

Deep dives

Local responses to large-scale displacement

Insights from Germany, Poland, and Türkiye

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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

- This Deep Dive presents how structured, two-way engagement between academia and local stakeholders can enhance the uptake of evidence-based local responses to large-scale displacement situations. It is based on engagement experiences between academia and policymakers in: Saxony (Germany), Lublin (Poland), and Antalya (Türkiye).
- All actions took place in locations that have faced sudden, intense arrivals of displaced people and remain primary sites for reception, services, and long-term integration.
- Common challenges were identified in all three locations and include: limited administrative capacity politicisation of migration debates; a strong dependence on national and regional frameworks; fragmented data; unstable funding; and a lack of sustained platforms for academia-to-policy engagement.
- The INNOVATE team developed a series of context-specific experimental actions. In Saxony: guidelines for integration management were co-created to support implementation of the regional integration law. In Lublin: diagnostic research, representative survey, and a citizens' assembly informed the city's first draft integration policy. In Antalya: a multilingual support guide for foreign women was developed.
- The key innovation presented in this Deep Dive is a shift from one-way knowledge transfer to needs-based co-creation. It demonstrates that knowledge exchange should be treated as a dialogical process integrating: scientific knowledge; policy practice; and lived experience.

Main findings

- While there is an unprecedented volume of migration research, its actual impact on policy remains limited. The project found that academic institutions are most effective when they act as "knowledge brokers" and offer neutral, safe spaces for practitioners to navigate sensitive issues without risking political backlash.
- Rapidly deteriorating public attitudes toward migration and political polarisation put local governments under strong pressure. Municipalities are required to balance technocratic, evidence-based approaches with the need for strategic public communication and political responsiveness in highly polarised settings.
- The most successful outcomes occur when research move away from one-way knowledge transfer. Engagement with evidence can instead be promoted by using co-productive tools, such as multilingual guides and implementation frameworks, to address the specific, pragmatic needs of policymakers.

- Scientific evidence gains value once it has been filtered through local context and social experience. This allows local stakeholders and the wider ecosystem to refine data through their everyday management experiences and transform abstract research into concrete recommendations tailored to local needs.
- Surveys in Chemnitz and Lublin revealed that only a small proportion of respondents valued the achievements of local integration work and policy. This highlights the need for greater visibility of positive developments.

Context-specific governance gaps

- **Saxony (Germany):** Administrative capacity is currently challenged by financial constraints, a political shift and changing public attitudes towards migration.
- **Lublin (Poland):** The city is successfully transitioning from an emergency humanitarian response to a strategic integration model, though it still struggles with the weak institutionalisation, financial constraints and structural barriers for conducting evidence-based policies.
- **Antalya (Türkiye):** Operating within a highly centralised system, the municipality lacks a formal integration mandate, forcing migrants to rely on informal networks and supplementary social assistance.

Strategic recommendations

- For the cities: move from "project-based" integration to more permanent policy settings and municipal budget lines to ensure the stability of expert teams and long-term planning, and engage academia in pursuing this goal. Create avenues that policymakers and researchers can engage openly and periodically.
- For academia: in polarised settings, use neutral terminology to build cross-party consensus and avoid ideological deadlock.
- For academia: in centralised systems, local governments should use research-backed "Shorts" to advocate for formal mandates, shifting the focus from "temporary" emergency framing to long-term approaches. In more institutionally advanced contexts, what is needed are Technical Deep Dives containing detailed data analysis and operationally relevant insights.
- For both: consider establish "Co-Labs" or similar platforms for regular evidence exchange to prevent the loss of institutional memory during political transitions or administrative turnover.
- For financing institutions: to successfully implement participatory actions and build capacity for engagement, it is necessary to establish an open research framework with a limited number of fixed tasks and the emphasis on the development of deliverables that are of practical use for local stakeholders.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
1.1. Presentation of case studies	4
1.2. The logic behind the Action and key challenges	4
2. Background and context	6
3. Engagement methods and comparative insights	7
4. Needs assessment in a comparative perspective	9
4.1. Germany and Saxony	10
4.2. Poland and Lublin	11
4.3. Türkiye and Antalya	13
5. Critical gaps	13
6. Descriptions of experimental actions in the three studied contexts	16
6.1. Saxony	16
6.2. Lublin	19
6.3. Antalya	23
7. Key takeaways: reflecting upon innovations and “typical” ways of doing things	24
8. A way forward	27
Bibliography	29
Annex 1. List of activities	32

1. Introduction

This Deep Dive synthesises evidence from a one-year Process Innovation Action (PIA) on research–policy engagement in three very different localities or regions that have all faced the challenge of responding to large-scale displacement: Saxony (Germany), Lublin (Poland), and Antalya (Türkiye).

Across these diverse contexts, the PIA tested structured engagement processes between researchers and local migration governance actors. PIA aimed to strengthen local integration policies and wider institutional trust by examining academia-practitioner engagement as the primary independent variable in local migration governance. Engagement, understood as consultative and participatory methods linking researchers, public authorities, and other stakeholders, including residents, is analysed in relation to policy quality, coherence, and trust as key dependent variables. The underlying assumption is that more structured and meaningful engagement contributes to improved policy outcomes and higher levels of trust, especially when supported by appropriate knowledge provision and dialogue frameworks.

1.1. Presentation of case studies

The political, migration, and social contexts of the three localities vary substantially.

1. Saxony is a federal state in eastern Germany. In the past, the region had little immigration. Since at least 2015, this situation has changed abruptly, resulting in the rapid establishment of structures for the reception and integration of immigrants which mainly consisted of forced migrants by that time. Yet these integration structures require stabilisation in the context of vague legislation, tight budgets, a shift in the political majority, ongoing major integration challenges, and fluctuating immigration numbers.

2. Lublin, a medium-sized city located in eastern Poland, became markedly multi-ethnic and multicultural only after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Its local policies are still in the early stages of development; however, local authorities and the broader local ecosystem are very active in promoting welcoming policies towards incoming new residents.

3. Antalya, a metropolitan Turkish city located on the Mediterranean coast, hosts a considerable number of refugees and migrants. Despite this, the legal competencies of local authorities with regard to local-level integration remain extremely limited.

1.2. The logic behind the Action and key challenges

The general logic of this action is based on several assumptions derived from earlier research. The first underlying assumption is that, as demonstrated many times but also after during the so-called 2015 migration crisis as well as the mass forced migration from Ukraine after 2022, cities and local authorities constitute the main points of arrival and stay for forced migrants (Scholten & Pennix 2016). The cities' authorities and other local actors provide arriving migrants with humanitarian

assistance, accommodation, access to public services, and support for integration into the labour market (Zapata-Barrero 2024). However, systemic forms of knowledge exchange and mutual learning between practitioners, the expert community, and other relevant stakeholders at the city level remain particularly underdeveloped (Broadhead 2020). This creates a paradox: on the one hand, the cities are particularly inclined to cooperate with knowledge producers because they have a strong need for context-specific, pragmatic solutions. On the other hand, they often have limited opportunities to do so and lack structured local mechanisms for sustained learning and exchange. The cities' capacity to engage systematically with the expert community is further constrained by the need for ad hoc and rapid responses during episodes of large-scale displacement.

In this context, it is particularly important to bridge the research-policy gap between academia and cities, as well as other relevant stakeholders operating at the local level. This PIA created such an opportunity by establishing longer-term, structured dialogue with local stakeholders. It tested different engagement methods and was accompanied by targeted knowledge provision and information distillation in areas where local administrations identified specific needs, with the overall aim of building better integration policies and trust among different stakeholders. While the project also delivered tangible policy outputs, these impacts should not be seen as the sole or primary outcomes. More importantly, the PIA demonstrated the value of investing in long-term cooperation, trust-building, and institutional learning between researchers and local administrations. Such engagement processes enhance administrative capacity to work with evidence, support more informed decision-making, and contribute to a sustained demand for research-informed policy in the longer term.

