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EDITORIAL

# Navigating the Bermuda Triangle: Exploring the Relationship between Migration Scholarship and Migration Governance

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## Abstract

In this introduction to the special issue on migration research and governance, we identify three key issues at the heart of current migration discourses: a range of normative and ethical assumptions, the transnational dynamics of migration, and the challenges of domestic policymaking. We argue that these intertwined dimensions create a complex 'Bermuda Triangle' where good intentions often falter and migrants themselves bear the greatest risks. Migration represents both a political and academic minefield with implications for policy outcomes. Through the nine contributions in this issue, we demonstrate how interdisciplinary perspectives and diverse stakeholder engagement offer pathways out of this impasse. Drawing on insights from the nups-network, we organize these contributions around three themes: addressing global challenges such as climate change and technology, examining the machinery of migration governance systems in different regional contexts and at different scales, and highlighting promising practises for research-policy dialogue and collaboration.

## Keywords

**Migration Governance; Migration Discourses; Social Policymaking; Transnational Networks; Intersectoral Collaborations**

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While migration scholars have dedicated tremendous efforts to understanding the complexity of migration ([Vertovec 2024](#)), they lament the absence of a ‘central body of theories that summarises, generalises and systematises [...] empirical research’ ([de Haas 2021](#), p. 3; [Favell 2007](#)). Instead, they observe a variety of ‘migration governance repertoires’ ([Geddes 2021](#), p. 27) in action. They even speak of migration governance as a ‘broken global system’ ([Pope 2025](#)) and describe migration itself as a ‘messy business’ ([Triandafyllidou 2022](#)). This complexity makes (im)migration one of the most controversial and contested issues in current policymaking, whether in destination countries – especially in Europe and North America – or in countries of origin – such as Ghana in Africa, Indonesia and the Philippines in Asia, and Ecuador in Latin America.

As we were preparing this special issue over the past year, we (the editors) witnessed how (im)migration challenges can expose and exacerbate political tensions. In Germany, these tensions triggered the collapse of the government in fall 2024, leading to an early election in February 2025 ([Tagesschau 2024](#)). In Canada, the federal government significantly raised migration targets across various categories in 2021 in response to presumed post-COVID-19 pandemic labour shortages. But in late 2023 and 2024, they abruptly reduced these targets in the face of a housing and cost-of-living crisis ([Bickerton 2024](#)).

Amid political and academic debates and tensions surrounding international migration, our aim with this special issue is to explore the existing experiences, scenarios, and solutions in migration governance. Specifically, we focus on the intricate relationship and potential synergies between scientific research (i.e., knowledge production) and the policymaking process. This relationship is marked by a delicate yet significant boundary (see [nups-network 2024](#)). Political decision-making often occurs under conditions of uncertainty (see McLeman in this issue) and unfolds on a stage that extends beyond the state, involving a myriad of actors with diverse competencies ([Hillmann & Samers 2023](#)).

We might consider bridging the gap between academia and policymaking through independent knowledge production in the field of migration, viewing it as a cornerstone of cosmopolitan societies. Building on Geddes’ notion of migration governance repertoire, we argue that ‘migration isn’t something that simply “happens” to governance systems’ ([Geddes 2021](#), p. 193). Rather, it is constructed and performed, tied to regional contexts, and frequently framed in terms of ‘crisis’. In our editorial, we propose the metaphor of the ‘Bermuda Triangle’ to grapple with this complex situation, where good intentions may suffer the fate of shipwrecks. Unfortunately, with numerous stakeholders at work, it is predominantly migrants who are left to navigate perilous waters on their own, lacking adequate information, resources, and support, thereby exposing them to significant risks.

To better understand this complex landscape, we have identified three key issues at the heart of the confusion in public and political discourse on migration: (1) the normative and ethical assumptions that underpin views on migration; (2) the transnational nature of migration and human mobility across national boundaries; and (3) the challenges of developing effective migration-related policies within national frameworks in an era of globalisation. We discuss these three key issues, why they must be considered as root causes for complexity, and why they represent a ‘Bermuda Triangle’ in migration governance. Then, we provide an overview of the papers included in this special issue.

## Three Key Issues in Migration Discourses

### NORMATIVE AND ETHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

First, it is important to understand the normative biases and ethical assumptions that colour public discourses and debates on migration, contributing to the Bermuda Triangle situation. These include framing migrants as ‘wanted’ or ‘unwanted,’ the role of social media in amplifying polarized debates, and the underlying belief that migration can or should be stopped.

### ‘Wanted’ vs. ‘Unwanted’ Narratives

Most conspicuous is the framing of certain types of migration and migrants as ‘unwanted,’ particularly those in need of support and resources, such as refugees and asylum seekers. Today, the perception of migration as an ‘unwanted event’ seems to be the prevailing perspective in many destination countries. This framing significantly contributes to tensions and contentious debates surrounding migration flows, driven by fears of numbers and resource shortages.

