study, we acknowledge that these factors naturally have a significant impact on policy development. We therefore ensure that important contextual factors and changes are included in both the document analyses and explicitly addressed in the interviews. For example, we explicitly challenged the informants on what they believed to be the impact of organisational structure compared to other potential variables such as specific crises and government policies. These aspects are further examined in the analysis and discussion sections.

Empirical analysis

Stable goals, but changes in instruments

To investigate how changes in organisational structure actually affect policy development, it must first be determined whether there is a correlation between the two. As such, we must explore whether the core areas of the various responsible ministries are reflected in the main goals and policy instruments of the integration field, and if so, how.

Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2010-2015

During this period, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD) was responsible for areas such as inclusion, equality and the rights of children and minorities, and the Social Democratic Party held the ministerial post. The allocation letters to IMDi during this period identified that the main goals of integration policy remained stable. These goals included integrating newly arrived refugees into society, rapid settlement, education in Norwegian language and social studies, increased employment for refugees and immigrants, and providing information about Norwegian laws and rights.

Legislatively, BLD proposed to expand Norwegian language training, introduce mandatory final exams in Norwegian and social studies, and expand the target group for the introduction programme (Prop. 79 L (2010-2011), 1-10). Further, they proposed to grant participants in the introduction programme the right to take leave to accept offers of regular employment (Prop. 130 L (2014-2015), 3) and new requirements for applying for Norwegian citizenship (exams in Norwegian and social studies) (Prop. 144 L (2014-2015)).

Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2015-2018

In response to the high influx of asylum seekers in 2015, the department for integration was transferred to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (JD). JD is responsible for areas such as the judiciary, correctional services, police, civil protection and immigration. A dedicated ministerial position for immigration and integration was established (for the first time), and the Progress Party assumed the new role.

The main objectives outlined in the allocation letters to IMDi during this period largely mirrored previous goals, including more rapid settlement of refugees and immigrants, qualification for employment for immigrants, and high participation in work and social life.

In the context of the increased asylum influx in 2015, the ministry emphasised an accelerated and streamlined settlement process. As regards legislative amendments, the main changes during this period were a number of restrictions in the asylum and immigration field, but that were partially justified by integration considerations. These measures included imposing stricter criteria for obtaining permanent residence permits, introducing income requirements and mandating three years of work or education in Norway for family reunification for certain groups (Proposition 90 L (2015-2016)). The latter proposal was not adopted by the Storting due to opposition resistance.

Ministry of Education and Research, 2018-2020

In 2018, the integration field was transferred to the Ministry of Education and Research (KD), with a Conservative Party member assuming the role of Minister of Education and Integration in 2019. KD is responsible for areas such as primary and secondary education, higher education, adult learning and skills policy.

During their time in KD, several policy initiatives were proposed and implemented. The main goals remained largely the same as before, but with a clarification that increased participation in work and society for refugees and immigrants should occur “through measures aimed at qualification for the labour market” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019, 2020, 2021).

The majority of legislative changes proposed during the integration department’s period under KD focused on increasing qualifications through language training, education and career guidance (the latter being a general measure under the responsibility of KD). One of the major changes was a proposition for a new law entitled the “Act on Integration through Training,

Education and Work” (hereafter the Integration Act), that would replace the previous Introduction Act of 2004. An important goal of the law was that “as many as possible should achieve formal qualifications during the programme” (Proposition 89 L (2019-2020), 87). To achieve increased labour market participation among immigrants, the act emphasises improving qualification and education opportunities as key efforts. It sets out many changes, including a more differentiated introduction programme based on age and previous level of education, a focus on formal qualifications, and skills mapping and career guidance.

Other changes during this period included the requirement that asylum seekers in reception centres should start training in Norwegian language and social studies (Proposition 45 L (2017-2018)) and a more stringent requirement for oral Norwegian language skills (Proposition 98 L (2019-2020)). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government addressed the challenges faced by refugees and immigrants by extending the programme period and Norwegian language training for those whose training was hindered by lockdowns and illness, as well as increasing allocations to county authorities to strengthen career guidance for refugees (Proposition 127 S (2019-2020); Proposition 78 L (2020-2021)).

At the end of the period, KD presented proposals for amendments to the Nationality Act (increasing the residency period required to apply for citizenship) and the Integration Act (changes in the scope of Norwegian language and social studies training to focus on Norwegian values and culture) (Proposition 130 L (2020-2021)).

Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2021-2024

In 2021, the new government consisting of the Labour Party and the Centre Party transferred the field of integration to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID), which oversees a broad range of areas, including the labour market, working environment, welfare, inclusion and social welfare measures. The main objectives for integration during the period 2022-2024 were to increase the employment of immigrants, qualify newly arrived refugees, ensure rapid and effective settlement, establish a comprehensive and coordinated integration policy, and provide the public sector with access to qualified interpreters.

As a result of the full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, Norway experienced a high influx of displaced persons from Ukraine who received temporary collective protection. The ministry introduced a temporary law that made adjustments to the Integration Act for Ukrainian refugees, with the aim that “many of the changes support the goal that as many as possible of the displaced from Ukraine should quickly enter the labour market” (Proposition 107 L (2021-2022), 54). The key changes in the integration sector for Ukrainian refugees were: 1) no obligation to conduct skills mapping before settlement; 2) the right, but not the obligation, to undergo career guidance; 3) the right to an introduction programme; 4) the right to (reduced) Norwegian language training after settlement in a municipality; and 5) no right or obligation to undergo social studies training.

AID also proposed enhancing the exchange of information about refugees’ qualifications between public actors, with the aim of rapid employment of Ukrainians (Proposition 110 L (2022-2023)). In February 2024, the ministry proposed a regulatory requirement to increase the scope of work-oriented elements in the introduction programme, such as work practice (a labour-market measure involving practical work experience).

Relatively stable goals, but varying use of instruments in line with ministerial affiliation

In general, the document analysis shows that the main objectives in the field have been (surprisingly) stable across different ministerial affiliations. However, there is a clear correlation between organisational structure and the policy instruments developed, with the exception of the period under BLD, as presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Responsible ministries for the integration field and main policy developments, 2010-2024.

Responsible ministry	Period	Main policy development
Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD)	2010-2015	No clear correlation between policy development and organisational affiliation.
Ministry of Justice and Public Security (JD)	2016-2018	(Restrictive) integration policies used to decrease immigration.
Ministry of Education and Research (KD)	2018-2021	New Integration Act with an increased focus on qualification and education measures.
Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID)	2022-2024	Shift towards employment-focused integration measures.

For example, under JD, the focus was on introducing integration requirements to obtain permanent residence and citizenship as a means to limit immigration (which falls under JD's responsibility). The most evident changes, however, occurred when the integration field was under KD and later transitioned to AID. During both periods, labour market integration was a key objective (as it has been throughout the years). However, the new Integration Act (developed under KD) had a clear focus on formal education, Norwegian language skills and the introduction of skills mapping and career guidance as measures to this end, all of which are areas and measures under KD's responsibility. After the responsibility for integration was transferred to AID in 2022, the measures shifted towards work-oriented initiatives, such as work practice. AID removed the obligation for skills mapping and career guidance for Ukrainian refugees, with the explicit aim of *quickly* getting Ukrainians into employment.

In the interviews, the informants also support the conclusion that the main objectives of integration policy are minimally influenced by organisational structure. Several informants suggest that this is largely due to a broad political consensus on the fundamental goals of Norwegian integration policy. Integration, as a cross-sectoral policy area, also means that they generally address various topics in their day-to-day work, and they are rarely assigned entirely new areas when moved to a new ministry. Informant (#1) points out that even though the integration sector was transferred to AID after a period under KD, "working with welfare policy was not new to us (...) we had worked on it before, just from a slightly different perspective". This supports the notion that although the integration field is frequently transferred between ministries, it does not necessarily change the fundamental objectives.

Nevertheless, several respondents argued that the organisational structure altered the "policy focus", resulting in varying emphasis on political issues. Consequently, the informants were asked to provide specific examples that could illustrate how the department's affiliation had influenced policy development.

One informant described how a ministry's primary focus could shape the policy instruments developed, citing the design of the integration subsidy (a government grant to municipalities that resettle refugees) in 2004. The integration subsidy was formulated when the integration field was under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KDD). The subsidy was provided as unrestricted funds, allowing municipalities flexibility in their use and enabling them to tailor support to local needs. The informant considered it unlikely that the design of this subsidy would have emphasised municipal autonomy to the same extent had it been developed under another ministry. For instance, the informant assumed that the subsidy would have been earmarked and targeted towards employment-oriented measures had it been under the auspices of AID.