During the implementation of the action, several challenges emerged that affected the scope and intensity of the cooperation with strategic stakeholders; however, they were mitigated through the adaptation and deployment of alternative engagement methods. It should also be noted that, given the short duration of the Action (one year) and its pilot character, the outputs achieved primarily relate to the production of written deliverables and to immediate outcomes such as stakeholder satisfaction, perceived usefulness, and trust-building. More institutionalised outcomes, such as the systematic use of evidence in policy documents, decision-making processes, and sustained coordination or consultation mechanisms, can be meaningfully assessed only over a longer time horizon.

The data presented in this report are drawn primarily from the need's assessments conducted within the project, as well as from our analysis of the engagement activities. The report is structured as follows. First, we provide a brief literature background and outline the comparative engagement approach. We then present the needs assessment and identify critical gaps in local responses from a comparative perspective. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the municipal actions undertaken within the PIA. The report concludes with reflections on the key takeaways and the way forward, focusing both on innovations and more "typical" ways of doing things.

2. Background and context

The Action is grounded in two complementary strands of scholarship. First, it draws on the literature on **academic-policy engagement**, with the focus on migration. Second, it builds on research on **local migration governance**, prioritising the literature that explores engagement and knowledge valorisation in local contexts.

Policy development is increasingly complex, while the use of scientific evidence remains limited, especially in politically sensitive fields like migration. Migration scholars face structural barriers to influencing policy, including:

- high political salience of migration;
- ideological and polarised environments;
- difficulty promoting evidence-based approaches in such contexts.

A growing engagement paradox is visible as:

- academic research output is at an all-time high (quantity and quality);
- yet its impact on decision-making remains modest and;
- actionable findings are still relatively few (Milazzo et al. 2025).

Evidence from the INNOVATE project shows that the most effective way to bridge the research-policy gap is through two-way, iterative engagement between researchers and practitioners initiated at the early stage of projects. Such engagement enables:

- mutual understanding of how knowledge is produced and used;
- awareness of the values and constraints shaping each side's work and;
- more realistic expectations about what evidence can (and cannot) do.

Two-way engagement also helps researchers avoid policy-based evidence-making, which can pose reputational risks (Geddes 2014).

For policymakers and practitioners, even when engagement does not lead to immediate policy change, it still:

- builds trust;
- strengthens crisis-response coordination and;
- creates conditions for implementing research-informed solutions when political windows of opportunity open (Porwit et al. 2025).

Another aspect that the most recent literature on academia-policy relations underlines is the need for a **more socially grounded understanding of expertise** in which knowledge exchange is conceived as a dialogue that brings together scientific knowledge, policy practice, and lived experience (Broadhead 2024). This perspective moves beyond viewing expertise as the linear transfer of research findings to decision-makers and instead recognises that valuable knowledge is co-produced through sustained interaction between researchers, public officials,

practitioners, and affected communities. Scholten (2018) and Ruhs et al. (2019), emphasise that attempting to influence policy-making and public debates on migration should be of significant importance for researchers.

Finally, a burgeoning body of scholarship demonstrates that **cities are often more open** than central governments to consultation and the use of knowledge-based evidence, largely because they require pragmatic solutions that address realities on the ground (Borket & Caponio 2010). Yet, despite the central role played by cities in refugee reception and integration, knowledge exchange and mutual learning among practitioners and researchers remain largely *ad hoc*, fragmented, and insufficiently institutionalised (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017; Penninx 2009). Scholten (2013) and Penninx (2009) show that divergent time horizons, incentive structures, and understandings of what constitutes “usable” knowledge frequently constrain sustained collaboration at the local level.

Box 1. How to overcome epistemic divides between research and policy worlds

Addressing these divides requires not only improving the uptake of evidence in local migration governance but also the design of institutional arrangements that enable continuous dialogue, mutual learning, and the co-production of knowledge. At the same time, researchers must pay closer attention to local governance contexts, as local governments' demand for pragmatic, operational solutions to immediate challenges strongly shapes how and when evidence is mobilised, often privileging actionable insights over more abstract or long-term research outputs.

Taken together, presented strands of scholarship highlight a central paradox: despite the growing volume and sophistication of migration research, its influence on policy-making remains limited. There is need for two-way, dialogical forms of engagement that treat expertise as socially situated and co-produced through interaction between scientific knowledge, policy practice, and lived experience. Local-level migration governance emerges as a particularly critical site for such engagement, as cities' direct responsibility for reception and integration makes them both more receptive to actionable evidence and more dependent on sustained, trust-based knowledge exchange between researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners.

3. Engagement methods and comparative insights

At the strategic level, we consulted stakeholders what types of evidence-based knowledge they required (both technical migration data and practical knowledge on engagement, communication, and management) to strengthen their capacity to address large-scale displacement. Their input shaped a mutual-learning engagement approach.

Although the three localities differ significantly in terms of displacement pressures, legal competences, and administrative capacity, all showed a clear interest in working with academia. In this context, a most-diverse-case comparative design was adopted with the aim to identify effective modes of engagement and knowledge use. In our approach we focused on how contextual differences shaped policy quality, coherence, and trust between researchers and local stakeholders. Engagement strategies were adapted to each setting, prioritising approaches that:

- were acceptable to local actors and;
- nurtured innovation defined as the introduction of new or significantly improved practices suited to local political, legal, and institutional conditions.

The project implementation took place amid shifting political and legal environments. Elections and national policy changes required adjustments, including modifying locations or withdrawing from citizen participation components. As most forced migrants had arrived after 2015 or 2022, local policies were also transitioning from emergency assistance to longer-term integration. Because our approach relied on open dialogue with city partners, engagement methods evolved over time in response to emerging needs. This adaptive, iterative model also helped mitigate risks by identifying and addressing challenges early as contexts changed.

The study's comparative scope covered three settings: Saxony in Germany, focusing on medium-sized eastern cities rather than the more frequently studied urban centres; Lublin in Poland, a rapidly emerging immigration hub that remains under-examined in the literature, and Antalya in Türkiye, a major host of displaced populations. To position these cases within broader debates, we complemented fieldwork with a review of international research and a webinar on the EU Temporary Protection framework. The comparative dimension was further supplemented through exchanges with academics and practitioners from Europe, Lebanon, Egypt, and Bangladesh during the INNOVATE dissemination event in Antalya.

Across all three localities, the PIA followed a similar order.

- Teams at each of the three sites organised roundtables or focus groups with local administrations and key actors.
- They then conducted needs assessments, gap analyses, and benchmarking to determine which experimental actions to implement.
- Each locality carried out an experimental action that tested specific engagement methods and co-produced the knowledge required for implementation.

Strategic stakeholders were involved from the outset to generate “multiplier effects” and reach additional stakeholders. Communication was prioritised throughout regular meetings, social media and media outreach.

Engagement methods used included: focus groups, roundtables, a sounding board, a survey with an experimental component, and a citizen's assembly (deliberative mini-public). While methods were custom-made to each context, we also applied a comparative lens through a representative survey with a vignette experiment in Poland and Germany (not conducted in Türkiye due to ethical constraints). The survey (executed via online panels) was aimed to capture attitudes toward immigrant arrivals, access to local services, and communication needs in Lublin (N=400), Chemnitz (N=400), Poland (N=1000), and Germany (N=1000).

4. Needs assessment in a comparative perspective

Despite their prominent role in hosting newly arrived migrants, the legal competences of the cities and local administrations remain structurally limited and dependent on national frameworks (Penninx 2009; Kreichauf & Glorius 2021). Key responsibilities in migration governance, including admission, legal status and rights, and access to welfare systems, are classically exercised at the state level, while local authorities focus mainly on administrative tasks and the delivery of services.