However, the ‘unwanted migration’ narrative obscures several important realities. First, the vast majority of people globally are not migrants. According to the [IOM World Migration Report \(2024; McAuliffe & Khadria 2020\)](#), in 2020 there were 281 million international migrants representing 3.6 % of the world’s population – i.e., international migration is still an exception, not the norm. Nevertheless, the number of displaced people in the world rose to 117 million by the end of 2022 – reaching an all-time high of 71.2 million internally displaced people, 5.4 million asylum seekers, and 35.3 million refugees ([IOM 2024](#)). International migration is increasing due to more violent conflicts, more disaster and environmental-related displacement, combined with blocked pathways into many destination countries ([Pope 2025](#)). Increasingly, migrants pay with their lives for attempting to migrate, and in 2023 the number of lost migrants was higher than ever ([IOM 2025](#)).

Within the ‘wanted/unwanted’ narrative, location and regional context are paramount. For forced migrants, displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees, migration is rarely voluntary and often a last resort after exhausting all other options. While institutions in the receiving countries may perceive them as a burden on social support systems, the perspective from countries of origin is vastly different. In regions where populations endure harsh and often unbearable living conditions, many people (albeit not all) see migration as a vital opportunity to build better lives for themselves and their families, even if temporarily (see papers by Rashidat Sumbola Akande et al. and Wiwandari Handayani et al. in this issue). Women, children, and other marginalized populations often face additional challenges ([IOM 2024](#)). Attempts to reduce complex socio-economic processes to simplistic binaries of ‘wanted’ and ‘unwanted’ migrants are a far cry from the realities on the ground.

### Social Media and Polarization

Over the past decade, the influence of the global mediascape ([Appadurai 1996](#)) has profoundly changed in its extent, scope and breadth of communication. This global imaginary and hope in migration ([Nakache et al. 2015](#)) is strongly enabled by social media and various intermediaries in the growing migration industry, influencing and guiding individuals’ migration decisions ([Triandafyllidou et al. 2023](#)). Moreover, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools increasingly shapes migration management (see Iazzolino in this issue), making algorithms an influential player.

Social media significantly impact the polarization of public opinion and political discourse surrounding migration. Migrants, especially those belonging to visible minorities, increasingly encounter discrimination and xenophobia upon arrival in many countries. This polarization manifests in various ways across different contexts. In European countries such as Germany and Italy, some political parties openly advocate for ‘remigration’ policies, which essentially means the forced return or deportation of selected migrant groups. Meanwhile, in North America, significant reversals in immigration policies affecting, often endangering, some migrant groups, are evident ([Betts 2019; Masferrer & Gil 2024](#)).

### Questioning the Assumption of Stopping Migration

Most importantly, these positions and policy shifts in different countries reflect an underlying assumption that migration movements can be stopped or reversed. They convey an overly simplified view of migration, as if people on the move were objects that could be stored away and retrieved at convenience. Moreover,

they usually underestimate the significant role of imagination, mental mobilities, and transnational ties in migration decision-making ([Kyle et al. 2019](#), p. 313ff). Notably absent from these polarized discourses is a recognition that privileged forms of migration and mobility, such as tourism and other leisure-traveling, inspire imaginaries about migration and mobility worldwide.

## TRANSNATIONAL NATURE OF MIGRATION

We now turn to the second issue in public and political discourses on migration that we see as a root cause of confusion on complexities: migration is inherently transnational in an increasingly interconnected world, with human mobility across national borders creating both connections and tensions between countries. We must not disregard the economic, social, and cultural value that accompanies migration ([Walton-Roberts 2022](#)). As with our first key challenge, we identify the main drivers of our Bermuda Triangle dynamics: global inequalities, increasing financial dependencies, the externalisation of migration control, and the dysfunctionality of international regulatory frameworks.

### Global Inequalities and Dependencies

Many countries in the Global North depend on (im)migrants – whether permanent, temporary, or undocumented – as a source of labour to support economic growth, prosperity, and demographic stability. Concurrently, many origin countries, particularly in the Global South, develop policies based on the labour opportunities their citizens may find abroad. Global hierarchies and inequalities accompany migration and mobilities ([Sheller 2018](#)), raising questions of international justice. One indicator that illustrates the extent of international dependencies and the dense web of transnational ties that migration creates is remittances. These international flows of capital that migrants send to their families and communities reached a peak of USD 831 billion in 2022 ([IOM 2024](#)). The story does not end here. We must think of remittances as accompanied by an armada of migration intermediaries, including recruiters, migration agencies, and traffickers, among others, that help facilitate migration but also serve their own interests while operating transnationally and across borders ([Triandafyllidou et al. 2023](#)). Such migration industries feed into the commercialization of international migration ([Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg-Sørensen 2013](#)) and serve as the glue for intensified transnational formations ([Dahinden 2010](#)).

