

Joint EMN Luxembourg – INNOVATE Workshop: Forecasting and Preparedness in EU Migration Governance

28 October 2025

Background

The 2015–2016 migration crisis and Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine revealed that many Member States and the European Union were not sufficiently prepared to respond swiftly and effectively to sudden, large-scale migratory flows looking for protection in the EU.¹ As a result of the new geopolitical challenges (e.g. tensions, wars, cybersecurity) that the European Union is being confronted with, the European Commission has presented a preparedness strategy to anticipate, prevent and respond to all these challenges, especially to migratory flows.² The challenges faced by governments across the European Union make the European Commission focus on forecasting and preparedness to confront new migration flows.³

Despite this policy shift, operationalizing migration forecasting and preparedness remains challenging. Even with improved data and forecasting methods, predicting future migration remains inherently complex (as there are too many factors involved), and some uncertainty remains irreducible.⁴ This situation poses challenges for experts and policy actors, such as:

¹ Sandra Morgenstern and Oliver Strijbis, “Forecasting Migration Movements Using Prediction Markets,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 12, no. 1 (October 9, 2024): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00404-0>; Council of the European Union, “Council Implementation Decision (EU) 2022/382 of”, March 4, 2022. URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022D0382>

² European Commission. “EU preparedness union strategy,” accessed June 27, 2025. URL: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/preparedness_en

³ Maciej Stępką, “In Anticipation of New Migration Crises: Resilience and Anticipatory Governance in the EU’s Migration Management Framework,” *Politeja* 19, no. 4 (79) (December 21, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.19.2022.79.09>; Sandra Morgenstern and Oliver Strijbis, “Forecasting Migration Movements Using Prediction Markets,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 12, no. 1 (October 9, 2024): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00404-0>.

⁴ Jakub Bijak, ed., *From Uncertainty to Policy: A Guide to Migration Scenarios* (Cheltenham, UK Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2024).

- 1) Forecasting experts face the challenge of communicating complex forecasting models to policy actors and explaining what these models can and cannot deliver.
- 2) Policy actors must put in place preparedness strategies and contingency plans for an uncertain future, which poses challenges such as deciding on adequate resource allocation and policy planning.

Objective of the workshop

In response to the above-mentioned challenges, the workshop pursues two objectives:

1. Providing a hands-on opportunity to explore what preparedness for an unexpected migration scenario means through using the LEGO® Serious Play® methodology.
2. Fostering discussion on how to effectively communicate and translate complex migration forecasting models to policy actors and the wider public.

Summary of interactive panel discussion

During the second part of the event on Forecasting and Preparedness in EU Migration Governance, experts presented their latest work on forecasting and AI models, followed by an **interactive panel discussion** that focused on the communication of complex migration predictions. The discussion between experts, policy actors, and the audience centered on three overarching questions:

- 3) How can we improve communication between forecasting experts and policy actors?
- 3) How to move beyond crisis-driven narratives when communicating migration predictions?
- 3) How can we build trust for decision-makers to rely on predictions?

Each question was answered by both policy actors and researchers. While their answers often overlapped, they also highlighted complementary approaches and perspectives.

Question 1: What works well – and what remains challenging – in the communication of migration forecasts to policymakers?

The panel discussion revealed remaining **challenges**. Notably, **both policy actors and researchers** highlighted that they sometimes “speak in different languages”.

According to **policy actors**, remaining **challenges in the communication of migration predictions** include:

- Academic language and scientific details in models can be challenging to decipher.
- Sometimes policymakers use models selectively, focusing only on results that support their views. Therefore, knowledge transfer can be difficult, as many people working in migration policy already have strong opinions about what is useful and what is not.
- One big challenge in communication is the “one number” requirement for migration predictions. In policy planning, budget allocation, etc., policymakers need/want *one number only*. This is the most difficult part: you can provide as much information as you want, but ultimately, feeding into policymaking requires a single figure. It is important to make policy actors understand that this number is not the absolute value but the **most optimal value**. Regular interactions are key to achieving this understanding. However, this can be challenging because policymakers are often too busy to discuss data in detail.
- Sometimes policy actors lack the bigger picture (outside of the national context), which is something researchers could provide them with. This would also be complementary information to what policy actors already receive from institutions on the national level.

According to **researchers**, remaining **challenges in communication** are:

- Governments often expect really good models within a very short timeframe. However, this is difficult without sufficient time and resources. In addition, to have a good model, you need very good knowledge data and understanding about the many factors that impact migration. Policymakers need to understand the enormous faults

in the existing sources of information they are using.

- Models depend on the quality of the data, which is fundamental. There is a balance between transparency and accuracy: the more explicable a model is, the less accurate it may become. To make models understandable for policymakers, some accuracy may be sacrificed.

Both groups also pointed out the importance of **dedicating more resources** to the development of models and high-quality data.

However, participants also highlighted **good approaches and successful examples** of communication between forecasting experts and policy actors:

Both researchers and policy actors highlighted the importance of conveying results in a simplified manner to policy actors.

When presenting results to policy actors, it is important to engage in briefings that convey the results without focusing on the technical details. They should also include clear recommendations.