This means that:

- Municipal competences in migrant integration are often narrow, fragmented, and contingent on national legislation, funding arrangements, and policy priorities.
- Institutional dependency constrains the autonomy of cities and exposes local integration policies to unpredictability, limiting their capacity to pursue long-term strategies.
- Local administrations have far fewer opportunities to reach out to the research community and obtain high-quality knowledge needed to develop evidence-based policies, and fewer opportunities for more long-term and structural engagement.

Box 2. Cities as key actors in large-scale displacement

In responding to large-scale displacement, cities play a central operational role in providing immediate reception, healthcare, education, and basic social services. Research shows that municipalities act as key coordinators among multiple stakeholders, national authorities, international organisations, civil society, and local communities, translating national and international policy frameworks into concrete local practices (Acuto et al. 2017; Łukasiewicz et al. 2026).

In this context, our approach placed a particular emphasis on the legal and administrative frameworks governing cities' activities, as well as on the broader institutional settings in which they operate, including integration and humanitarian systems and networks. The analysis extended beyond the formal legal context of operations of municipalities to encompass broader structural and systemic gaps that have constrained both their capacity for engagement as well as the development and implementation of evidence-based policies.

The three analysed cases can be grouped along a continuum of institutional development.

- Germany and Saxony represent the most developed and mature frameworks, characterised by clearly defined local governance arrangements and established financing mechanisms.
- Poland and the city of Lublin occupy an intermediate position, where the system has only recently begun to develop and remains in a formative stage.
- Türkiye and Antalya constitute a context marked by substantial needs on the part of the displaced population, combined with comparatively limited formalised structures and institutional capacities.

4.1. Germany and Saxony

In Germany, the reception and integration of immigrants are organised as a shared responsibility across the federal, state, and local levels of government, with each level holding distinct tasks and competences. The federal level is primarily responsible for overarching migration policy and asylum matters, including decisions on asylum applications. The federal states are responsible for the initial reception of refugees and their distribution within the respective state territory. In addition, they can shape regional and local integration policy through state legislation and targeted funding programmes. Regarding the reception of large-scale displaced refugees, the Refugee Reception Act of Saxony (SächsGVBl 2018) regulates the distribution, reception, accommodation, and benefits of asylum seekers and the Integration and Participation law (SächsIntG 2024) sets the framework for integration policies at the municipal level. The latter is specified in the Local Government Integration Regulations (KomIntAVO 2024). According to this legislation, local authorities are responsible for the operational implementation of integration-related measures, including the provision of integration services, the coordination of local activities and projects, and the overall management of local integration processes.

At the municipal level, it is important to distinguish between mandatory and voluntary integration-related tasks. Mandatory delegated tasks include, for example, immigration administration, naturalisation procedures, the provision of benefits and accommodation for asylum seekers, which are carried out on behalf of federal or state authorities, and municipalities are obliged to fulfil these tasks. In contrast, mandatory self-administration tasks, such as school administration, the operation of kindergartens, and the organisation of social, child and youth welfare services, must be fulfilled by municipalities, although while allowing discretion in

their implementation. This results, for example, in different local approaches to the integration of refugees into nursery schools (Glorius 2023, p. 410). Voluntary municipal tasks include the promotion of culture and associations, the organisation of community meeting spaces, and local economic development activities. The extent to which municipalities engage in these areas is strongly influenced by the legal and financial frameworks and the conditions, as well as by local strategic and political priorities (Glorius 2023, p. 411).

Since integration in large part is a voluntary task in which local governments can decide for themselves how much importance they attach to the issue of integration and how much of their resources they are prepared to allocate to it, the municipality's commitment to this policy area can be measured by the quality of its integration policy.

4.2. Poland and Lublin

Poland is a unitary state, where public authority is exercised within a single, uniform legal framework, without territorially autonomous or federal subnational units. Administrative decentralisation in Poland is therefore functional rather than constitutional in nature and is organised through a three-tier system of territorial self-government, comprising municipalities, counties, and regions. Cities with county rights, like Lublin, combine municipal and county-level competences within a single administrative entity, in that way occupying a structurally stronger position within the system of territorial governance. At the same time, one should remember that municipalities, no matter with which legal status, do not hold an explicit statutory mandate for migrant integration as a distinct public policy field. Neither the 1990 Act on Municipal Self-Government (1990) nor sectoral legislation defines the integration of migrants as a separate local government competence. Nevertheless, cities perform a central *de facto* role in integration governance through the exercise of so-called own tasks, particularly in the areas of social assistance, education, housing, local healthcare programmes, and community services. To sum up, in practice, the scope and nature of a city's responsibilities towards migrants depend both on the legal residence status of the foreigner¹, with different rules applying, for example, to beneficiaries of international protection, beneficiaries of temporary protection, labour migrants or third-country nationals under general residence regimes, and on the specific policy domain concerned.

Individual areas of public service provision are regulated by separate legal acts, such as social assistance or education laws, resulting in a fragmented and status-dependent allocation of responsibilities. Cities with county status such as Lublin combine municipal and county-level competences, including responsibility for secondary education, selected labour market instruments, specialised social services, and crisis management, thereby enabling more comprehensive and territorially integrated responses to migrant needs. By contrast, municipalities without county status must rely on coordination with county authorities, which often fragments integration pathways and reinforces inter-municipal inequalities.

¹ In Polish law, the official legal term used to refer to non-nationals is "foreigner" rather than "migrant".

As a result, urban integration governance in Poland emerges not from a coherent legal framework but from the aggregation of sectoral competences and differentiated legal statuses, with cities, especially those with county rights, acting as key integrative nodes within a fragmented, multilevel migration governance system.

Municipalities are primarily responsible for the provision of local public services that enable integration into everyday life, such as social assistance and crisis intervention, public education (notably through the management of preschools and primary schools), municipal housing, and local community services, including culture, sport, public transport, public order, and local information services that facilitate participation in community life. However, given the very limited availability of central government budget allocations specifically targeting foreigners, municipalities wishing to organise Polish language courses or provide targeted integration measures must finance such activities from their own budgets or implement them in cooperation with international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and other partners. The role of cities became particularly crucial in response to the post-2022 influx of forced migrants from Ukraine, among others, by organising humanitarian assistance and reception measures at the local level (Jarosz & Klaus 2023). Polish national authorities established a special legal framework for recognising the legal stay of Ukrainian citizens and defined general categories of assistance that may be provided by local government units (Sejm 2022). However, it did not set detailed, operational instructions for municipal authorities on how specific services should be organised at the local level; these are implemented under separate sectoral laws and administrative practices.

The specificity of Lublin's approach to migrant integration lies in its long-standing practices of cross-sectoral cooperation and a well-established institutional memory, despite the absence of a single, formal strategic document (Podgórska et al. 2023). The city has been developing a draft *municipal integration policy* since 2023 through the Commission for Civic Dialogue, which functions as an advisory body to the mayor of Lublin and has an opinion-forming and initiatory character (City of Lublin 2025). The current framework, apart from the competences deriving directly from the national laws specified above, remains a collection of *ad hoc* projects and decentralised sectoral policies. Nevertheless, Lublin is recognised as a pioneer in Poland, having been the first city to join the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities² network in 2008. Moreover, Lublin was a leader in establishing a foreigners' service point in 2014 and in hiring foreign nationals within municipal structure, which is also a result of the university character of the city. The municipality's response to the arrival of migrants from Ukraine following the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022 was developed largely outside the mechanisms available at the national level and was based on the establishment of the Lublin Social Committee for Aid to Ukraine. Established in 2022, the Committee served as a unique national model of effective cooperation between municipal authorities

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities>

and third-sector actors in coordinating large-scale humanitarian assistance (Podgórska et al. 2023).

4.3. Türkiye and Antalya

In Türkiye's unitary and highly centralised state structure, migration management is governed by a top-down hierarchy in which primary authority resides with the President and the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) in Ankara. While the PMM maintains a local presence through Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMMs) in each city, these bodies function as direct extensions of the central state and lack a formal mandate for official collaboration with local governments.

