

Deep dives

Forecasting and preparedness in migration

Insights, evidence needs and engagement

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This research report is part of the [INNOVATE project](#). INNOVATE aims to bring about *significant changes* in the nature and impact of *migration research on policy* through a series of innovations designed around the needs and interests of researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

The project has established the [Migration Research to Policy Co-Lab](#), which has both a physical and virtual presence and includes a Research Exchange, Engagement Hub, and Training Facility.

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Forecasting and preparedness in migration. Insights, evidence needs and engagement

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Executive Summary

- Given the increasing need and interest in anticipating migration movements to ensure policy preparedness, this report analyses how the European Migration Network (EMN) can contribute to evidence engagement on migration forecasting by examining current initiatives as well as the scope and interests for future developments.
- By serving as a knowledge broker and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and learning on migration forecasting, the EMN contributes to strengthening forecasting capacity, which can ultimately contribute to better policy preparedness for future population movements and arrivals
- This report shows that while the EMN's National Contact Points (NCPs) currently have neither the training nor the specific skills required to conduct forecasting exercises, they play a supportive role as 'knowledge brokers', facilitating the exchange of knowledge and evidence between different actors in the field.
- The EMN role as a knowledge broker occurs by collecting and disseminating information through the Ad-hoc query system and by providing opportunities for exchange and networking through the events.
- We make three recommendations:
 1. **Targeted exchanges to** bridge the gap between experts and policymakers through relatively short, interactive sessions between both communities.
 2. **Introducing interactive elements at events** to strengthen the practical skills and capacity of participants in conducting forecasting exercises.
 3. **Creation of a living document/EMN output on forecasting** for which the EMN, with its extensive network of Member and Observer States, is well-positioned to collect and map information that can support forecasting and preparedness efforts.

Part 1: Introduction

The key question addressed in this report is *how does the European Migration Network (EMN) contribute to evidence engagement in migration forecasting?* The EMN is a key network for collecting and exchanging information on a wide range of migration and asylum issues in the European Union (EU) and beyond. Given the importance of anticipating migration flows, it is highly pertinent to examine the role of the network in supporting forecasting efforts.

Anticipating future migration flows has become an indispensable part of any effort to proactively prepare for future opportunities and challenges, therefore feeding the heightened interest of policymakers in making migration more predictable (Lendorfer, 2020; Bijak, 2024; Angenendt & Koch, 2024). At the same time, migration is known to be a highly complex demographic process, making it virtually impossible to be precisely predicted (Albertinelli et al., 2020; Lendorfer, 2020; Bijak, 2024). Despite this seeming paradox, policymakers are increasingly emphasizing the value of predictive tools to anticipate and manage migration flows. For example, the European Commission's New Pact on Migration and Asylum underscores the importance of foresight, crisis preparedness, and response mechanisms to manage migration more effectively (Lendorfer, 2020). In this context, the EU Commission has also introduced the Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint, an operational framework for monitoring and anticipating migration flows, to develop an early warning and forecasting system at the EU level ([EU Commission, n.d.b](#)). In addition, recent crises, including the war in Ukraine and increased migrant arrivals through the Balkan and Mediterranean routes, have heightened interest in anticipating future migration flows and avoiding being caught by surprise (Angenendt & Koch, 2024). All this drives interest in approaches that help anticipate migration flows, with the ultimate goal of enabling a shift from a reactive response to migrant arrivals to more anticipation and policy preparedness (Bijak & Czaika, 2020).

This leads to two sub-questions:

- *What initiatives is the EMN currently taking to enhance capacity on migration forecasting and preparedness?*
- *What is the scope and interest expressed by stakeholders for potential future development of the EMN's work on forecasting?*

Our research shows that, to date, the EMN has mostly played a facilitating role in strengthening migration forecasting capacity. It does this by providing a platform for experts and other stakeholders working on migration forecasting to exchange and build relationships through its events and by collecting and disseminating information. In this way, the network contributes to forecasting capacity by acting as a **knowledge broker**.

Although the term knowledge brokering is not clearly defined and is used slightly differently across the literature (MacKillop et al., 2020; Walting Neal et al., 2022), it broadly refers to intermediaries (knowledge brokers) who mediate between users and producers of knowledge to facilitate the creation, exchange, and uptake of knowledge (Bielak et al., 2008; Meyer 2010, citing Sverrisson, 2001).

Knowledge brokers contribute to knowledge sharing, facilitating information flows, capacity building, and relationship building between different actors and audiences (Bielak et al., 2008; Meyer, 2010; Knight & Lyall, 2013; Walting Neal et al., 2022). This involves a variety of approaches and practices, ranging from communication work to identification work to education work (Meyer, 2010). It may involve facilitating interaction by organizing seminars and meetings (Meyer, 2010, citing Sverrisson, 2001; Bielak et al., 2008), or directing those needing evidence to relevant sources of knowledge (Bielak et al., 2008). In addition, knowledge brokering consists of ensuring that different communities (e.g., practitioners, policymakers, and researchers) understand each other's needs and interests, or helping to align knowledge production and needs (Bielak et al., 2008; Gluckman et al., 2021). (For more information on knowledge brokers, please see **D1.2, Part 1.2.**) Importantly, it should be noted that knowledge brokering is understood differently by different actors and in different spaces, as needs and interests can vary considerably (Meyer, 2010). For example, while

knowledge brokering is often described as mediation at the science-policy interface (e.g. Bielak et al., 2008), this is not necessarily the case in the context of the EMN, as the network often acts, for example, as an intermediary between different practitioners (e.g. civil servants, lawyers, experts, etc.) and/or between practitioners and policy actors.

It is known that knowledge brokering can have a positive impact on evidence uptake by applying a strategic approach to knowledge mobilization, rather than simply hoping that evidence will 'find' the right audience and is used correctly (Bielak et al., 2008; Shaxson et al., 2024). Knowledge brokering is, therefore, an interesting approach to consider in the context of the INNOVATE project, which aims to find ways of bridging the gap between evidence and policy.

