

WHY WE NEED AN EVIDENCE-BASED MIGRATION POLICY ? IN EUROPE/THE EU

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This policy brief builds on insights from the EUROMOBI Conference, part of the EU funded EuroMobi project (Horizon Europe, Grant No. 101232335), which explores mobility, demographic change, and socio-economic resilience in Europe.

MARTA PACHOCKA
CENTRE OF MIGRATION RESEARCH
M.PACHOCKA@UW.EDU.PL

MIKOŁAJ PAWLAK
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL PREVENTION AND RESOCIALISATION
MIKOŁAJPAWLAK@UW.EDU.PL

Migration is a permanent "fact of life" shaping Europe's future, yet policy often treats it as a temporary crisis. While data on migration has grown exponentially across academia, international organizations, and NGOs, this knowledge is frequently fragmented, inaccessible, or actively ignored by decision-makers. This brief addresses the critical gap between knowledge production and its actual application in governance.

Europe demonstrably needs migrants to counter demographic decline and acute labor shortages. However, successful management requires shifting from by myths and an failure" to one evidence. Key include "boundary-mechanisms to researchers and ensuring policy employment, social inclusion robust evidence to flows rather than reacting to them, EU Member States can combat structural discrimination and transform migration from a perceived threat into a driver of economic competitiveness and societal resilience.

National, and local levels.

"As Europe faces demographic decline and labor shortages, evidence-informed migration policies are essential for competitiveness, inclusion, and long-term resilience."

KEY MESSAGES

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CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

There is no single, comprehensive source of knowledge on migration. Migration has long been a subject of inquiry across a wide range of disciplines, including demography, geography, economics, law, political science, sociology, and many others. Over recent decades, the sources of migration data and the number of their “providers” available to researchers have grown exponentially—encompassing both secondary and primary data. The past decade has been marked by two overarching European Union (EU) migration strategies: the European Agenda on Migration (2015) and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2020), outlined in the European Commission’s (EC) communications and translated into specific legal instruments, including directives and regulations (Pachocka & Caballero-Vélez, 2025). Yet the EU continues to face a pressing need for more profound knowledge about migration processes and governance—knowledge that spans not only the Union level but also its Member States and relevant third countries. This knowledge must be grounded in primary data derived from robust, comparative academic research and effectively translated into policy-oriented outputs and actionable recommendations, thereby

KEY MESSAGES

Europe does not lack migration knowledge—it lacks stronger mechanisms to translate evidence into effective and forward-looking policies.

ensuring measurable impact. This approach is reflected in the formulation of EU research calls for projects under the Horizon 2020 (2014–2020) and Horizon Europe (2021–2027) Framework Programmes, which have placed significant emphasis on migration. As a result, the EU has been implementing numerous multiannual research projects addressing themes of mobility and migration, often in cooperation with partners from non-EU countries, intergovernmental organisations, and NGOs. >>



CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

An overview of 54 Horizon migration-focused projects is indeed impressive, showcasing the vast diversity of issues addressed through research conducted within international consortia. (see European Commission, n.d. a). The thematic structure of Horizon-funded migration projects is clearly dominated by migrant integration and inclusion, alongside migration governance and asylum, which together account for the majority of initiatives. By contrast, legal migration and talent attraction, return and readmission, and emerging challenges remain marginal, indicating a strong research focus on social and institutional dimensions of migration rather than on selective mobility schemes or return-oriented policies.

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WHO PRODUCES DATA ON MIGRATION

Infobox 1: Who produces data on migration

Academia	Universities, Research institutes
States and their institutions	National statistical offices, Ministries and specialised agencies for foreigners/migration, Border guards, Local authorities
International organisations	UN agencies (e.g., IOM, UNHCR), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
European Union	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (replaced EASO in 2022), Frontex (with its reinforced mandate since 2016), European Migration Network (EMN), Eurostat
Other actors in the knowledge ecosystem	Think tanks, Private sector entities (e.g., transnational companies such as Deloitte or Accenture), Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

The challenge is therefore not the absence of robust, multidimensional knowledge on migration—grounded in up-to-date quantitative and qualitative data—but rather two interrelated issues. First, the way this knowledge is communicated to non-expert audiences (policy-makers, civil society, the media, and the general public) in forms that are accessible, useful, and engaging. Second, the willingness and capacity of different migration governance actors to make use of this knowledge in the planning and implementation of policies and actions.