Consequently, local governments, such as the Antalya Metropolitan Municipality, possess significantly restricted jurisdiction and are not responsible for designing or directing migration policies; rather, their role is largely supplementary and secondary to national agencies. Under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (2013), the PMM may seek suggestions and contributions from local bodies. Yet, the central government maintains strict administrative and financial supervision to ensure legal compliance and administrative unity. While the Municipality Law (2005) establishes the "townsman" (*hemşehri*) principle, entitling all residents, regardless of nationality, to participate in decision-making and benefit from general services, municipal involvement in migration matters remains limited to providing basic infrastructure, social assistance, and vocational training, typically without the support of dedicated units or a formal integration mandate.

This institutional arrangement directly informed the Suleyman Demirel University (SDU) team's methodology for the INNOVATE project. Because of these legal and political constraints, the team focused on co-creating the "Support Guide for Foreign Women" as a pragmatic tool that the municipality could implement within its existing service-delivery powers. Concurrently, the team engaged with the policy makers, including relevant Turkish ministries, international organisations alongside CSOs and academic researchers, using research shorts and dissemination events to address systemic structural barriers at the national level.

5. Critical gaps

In the case of Saxony, several critical gaps were identified that hinder the effective engagement of stakeholders in research-to-policy dialogue processes with regard to responses to large-scale displacement.

First, the **strong politicisation** of migration limits stakeholder engagement. In several local contexts, fears of political controversy, institutional conflicts, or potential personal repercussions reduce actors' willingness to participate openly in dialogue formats. At the municipal level in particular, a tendency to avoid public debates on integration-related issues to maintain existing governance arrangements and avoid destabilising established cooperation structures was observed. With regard to implementation at the local level, it has become apparent

that the issue of migration is increasingly having to “compete” with other issues (such as the housing shortage). Yet, on both the local and regional levels, the authorities and politicians often overlook the fact that integration is a cross-cutting topic.

Box 3. The Saxon Integration and Participation Act

In the years since 2015, the local authorities in Saxony have proactively established integration policies and built up relevant structures. Rural regions in particular were forced to establish these structures and networks of actors in order to provide the refugees assigned to them with basic services (housing, social assistance, healthcare, education, etc.) and to offer them long-term prospects of staying and opportunities for social participation. The Saxon Integration and Participation Act passed by the state government in 2024, was intended to help stabilise these still new structures and consolidate integration policy throughout the entire federal state.

Second, the implementation of evidence-based policies is constrained by **multi-level governance arrangements and the relatively weak legislative framework** of the new law. The limited regulatory specificity creates considerable room for manoeuvre for local administrations and political actors to interpret implementation requirements according to local priorities, rather than on the basis of scientific evidence. In addition, the German local governance level holds substantial political competences regarding both the extent and modalities of integration policy implementation. In the context of increasing anti-migration attitudes and tightening financial resources, many municipalities have prioritised preserving their autonomy in local policy-making. This has created an additional structural barrier to the consistent application of evidence-based policy approaches.

Third, **limited financial and human resources** restricted the depth and continuity of stakeholder engagement. While many actors demonstrated strong normative commitment to integration objectives and to participating in dialogue processes, practical engagement is often constrained by limited staffing and restricted financial resources available for sustained participation in research-to-policy exchange formats.

The Lublin case also resembles certain features of the Saxony case, particularly with regard to weak legislation, the politicisation of migration, and limited financial and human resources for more strategic engagement.

First, Lublin lacks **wider institutionalisation and strategic thinking** in its migration and integration policies, stemming from the structural constraints but also from the absence of a formal strategic document. The city's previous efforts in the field of migrant integration were largely ad hoc and focused primarily on networking activities among various actors, without clearly defined objectives or assigned responsibilities. At the same time, both municipal officials and NGOs express concerns about the politicisation of migration which limits their opportunities for

long-term planning. In this context, the lack of a formal policy document has at times been perceived as a way to avoid ideological disputes within the City Council. This has also led to a shift in language: instead of "integration", the term "intercultural dialogue" is increasingly used. The use of this expression is also justified by the preparations of the Lublin City Hall to become a European Capital of Culture 2029 in Poland³.

Second, the city does not have a **single, dedicated migration unit**. Responsibilities related to migration and integration are dispersed across the Office for Social Participation, the Centre for International Cooperation, and other municipal departments.

Third, Lublin's integration policy is characterised by **unstable and largely external financing**. A key challenge remains the allocation of stable municipal funds for the long-term integration of all migrant groups, rather than short-term emergency support only. Although substantial funds were allocated to crisis management and assistance for refugees from Ukraine, the majority of these resources came from the governmental Assistance Fund and had temporary character. The withdrawal of the UNHCR office from Lublin in August 2025 and the phasing out of UNICEF support have created significant financial pressures for the city. Non-governmental organisations report that funding for integration activities is often short-term (lasting only a few months), which hinders long-term planning and possible evidence-based interventions.

Finally, another major barrier is **the "knowledge gap" and the fragmentation of data**. The city does not systematically monitor the situation of migrants; information on the number of migrant students, workers, or social assistance beneficiaries is scattered across isolated databases held by different municipal departments and institutions (such as social insurance authorities, education authorities, and the regional government office). This significantly hampers the development of evidence-based policies and forces public officials to operate with limited and incomplete information.

In the case of Antalya, several critical gaps were identified that parallel the challenges in Saxony and Lublin while remaining distinct due to Türkiye's specific legal and administrative landscape. Antalya serves as a major hub for diverse displaced and migrant populations, including Russians, Ukrainians, Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis. However, the role of local governments in migration management is fundamentally constrained by Türkiye's highly centralised administrative structure.

First, a significant structural gap exists because the Antalya Metropolitan Municipality does not maintain a **specialised unit for migrants or refugees**; instead, support is provided through general public services such as transportation, waste management, and social assistance. These services are generally equivalent to those provided to the Turkish population, leaving a deficit in specialised measures. Furthermore, the Turkish government avoids the term "integration" in

³ <https://lublin2029.pl/en/home-page/>

official policy documents. This is largely due to the specific legal status of the population: as of January 2026, about 2.3 million Syrians are hosted under temporary protection status, while other groups, such as Ukrainians, typically receive residency permits, and Afghans are either irregular migrants or conditional refugee status holders (PMM 2026). This lack of a formal “integration” mandate at the local level creates a “temporary” framing that hinders long-term strategic planning.

Second, the needs assessment revealed a **profound disconnect between academic research and the policy agendas** in the Turkish context. Despite a growing body of scholarship, research has a limited role in shaping policy due to the highly politicised nature of migration and specifically, 15 structural barriers identified in the project's research shorts⁴, such as limited data transparency and a reliance on informal personal networks rather than institutionalised dialogue. Policy-makers often exhibit resistance to formal integration policies and frequently dismiss findings that challenge official narratives.

Third, despite these challenges, there is a **clear appetite for local cooperation**. Initiatives such as the COMMIGRATION Project, which seeks to enhance interaction between the Antalya Municipality and Akdeniz University, serve as notable examples of efforts to bridge these gaps through local partnerships. The experimental action built upon such local interest by developing the multilingual “Support Guide for Foreign Women Living or Temporarily Residing in Antalya”. This tool addressed a specific gap identified during focus groups: the critical lack of accessible information on rights and local support mechanisms for vulnerable migrant populations.