The report is structured as follows: **Part 1** of the report will briefly present the EMN and introduce migration forecasting as well as the project methodology. In **Part 2**, the current initiatives taken by the EMN to support migration forecasting and preparedness will be outlined, while **Part 3** will examine the needs and interests of interviewees for potential future development of the EMN's role in forecasting capacity building. **Part 4** concludes and provides recommendations.

1.1 The European Migration Network

The **EMN** was established in 2008 by EU Council Decision 2008/381/EC to provide objective, comparable, and timely information on migration and asylum related issues to inform the wider public and to support policymakers' needs on the EU and national level. To do so, the EMN produces a variety of outputs, such as Informs, Studies, Ad-hoc queries, or Policy Factsheets. In addition, it performs a variety of other activities, such as organizing and hosting of various events and workshops on topical issues (EU Commission, n.d.; [EU Commission, n.d.a.](#)).

The EMN is constituted of the **National Contact Points (NCPs)** in **EMN Member States** (EU Member States except Denmark) and eight **Observer Countries** (NO, GE, MD, UA, ME, AM, RS, MK), the **EU Commission**, and the **EMN Service Provider** (ICF).

While the network does not usually conduct primary research, it specializes in **gathering, synthesizing, and disseminating relevant information** on migration and asylum related topics comparatively across Member States and Observer Countries. In addition, it analyzes and synthesizes information to feed into EU policymaking and improve harmonization at the EU level.

For more detailed information on the EMN, please refer to **D1.2**.

Text Box 2: the EMN Studies at a Glance

The EMN produces **several thematic Studies** annually, addressing themes relevant to policy developments in EMN Member and Observer Countries. EMN Studies are lengthier, more detailed EMN outputs.

The Creation of EMN Studies

- **Topic Proposal:** study topics are proposed annually by NCPs or the EU Commission. To determine topic proposals, NCPs consult with national stakeholders or identify relevant issues at the national level.
- **Topic Selection:** then, through a voting procedure, the most relevant topics for the years are chosen, a decision which is finalized by the EMN Steering Board.
- **Approach:**
 - A standardized questionnaire template is developed by NCPs (sometimes in consultation with stakeholders) to ensure comparability of information gathering across EMN Member and Observer Countries.
 - Next, the NCPs respond to the questionnaires on the national level (National Reports).
 - Lastly, the EMN Service Provider summarizes and synthesizes the National Reports into an EU-level report (EMN Study), which provides a comprehensive overview from the perspective of the participating EMN Member and Observer Countries and incorporates relevant EU policy perspectives (EU Commission, n.d.; interviewees 4, 19 & 21).

The EMN Studies an Evidence Engagement

- NCPs highlighted the Studies as a good way of identifying and responding to stakeholders' evidence and information needs (e.g. interviewees 5, 10, 14 & 21).
- Through the Studies, the EMN can act as a sort of **knowledge broker**: by identifying an information need, developing relevant questions, collecting and synthesizing information, and disseminating it in an easily readable format (e.g. Kislov et al., 2017).
- The Studies often respond to an expressed evidence need, thereby ensuring relevance of the produced information, which is an essential part of knowledge brokering (e.g. Bielak et al., 2008).
- However, the policy relevance of the Studies can be reduced due to the focus on comparability across Member States, which can water down the initial questions raised by stakeholders (e.g. interviewees 22 & 33), as well as the relatively lengthy time frame required to create the studies (between 6 -18 months) (e.g. interviewees 21 & 22).
- Therefore, some indicated that Ad-hoc queries (see Text Box 1, D1.2) can be more appropriate to support policy development (e.g. interviewees 21, 22 & 33).

1.2 Introduction to Migration Forecasting

In all areas of policy development, decision-makers seek to anticipate future developments to inform their decisions, and migration is no exception (Angenendt et

al., 2023). For example, effective migration predictions can help governments and international organizations plan for increased reception capacity, adapt border security measures, and coordinate humanitarian assistance (Angenendt & Koch, 2024). Additionally, it can support more efficient allocation of EU and national resources, proactively manage public opinion, or contribute to evidence-based decision-making by informing policy adjustment in advance (Migration Data Portal, 2020; Sohst & Tjaden, 2020). Thus, the overall goal of migration forecasting is to **improve preparedness** for migration inflows, rather than relying on ad hoc responses and measures (Bijak & Czaika, 2020; Sohst & Tjaden, 2020).

Interest in migration forecasting has grown in recent decades, driven by rising international migration (Bijak, 2006; Angenendt et al., 2023). In the EU, migration is an important driver of demographic change, not least due to the high life expectancy and low birth rates in the Union, which drives policymakers' need to predict migration flows (Wilkin & Melachrinou, 2024). In addition, interest in forecasting has intensified following the large-scale arrivals in 2015 and 2016, which caught many governments unprepared and left them struggling to address challenges related to housing, public infrastructure, and integration policies (Morgenstern & Strijbis, 2024). These events have made migration a central concern in the EU and resulted in EU migration policymaking operating in a constant state of perceived crisis, with spikes in irregular migration often leading to a sense of loss of control (Bijak & Czaika, 2020; Angenendt et al., 2023). This dynamic has further increased the demand for migration forecasting, with the primary aim of improving migration governance (Casagran et al., 2021, citing Robinson, 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2020) and gaining a sense of control in a policy area characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability (Angenendt et al., 2023). Recent crises, including the war in Ukraine and increased migrant arrivals through the Balkan and Mediterranean routes, have yet again fueled interest in anticipating future migration flows and avoiding being caught off guard (Angenendt & Koch, 2024).

The increased demand for better forecasting of population movements in the EU has culminated in initiatives such as the European Commission's Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint in 2020 (Lendorfer, 2020; Bijak, 2024). This Blueprint is part of the

EU's New Pact on Migration and aims to improve migration governance by finding proactive strategies to respond to migration inflows based on better monitoring of population movements, aiming at more anticipation and preparedness in policy responses (Janssen, 2021).