The knowledge practices of migration scholars do not always contribute to the policy-research dialogues. According to Natter and Welfens (2024), the migration scholarship in Europe suffers from fragmentation and tribalism that undermine its credibility and impact. Moreover, not all scholars define impact within the framework of dialogue with policymakers whom they perceive as suspect and inherently complicit in the state's oppressive practices. Some scholars are simply not very much interested in impact but in solving research problems defined by academia without the need to be relevant to the “world outside”.

Knowledge concerning migration is also often actively ignored by policymakers (Pawlak, 2025). Ignoring is not always a passive state, but requires active participation. Nonrecording of certain events and processes allows the state to avoid taking responsibility (Kalir & van Schendel, 2017). For example, knowing too much about irregular migration would require state agencies to act on it; thus, they often deny the legitimacy of existing knowledge or resign from efforts to learn about certain issues (Boswell & Badenhop, 2021). In extreme situations, populist decision-makers not only ignore academic knowledge but also undermine the knowledge produced by state agencies and the recommendations delivered by their own advisors (Mica et al., 2020).

Expertise concerning migration is produced by various actors outside academia, including non-governmental organisations involved in supporting migrants; state agencies responsible for recording and processing multiple data concerning migration; international organisations pursuing their own agenda; and a growing community of commercial actors producing expertise according to client-customer logic (i.e. consultancy companies). They not only have diverse interests but also vary in their cultures of knowledge production, valuation and communication. Thus, efficient dialogue between such parties requires boundary-spanning (Bednarek et al., 2018, p. 1176). This work requires not only translating the divergent ways of framing the issue of migration for different parties, but also dealing with their mutual mistrust

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Yet a key questions arise: (1) To what extent are non-academic stakeholders using the migration knowledge, data, and recommendations produced? (2) Is the limited uptake due to lack of access, competing interests, or a deliberate disregard for research findings?

How will international migration flows in Europe evolve in response to changing global and regional contexts?

What are the key challenges?

What is the vision for future migration governance in the EU and its Member States, including Central and Eastern Europe, from the perspective of various stakeholders/actors?

The discussion aimed to identify “real, not imagined challenges” and emphasised the importance of connecting research with policymaking. A core message was that migration is a persistent, not temporary, phenomenon and a “fact of life” that will continue to shape Europe’s future, alongside more specific messages for policymakers, researchers and wider audiences, as outlined below.



MIGRATION IS A FACT OF LIFE

Migration is a persistent, not temporary, phenomenon and a “fact of life” that will continue to shape Europe's future. It is not merely a crisis to be managed but a constant factor in Europe's landscape.

Europe demonstrably needs migrants due to demographic changes, acute labour market demands and skills shortages. The prevailing “obsession with failure” and negative discourse, often driven by myths and securitised frameworks (i.e. presenting migration in the context of crime, terrorism, and other threats to security), hinders effective policy-making and public debate.

There is a critical legal and practical distinction between voluntary migrants and refugees who have a right to seek asylum. This distinction is vital for appropriate governance strategies.

TO RESPOND, POLICYMAKERS CAN:

Foster a common understanding of comprehensive migration governance that includes diverse, sometimes demanding tasks.

Update policies to reflect the diverse categories of migrants, recognising migration as a governance issue, rather than a control issue.

Build and consolidate trust and strong cooperation among diverse stakeholders—governments, international organisations, civil society, and researchers—to effectively implement agreed policies.

Ensure policy coherence between migration, employment, education, and overall social inclusion to leverage migration as a driver of competitiveness.