Based on findings from the document analysis, we asked all informants to reflect on whether, and if so how, the Integration Act, which largely focused on education, qualification and training, was influenced by the integration field's placement under KD when it was developed. Several informants agreed that there was an increased focus on skills policy during the KD period, whereas greater emphasis was placed on labour market measures when it was moved to

AID in 2022. Some informants emphasised that certain departmental transfers had a more significant impact on the development of measures than others. They particularly highlighted the transfer from JD to KD in 2018 as notable in terms of the types of policies prioritised, with a clear focus on measures aimed at formal education, qualification, skills facilitation and training under KD, all of which fall under its general remit.

When asked hypothetically whether the 2021 Integration Act might have looked different if it had been drawn up under another ministry with different areas of responsibility, several informants affirmed this, suggesting that there might have been more focus on employment-oriented measures under AID. However, informants had varying perspectives on the extent to which the transfer to KD influenced the measures in the new Integration Act. One informant pointed out that work on the Integration Act had already begun when the integration field was under JD, and that knowledge, training and education were already driving elements of integration policy. Therefore, it is important to recognise that KD's influence on the integration field cannot be seen solely as a result of the transfer, but rather that the focus on qualification and education was underway before the field was placed under its control. Nevertheless, the informant described how the transfer to KD could have had some impact on how the core mission of the new Integration Act was cultivated:

The integration strategy is called “integration through knowledge”. Perhaps the core mission is cultivated wherever you are placed. (Informant #5)

Recurrent ministerial transfers raise the question of continuity in the use of policy instruments. After the integration field was moved from KD to AID, one informant observed a diminished focus on reducing the skills gap between newly arrived refugees and the majority population (which was the main focus in KD), and a stronger focus on work practice and rapid transition to employment (particularly with a focus on Ukrainian refugees). The informant explained that the reason for this reduced focus was likely a combination of several factors including context, policy and organisational structure. Nevertheless, they also pointed out that the ministerial transfer may have de-emphasised the focus on measures used by the previous ministry (KD) in favour of greater attention to measures in the new ministry's own toolkit, for example on work practice rather than education.

Recurrent transfers as an opportunity to put integration on the agenda

The Department of Integration has influenced the agenda in the various ministries they have been part of in different ways. (Informant #2)

The analyses above adopt a top-down perspective on how organisational changes and new departmental affiliations can specifically influence goals and policy instruments in the integration field. However, almost all informants highlighted INA's role in putting integration on the agenda in the sector they were assigned to. This involves a more bottom-up approach to how departmental transfers can affect policy development (Vabo, Klausen, & Askim, 2020). Rather than focusing on how the new ministry influences integration policy (e.g., the use of measures in the Integration Act), a supplementary element is how the integration field influences policy development in the new sector they are assigned to.

Several informants emphasised how recurrent reorganisations allowed them to continuously influence and shape policies in the various ministries and sectors by promoting integration perspectives and challenges. They described it as continuous advocacy work, where they actively contributed to incorporating integration, and especially refugees and immigrants as target groups, into the general sector policies of the various ministries they were organised under.

One interviewee believed this was evident when the Introduction Act was drawn up in AID (in the early 2000s), introducing a strong focus on combining benefits with the obligation to participate – principles that eventually permeated broader social legislation. The interviewee thought this was partly due to INA's placement under a ministry whose core mission at the time aligned with these principles. Another informant highlighted measures such as free core time (e.g. in kindergartens) as approaches that, over time, have become more generally applicable across various social programmes.

The informants, furthermore, described various methods used to put integration on the general agenda in the respective ministries. Some emphasised the importance of research to create a robust academic foundation that supports the recommendations presented to the new ministries. For example, gaining the approval of the senior leadership team had required thorough analytical preparation when integration measures or topics were to be promoted at administrative meetings.

At leadership level, the importance of proximity to decision-makers in ministries was highlighted, as this helped them actively participate in policy formulation early in the process, for instance by putting integration issues on the agenda at senior leadership meetings at department or agency level. Furthermore, the importance of being present at preparatory meetings for policy development processes that touched upon their issues or target group, as they could then influence which issues were prioritised and how they were handled in the respective ministries. This positioned them to ensure that priorities and focus on integration were more extensively included in the overall sector policy.