There are **various methods and approaches** to identifying and anticipating future migration flows. They can be roughly divided into three categories, briefly described below:

1. **Early warning systems**

Early warning systems use quantitative (e.g. migration flows, social media, etc.) or qualitative (e.g. expert judgment or warning thresholds) data to monitor potential drivers and population movements in real time, providing short-term estimates in rapidly changing contexts (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020; Migration Data Portal, 2020, citing Carammia & Dumont, 2018). These systems select indicators (e.g., border crossings per week) and set warning thresholds (e.g., the threshold of people crossing the border per week) that, when exceeded, trigger an automated and predetermined chain of actions (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020; Migration Data Portal, 2020, citing Bijak et al., 2017). Early warning systems can be useful tools for decision makers to track rapidly changing situations and to be aware of potential migration or displacement risks (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020). **Key challenges** include determining what indicators and thresholds are useful and maintaining a high level of consistency in data collection to ensure that thresholds are not reached because the data collection method has changed (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020). Early warning systems are used for **short-term projections** (weeks, months) (Migration Data Portal, 2020).

2. **Forecasts**

Forecasting refers to quantitative estimates of future migration (Migration Data Portal, 2020, citing Bijak, 2011). They are based on past trends, including patterns in immigration and emigration, policy changes, and other drivers of migration, which are used to make projections about the future (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020; Migration Data Portal, 2020). Forecasting encompasses various methods, including demographic projections, emigration survey analysis, econometric models, expert judgment, and combinations thereof (Sohst, de Valk, & Melde, 2020). The reliance on past data is one of the **main challenges** of this method, as past (high quality) migration data is not readily always available for every country and period (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020). Forecasts are used for **short to long-term projections** (1-100 years) (Migration Data Portal, 2020).

3. **Scenarios/Foresights**

Foresights or scenarios are based on imagination rather than statistics (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020). They are qualitative narratives that explore plausible futures based on the interaction of migration drivers, such as political or economic changes. They are not predictions, but rather "what if...?" thought experiments designed to generate alternative visions of the future, with each scenario representing a plausible future (Sohst, de Valk, & Melde, 2020, citing Vezzoli, et al., 2017). The goal is not to be 'real,' but to get decision makers thinking about plausible future scenarios (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020, citing Vezzoli et al., 2017). Foresight can be used where statistical information is limited because it relies heavily on expert opinion (Migration Data Portal, 2020). This, however, is also a **key limitation**, as expert opinions come with their own "cognitive biases" (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020). Additionally, because they are concerned with future scenarios, they are often not of timely interest to policymakers who are dealing with decisions in the here and now (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020).

Foresight is used for **long-term projections** (10–50 years) (Migration Data Portal, 2020).

Despite their differences, these approaches and methods of migration forecasting share the overall objective to help governments move away from reactive, ad hoc responses to arrivals to more anticipation and **preparedness**, allowing for more efficient migration governance (Bijak & Czaika, 2021; Sohst & Tjaden, 2020; Bijak et al., 2023). Preparedness includes the usage of foresight to anticipate migration flows as efficiently as possible, the commitment to allocating resources to migration contingencies, as well as political will and buy-in to consider forecasts in policy development (Bijak, 2024).

However, the different approaches also face the same **key challenge: uncertainty**. While there is a high need and demand for migration forecasts to support policymaking (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020), it is widely known that the complexity of migratory movements makes them incredibly difficult to predict accurately, and margins of error remain high (e.g., Bijak et al., 2019; Albertinelli et al., 2020; Bijak, 2024). Large-scale migration is often triggered by a single event that is difficult to foresee, such as an economic or political shock or turmoil (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020, citing De Haas, 2011). In addition, migration forecasts remain difficult to navigate for policymakers (Acostamadiedo & Tjaden, 2020), for instance, regarding how they should be properly used and understood, knowing that precise predictions of the future are impossible (e.g., Wilkin & Melachrinou, 2024). Therefore, although technological advances have improved forecasting capabilities, understanding their technical and practical limitations is essential for their effective application (Sohst & Tjaden, 2020).

1.3 Methodology

This study examines EMN initiatives in the areas of migration forecasting and preparedness capacity building and explores the scope for possible future

development. The primary data for this report comes from qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted with EMN National Contact Point (NCP) members and stakeholders active in the field of migration forecasting and preparedness.

In total, **35 semi-structured interviews were conducted**, (see **D1.2**), out of which 17 focused on forecasting. They were conducted with 7 EMN NCP members and 10 participants of the EMN and Prague Process Forecasting Workshop of the EMN.

	Number of Interviewees
EMN National Contact Point Members	7
Event participants (data analysts, staff of agencies, academic researchers...)	10

The interviews were conducted online between the 7th of November and the 9th of December 2024 in English (except one in German). NCPs were sampled to ensure organizational and geographical diversity. Stakeholders were approached at the EMN & Prague Process Forecasting Workshop. Some interviewee participants used to work at an EMN NCP in the past but are now EMN stakeholders. Therefore, some interviewees spoke from both the perspective of an NCP member and a stakeholder.

Finally, observations from the joint EMN Luxembourg & Prague Process Forecasting and Capacity Building Workshop (hereafter: Forecasting Workshop), which was held on the 5th and 6th of November 2024 in Luxembourg, complemented the interviews and informed the report.

Data analysis

Content analysis was selected as the analytical method because it provides a systematic approach to identifying, categorizing, and quantifying patterns within

qualitative data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then imported into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, to facilitate systematic coding and organization of the data. A hybrid method of deductive, concept-based codes and inductive, data-driven codes was employed (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The quotes used in the following report have been transcribed into proper English for clarity.

Limitations

There are limitations to the data collection and research design. Firstly, not all potential respondents were available for the interview. 13 potential interviewees on forecasting declined the interview due to time constraints or did not respond to the invitation. Secondly, the EMN consists of a very large network of NCPs and national network members in 26 Member States and 8 observer countries. Therefore, the views and opinions captured in these interviews do not represent all opinions and initiatives within the EMN. There may be NCPs that are more involved in forecasting or have taken other initiatives that are not included in this project if they did not participate in an interview.