Support civil society organisations by increasing their agency and political representation at all levels, alongside stable funding. NGOs play a vital humanitarian role and can prevent larger-scale failures in crisis responses, as seen with Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Prioritise sustainable, foresight-driven solutions to anticipate future flows and prepare for them, learning from past crises, such as in 2015, when large numbers of asylum seekers were crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Implement smart inclusion policies for refugees: their economic contribution can lead to significant benefits, exemplified by Ukrainian refugees' contribution to countries' GDP.

Develop firm but fair border management, clear screening and border procedures with safeguards for asylum seekers, and ensure effective but humanitarian returns for those without a right to stay to maintain the integrity of the asylum



FOR RESEARCHERS

RESEARCHERS CAN:

Counter the “obsession with failure” and negative discourse surrounding migration by providing evidence-based insights.

Further research is needed on fostering a common understanding of comprehensive migration governance and building trust among diverse stakeholders.

New research questions could address the long-term socio-economic and political impacts of different migration governance models, the efficacy of specific digitalised systems in migration management, and effective strategies for communicating the benefits of migration to host societies.

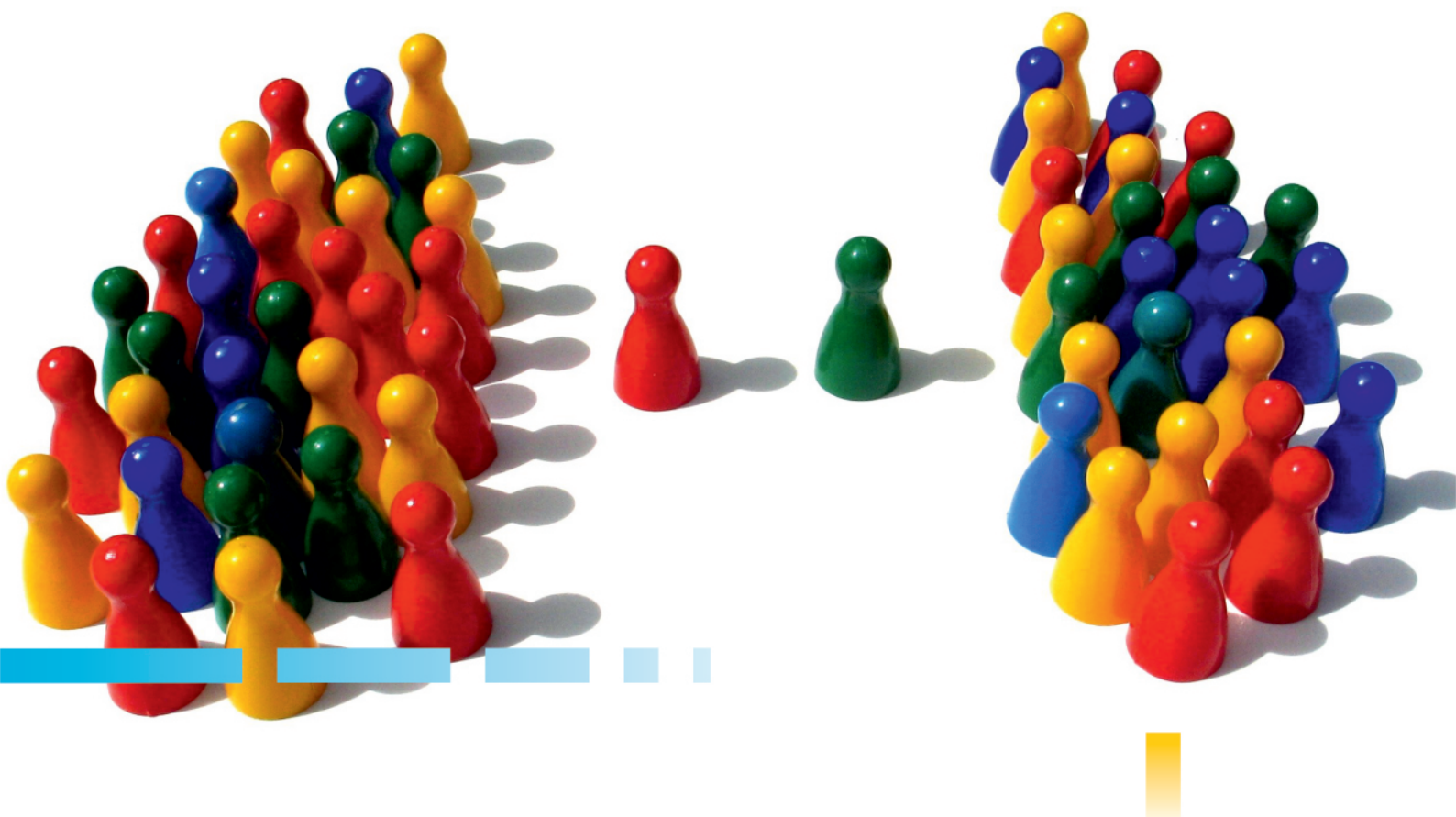
Explore effective strategies for integrating diverse migrant categories into historically monocultural societies, drawing lessons from countries like Poland transitioning into immigration countries.