This bottom-up approach to influencing broader sector policy is most relevant when organised under a specific ministry. However, one informant also emphasised the importance of maintaining and nurturing these internal relationships to ensure that the focus on integration could continue to influence policymaking even after they had moved to a different ministry. While some of the original initiatives and approaches may fade or revert to previous practices, several informants found that ministries had retained projects and focus areas that INA had introduced, even after they had moved on.

Short and long-term effects on interorganisational coordination

Since integration is a field that requires coordination across multiple sectors, the instrumental perspective predicts that the integration department and directorate will increasingly collaborate with and coordinate policy development with departments and directorates under the same ministry.

The majority of informants indicate that coordination between INA, IMDi and other departments and directorates is simplified when they are organised under the same ministry, by ensuring easier access to collaborative resources and faster decision-making processes, as fewer formal clarifications are needed across ministries. It is emphasised that physical proximity to relevant directorates and departments is important.

One informant explained that when INA is “just two floors up” from the labour market department in AID, they had facilitated spontaneous meetings and conversations that had led to more effective policy development. Another informant emphasised that while collaboration between the labour market and integration fields has always been important, it was strengthened when they had access to the same toolkit, resulting in easier communication and shorter decision-making pathways: “It’s a much shorter distance, and we are in the same family” (Informant #1). Physical proximity to other key departments has proven particularly useful in situations requiring a rapid response, such as during the influx of refugees from Ukraine, where coordinated measures between INA and the labour market department in AID were essential. The close collaboration led to more coordinated approaches to income security and labour market measures for newcomers. Being physically closer to these departments in AID, and under the same political leadership, resulted in more natural and frequent meetings, which in turn enhanced INA’s influence on both the policy process and its implementation.

A few informants, however, nuanced the importance of being under the same ministry. One informant noted that while changes in organisational structure are not irrelevant to their work, they did not find it crucial for effective coordination. Another emphasised that the choice of collaborative partners within the integration field is not necessarily determined by organisational structure, as key actors, such as the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) and Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills have always been important for their work, regardless of whether they had joint ministerial affiliation.

The latter argument is related to another finding about the more long-term effects of *recurrent* changes in ministry affiliation on coordination. The integration department’s movement within the ministry apparatus has fostered relationships with other specialised

departments, directorates and individuals during the periods they were under the same ministry. These relationships are maintained even after their affiliation shifts.

The department stands firm and becomes quite robust because of it [the transfers]. We have a unique network, which provides us with significant advantages in maintaining this coordination function, as we have many relationships within the ministerial community. (Informant #5)

The informant emphasises the crucial role of previous ministry affiliation in effectively managing the influx of refugees from Ukraine. By being placed together in JD from 2015 to 2018, both the integration and immigration fields were better coordinated when they had to collaborate closely again in 2022. Established relationships significantly simplified communication and coordination in 2022, even though they were no longer under the same ministry, resulting in faster and more effective decision-making processes. Thus, repeated reorganisations have enabled the department to build a unique cross-sectoral network within the ministerial apparatus, enhancing its coordination capacity.

Surprisingly positive perspectives of constantly “being on the move”

The next question, as such, is how recurrent reorganisations affect the organisational culture of the integration department. Previous literature on the effects of changes in departmental structure largely focus on the negative impacts of departmental transfers, such as costs, resource-intensive processes and potential inefficiencies (Durrant and Tetlow, 2019; Heppell, 2011). In our study, all informants acknowledged that these relocations were both time-consuming and costly. However, there were varied experiences and opinions regarding the challenges associated with them, as they affected the interviewees’ day-to-day work differently depending on their position and level. While some highlight that these processes involve “challenges many are not aware of” (Informant #1), others found that “there is not much double work, and it mostly goes well” (Informant #3).

The interviewees took a consistently positive view of the frequent departmental transfers, highlighting them as an integral part of the department’s identity and organisational culture. After several years of frequent reorganisations, the informants state that they have become accustomed to entering a new ministry. Continuous relocations have created an internal culture within INA that prepares them for new reorganisations – it is something they expect. They mention that after each parliamentary election, there are many internal speculations of the type “where will we be moved now?”, as they know from experience that the likelihood of a reorganisation is high after a change of government. One of the leaders also pointed out that when hiring new employees, they clearly communicate from the start that the department will most likely be moved, so that they are prepared.

Although the informants describe how it can be challenging to enter a completely new environment with new colleagues and a different culture, most emphasise the positive experiences rather than the negative ones in the interviews. Several highlight the positive aspects they gain at a personal level, such as regularly encountering new challenges, perspectives and colleagues without changing jobs.