Lastly, it is important to note that although different terms describe different approaches and methodologies for anticipating migration flows, this report uses the umbrella term 'migration forecasting', as it was often not specified in the interviews which exact method or approach was being referred to.

Part 2: The European Migration Network's current role in migration forecasting

The following section examines existing EMN initiatives around migration forecasting to address the following questions:

- *How does the EMN contribute to evidence engagement in migration forecasting?*
- *What initiatives is the EMN currently taking to enhance capacity on migration forecasting and preparedness?*

The data obtained from the interviews suggests that, up until now, the EMN's role in directly working with forecasting models and conducting forecasting exercises per se is limited, which is largely due to highly specific skills needed to actively participate in such exercises, which NCPs do not necessarily have (interviewee 3, 14, 21, 23, 24, 28, & 33). Interviewee 21, for instance, explained that forecasting is a *"very, very specific topic, and people in charge of that need specific skills"*, which they argue EMN NCP members do not have, at least not in their country. Similarly, interviewee 28, an expert working in forecasting, highlights the highly specific skills required to work with forecasting methods, which is why they do not envision the possibility of the EMN NCPs contributing to conducting forecasting directly (echoed by interviewee 24).

However, interviews with both EMN NCP members and stakeholders highlighted the supportive role the EMN can play in enhancing the capacity to anticipate migration flows, and by extension, policy preparedness. In general, the network supports forecasting capacity building in two dimensions. Firstly, the EMN can carry out **data collection and mapping exercises**. Secondly, through the **organization of various types of events**, the EMN acts as a platform to bring together experts and stakeholders active in the field of migration forecasting and preparedness. These dimensions are described in more detail below.

2.1 The role of the EMN: data collection and dissemination

The EMN can support forecasting efforts through **data and information gathering and sharing**, which was also highlighted by several interviewees (interviewees 3, 5, 21, 23, 28, 30, & 33). For example, interviewee 21 considers that, while their NCP cannot be involved in building migration scenarios or forecasts, as this requires very specific skills, they can contribute by collecting information or answering Ad-hoc queries on more policy-related forecasting issues. Another NCP highlighted that the EMN can play a supportive role in migration forecasting by carrying out relevant mapping exercises, for example concerning migratory routes or irregular migration (interviewee

23). Lastly, one respondent explained that their NCP supports their national authorities with advice on the development of a national forecasting system, highlighting that

“It is naturally always just very helpful to use this [information received] as an evidence in our judgement, or as an example for different institutions, just as a way to establish some kind of [...] best of best practices, which exist in [other] Member States” (interviewee 3).

So far, information mapping exercises have been conducted through Ad-hoc queries (for more information on the Ad-hoc query mechanism, please see **Text box 1** in **D1.2**). In addition, information can be gathered by attending forecasting events and reporting back on the information received on the national level (e.g. interviewees 3 & 30).

Ad-hoc queries on forecasting conducted by the EMN are:

1. EMN Ireland Ad-hoc query on **Forecasting and Contingency Planning Arrangements for International Protection Applicants** (October 21, 2014).
This ad hoc request was made to gather best practices from other Member States in light of the Irish Office of the Commissioner for Refugee Applications' objective to strengthen its planning and forecasting capacity and to develop a contingency plan for a possible increase in reception and processing capacity.
2. EMN Austria Ad-hoc query **on forecasting methods that inform policy making at EU and national level** (July 6, 2020).
The objective was to map the different forecasting methods and approaches used in EMN Member States to feed into the EMN Austria National Conference that focused on migration forecasting.
3. EMN Finland Ad-hoc query **on forecasting methods of future migration trends** (January 24, 2024).
The objective of the Ad-hoc query was to support the Finnish Immigration Service (FIS) in its two-year project ENNACOI (Foresight Country Information),

which aims to produce information relevant to predicting and analyzing future migration trends and developments.

Through these Ad-hoc queries, which were based on questions submitted by network members, the EMN collected relevant information on migration forecasting methods and practices in Member States and Observer countries, which were then circulated among Member States.

2.2 The role of the EMN: supporting forecasting by providing a platform for exchange.

Secondly, besides the EMN's role in mapping and disseminating information, both NCP members and stakeholders have pointed out that platforms such as EMN can support migration forecasting capacity building through the **organization of events** and by fostering the **participation of stakeholders in such events** (interviewees 5, 21, 28, 30, 31, & 32). For instance, two NCP members mentioned that they can support forecasting capacity building by sending experts to relevant conferences and by financing their participation (interviewees 5 & 30). Therefore, interviewee 5 described the role of the EMN in forecasting as that of an *"intermediary"*, as *"we [the NCPs] have the money and we can spend it on putting people together who have the knowledge in a particular sphere"*. In addition, other NCPs participated in the event to gather information to feed into their national forecasting efforts (interviewees 3 & 30).

Up to this point, the European Migration Network has **held six events** related to migration forecasting:

EMN Austria National Conference: "Forecasting the Future of Global Migration"

Held on **September 29, 2020**, in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) and focused on migration forecasting methods and how different approaches can best inform policy decisions.

1. **Joint EMN Georgia and EMN Estonia Conference: “Advancing Data-Driven Decision Making”** Organized on **September 20, 2022**, this conference focused on the role of data and technology in improving migration management, with a focus on data-driven decision-making, including its role in predicting and preparing for migration flows.
2. **EMN Slovenia Presidency Conference: “EU Preparedness on Future Migration Flows”**
Held on **October 5 –6, 2021**, the conference focused on EU preparedness for asylum and irregular migration flows.
3. **EMN Luxembourg National Conference on Forecasting Models in Migration: “State of Play and New Developments”**
EMN Luxembourg's national conference held on **September 22, 2022**, served as a capacity-building workshop bringing together representatives of Member States, EU institutions, and academia to provide opportunities for discussion on migration forecasting.
4. **EMN Luxembourg Capacity Building Workshop: “Forecasting and New Technologies in Migration and Asylum Governance”**
This capacity-building workshop, held on **November 7-8, 2023**, in Luxembourg, focused on forecasting and the application of new technologies in migration and asylum management.
5. **EMN Luxembourg & Prague Process joint Workshop: “Forecasting and New Technologies in Migration and Asylum Governance: State of Play and New Developments”**
This joint capacity-building workshop, organized on **November 5-6, 2024**, provided a space for exchange and discussion on the current state of play in forecasting migration and asylum flows.