Examine barriers to labour mobility and social inclusion, particularly data gaps on labour market shortages and issues with qualification recognition.

Analyse the impact of populist rhetoric and the politicisation of migration on societal divisions and anti-migrant sentiments, and propose effective counter-narratives rooted in societal solidarity and values.

Study the mechanisms for ensuring sustainable funding and increased political representation for NGOs, given their vital humanitarian role and ability to prevent larger-scale failures in crisis responses.

Foster multi-actor and multi-sectoral dialogue that explicitly engages academia and researchers, NGOs and CSOs, IGOs, and public authorities, guided by a multi-level governance (MLG) approach.



FOR RESEARCHERS

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES:

For Citizens and Communities:

Migration leads to more diverse societies. Learning to live with diversity and actively combating structural discrimination are essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable development. This can mean richer cultural experiences and a more resilient society.

For Workers:

Migrants often fill labour market gaps, ensuring businesses can operate and reducing burdens on existing workforces, particularly in sectors facing shortages. This can lead to a more stable economy. Migrants create new workplaces and, as consumers, contribute to economic growth. In most cases, the employment of migrant workers complements the employment of citizens, so they do not push citizens out of the labour market.

For Migrants:

Effective governance requires policies that are updated to reflect diverse migrant categories, ensuring fair treatment, streamlining procedures, and recognising qualifications to allow them to contribute fully to their new homes. It is crucial that people understand their role in the social structure, be able to contest it and change it.

For Young Generations:

Young people will grow up in a more diverse and interconnected Europe. Understanding migration as a governance issue, rather than a control issue, and grounding policies in societal solidarity, are crucial for the future stability and prosperity of the continent.

For Seniors:

An ageing population relies on a strong workforce to support social security and healthcare systems. Migrants contribute to this workforce, helping to sustain the services that seniors depend on.

Concrete impacts on daily life:

You might encounter migrants in your workplace, local shops, or as service providers, filling essential roles that keep your community functioning. Your local community might become more culturally rich, with new restaurants, traditions, and perspectives. A strong economy, bolstered by migrant contributions, can lead to better public services and infrastructure. Supporting NGOs (through volunteering or donations) means directly contributing to effective crisis response and community integration efforts.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Institutionalise "Boundary-Spanning" Mechanisms

Policymakers should promote permanent, formal structures for boundary-spanning to mediate between the diverse "cultures of knowledge production" found in academia, NGOs, the private sector, and state agencies.

2 Promote Collaborative Research Design

To ensure relevance, the policy should incentivise research methodologies that include governance actors and NGOs in the design phase, rather than just as consumers of final reports.

3 Prioritise Sustainable, Foresight-Driven Solutions

Move towards long-term solutions by anticipating future flows and learning from past crises to build preparedness.

4 Implement Smart Inclusion Policies for Refugees

Leverage the economic benefits of refugee inclusion, as demonstrated by Ukrainian refugees' significant contribution to Poland's GDP, by designing intelligent policies.

5 Align Policies Across Multiple Sectors

Foster policy coherence between migration, employment, education, and overall social inclusion to maximise migration as a driver of competitiveness.

