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First Policy Brief: Output from 1st policy expert meeting

Deliverable 11.1



QuantMig has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 870299.

History of changes

Version	Date	Changes
1.0	26 January 2021	Issued for Consortium Review
1.1	29 January 2021	First version submitted as official deliverable to the EC

Suggested citation

Vono de Vilhena D and Bijak J (2021) QuantMig Project First Policy Brief: Output from 1st policy expert meeting. QuantMig Project Deliverable D11.1. Southampton: University of Southampton.

Dissemination level

PU Public

Acknowledgments

This document reflects the authors' view and the Research Executive Agency of the European Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Table of Contents.....	2
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Policy Brief.....	4

1. Introduction

D11.1 - Policy Brief: Output from 1st policy expert meeting is a formal deliverable on WP11, due in month 12.

D11.1 was conceived as an opportunity to present and seek user feedback on first results of the project (Bijak, J. and Czaika, M. 2020. *Assessing Uncertain Migration Futures: A Typology of the Unknown*. QuantMig Deliverable D1.1), where the authors involved developed a typology to categorise uncertain migration futures. This typology is based on a systematic literature review of migration research with respect to how migration uncertainties and complexities are being defined, measured, and analysed. In order to test and fine-tune the arguments from this largely conceptual and literature-based study, the QuantMig project organised a high-level expert meeting on “Migration Forecasting, Policy and Practice: Bridging the Uncertainty Gap”, which took place online on 10 November 2020.

The **aim of the meeting with world-leading migration experts** was to discuss where most of the uncertainty about the future of migration comes from, as well as what can be done to reduce or manage this uncertainty from practitioners’ point of view, which would then serve as the main input of a Policy Brief summarising meeting discussions.

Participants in the meeting included:

- Linda Adhiambo Oucho, Executive Director of the African Migration and Development Policy Centre based in Nairobi, Kenya.
- Eva Åkerman Börje, Director of the Policy Hub of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).
- Jakub Bijak, project lead of QuantMig, joint Head of the Department of Social Statistics and Demography and Professor of Statistical Demography at the University of Southampton.
- Zsuzsanna Felkai Janssen, DG Coordinator for Artificial Intelligence, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission.
- Jason Gagnon, development economist at the OECD Development Centre.
- Juan Francisco Galvan Montero, Policy Officer, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission.
- Björn Gillsäter, Head of the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, a partnership between the World Bank and UNHCR.
- Diego Iturralde, Chief Director of the Demography and Population Statistics Division at Statistics South Africa.
- Luca Lixi, Migration Policy Officer in the Directorate General for Research and Innovation.
- Marie McAuliffe, head of the Migration Research Division at IOM headquarters in Geneva and Editor of IOM’s flagship World Migration Report.
- Rainer Münz, expert in Demography and Migration at the Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography (KCMD), part the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre when the meeting took place and is currently retired.

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- Elsa Oommen, Senior Research Officer for the Human Mobility Initiative (HMI) at Overseas Development Institute (ODI).
 - Ann Singleton, Senior Research Fellow in the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, and Senior Adviser to IOM's Data Analysis Centre.
 - Ronald Skeldon, Emeritus Professor in the Department of Geography, University of Sussex and Professor of Human Geography at the Graduate School of Governance, Maastricht University.
 - Mehari Taddele Maru, part-time Professor at the Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute.
 - Daniela Vono de Vilhena, Research Scientist at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research and Deputy Executive Secretary of Population Europe.
 - Hania Zlotnik, former Director of the United Nations Population Division and currently retired.
 - Frans Willekens, Emeritus Professor of Demography at the University of Groningen and Honorary Fellow and former Director of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute.
 - Teddy Wilkin, head of Data Analysis & Research for Asylum and Forced Migration at the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

The discussions were then translated into the **Policy Brief** "*Vono de Vilhena, Daniela and Bijak, Jakub (2021), Uncertainty in Future Migration Flows: Where Does It Come From? Accessing experts' opinions. Population and Policy Brief, n.29, Berlin: Population Europe, https://bit.ly/PE_UFME*". The Policy Brief constituted a key element to ensure that participatory dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders was made available as an input for the migration scenario development process throughout the project.

2. Policy Brief

Please find the original Policy Brief attached to this document.



Authors

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Uncertainty in Future Migration Flows: Where Does It Come From?

Accessing experts' opinions

Evidence needs to be injected into the decision and policy processes related to migration from the outset, as a way to ensure preparedness for future migration trends.

The future of migration trends should ideally be assessed for different types of migration separately. It is crucial to take into account the role played by policies and administrative procedures in shaping migration flows.

More collaboration and dialogue between stakeholders is necessary to improve coordination mechanisms for better migration data provision.