Interview data shows that participation in the events supported actors in the field in two main ways. On the one hand, interviewed participants appreciated getting to know the **relevant developments and newest insights from the field**, presented by a

variety of state, institutional, and non-governmental actors (interviewees 3, 24, 25, 26, 30, & 33).

On the other hand, in line with what has been found for the EMN in general, **networking and personal interactions** were highlighted as key benefits of the events by most interviewees, and were oftentimes linked to **tangible, positive outcomes** for their work (interviewee 5, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, & 32). Tangible outcomes include, for instance, being invited to future forecasting-related events through networking at the most recent Forecasting Workshop (interviewees 26 & 27) or creating and reinforcing relationships that assist them in their work (interviewees 27 & 28). Therefore, according to one interviewee, networking has real benefits for their work and is not just a “fluffy word” (interviewee 27).

Some interviewees particularly emphasized the beneficial **informal and interpersonal aspects** of networking (interviewees 3, 5, 27, 31, & 32). For example, one NCP member highlighted the importance of meeting other experts in person at such events, allowing participants to reach out afterward to discuss the challenges they are facing (interviewee 5). Others highlighted the importance of getting in-person feedback on their work during the coffee breaks and after presentations (interviewees 27 & 31). In addition, interviewee 31 explains that the value of these events is “sometimes [...] not what you see in the room, but rather in an informal [aspects]. So, this is what also is very much underestimated”. This participant claims that networking is the biggest advantage of platforms that bring stakeholders together and foster interaction, highlighting the importance of

“[Having] this informal exchange rather than anything else. That is the most important, because they [civil servants/policy actors] need connections. Sometimes we really underestimate how important it is for a very small administration to have some contacts in country A, B, C or they can call and say, ‘look we have a problem here, would you have any suggestions for us, or would you suggest me something else?’” (interviewee 31).

This is echoed by interviewee 32, who stated that personal connections facilitate the exchange of knowledge between participants after the events, concluding *"that's a very important aspect of the dialogues, the human, personal relations"*.

To sum up, in line with what has been found for the EMN in general (see **D1.2**), networking and the creation of personal relationships appear to play a key role in evidence engagement. Networks such as the EMN can play a crucial part in evidence engagement and information sharing, for instance, by providing spaces for stakeholders to participate in meetings and activities, thereby incentivizing interactions and knowledge diffusion (Soares, 2024).

The EMN's geographic scope: an added value in information exchange

In addition, several interviewees pointed out that an added value of the EMN in data collecting and sharing, whether through events or otherwise, is its **large network spanning across a relatively wide region**, especially considering the EMN Observer Countries (interviewees 3, 23, 28, & 30). Interviewee 33, for instance, maintains that the EMN's added value is its wide network that could contribute to forecasting on a regional and European scale. This can be particularly relevant as forecasting exercises are often focused on a national scale (which was echoed by interviewees 25 & 28). In this context, interviewee 23 also notes that the EMN might become more relevant in mapping exercises to support forecasting with the recent joining of new Observer Countries, such as Serbia.

The geographical scope for the exchange of experience and data collection is also extended beyond the European Union or even Observer Countries through the organization of joint events with other platforms and organizations, such as the **EMN LU & Prague Process Forecasting Workshop**.

The Prague Process is a platform fostering targeted dialogues on migration, as well as a policy process promoting migration partnerships between countries of the EU, Schengen area Eastern Partnerships, Central Asia, and Türkiye. Launched under the EU-funded "Building Migration Partnerships" project, the Prague Process was initiated

during the Czech EU Presidency at the inaugural Ministerial Conference in April 2009, where the Prague Process Joint Declaration was officially endorsed. ICMPD serves as the Secretariat of the Prague Process ([Prague Process, n.d.](#))

Due to the joint organization between the EMN and the Prague Process, the workshop attracted participants from different geographic regions, ranging from EU Member States to Central Asia Countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The event was held in English, but the presentations and discussions were simultaneously translated into Russian to ensure that each participant could follow.

The wider geographical scope and the bringing together of participants who would not normally attend the same events were appreciated by several respondents (interviewees 24, 27, 28, 31, & 32). For example, one participant mentioned that networking at the event was particularly relevant, considering that there were also non-European participants present (interviewee 28). Another participant stressed the importance of learning about the perspectives of Europe's eastern neighbors, as these are often the countries of origin of their migratory flows (interviewee 24).

2.3 The role of the EMN: a knowledge broker

Lastly, through its intermediary position between different audiences, the EMN can contribute to bridging the gap between research and policymaking on migration forecasting, as has been highlighted in several interviews (interviewees 5, 21, & 26). For example, one expert identified one 'good practice' of the EMN in bridging the gap is to bring together forecasting experts and bureaucrats at the events (interviewee 26). According to this respondent, the latter can take the evidence from the events and, hopefully, influence policymaking at home. Therefore, this participant stated that the EMN can be a "good [networker] and bridge" between communities.

"And I think [being a bridge] is also what [the EMN] has been quite good at doing [...] Through these events, we can enhance the understanding among the bureaucrats around what is [...] possible and feasible to do, and what are the tools that are available out there and approaches to this. And then [...]"

hopefully that will essentially address this sort of translation problem [of research to policymaking] that [...] we are facing” (interviewee 26).

The challenges of communicating migration predictions to policymakers, touched upon by interviewee 26 in this quote, have been mentioned more frequently by interviewees and will be discussed in **Part 3**.