6. Descriptions of experimental actions in the three studied contexts

6.1. Saxony

The spatial and thematic focus, as well as the methodological approach, evolved during the initial stakeholder meetings and the needs assessments conducted at the beginning of the intervention. These dialogues revealed that local actors were facing significant challenges in implementing a new regional integration law. On the one hand, the actors responsible for implementation lacked the necessary knowledge to apply the law on the local level. On the other hand, many local governments often showed little political will to support its implementation. Although the PIA was initially intended to focus on a specific city in Saxony, discussions quickly showed that there were limited opportunities for the project team to start a science-policy dialogue on local integration management in this locality due to a lack of political will to set this topic on the political agenda. Second, the implementation challenges associated with the new law were not limited to

⁴ <https://migrationresearchtopolicy.eu/2025/09/12/15-key-factors-limiting-the-impact-of-migration-research-in-turkiye/>

this city but were observed across all municipalities throughout the state of Saxony. Consequently, the scope of the intervention was broadened to the regional level.

The PIA addressed stakeholders and decision-makers at both the local and regional governance levels to identify the obstacles and expectations associated with the implementation of the new Integration Act at the local level, as well as the need for scientific evidence. For this purpose, individual interviews with local and regional actors were conducted (16 interviews with 25 participants from 13 municipalities, the responsible regional ministry, and a municipal interest representation body). The interviews showed that stakeholders at the local level face considerable constraints when it comes to dialogue with policy-makers, but that a scientifically objective perspective can help to focus the debate on local integration policy and administration. They also revealed knowledge-specific gaps regarding local integration management and local integration plans. Finally, it became apparent that the individual interviews, which were later anonymised in accordance with scientific standards, provided a safe environment in which the interviewees could express themselves freely and describe their concerns.

In order to present and discuss the (interim) results of this interview-based baseline assessment, already existing stakeholder dialogue formats were used by the project team. The first roundtable discussion took place during a meeting of the "Regional Working Group of integration officers" in April 2025. This meeting served to present the initial results and to engage further local stakeholders, as well as the ministry responsible for integration, in the process. Over the course of the following months, exchanges with both local stakeholders and representatives of the ministry continued and intensified significantly. The team worked with the stakeholders on the framework for the "Guidelines for Integration Management in Saxony", which will serve as a tool for local stakeholders in administration and politics to implement the new integration law in the future. This exchange of insights gained from the interviews, enriched with existing scientific evidence (including from previous research projects conducted by the project team and the work of Prof. Dr. Birgit Glorius in the German Expert Council on Integration and Migration), led to a growing demand for further engagement. As a result, the project team was invited by the responsible ministry to two further stakeholder meetings in October 2025 to share the findings from the baseline assessment and new overarching findings in the field of migration and integration.

Finally, an inter-municipal expert symposium in November 2025 was organised by the project Team at the University of Technology in Chemnitz. They presented the final results of the process, shared knowledge about the challenges and opportunities in the field of local integration policy in Germany during keynote speeches of the project team and an external expert (Prof. Dr. Hannes Schammann) and finally, convened two workshops to discuss the results and further steps to be taken with all participants. The symposium not only served to share knowledge but also revealed the potential that can be achieved when stakeholders are incentivised for their commitment. In particular, the two workshops provided a setting in which, based on the shared knowledge base, common and locally implementable standards for the implementation of integration management

could be developed and strategies for dealing with limited financial resources and heated public discourse could be identified through dialogue.

The outcome of this comprehensive dialogue process is the "Guidelines for Integration Management in Saxony". It summarises the results of the dialogue process, supplements them with scientific findings, and thus offers guidance on the implementation of the new law at the local level.

From a methodological perspective, adjustments and deviations from the original approach were made throughout the process. The initial assessment quickly revealed the constraints faced by those involved. Against the backdrop of a shift in public debate towards migration-friendliness and the strengthening of political actors who seek to delegitimise or even destabilise integration policy and structures, it was necessary to orient the methodology away from the application of deliberative methods and dialogue processes involving a broader public. For the dialogue process, this first meant creating protected and secure settings in which the actors could express themselves freely, without fear of political or personal consequences. Second, the process was designed with a more technical focus on stabilising integration structures through the work on the "Guidelines for Integration Management in Saxony". However, existing mutual learning processes were supported through a comparative survey conducted in both the Polish and German case studies.

Against the fact that local actors in many of the participating municipalities faced considerable restrictions in their ability to realign and stabilise local integration policy, the question arose as to how the local population assessed the approach of local integration policy. To provide insight into this key issue a survey was designed to record the attitudes of the population towards local integration policy at both the national level (Poland and Germany) and the local level (Lublin and Chemnitz).

Box 4. Attitudes of the population towards local integration policy in Germany and Chemnitz

The survey's results suggest that the residents of Chemnitz are in general more sceptical about the local integration policy and showed less openness and acceptance of migrants than the German population in general. However, the differences between these two groups remain low. Respondents in both groups expressed strong scepticism about the effectiveness of public administration in the field of migrant integration. Around two-thirds believe that their localities are overburdened by immigration (Germany: 62.7%; Chemnitz: 65.6%).

Given the short period (10 years) in which the local authorities in Saxony, including Chemnitz, had to establish integration structures and a welcoming culture, it was asked whether respondents were proud of what had been achieved in this area in recent years. Only a minority of respondents agreed fully, somewhat or partially with this statement (Germany: 35,6 %; Chemnitz: 28,1%). Also, the agreement (strongly agree) among Chemnitz respondents to the statement "I

have the impression that the new residents of my city receive more attention from the local authorities than the long-established residents" was high with 33.3% (Germany: 22.4%). The results suggest that public opinion is leaning more towards conservatism and that there is a widespread perception of disadvantage in terms of state benefits. This resonates with the sociological observations of the East German society in transition in recent years (Mau, Lux et al. 2023).

On the opposite, respondents clearly identify areas where local authorities should support newcomers, particularly children's education (Germany: 88.9%; Chemnitz: 93.0%) and healthcare (Germany: 82.6%; Chemnitz: 85.3%). Support for access to employment and housing is also widely expected (around 76-80%). Ultimately, around half of those surveyed (Germany: 48.8 %; Chemnitz 50.5 %) would like to see greater involvement through communication of local government measures to new residents via public consultations with residents.

6.2. Lublin

An experimental engagement action in Lublin focused on supporting the local administration in developing a local integration policy through a participatory needs assessment and strategic advice, integrating inputs from the wider local ecosystem and public opinion. Currently, the city is transitioning from a 'reactive' mode to a more strategic, evidence-based approach through projects like INNOVATE.

The city of Lublin was selected as a particularly relevant case, representing a medium-sized city in eastern Poland and one of the first destinations for forced migrants, especially after the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Lublin exemplifies an innovative local government in the Polish context, characterised by extensive experience in implementing public governance innovations, the use of advanced participatory mechanisms, sustained cooperation with the academic sector, active support for foreigners, and the facilitation of their integration into the local community.

Ongoing dialogue with counterparts in Lublin enabled to identify a need to support the municipality in preparing a draft local integration policy. This policy development was envisioned as grounded in goals and principles broadly shared by local residents and informed by a broad understanding of the local integration support ecosystem. Consequently, the experimental action implemented in Lublin focused on conducting a comprehensive needs assessment and benchmarking existing solutions. These activities addressed not only the broader field of integration policies but also key cross-cutting dimensions, including the coordination of actions, use of evidence in policy-making, and creation of mechanisms for systemic consultations with residents and local stakeholders. To this end, in close cooperation with the city authorities, several engagement and co-design methods were used, including organising several roundtables,

implementing a local mini-public, and conducting a survey with an experimental component.

The cooperation was initiated in early 2025, with the establishment of regular communication channels between the research team from the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw and representatives of the City of Lublin. Through a series of online meetings and site visits in Lublin, we jointly identified preliminary needs related to local migrant integration policy, as well as the opportunities offered by participation in the project. As part of this process, the City of Lublin designated the Participation Office as the main institutional partner. This decision was strategic, as the office was already engaged in the development of the city's local integration strategy and was coordinating preparations related to Lublin's candidacy as the European Capital of Culture 2029. These initial discussions resulted in the signing of a strategic partnership agreement in spring 2025. The agreement formalised a non-financial cooperation focused on scientific research, expert support, education, and the dissemination of knowledge on international migration. While the city did not assume direct financial obligations, it committed to co-organising and participating in project's activities. At this preparatory stage, approval from the University of Warsaw's Research Ethics Committee was also obtained.