- Data simplification and visualizations (simple charts or maps) to convey the results are very useful for decision-makers.
- Briefings and interactive, engaging presentations are more useful than traditional reports.

Researchers also pointed out that:

- Intermediaries, so-called “technical communicators,” are useful to bridge the gap between technical experts and policymakers.
- What should be communicated instead of the accuracy of results or the number of people arriving, is an emphasis on the human and financial cost of *not* being prepared/of not relying on forecasts.

Both researchers and policy actors highlighted that **continuous exchange and interaction** are key to good communication and mutual understanding:

- Successful collaboration requires **ongoing dialogue** rather than one-off presentations or short visits. Avoid the fly out approach, of having one-off, isolated interventions. Regular interaction is also key for researchers and policy actors to build a common understanding and language, which is important for good communication.
- This allows experts to incorporate policymakers' perspectives when creating models. At the same time, involving decision makers in the process creates trust in the results.
- Good example of such a continuous exchange: Metropolis Canada Conference⁵, which is an annual meeting between academics and policymakers working in the field of immigration and settlement in Canada.

Question 2: How can we move away from crisis-driven narratives in migration predictions?

Both policy actors and researchers highlighted the importance in **shifting the narrative** when discussing migration predictions. However, this can be challenging in the current, polarized climate where evidence-based policies are increasingly questioned/disregarded.

- There is a need to move away from a crisis-centered narrative. It should involve a shift from a reactive to a proactive approach.
- Communication about high levels of migration to citizens should acknowledge that crises can occur, but emphasize that we are prepared for it. Being prepared allows

⁵ [Metropolis Canada – ACS Metropolis](#)

The Metropolis Canada Conference is the largest annual gathering of researchers, policy makers, and representatives from community and settlement organizations working in the field of immigration and settlement in Canada. Metropolis Canada connects up to 1000 people every March to discuss emerging issues, identify and set research priorities and inform policy regarding immigration, refugees, settlement and integration in Canada. The annual conference includes plenary panels with distinguished speakers, as well as workshop and roundtable sessions on a wide variety of topics.

for a more positive narrative: “this is tough, but we are prepared for it, and we will manage it”. It includes shifting the narrative away from crisis to predictable risk.

- Contingency planning is key in allowing this shift in framing and being actually prepared. This also highlights the importance of linking forecasting with contingency measures.
- Changing the narrative also includes emphasizing that migration is a natural phenomenon and not a crisis.
- Strategies to shift the narrative should be multifaceted, including, for instance, education.

Policy actors added that

- In the current climate, networks or institutions, such as the EMN, who are tasked with providing evidence-based and objective information, must continue their work as it is now as important as ever. Even when there is no desire to consult the information that has been prepared, the work needs to continue.

Moreover, according to **researchers**:

- With every crisis, a new model is developed, or an existing model is improved. In that context, we should have less of a crisis-driven narrative because we are better prepared, as the models have improved. A crisis often reflects a lack of operationalization; better preparedness is needed to avoid crises.

The last question was posed by the audience, and aligned with the question that was initially prepared for the panel discussion:

Question 3: How can we help policymakers understand and sell the importance of investing in preparedness today for events that *may or may not* occur in the future?

This is a challenge - it is clear that we are often “lost in translation” between policy and practice. Both sides need to engage more, but the models are extremely complex and difficult to distill into a single number or simple message. Policy makers also have to justify

their choices with budgets in mind, and it is challenging to justify allocating money to something that *may* or *may not* happen.

Both researchers and policy actors highlighted again the importance of **collaboration and engagement** to increase **trust** in migration predictions.

- Continuous contact and effective information channels are essential to build trust and mutual understanding.
- Co-designing (involving both policy actors and researchers in the creation of the predictions) is a good approach to improve trust in the results. Therefore, a good approach is to involve more actors in more stages of the creation of predictions.
- Forecasting experts should ideally be included in meetings where policy decisions are made. A new governance framework is needed, where data scientists are on the frontline.

Good approaches to increase the chance that policy actors take migration forecasts and preparedness into consideration include:

- **Identifying the right audience** by mapping who is ultimately in charge (the right person responsible for the topic). That way, results should be disseminated to the appropriate audience, and the chances of impact can be increased.
- **Changing of narrative:** funding for forecasting and preparedness should be seen not as a cost but as an **investment**. It must be highlighted that the cost of preparedness is a lot lower than the cost of *not* being prepared.

Policy actors also highlighted that:

- Policymakers must develop an understanding of the quality of the information they receive. There is a wide range of data available across different domains, so they need to know what to rely on.
- Policymakers must show willingness to act. In the past, we have seen “boiling frog” phenomenon: we slowly saw numbers raising over time, but decision-makers did not act accordingly. If there is no willingness to act, forecasting efforts are in vain.

Conclusion

Overall, the discussion showed that there are remaining challenges in the communication and translation of migration predictions to policy actors – however, it also showed considerable willingness among both sides to improve this. What stood out most was the need to create an ongoing channel of communication and interaction between researchers and policy actors to create mutual understanding and trust.