To conclude this section, while the role of the EMN NCPs in conducting forecasting exercises per se appears to be limited due to the highly specific and technical skills required, the network can assume a role as a type of **knowledge broker** or **“intermediary”** (interviewee 5). Though knowledge brokering can look very different depending on the actors involved and the spaces in which they operate (Meyer, 2010), it generally refers to individuals or organizations that facilitate the creation, sharing, and uptake of evidence, thereby bridging the gap between research and various audiences, such as decision makers (Meyer, 2010, citing Sverrisson, 2001; Knight, C & Lyall, C 2013, citing Nutely et al., 2007). The EMN serves as a kind of knowledge broker, by gathering and disseminating information and bringing various actors in the field together, thereby also enhancing evidence engagement. To date, this has been achieved through Ad-hoc queries, which allow for the collection and circulation of relevant information, and forecasting events, which also contribute to the dissemination and exchange of knowledge among participants and include a strong relationship-building aspect. The next section will discuss several approaches through which the EMN's role in evidence engagement and its knowledge brokering position could potentially be further enhanced.

Part 3: Room for future development reflecting network member needs

The previous section outlined the current role played by the EMN in migration forecasting, whereas this section addresses the following question:

- *What is the scope and interest expressed by stakeholders for potential future development of the EMN's work on forecasting?*

Based on the data obtained from the interviews, several aspects emerged in which the role of the EMN in contributing to migration forecasting and capacity building could be further enhanced. Firstly, interviewees pointed out that one factor contributing to the gap between research and policy in forecasting is the challenge of communicating migration forecasts to policy actors. In this respect, a more targeted exchange between policy actors and experts could be envisaged. Secondly, based on statements from interviews, integrating more interactive elements in forecasting events could be considered. Thirdly, respondents expressed interest in an EMN output dedicated to forecasting. These three aspects are discussed in more detail in the following section.

3.1 The gap between research and policy: the challenge of communicating forecasts.

One aspect of the research to policy gap that was mentioned relatively frequently during interviews is related to **communication about forecasts to policy actors** (interviewees 26, 27, 28, 25, 30, 31, & 32 to some extent). Interviewee 25, for instance, names communication with policy actors one of the key challenges when it comes to forecasting and scenarios.

"If you're forecasting something, you always have to communicate it well so that the necessary actions are taken. I think when [...] looking back on 2015/2016 or even the past year, there are always people who were predicting what happened a year later or two years later, but nobody actually listens to them. So even if you have the data or the numbers and you know, OK, something is probably going to happen in the next weeks, months, or even years. I think the challenge is to communicate it in such a way that, yeah, people who are responsible politicians, [...] they take the necessary actions, and I guess this that's the key challenge in in forecasting" (interviewee 25).

According to this participant, this is particularly the case given that migration is a highly politicized area, which can make it difficult for policy actors to act on the basis of forecasts. For example, the participant adds that even if policymakers know that

reception capacities need to be increased because of an expected increase in arrivals, it is not a given that they will act on this, as policymakers may be concerned about sending the wrong political signal, such as welcoming the arrival of more asylum seekers or potentially acting as a pull factor. This refers back to the issue of preparedness requiring not only efficient forecasting but also political commitment to acting based on the predictions made by analysts (Bijak, 2024).

In addition, interviewees highlighted that policymaking can be a black box, and it is not always clear to them how policy actors are using the forecasts, or if what analysts produce is useful for policymakers (interviewees 27, 28, & 33).

“But I’m interested, from the global or the EU point of view, like how do they use [the forecasts], and if they don’t use it, why do they never use [it]? I mean, so I’m working on this, is anybody reading it? Because, I mean, I think they are reading it, but I don’t [know] if it’s the scientist or the analyst reading or if it’s really the policymaker reading it” (interviewee 27).

This quote illustrates that experts working on forecasting do not necessarily have a direct exchange with policymakers on their usage and understanding of forecasting models and therefore do not always know if they are using their outputs. Here, the EMN could step in as an intermediary as it oftentimes already has established relationships (and some degree of trust) with national policymakers and other civil servants (see **D1.2**).

A further challenge that was highlighted in relation to communication migration forecasts to policymakers in forecasting is the difficulty of **managing expectations and reality of what forecasting is**, and what it can do for policymaking (interviewees 27, 28, & 30). Therefore, it can be difficult to get policymakers to trust the forecasts, knowing that they are not accurate predictions of the future (interviewees 27 & 28). This is echoed by another expert, who states that forecasting is inherently difficult as it needs to capture complex, human decisions to migrate, therefore never being a precise science. At the same time, it needs to be communicated with a certain degree

of confidence and accuracy to policymakers in order to remain credible. The participant stated *"so it needs to be reliable, but it has a lot of flaws in it, at the same time, if you understand what I mean. That's the biggest challenge."* This issue also prevents this participant from making use of more complex, long-term forecasting models produced by researchers, as it is even more difficult to maintain the necessary level of accuracy (interviewee 30).

Therefore, interviewee 27, described communication with policymakers as the *"most challenging part of their job"*.

"To do a forecast, if you have studied economics, mathematics, physics, statistics, I mean, you follow some methods, and you do a forecast. That's the easy part. The more difficult stuff is to explain it to policymakers, to make it understandable to them.

To get buy-in from the policymakers, [to] get them to care about it, and get them to believe it. Trust it in a way, not believe it, trust in the forecast"
(interviewee 27)

The participant adds that:

"I think a lot of people just confuse our job as forecast makers, as prognosis people, they confuse our job as being able to predict the future. But no, we don't predict the future. We try to prepare for different futures." (interviewee 27).

This shows that a gap between policymakers and experts in migration forecasting is the communication of forecasts, knowing that uncertainty remains a component. This can be challenging; while policymakers seek certainty and definitive answers and solutions, forecasts and projections are probabilities, and margins of error are a natural part of them, especially considering how uncertain migration is (Albertinelli et al., 2021).

3.2 Room for future development: inviting policy actors to events.

Based on the above-mentioned challenges of communicating forecasts with policy actors, several interviewees have stated that it could be helpful to include policy actors more systematically in discussions, for instance by having dedicated exchanges with them, which is something that could potentially be facilitated by the EMN.