In 2025, a comprehensive assessment to identify the key evidence needs and governance gaps in Lublin's migration response was conducted. The City Office granted access to extensive administrative data from 2022 onward, including demographic records, education data on foreign pupils and students, labour-market indicators, and information on the use of social and health services. Additional datasets covered selected administrative services, civil society activities, strategic documents, individual integration programmes, and crisis-response measures after February 2022.

This quantitative material was complemented by qualitative research in May–June 2025. The research team reviewed the draft local integration policy prepared by the City's Commission for Civic Dialogue, conducted nine interviews with municipal officials, and organised three roundtables with representatives from the city administration, NGOs, and the business sector.

These inputs formed the basis of the draft report on needs and critical gaps in Lublin's migration response (November 2025). The analysis provided:

- a diagnosis of the local migration situation;
- a synthesis of municipal actions since 2021; and
- an assessment of governance, service-delivery, knowledge, and dialogue gaps.

As agreed with the city administration, the needs assessment and critical gaps analysis focused specifically on coordination practices, use of evidence, and stakeholder engagement, highlighting where research–policy interaction is functioning and where it remains limited.

An important element of the cooperation was a benchmarking study visit to Kraków, selected as a reference case due to its prior implementation of a second local integration strategy, "Open Kraków", and its membership in the Intercultural Cities network. The visit brought together researchers from our team, academic representatives from Lublin and Kraków, officials from the Kraków City Hall, and representatives of Kraków-based non-governmental organisations, including the Multicultural Centre. The programme focused on structured knowledge exchange, encompassing presentations of the "Open Kraków" strategy, discussions of intercultural dialogue initiatives implemented in Lublin, and a comparative debate on the opportunities and challenges of cooperation between local administrations and expert or academic communities in both cities.

Following the diagnostic and benchmarking stages, the project entered its operational phase in late 2025 and early 2026. In November and December 2025, we commissioned a comparative quantitative CAWI survey with an experimental component (in which we investigated two framings of migrants in the local context) entitled, "Opinions on integration policies and intercultural dialogue", which was implemented in Poland and Germany, with particular attention to the cities of Lublin and Chemnitz. This approach enabled the generation of comparable data on public attitudes toward integration policies at both the national and municipal levels that will likely serve as feedback information for the integration policy to be adopted.

Lublin residents demonstrate a notable openness toward integration compared to the national average (58.6% vs. 53.7%), a sentiment reinforced by the fact that 78.3% of them interact with new residents at least every few days, compared to 68.2% nationally. While support is robust when migration is framed through a pragmatic, conditional lens focusing on legal residency and economic contribution (58.6%), a significant percentage (40.3%) of Lublin residents express concerns that the city is already overburdened, a figure considerably higher than the national average (25.9%). To manage these changing demographics, residents prioritise children's education (81.3%) and social integration (79.0%) as the primary areas for local government support. Ultimately, they prefer information regarding these policies to be delivered through official municipal websites (56.0%) and direct consultations (51.0%),

The central experimental activity was a local assembly entitled "How to support neighbourhood-level intercultural dialogue in Lublin?", organised between December 2025 and January 2026. The local assembly in Lublin was designed as an experimental action aimed at developing a model of intercultural neighbourhoods, combining a practical objective of identifying residents' expectations regarding integration policy and intercultural dialogue, a scientific objective of examining how in-depth deliberation and exposure to expert knowledge influence residents' attitudes toward migration, and a social objective of strengthening mutual trust and participants' sense of political agency.

A citizens' assembly is a deliberative method that has developed in Poland through the combination of elements drawn from the Anglo-Saxon concept of citizens' juries, which emphasise participant diversity, and the consensus conference

model, which places a particular importance on the thorough preparation of participants for the deliberative process (Smith 2009).

Yet, in the Polish context, the concept of a citizens' assembly has emerged primarily through practice, shaped by the engagement of civil society organisations and local government movements, rather than through systematic theoretical development. It also remains relatively underexplored in the academic literature (Uefel & Rodziewicz 2023). This study built on the understanding of the citizens' assembly developed by deliberation practitioners adapted by the research team to meet the academic standards.

Box 5. What is citizens' assembly?

A citizens' assembly is a form of public consultation on issues of importance to a given community, aimed at developing recommendations on a specific topic through the active involvement of experts responsible for providing relevant knowledge. This approach is grounded in the assumption that participants engaged in such deliberation strive for impartiality and rationality and that, under such conditions, they are capable of reaching higher-quality political judgments and decisions.

Commissioned by the research team and implemented by the NGO Pole Dialogu, the assembly also fulfilled the city's commitment to deliberative engagement with the residents. Its objective was to move beyond standard consultation mechanisms by applying deliberative techniques that allowed residents to learn from experts, deliberate collectively, and formulate recommendations addressing migration-related challenges identified in the earlier diagnostic phase. Conducted over four days across two weekends in January 2026, the assembly constituted a practical application of innovative dialogue methods and facilitated direct interaction between city representatives and residents, supported by members of the research team.

The cooperation cycle concluded on February 12, 2026, with a summary conference held in Lublin under the title "Innovations in managing integration and intercultural dialogue in Poland at local and regional levels". Co-organised by UNIWAW research team together with academic and municipal partners, the conference presented the key findings of the project and reflected on their broader implications. The programme included opening addresses from representatives of the academic and local government leadership, followed by two expert panels dedicated to cross-sectoral management of integration policies and the practical conditions required for effective cooperation between experts and decision-makers.

6.3. Antalya

The Türkiye PIA addressed a specific “engagement paradox” in which local actors manage a large foreign population within a highly centralised framework. By the end of 2025, Antalya served as a major migration hub, with more than 132,000 non-Turkish residents residing in the city (TÜİK 2025). However, these official statistics reflect a significant administrative undercount: they only encapsulate foreigners registered with valid residence or work permits, explicitly excluding temporary protection beneficiaries and undocumented populations.

Because the jurisdictions of metropolitan municipalities in Türkiye are strictly defined, migration matters are primarily decided through central government mechanisms, such as the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM). In this framework, the municipality’s role is largely restricted to providing general urban infrastructure including roads, sewage, water, and gas and offering social assistance and referral services. These services, which include language classes, vocational training, and legal aid referrals, are generally made available to the Turkish population as well under the “townsman” (*hemşehri*) principle.

To address these constraints and bridge the research-policy gap, the team focused on two levels of intervention based on a methodology of three focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews conducted between March and April 2025 with 30 diverse stakeholders. First, the team developed the “Support Guide for Foreign Women Living in or Temporarily Residing in Antalya”, specifically requested by the municipality due to local sensitivities—which local authorities assessed as a critical need for facilitating access to support mechanisms for migrant women. To ensure maximum accessibility, the brochure /guidance note was produced in Turkish, Arabic, English, and Russian. The SDU team finalised the action and disseminated the findings at a public event on January 21, 2026. This multilingual tool was produced to facilitate streamlined access to local legal, psychological, and vocational support mechanisms.

Second, to ensure that the research outputs reached those with the legal competence to implement policy, the team included the Turkish policymakers, including central ministries, CSOs and international organisations in their consultations. A core pillar of this engagement was the promotion of the research short, “Governing Mass Displacement: Ten Key Lessons from Türkiye’s Response to the Syrian Refugee Influx”⁵, which distils over a decade of operational experience into a strategic framework. This output emphasises the necessity of accurate and rapid registration to ensure immediate protection, the ineffectiveness of long-term refugee camps in favour of sustainable urban integration, and the importance of proactive resource allocation to help local administrations manage infrastructure strain during large-scale arrivals.