6 Address Labour and Skills Shortages Proactively

Tackle acute labour and skills shortages driven by ageing populations and technological shifts by addressing data gaps on labour market needs, streamlining immigration procedures, and developing effective matching systems, such as the proposed EU talent pool.

7 Root Policies in Societal Solidarity

Develop policies grounded in societal solidarity and values, rather than short-term political interests, to counter divisive rhetoric and anti-migrant sentiment.

8 Update Policies for Diverse Migrant Categories

Ensure policies reflect the diverse categories of migrants, distinguishing between voluntary migrants and refugees

9 Ensure Strong but Fair Border Management

Implement clear, transparent screening and border procedures, with robust safeguards for asylum seekers. **Effective but humanitarian returns for those without a right to stay** are critical to maintain the integrity of the asylum system.

10 Poland's Specific Approach

For countries like Poland transitioning to immigration countries, strategies should aim for a **considered approach to new arrivals** while strengthening integration mechanisms for those already present, including digitalising systems and building administrative capacity. **The lack of such actions is a recipe for future social tensions.**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RESOURCES FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND FURTHER EXPLORATION

Bednarek, A. T., Wyborn, C., Cvitanovic, C., Meyer, R., Colvin, R. M., Addison, P. F., Close, S. L., Curran, K., Farooque, M., Goldman, E., Hart, D., Mannix, H., McGreavy, B., Parris, A., Posner, S., Robinson, C. Ryan, M., & Leith, P. (2018). Boundary spanning at the science-policy interface: the practitioners' perspectives. *Sustainability Science*, 13(4), 1175–1183.

Boswell, C., & Badenhop, E. (2021). "What isn't in the files, isn't in the world": Understanding state ignorance of irregular migration in Germany and the United Kingdom. *Governance*, 34(2), 335–352.

European Commission. (n.d. a). Migration and mobility. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, from https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/social-sciences-and-humanities/migration-and-mobility_en

European Commission. (n.d. b). Projects & results. In CORDIS – EU Research Results. Retrieved August 29, 2025, from <https://cordis.europa.eu/projects>

Kalir, B., & van Schendel, W. (2017). Introduction: Nonrecording states between legibility and looking away. *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 2017(77), 1–7.

Mica, A., Horolets, A., Pawlak, M., & Kubicki, P. (2020). Ignorance and Change: Anticipatory Knowledge and the European Refugee Crisis. Routledge.

Natter, K., & Welfens, N. (2024). Why has migration research so little impact? Examining knowledge practices in migration policy making and migration studies. *International Migration Review*, 58(4), 1669–1700.

Pachocka, M., & Caballero-Vélez, D. (2025). Exploring Migration Challenges in Europe after 2014: What is the direction of EU migration management and policy? In Y. Abu-Laban, M. Paquet, & E. Tungohan (Eds.), *Knowledge, Power, and Migration: Contesting the North/South Divide* (pp. 265–291). Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Pawlak, M., (2025). Producing and using knowledge in governing migration in Europe. In L. Cleton, N. Irastorza, A. Weinart, L. Zhyznomirska (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Migration in Europe*, second edition. Routledge, (forthcoming).

Additional resources from the EUROMOBI conference:

Myroslava Keryk. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3-_MAiBTDs

Mikołaj Pawlak. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBqfNu7nBo8>

Marta Pachocka. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AT3PrJnZHY&t=1s>

Why Has Migration Research So Little Impact? Knowledge Practices in Policy Making and Migration Studies: Natalie Welfens. YouTube. https://youtu.be/Fy5Tj8HUVtI?si=eja-qcpr_92NIMo

Keynote speech by professor Hein de Haas. YouTube. https://youtu.be/rxltmdmCgIQ?si=LW_RRy2rk5s6Aprt

Europe and Mobilities Day 1 Session I Future of migration in Europe. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtCoaN4_1ms&t=4634s

Resources from the Centre of Migration Research:

Migration Research. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2m3P7FfJloxjnA5KKzHHgw>

CMR Spotlight. https://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/publication_type/spotlight/

DISCLAIMERS

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