In this regard, interviewee 27, for instance, would appreciate using the forecasting events organized by the EMN as an opportunity to receive direct feedback from policy actors on what they are expecting from those making the migration forecasts, as well as how they are using forecasts prepared by analysts. The interviewee wonders *"What do [policymakers] want? What do they need? Because if they tell us, maybe we can give it, maybe it is simple to give. Maybe we can direct our attention towards those [needs]"*. According to interviewee 27, a dedicated session of exchange with policy actors at the EMN events could really benefit their work by showing the experts what direction to focus their attention on.

Similarly, interviewee 28, believes that it would be interesting to hold some type of special session that is linked to the EMN Forecasting events, targeting more specifically an exchange with policy actors. The objective could be to have an *"open discussion between statisticians and economic practitioners, really [the] data practitioners, and policy practitioners"*. Relating to the point about communication with policy actors, interviewee 28, maintains that it would be beneficial for experts to have an exchange with policy actors on how they are making use of the forecasts. As their work aims at supporting policymakers, it would be valuable to know if the forecasts produced are useful, before developing further, more sophisticated forecasting methods that may not be understandable or relevant. In addition, interviewee 28 believes it would also be valuable for policy actors to exchange with each other on the operationalization of forecasting practices, as the discussions on the impact of forecasting on policymaking are often limited to the national level.

Thus, interviewed forecasting experts expressed a need and interest in ensuring that their work aligns with policymakers' knowledge needs and is understandable and useable to decision makers. Therefore, by leveraging its wide network and

connections, as well as expertise in organizing various types of events, the EMN could strengthen evidence engagement by organizing targeted, interactive exchanges between policy actors/civil servants and forecasting experts to help ensure knowledge needs and knowledge production align. In this way, the EMN could also enhance its role as a knowledge broker, which includes ensuring that various communities understand each other's needs and interests as well as the production of policy-relevant research (e.g., Bielak et al., 2008).

Importantly, it should be noted that policy actors have been invited to and have participated in EMN forecasting events. However, based on the needs expressed by the interviewees, it could be considered to introduce a more targeted exchange between policymakers and practitioners. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some interviewees also expressed doubts about the feasibility of this format. This can be based, for example, on the reluctance of some policy actors to openly discuss challenges and practices in such a setting (interviewees 30, 31, & 32).

3.3. Room for future development: more interactive workshops.

In addition to the above-mentioned suggestion of including a more interactive and targeted exchange with policy actors at the events, several interviewees also expressed an interest in including other, more **interactive elements**, albeit in different forms, in the forecasting workshop (interviewees 24, 26, 28, 33, & 31 to some extent). Interviewee 24, for instance, would be interested in a workshop format, that would allow participants to gain practical experience in creating forecasting exercises in small groups. Similarly, interviewee 28, on the other hand, believes that what would be interesting for those working in forecasting is to gain practical experience beyond the presentations of technological developments.

"We have to put the hands on something at some point. So, really sharing like programs and talking about programs. [...] I would say that the best

approach if we really want to learn from each other would be to have like some kind of training or masterclass" (interviewee 28).

However, interviewee 28 admits that this can be very difficult to organize in practice, especially in person, not least because of data protection rules and the exchange of sensitive data. In addition, different Member States use different software, which can also complicate such an exercise. Furthermore, interviewee 27 mentions that they would, for instance, be interested in getting a more concrete overview of what data or programming interfaces the different actors are using to build their forecasts, which could be accompanied by a practical example or tutorial. Lastly, interviewee 30 maintains that the EMN could support experts and governments through a long-term project offering tailored support for individual countries on how they can improve their national foresight methods. With this format, governments could receive some feedback on how to improve their system without having to completely overhaul it, as this is often unrealistic. Thus, based on the interviews, there is interest in adding some more interactive elements to the EMN's work on forecasting, which could enhance capacity.

Nevertheless, there are some barriers to making the events more interactive. While interviewee 30 would also be interested in a more interactive workshop, they admit that increasing the effort to participate in such events can act as a barrier for some stakeholders to participate and that *"if you make it too complicated for them, sort of, you need to invest when you come here, then they might not come"*. In addition, making the events more interactive requires having very similar skill levels, which can prevent the events from having a broader audience and geographic variety (interviewee 31, interviewee 25 to some extent).

3.4 Room for further development: the creation of an EMN output on Forecasting

Lastly, several interviewees have expressed interest in the creation of a written output that would outlive the events (interviewees 25, 26, 27, 30, & 33). For example,

interviewee 26 would like a catalogue that details the current tools and methods in forecasting, providing an accessible overview of available resources, as well as including the contact information of experts who one can reach out to for further inquiries. Interviewee 27, on the other hand, is interested in a repository where experts can find relevant data sources to use for forecasting or an overview of the different experts in each subfield of forecasting. They think it would be valuable to have this in the form of a website that is updated with the new developments in the field. Interviewee 33 would appreciate a compilation from different NCPs, sharing their predictions for the next six months. However, they acknowledge the challenge in this, as NCPs typically avoid making claims that cannot be supported by facts.

Lastly, interviewee 30 would be interested in the EMN producing a written output mapping the challenges and gaps related to data gathering for migration forecasting purposes by Member States. Moreover, the respondent would be interested in an EMN output looking into preparedness, as well as how Member States and the EU Commission are making use of migration predictions to strengthen policy preparation. Thus, interview findings suggest that there is an interest in the EMN going beyond the Ad-hoc queries and creating written outputs on statelessness.

In conclusion, the data obtained from the interviews show that there is interest among EMN stakeholders to expand its contribution to building migration forecasting capacity in several ways. Firstly, interviewees indicated that one factor contributing to the gap between research and policy in forecasting is the challenge of communicating migration forecasts to policy actors. In this respect, a more targeted exchange between policy actors and experts facilitated through the EMN could be envisaged. Secondly, based on the interviews, the introduction of more interactive elements to the forecasting events could be considered. Lastly, respondents expressed an interest in an EMN output dedicated to forecasting.