⁵ Meltem İneli Ciger and Özgenur Yiğit Aksu, ‘Ten Lessons from Türkiye’s Responses to Large-Scale Displacement’ (Migration Research to Policy Co-Lab, 25 September 2025) <https://migrationresearchtopolicy.eu/2025/09/25/lessons-from-turkiyes-responses-to-large-scale-displacement/> accessed 20 February 2026.

Unlike the case studies in Lublin or Saxony, which focused on drafting local integration policies or stabilising regional structures amidst shifting political majorities, the Antalya action had to navigate a landscape in which local integration competences are legally restricted. Consequently, the Turkish team produced two additional shorts specifically addressing the national research-policy nexus: “15 Key Factors Limiting the Impact of Migration Research in Türkiye”⁶, which identifies structural barriers such as limited data transparency and project-driven research, and “10 Ways to Improve Migration Research–Policy Engagement in Türkiye”⁷, which offers actionable recommendations to institutionalise dialogue at the state level. Although the detention of the Metropolitan Mayor and key officials limited planned surveys, the collaborative efforts, culminating in a public dissemination event on January 21, 2026, ensured that while providing immediate practical tools for the municipality, the project simultaneously addressed broader structural barriers within central government mechanisms through evidence-based policy guidance. Gathering researchers and representatives from various Turkish and international institutions and universities also served as a pivotal platform for bridging local Turkish research with international scholarship, situating context-specific outputs within a global migration policy landscape.

7. Key takeaways: reflecting upon innovations and “typical” ways of doing things

The PIA “Responding to Large-Scale Displacement” introduced an engagement-centred model that placed interaction between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers at the core of all activities. Instead of treating impact as the dissemination of findings or the production of “hard” policy outputs, the Action reversed the usual research logic by starting from stakeholders’ needs and constraints. The aim was to strengthen the capacity of local administrations to work with evidence and to support the development of integration policies that are strategic, coordinated, and grounded in the realities of local governance ecosystems.

A central innovation was shifting the focus from generating new knowledge to understanding what types of evidence policymakers actually require and how institutional conditions shape their ability to use it. This allowed research inputs to be tailored to policy-relevant contexts and to support more informed decision-making.

Some innovations were case-specific. In Lublin, a citizens’ assembly was organised to inform the city’s integration policy and demonstrate the value of deliberative methods in polarised environments. In Antalya, innovation centred on exposing

⁶ Meltem İneli Ciger and Özgenur Yiğit Aksu, ‘15 Key Factors Limiting the Impact of Migration Research in Türkiye’ (Migration Research to Policy Co-Lab, 12 September 2025) <https://migrationresearchtopolicy.eu/2025/09/12/15-key-factors-limiting-the-impact-of-migration-research-in-turkiye/> accessed 20 February 2026.

⁷ Meltem İneli Ciger and Özgenur Yiğit Aksu, ‘10 Ways to Improve Migration Research–Policy Engagement in Türkiye’ (Migration Research to Policy Co-Lab, September 2025) <https://migrationresearchtopolicy.eu/2025/09/12/10-ways-to-improve-migration-research-policy-engagement-in-turkiye/> accessed 20 February 2026.

stakeholders to comparative international practices, supported by translation and interpretation to ensure full participation. In Saxony, local integration structures were analysed, and benchmarks were established to compare municipalities, something that had not been done before in this locality. These inter-municipal comparisons illustrated the respective performance of each municipality and served as a basis for argumentation for some stakeholders.

Despite its one-year pilot character, the Action produced visible changes. Cities were able to conduct rigorous assessments of their administrative capacities and policy needs. Deliverables co-designed with stakeholders generated substantially greater interest among practitioners than is typically observed in comparable initiatives and are likely to be used in future policy development. Trust between researchers and local actors increased, and Action helped strengthen strategic thinking, improve coordination, enhance the use of evidence, and embed policymaking in broader engagement processes. These outcomes may enable the cities involved to respond in a deliberate, coordinated, and long-term manner in the event of future large-scale displacement.

Core Innovations and Lessons Learned

• From “sacrality of evidence” to needs-based co-creation

The research team acted as knowledge brokers rather than providers of authoritative facts. By identifying concrete administrative needs and linking academic expertise with practitioners' operational knowledge, Action co-developed feasible, context-specific solutions. This transformed research-policy relations from one-way transmission into iterative dialogue. Extended deliberation and structured Q&A sessions confirmed a key INNOVATE hypothesis: policymakers who participate in meaning-making events are more likely to champion research outcomes. This approach produced practical tools with high implementation potential, such as Antalya's "Support Guide" for foreign women, strategic advice for Lublin's Intercultural Dialogue Programme, and Saxony's "Guidelines for Integration Management". Co-creation was also used in the context of developing a questionnaire for the survey that tested attitudes of the local inhabitants and desired policy framing and policy priorities.

A critical factor in this success was the team's empathetic approach. This validation of the practitioners' reality, including infrastructure strain and the complexity of temporary protection frameworks, built a foundation of mutual trust and respect. Rather than offering mere critique, researchers explicitly acknowledged the immense logistical and political challenges faced by Turkish officials in hosting (at its peak) 3.5 million Syrians. In Saxony, too, recognition of achievements (establishment of an integration administration, creation of a welcoming culture, major successes in integrating immigrants) within a short period of time and under difficult conditions was a central motif during the dialogue process. Only then it was possible to incorporate locally established good practices into the overall assessment of integration policy in Saxony. In the Lublin local assembly, the shift from the “sacrality of evidence” to “needs-based co-creation” was achieved by positioning expert knowledge as a flexible resource rather than an absolute mandate. This process allowed a representative panel of residents to filter technical data through their daily neighbourhood experiences, ultimately

transforming abstract research into actionable, locally-tailored recommendations that directly address the city's specific challenges.

• **Creating safe spaces in politicised environments**

Migration is highly politicised in all three contexts. The Action demonstrated that academia can provide a neutral, trusted space for dialogue, especially for actors who face political pressure or fear public backlash. In Lublin, the use of Chatham House rules and the university as a neutral venue enabled stakeholders to discuss integration without partisan constraints. Strategic reframing, using terms such as “intercultural dialogue” or “new inhabitants”, helped avoid ideological deadlock. In Saxony, fears of political repercussions and attempts by right-wing actors to delegitimise integration structures made anonymity and controlled dialogue formats essential. In Türkiye, operational safety and academic integrity were maintained through a risk-aware research approach that strictly respected local political and institutional sensitivities.

• **Institutional learning and multiplier effects**

A major innovation was shifting from episodic outputs to sustained relationships. Regular dialogue deepened researchers' understanding of administrative instability and helped policymakers appreciate the rigour required for reliable evidence. This shift generated a sustained demand for evidence that extended beyond the project's scope. In Antalya, early involvement of municipal actors enabled a thorough assessment of capacities and co-creation of the Support Guide, which secured strong institutional buy-in. In Germany, the engagement process led to invitations to additional policy events, requests for interim outputs, and growing demand for accessible scientific information. These multiplier effects illustrate how structured engagement can embed evidence use in institutional routines.

Two Types of Research Outputs Needed

The Action identified two forms of evidence that are particularly valuable for local policy-makers:

- **Technical Deep Dives** containing detailed data analysis and operationally relevant insights.
- **Concise, policy-oriented outputs** (“research shorts”) that distil key findings and facilitate rapid uptake.

Combining short, targeted outputs with focused presentations and multi-actor discussions proved far more effective than traditional dissemination.

What Did Not Work or Produced Contradictory Results

Some initial objectives, particularly the comparative and benchmarking components, could not be fully realised due to structural differences and external shocks. The three localities functioned as a most-diverse-case design rather than a coherent comparative set. Saxony was selected instead of Chemnitz due to limited engagement potential. Türkiye's securitised migration context required

highly adaptive methods, and research goals had to be subordinated to local administrative needs. The jurisdictions of the three regions were too different for cross-national benchmarking, which was instead conducted within national contexts. While Turkish stakeholders sought global comparisons, German and Polish actors prioritised actionable knowledge aligned with their limited competences.