More specifically regarding the policy development process, the informants point out the opportunity to utilise the political toolkit available in the new ministry (e.g., measures, networks, etc.). By continually switching sectors and toolkits, they saw opportunities to learn about new policy instruments and measures. Several informants also highlight relationship-building across departmental communities as a positive aspect of continually moving. This enabled them to learn new ways of performing their work, as departments have different professional perspectives and cultures.

Informant (#3) explained that they enjoy entering a new ministry because, “There is always room for improvement”. After some reflection, the informant added:

When you are moved around, you gain expertise from different people and various fields, which contributes to creating a robust organisation and workforce. (...) Additionally, you develop collaborative relationships that you can utilise later when you have moved on. (Informant #3)

In summary, the interviews highlight that the recurrent relocations have clearly shaped the organisational culture. There are predominantly positive attitudes towards the transfers, with

employees explicitly focusing on the benefits of being “on the move”. One informant rationalised the constant transfers by stating that:

We [INA] say that we are engaged in a continuous advocacy project. And because the field of integration touches so many other departments, there is a certain logic to us constantly being on the move. (Informant #4)

Effects of recurrent reorganisations – theoretical implications

The empirical analysis reveals that sector affiliation and ministerial transfers have influenced policy development in the field of integration. While the overarching goals have remained relatively stable, the use of policy instruments and short-term coordination have been affected by the sector they are associated with. Thus, this case aligns with theoretical assumptions in an instrumental perspective on the effects of horizontal organisation. However, we also seek to identify what nuances the study uncovers regarding the effects of specifically *recurrent* reorganisations, and what role organisational culture plays as a moderating factor. Here, we wish to emphasise four theoretical implications.

Firstly, this study does not find that frequent reorganisations have led to changes in the main goals of integration policy. In contrast, Vestlund (2015), who analysed a major reorganisation of the pharmaceutical unit in the EU Commission from industry interests to public health, concludes that the reorganisation led to clear shifts in policy focus from industry interests to public health. A possible explanation here could be that recurrent relocations prompt employees to work systematically to ensure continuity in a constantly changing environment. The employees at INA tell how they actively use research and “educate” new ministries to foster understanding. Thus, it may be reasonable to assume that a ministerial transfer has a greater impact on policy focus (in line with Vestlund’s concept) and main goals when there is a single isolated change than when reorganisation becomes part of the expected work routine.

Secondly, the analyses show the importance of organisational culture as a moderating, or reinforcing, factor in the potential effect of structural organisational changes. The interviews paint a picture of an open and adaptable organisational culture that, while acknowledging the costs, mainly focuses on the learning potential and opportunities when entering a new ministry. The overall positive attitude towards recurrent reorganisations found in this study is theoretically counterintuitive and contradicts our original institutional assumption of a general resistance to change (March & Olsen, 2006; Selznick, 1957). However, the organisational culture at INA signals robustness, with the ability to adapt to new structural conditions without losing its fundamental character and functionality. We find that the informants have incorporated the expectation of recurrent changes as part of their cultural identity, making them adaptable in the face of constant change. However, INA’s organisational culture, which accepts and is prepared for recurrent structural changes, may be a decisive factor for the effects found in this case study. It may be reasonable to assume that with an organisational culture that was highly critical and reluctant to constant shifts, the actual impact of ministerial transfers would be less significant, where cultural resistance serves to diminish or counteract potential structural effects (Selznick, 1957; Christensen, 2019).

Thirdly, while previous studies have often focused on ‘the dark side’ (negative effects) of either ministerial changes (Durrant & Tetlow, 2019; White & Dunleavy, 2010; Heppell, 2011) or recurrent reorganisations (Wynen et al., 2020a; Wynen et al., 2020b), this study exemplifies the potential bright side of recurrent ministerial transfers. Although the interviewees acknowledge challenges with recurrent reorganisation, they mainly highlight several positive effects of frequent shifts, including how the integration field gains knowledge of and access to new policy instruments, as well as long-term coordination effects with actors across the ministerial apparatus.