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Introduction

Migration processes, despite being highly uncertain, volatile and complex, very often demand concrete, rapid and targeted policy responses. Migration forecasting tools, from early warnings to long-term scenarios can help bridge the uncertainty gap between the evidence and knowledge base and what policy makers and practitioners require. However, these instruments should be based on solid assumptions to provide effective decision aid. Assumptions underlying empirical models tend to be a complicated part of any forecasting exercise, as they demand the analyst to be aware of a multiplicity of factors that may influence future flows. In the framework of the H2020 Project QuantMig (www.quantmig.eu), Bijak and Czaika (2020) developed a typology to assess uncertain migration futures. This typology is based on a systematic literature review on migration studies with respect to how migration uncertainty and complexity are being defined, measured and analysed.

To test and fine-tune the arguments from this largely conceptual and literature-based study, the QuantMig project organised a high-level expert meeting on 'Migration Forecasting, Policy and Practice: Bridging the Uncertainty Gap', which took place online on 10 November 2020. The meeting with world-leading experts aimed to discuss where most of the uncertainty in the future migration comes from, and what can be done to reduce or manage this uncertainty. Participants included Linda Adhiambo Oucho (African Migration and Development Policy Centre), Zsuzsanna Felkai Janssen, Juan Francisco Galvan Montero, Luca Lixi and Rainer Münz (European Commission), Jason Gagnon (OECD), Björn Gillsäter (UNHCR/World Bank Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement), Diego Iturralde (Statistics South Africa), Marie McAuliffe (International Organisation for Migration), Elsa Oommen (Overseas Development Institute), Ann Singleton (University of Bristol), Ronald Skeldon (Sussex University), Hania Zlotnik (Independent Population Specialist, formerly at the United Nations), Frans Willekens (University of Groningen and Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute), and Teddy Wilkin (European Asylum Support Office). The meeting was hosted by Daniela Vono de Vilhena (Population Europe) and Jakub Bijak (University of Southampton).¹

Shades of Uncertainty and Migration Types

When looking at the future of migration, the meeting par-

ticipants stressed the importance of differentiating flows by type of migration and of identifying the role played by policies and administrative procedures.

A common mistake is looking at migration as a single phenomenon. When looking at regular migration, the drivers affecting the decision to migrate vary for different types of flows – even if these types are just ideals. For example, family migration and family reunion are relatively stable flows and tend to be well registered, largely depending on the size of diasporas and differences in quality of life between origin and destination, and on the related migration policies. Recruitment of third country nationals as workers, in turn, depends mostly on economic cycles. Policies have less power to regulate migration of citizens in the areas of free movement, like in the EU, which makes it less predictable. However, reality has shown that intra-EU migration is highly dependent on wage differences and reflects economic convergence among the Member States.

Forced and irregular migration are the most uncertain and hence the least predictable flows, as agreed by participants. Much has been said on the fact that a large proportion of asylum applications lodged in Europe comes from people who arrived either holding a valid visa or through visa-free channels. However, arrivals by boat, even if less numerous, are much more visible and create more political pressure for decision makers to take concrete actions. Possible double-counting of applications in different systems adds complexity to the estimates and predictions.

Finally, the participants stressed that divisions inside public administrations working with regular and with irregular migration add further complexity to forecasting future migration flows, particularly when it comes to data collection and data management. More collaboration and dialogue between stakeholders is necessary to improve coordination mechanisms for a less fragmented data landscape.

Policy Actions: High Uncertainty Levels Can Be Deliberate

The discussion went further on the role played by migration policies and administrative procedures, as even the smallest change in policies can have a large impact on migration, and through a feedback loop, on migration management. At a comparative level, the participants discussed how countries are sovereign in their migration policies and perceive the uncertainty surrounding migration, as well as its challenges, in different ways. The outcome of this is

that not only national migration policies are very different among European countries: their implementation also varies substantially, and the differences in implementation also generate further uncertainty.

The analytical challenge is then, how to take the policy implementation aspects into account in migration forecasting and scenario-setting. Processing visa applications, for example, is far from being a transparent process in most countries. Rules related to visa extensions and fees are often subject to changes. Even in places with fixed annual quotas (for example in the case of seasonal workers in agriculture), procedures are not straightforward and often encompass administrative delays, slowing processes of application, or increase in denials as an implicit policy strategy. In addition, it has been mentioned the importance of distinguishing changes in regulations and those in administrative practices related to migration governance.

Participants believed that these dynamics are considerably under-researched and in that regard, two main endeavours should be pursued. First, it is necessary to better understand the process of policy formulation and implementation. Second, there is a need for quantifying the functioning of administrative agencies in processing visa and residence applications, so that it can be properly assessed in the forecasting exercises. What to do? Participants agreed that the first step is to strengthen the dialogue on this topic between data experts, academia, policy makers while also including migrants and their views.