8. A way forward

The goal is to transition these pilot innovations into **institutionalised outcomes** that survive beyond the project's timeframe:

1. **Sustainable policy frameworks:** In Lublin, the priority is to finalise the draft integration policy into a formal strategic document that ensures permanent municipal budget lines, survives political shifts and **institutionalises the involvement of wider integration ecosystem** into its functioning.
2. **Bridging the central-local gap:** The future of migration governance in Türkiye involves leveraging the project's engagement tools to advocate for structural change at the national level and granting municipalities a more formal integration mandate, thereby moving away from a purely "temporary" framing of displacement that currently hinders long-term strategic planning.
3. **Stabilising regional structures:** The focus is on the further implementation of the Saxon Integration and Participation Act, the stabilisation of integration structures, and strategic orientation of local integration policy and practice. The "Guidelines for Integration Management in Saxony", which were developed as part of the PIA, including the standards and strategies identified during the symposium, can make an important contribution to this.
4. **Strengthening administrative capacity:** Continuing to build the capacity of public officials to work with scientific evidence through networking and platforms such as the MR2P Co-Lab.

Ultimately, the INNOVATE approach concludes that innovation is a contextual phenomenon. Reducing the research-policy gap requires a commitment to **long-term, reciprocal, and fair relationships** that enhance the administrative capacity to work with evidence as part of a sustained knowledge ecosystem. In order to successfully implement such participatory actions and build capacity for engagement, it is necessary to establish an **open research framework** with a limited number of fixed tasks and the emphasis on the development of deliverables that are of practical use for local stakeholders and policy makers. This approach would facilitate the ability of researchers to listen to the field and identify opportunities for co-creation, as well as allowing time to develop stakeholder contacts.

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Annex 1. List of activities

Chemnitz University of Technology (TUC)

1. Meeting with local stakeholders from Chemnitz; 02.05.2024; short presentation of the INNOVATE project and the PIA, discussion about topics and needs to work on during PIA activities.
2. "Conference on Integration Practice" in Chemnitz; 12.06.2024; Networking with local integration actors and identifying the needs of stakeholders and policy-makers.
3. "GetTogether Integration-Network Chemnitz"; 28.08.2024; short presentation of the INNOVATE Project, the PIA and the "Chair of Human Geography with a focus on European Migration Studies" as local research institute; networking and identification of needs in terms of large-scale displacement.
4. Stakeholder meeting at the Department for social affairs of the City of Chemnitz; 20.12.2024; discussion about challenges to implement the new "The Saxon Integration and Participation law" at the local level, planning of engagement with local and regional stakeholders during the PIA.
5. "Regional Working Group for Municipal Integration Work" (online meeting); 31.01.2025; needs and challenges of local actors regarding the implementation of the "The Saxon Integration and Participation law", invitation of stakeholders to engage within the PIA.
6. "Regional Working Group of local Integration Officers"; 11.04.2025; Integration Office City of Leipzig; presentation and discussion of first insights from individual interviews conducted with integration officers and other local stakeholders; coordination of further cooperation and engagement with representatives of the regional administration.
7. Stakeholder Meeting "Implementation of the Saxon Integration and Participation law and its corresponding administrative order"; 22.10.2025; Ministry of Social Affairs of Saxony; presentation and discussion of results of the PIA activities for stakeholders of local administrations in the field of integration, representatives of municipal interest groups and Ministry of Social Affairs of Saxony.
8. Inter-municipal Conference "Integration Management in Saxony"; 07.11.2025; University of Technology Chemnitz; Scientific keynote presentations by Prof. Dr. Hannes Schammann on integration management in Germany, Prof. Dr. Birgit Glorius on challenges and needs to foster local receptivity and Johannes Glöckner on the results of the assessment on the implementation of integration managements and integration guidelines on the local level in Saxony; two workshops (1. Quality standards for integration management in Saxony; 2. Strategies to implement and stabilise local integration-managements in the context of high politicisation of the topic of migration and limited budgets); 29 participants (local integration officers and stakeholders, representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs of Saxony,

researcher in the field of migration, students from the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Technology of Chemnitz.

University of Warsaw (UNIWAW)

1. Early 2025: Initiation of cooperation and establishment of regular communication channels between the CMR UW research team and City of Lublin representatives.
2. Spring 2025: Formal signing of a Strategic Partnership Agreement between the University of Warsaw and the City of Lublin to formalize scientific and expert cooperation.
3. May-June 2025: Qualitative research phase involving nine in-depth interviews with city officials and the organisation of three strategic roundtables.
4. 20.05.2025: strategic roundtable for city administration.
5. 12.06.2025: A roundtable workshop for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to discuss integration experiences and needs.
6. 12.06.2025: A roundtable for Business and Labor Market Institutions focusing on the challenges of employing and integrating foreigners.
7. Throughout 2025: Systematic collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative administrative data from 17 municipal units (e.g., demographics, education, and labour market data).
8. November 2025: Completion of the diagnostic "Report on the assessment of needs and critical gaps in the local response to the influx of foreigners in the city of Lublin".
9. 17-18.11.2025: A benchmarking study visit to Kraków, where Lublin officials and researchers met with authors of the "Open Kraków" programme to exchange best practices.
10. November-December 2025: Implementation of a comparative quantitative CAWI survey (N=400 in Lublin) using a vignette experiment to investigate public attitudes toward integration and communication needs.
11. 9-10 and 16-17.01. 2026: Conducted a Local Assembly (deliberative mini-public) titled "How to support neighbourhood-level intercultural dialogue in Lublin?", resulting in 23 actionable recommendations for the city.
12. 12.02.2026: Final Summary Conference in Lublin: "Innovations in managing integration and intercultural dialogue in Poland at local and regional levels", presenting the project's key findings to academic and municipal partners.

Suleyman Demirel University (SDU)

1. Stakeholder Consultations and Interviews

Bilateral consultations and semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives from Antalya Municipality on the following dates;

- 16.01.2023
- 19.12.2023
- 26.09.2024

- 17.04.2025
- 20.05.2025
- 13.08.2025

2. Focus Group Discussions

Three focus group discussions were organised and held on 24.03.2025, 27.03.2025, and 29.04.2025, with 28 participants, including policy-makers, local officials, researchers, civil society actors, and international organisations. In addition to focus groups, 2 semi-structured interviews were held for those who cannot join the focus groups.

3. Data Analysis and Reporting Activities

- Türkiye Baseline Assessment
- 15 Key Factors Limiting the Impact of Migration Research in Türkiye <<https://migrationresearchtopolicy.eu/2025/09/12/15-key-factors-limiting-the-impact-of-migration-research-in-turkiye/>>
- 10 Ways to Improve Migration Research-Policy Engagement in Türkiye <<https://migrationresearchtopolicy.eu/2025/09/12/10-ways-to-improve-migration-research-policy-engagement-in-turkiye/>>
- Governing Mass Displacement: Ten Key Lessons from Türkiye's Response to the Syrian Refugee Influx <<https://migrationresearchtopolicy.eu/2025/09/25/lessons-from-turkiyes-responses-to-large-scale-displacement/>>
- Support Guide for Foreign Women Living in or Temporarily Residing in Antalya (Turkish, Arabic, English, and Russian)
- Dissemination Event Report (Antalya, 21 January 2026)

4. Dissemination Event and Event Report

<https://migrationresearchtopolicy.eu/events/?exteventid=24560>

The dissemination event was held in Antalya on 21.01.2026. The event brought together academics, representatives of international organisations and policy-oriented experts working in the field of migration. Participants included Professor Andrew Geddes (European University Institute) and experts from ICMPD, TU Chemnitz, the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies, Lebanese American University, and the University of Birmingham.