Finally, the starting point for this analysis was how organisational structure (the ministry’s sector and expertise) influences policy development, in line with a more top-down perspective that often dominates studies of departmental changes. An important finding in our study, highlighted by the informants themselves, is how employees in the integration field actively utilise the opportunities that arise in the new ministry to bring integration onto the agenda of the

respective ministries' general sector policy. Agenda-setting can be understood in many ways, but Cobb, Ross, and Ross (1976) describe a bottom-up approach to agenda-setting, an internally initiated model, where groups (e.g., INA and IMDi) with direct access to decision-makers can actively influence the agenda by shaping the discourse. The core of the internally initiated model lies in the fact that discussions about desired changes in policy areas are often confined to specialised groups with in-depth knowledge of the relevant field. The initial negotiations and discussions about policy development in one's sector or field often start internally within a department. Here, however, the integration department is able to promote integration considerations and focus on the target group (immigrants) early on in processes that involve more general sector policy (Cobb, Ross, & Ross, 1976, 135; Vabo, Klausen, & Askim, 2020, 92).

In relation to the latter point, it is important to emphasise that the document analyses in this study have been limited to investigating how integration policies have been affected by changes in ministerial affiliation. It has not been designed to investigate how the integration department may have influenced the general sector policy in the ministries they have been affiliated with. However, this bottom-up perspective surfaced in the interviews on the initiative of the interviewees themselves. To test the interviewees' perception of such bottom-up effects systematically would require broader document analyses of policy development within the relevant sectors, as well as interviews with other actors in the ministries where the integration department has "temporarily resided". The bottom-up perspective on agenda-setting is, nonetheless, an interesting area for further research, both for the literature on changes in ministerial structure and horizontal reorganisation in general. As the internal culture in INA is found to be an important moderating factor in our analysis, the culture in and attitudes of the recipient ministries towards including a new subdepartment would also be important to investigate in such studies.

Conclusions

This article explores the effects of recurrent reorganisation of the field of integration within the Norwegian ministerial structure over the past 25 years, and we have looked at how such organisational changes affect policy development, whether *recurrent* reorganisations bring about specific effects and the role of organisational culture in the processes.

We find that the overarching goals have remained relatively stable in the period 2010-2024, but that the (changing) ministerial affiliation has affected the integration department's use of policy instruments and coordination patterns. Our study contradicts previous assumptions in institutional theory and public administration literature, which often focuses on resistance to change and negative consequences of (frequent) reorganisations more generally (Wynen et al., 2019; Wynen et al., 2020a; Wynen et al., 2020b). We find that although informants acknowledge that such reorganisations can be time and resource intensive, they are largely positive about the recurrent ministerial transfers. In the interviews, the majority focus on the positive effects of being on the move, such as cross-sectoral networks, the possibility of learning about and adopting new sectoral policy instruments, and the ability to put integration on the agenda in the respective ministries. However, an important moderating factor for these positive effects is that the integration department has embraced being a "frequent mover" as part of its identity and organisational culture.

The findings in this study have interesting policy implications. According to the informants, there may be a rationale behind their constant movement across ministries, as it provides the opportunity to place integration on the agenda of the respective ministries and in their general sectoral policies. If the integration field had always been separated from many of these areas by being confined to one single ministry, integration considerations, and immigrants as a group, might not have been prioritised in other areas such as education, training, employment, preparedness and equality. However, linking integration with multiple areas over time has allowed a two-way process where the integration field incorporates different sectoral perspectives, and the sectoral policies better incorporate the integration perspective. This two-way effect has not been part of an overarching political strategy, but rather caused by political priorities, government reshuffles and responses to crises. Nevertheless, this study shows how

recurrent reorganisations can potentially be used as a political tool to ensure coordination across ministerial silos, which is perhaps particularly relevant for “wicked issues”.

This has a clear parallel to the concept of interorganisational employee mobility, which shows that such mobility increases interorganisational coordination, and that these effects are intensified for “recurrent movers” (Vantaggiato et al., 2024). Future studies of recurrent reorganisations should build on this line of research and test whether similar positive and negative effects, and the conditions for optimising positive effects and mitigating negative effects, are transferable also at the organisational level. Our study highlights that one crucial mediating factor for optimising the positive effects is to nurture an organisational culture that accepts and welcomes reorganisations by (mostly) focusing on the opportunities they bring, rather than the costs they involve.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Appendix 1: List of analysed propositions and allocation letters

1. Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet. 2022. «Tildelingsbrev til Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet for 2022.» [Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. 2022. "Allocation Letter to the Directorate of Integration and Diversity for 2022."] Without attachment.
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