Old and New Concerns on the Links Between Migration and Development

According to the participants, more attention should be given to the role that an individual's resources and access to technology have in shaping migration decisions. Information on migration intentions and how they interact with the population composition might also help understand the future migration flows. On a more critical note, participants indicated that many times, the broader idea of development policies might actually influence the decision to leave the countries of origin. They also pointed towards the under-studied role that resources available in neighboring countries (for example political stability and economic development) play on migration flows towards Europe.

Enabling factors and non-state actors have also been mentioned as becoming highly influential over time. Particular concerns have been raised with respect to the impact of

technology on decision-making processes: how individuals determine the feasibility of their decision to migrate, and how they access smugglers or other intermediaries is currently heavily mediated by the access to information, which is facilitated by mobile technology. Recruitment agents, manpower managing agencies, lawyers, enterprises, universities and training institutions are also key players and their role is so far under-studied.

Acknowledging Heterogeneity in Data Gaps

It is widely known that migration data are far from being sufficient to understand and predict migration flows, even partially. However, data needs depend on the aims of the forecasting exercise. During the meeting, the participants highlighted, on the one hand, the need for more efforts in strengthening data collection capacity and in collecting information on pull factors in the Global South. On the other hand, they stressed the importance of improving coordination efforts among different agencies collecting and organising migration data in Europe, particularly with regard to irregular border crossing. As a prerequisite, this also demands working on common definitions, standards, and data sharing procedures. A step in this direction is the recently launched feasibility study by the European Commission, which is based on an integrated European forecasting and early warning tool for migration based on A.I. technology. This study called for better cooperation on migration data sharing to reduce data fragmentation, improve the quality of data sources, fill gaps in the data reporting time frames and data registration.

In addition, migration data collection is becoming a significant policy issue across Africa. Capturing population movements is relatively new, and most countries rely only on census data for that purpose. Overall, the situation is evolving, but there still need to strengthen data collection and to support national statistical offices to strengthen their capacity. Participants in our meeting pointed that the World Migration Survey, to be piloted soon in many African countries, may be a significant positive step in this direction.

Talking Two Different Languages?

Lastly, the participants also raised awareness of the fact that in policy circles, uncertainty is not always perceived as such. Cognitive biases often play an important role in

creating shortcuts for explanations for reality and for what needs to be done around a specific policy challenge. While policy makers tend to work based on risk and seek to actively reduce uncertainty through regulatory tools and migration diplomacy, researchers seek to better understand causes of uncertainty so policy actors can better prepare their policy responses and not just react to events as they happen. Time frames are also vastly different, with policy and practice working on much shorter time frames with much narrower 'fields of view' (or scope) than research.

To overcome generalisations and anticipated reactions, participants suggested that scholars need to better identify the decision-making contexts in which migration decisions are made. A clear example is the – established but not evidence-informed – policy assumption that more returns from Europe would contribute to a decrease in future migration flows from the specific region. Participants stressed the importance of promoting science-policy dialogue before policy agendas are settled, and to bring evidence to the forefront of conversations. It is also important that once policies are in place, their implementation is properly monitored and their impact is measured.

Policy Recommendations

– Migration policies should move from a reaction mode towards prevention, preparedness, readiness and anticipation.² Proactive responses can help achieve greater resilience.

– More and clearer legal migration pathways should be promoted to reduce uncertainty. At the national level, criteria for granting visas and migrant admissions should be transparent.

– Evidence needs to be injected into the decision and policy processes from the outset, in a continuing dialogue on the uncertainty and trade-offs between different options.

– Coordination among data providers needs improving to reduce data fragmentation. There is high demand for integrated, multi-purpose data collection systems, both by enhancing existing data collection tools (administrative or surveys) and by combining data from different sources through record linkage or other methods of data fusion, subject to ethical and privacy safeguards.

– An actor-based approach more than focusing on drivers of migration should be promoted as a methodological

choice in forecasts, as determinants of flows are likely to be different for different groups of migrants. ■

Footnote

1 The meeting was held under the Chatham House rule, so with no attribution of specific views to individual participants.

2 In line with the principles set out in the European Commission's recommendation on an EU mechanism for Preparedness and Management of Crises related to Migration (Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint), adopted on 23 September 2020 as part of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

References

– Bijak, J. & Czaika, M. (2020). *Assessing Uncertain Migration Futures: A Typology of the Unknown* (QuantMig Working Paper, Deliverable 1.1). Southampton/Krems: University of Southampton and Danube University Krems. Available at <http://www.quantmig.eu/outputs/>

Imprint

Publisher: Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science on behalf of the collaborative network 'Population Europe'

Technical Coordination: Emily Lines

Layout: Karen Olze / Judith Miller / Produkt und Grafik Design

Photo Credit (Cover Page): ©oatava – iStock

Print: Newprint blue GmbH, Berliner Straße 13-14, 10715 Berlin, Germany

ISSN: 2512-6164

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This work has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 870299. This document reflects the authors' view and the Research Executive Agency of the European Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.