Part 4: Outlook and recommendations

This report addressed the following research questions: *How does the EMN contribute to evidence engagement in migration forecasting?*

Sub-questions included:

- *What initiatives is the EMN currently taking to enhance capacity on migration forecasting and preparedness?*
- *What is the scope and interest expressed by stakeholders for potential future development of the EMN's work on forecasting?*

Therefore, current initiatives taken by the EMN on migration forecasting have been examined, and the scope and interest for further development were explored. Firstly, the interview data shows that although NCPs do not currently have the training nor specific skills required to participate in forecasting exercises, they do play a supportive role as a kind of **knowledge broker** by collecting and disseminating relevant information and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and relationship-building between different actors in the field.

On the one hand, this is achieved through the **Ad-hoc queries**. As they are based on questions submitted by the national network members, the EMN is responding to concrete information needs related to forecasting in a timely manner (for more details on the Ad-hoc query system, see **Text Box 1, D1.2**). Thus, the EMN arguably acts as a knowledge broker by assisting in the development of a relevant questionnaire, as well as identifying, collecting, and disseminating information in a summarized format to those who need it (e.g., Bielak et al., 2008). However, the EMN does not (yet) go to the extent of synthesizing and transforming complex, scientific evidence on migration forecasting to provide policymakers with clearly understandable options, as is often the understanding of knowledge brokering at the science-policy interface (e.g., Gluckman et al., 2021). As discussed in **D1.2, Part 2.3**, the synthesis of complex scientific knowledge is not part of the EMN's mandate or working method, which limits the network's role as a knowledge broker in this regard. In addition, compared to other

thematic areas, the EMN does not yet produce outputs such as Studies or Informs on migration forecasting.

On the other hand, this knowledge brokering is achieved through the EMN **forecasting events**. Interviews showcased that the EMN's strength lies in bringing together actors through the events, contributing to the dissemination and exchange of knowledge and ideas, as well as relationship-building between different communities, which are crucial aspects of knowledge brokerage (Bielak et al., 2008; Knight & Lyall, 2013; Walting Neal et al., 2022). The EMN's role as a **linking agent** that brings actors together through events and fosters networking (Meyer, 2010), was highlighted as a clear asset of the EMN by interview respondents, as well as a key factor to evidence engagement.

Secondly, regarding the **scope and interest for future development**, the interview data revealed that communication with policy actors remains a key challenge for forecasting experts, particularly in terms of managing expectations about what forecasting can do and what it can realistically achieve. This issue of communication between policy actors and experts has been highlighted in the literature on migration forecasting (e.g., Bijak, 2024a). In this context, Bijak, for example, emphasizes the importance of managing expectations around forecasting and reminding policymakers of the uncertainty that will always accompany such forecasts, which will also help to "move away from the false illusion of control" (2024a, p.133). According to the author, this is a role that can be played by scientific advisers, who can act as brokers between researchers and policymakers, explaining what is known while highlighting the uncertainties inherent in migration projections.

Furthermore, Wilkin and Melachrinou (2024) have outlined several suggestions to help bridge this gap and strengthen the uptake of forecasting evidence in policymaking. In brief, they suggest:

- 1) Organizing joint meetings and workshops, as regular face-to-face interactions can help both communities to understand each other's constraints and needs.

Importantly, it can also help policymakers design policies that generate the missing data needed to make better predictions.

- 2) Providing training to policymakers in research methods and evidence-based policymaking to strengthen their ability to use complex forecasts.
- 3) Establishing regular feedback mechanisms to help experts refine their outputs based on feedback from policymakers.

These suggestions put forward by Wilkin and Melachrinou were to some extent reflected in the ideas and needs for potential future developments of the EMN's work expressed by the interviewees. For example, respondents suggested that the EMN could facilitate targeted dialogue sessions with policy actors in order to improve the experts' understanding of policymakers' needs and to receive feedback on the use of their forecasts for policy development. These sessions could also serve as reminders for policymakers on the limits of forecasting models and assist them in understanding how to make use of the prognosis.

In addition, some interview respondents expressed a desire for an introduction of more interactive elements in the forecasting workshops, as this could help to strengthen the capacity and skills to carry out forecasting exercises. Finally, EMN stakeholders expressed interest in EMN output on forecasting. This could be done, for example, through an EMN Study (see **Text Box 2**) on the state-of-the-art in forecasting.

4.1 Recommendations

Based on the interview findings and literature on forecasting, the following **recommendations** are made concerning forecasting activities within the EMN:

4. Targeted Exchanges with Policymakers:

The EMN could help bridge the gap between experts and policymakers by organizing relatively short sessions of targeted exchange between both

communities. This would contribute to ensuring that policy actors have a realistic idea of what migration forecasting can achieve and refine their understanding of how to use prognosis to inform migration policy. In addition, it would allow forecasting experts to get valuable feedback on the usage of their models, making sure that they are not creating outputs that are not understandable or applicable at the policy level.

5. Introducing Interactive Elements at Events:

The EMN could envision hosting separate, practical workshops to strengthen the practical skills and capacity of participants in conducting forecasting exercises. This is important considering the highly technical skills needed to create migration forecasts.

6. Creation of a Living Document/EMN Output on Forecasting:

The EMN, with its extensive network of Member and Observer States and strong data collection capabilities, is well-positioned to collect and map information that can support forecasting and preparedness efforts. It would be beneficial for the EMN to develop and regularly update a document on the state-of-the-art of forecasting methods and approaches in order to provide stakeholders with quick and easy access to relevant information.

By acting as a kind of knowledge broker and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and learning on migration forecasting, the EMN strengthens evidence engagement and forecasting capacity. The above recommendations are based on the needs and interests expressed by stakeholders and could therefore further strengthen the EMN's contribution to evidence engagement on forecasting, which can ultimately contribute to better anticipation and preparedness for future population movements at the policy level (e.g., Bijak & Czaika, 2020; Sohst & Tjaden, 2020).

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