### Externalizing Migration Control

What further adds to the complexities of transnational migration is the trend of externalizing migration control through bilateral agreements. Much focus has been on countries that build higher fences and revert to nationalist policies to ‘control’ migration flows and keep migrants out (e.g., the deal Germany made with Turkey to host Syrian refugees; [Knaus 2021](#)). Countries such as Australia, the USA, and the EU (e.g., Italy) impose agreements on transit and developing countries to contain unwanted migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Since 2023, Germany has also embarked on migration agreements that link skill mobility partnerships with the return of denied asylum seekers. All these arrangements reflect significant power imbalances, with wealthier destination states exerting economic and political pressure to secure cooperation from transit countries, often at the expense of migrants’ rights and well-being ([Mountz 2011](#); [Mountz 2020](#)).

### Limitations of International Frameworks

We already mentioned the polarized public and political discourses surrounding (im)migration. Public and political discourses that frame migration primarily in terms of national policy concerns fail to grapple with the complexities described above. In many cases, public discourses often fail to acknowledge the inherently transnational nature of contemporary migration, leading to international arrangements that remain mostly *ad hoc*, fragmented, and oriented towards the interests of more powerful states. Truly effective global

migration governance continues to remain elusive, lacking a coherent regulatory framework ([van Riemsdijk et al. 2021](#)). This is despite years of efforts to establish international frameworks, such as the International Labour Organization's *Convention 189 on Domestic Workers* ([ILO 2011](#)), the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants* ([UNHCR 2016](#)), and the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* ([IOM 2018](#)). These agreements, however, are legally non-binding international cooperation frameworks and have yet to be universally ratified. They are supported by an entangled and untransparent network of NGOs around global institutions such as ILO, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UN organisations ([Yeates & Pillinger 2021](#)). Some critics even argue that the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* represents merely a 'catalogue of "actions"' and is 'torn between a laissez-faire and a planning approach', depicting an ideal migration world while 'silencing and dodging the core political dilemmas' ([Pécoud 2021](#), p. 29).

The issue here is that there is often little public discussion about these immense challenges of creating coherent international frameworks. In part, this may be due to the fact that actors discuss transnational questions in informal settings rather than on the frontlines – such as behind the scenes meetings, at coffee tables during conferences, and occasionally in more official settings (see Duncan in this issue).

### THE DOMESTIC CHALLENGE OF MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

The third and final issue contributing to the Bermuda Triangle dynamics is that (im)migration as a social reality continues to be seen as a domestic challenge for liberal democracies. In most countries, (im) migration policies are designed to address social policy concerns that have traditionally been managed at the national level. The more complex national welfare schemes are, the more judicial interpretations give rise to controversies and varying practices ([Martinsen et al. 2021](#), p. 1649). Much of the public and political discourse around migration governance focuses on the challenges it poses for national-level policymaking, particularly in terms of managing the false division into 'wanted' vs. 'unwanted' migrants within state borders. This narrow domestic focus fails to grasp the inherently multi-scalar nature of migration and the need for coordinated responses across the full spectrum of governance, beyond scales and levels ([Hillmann & Samers 2023](#)).

More effective migration governance would require the integration of local authorities, regional bodies, international organizations, civil society actors, the diaspora, and migrants themselves ([Hamilton et al. 2020](#); see Tirbanie & Pawiński and Salifu & Jørgensen in this issue). Crucially, it also necessitates the engagement of researchers working in diverse regional contexts to allow for a comprehensive understanding of migration realities on the ground.

These three issues in combination risk to create what reminds us of a Bermuda Triangle situation. The safeguards against this dynamic are research, policymaking, public opinion and civil society. Yet, bringing together such a diverse array of actors with their different perspectives, priorities and resources is a daunting challenge. Moreover, ensuring meaningful participation and representation, particularly of marginalized groups, is an ongoing struggle.

Ultimately, effective migration governance in an interconnected world requires mechanisms for sustained dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration among diverse stakeholders. This is where researchers have a crucial role to play. Their work is needed to broaden the conversation beyond narrow national policy debates. Their research can help lay the foundations for more comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable migration governance frameworks.

### THE POLITICAL AND ACADEMIC MINEFIELD OF MIGRATION

Given the complexity of the topic, it comes as no surprise that over the past few decades, migration has rarely been a winning ticket in politics. For politicians, political parties, and policymakers, migration is a



risky subject ([Ambrosini 2023](#)) that can be used as a wedge issue, often leading to political losses rather than gains. It seldom wins the public's heart. Similarly, conducting research on migration poses significant challenges and is far from being a winning ticket. Individual researchers usually face a trade-off between producing in-depth case-studies that may lack generalizability, and analysing big data based on standardised approaches that may miss important contextual dynamics and nuances.

Many researchers fear that their findings could be used instrumentally to advance specific political agendas, leading some to maintain a deliberate distance from policy debates; they might inadvertently receive praise from the wrong crowd ... Consequently, many prioritize academic publications in peer-reviewed journals (with limited outreach to public audiences) over public engagement. They also often critique policymaking without fully understanding the constraints and negotiations involved into the decision-making process. Much of the documentation on political activities is inaccessible to them, as there tends to be little transparency in state projects and programs (see Patzwaldt & Ette in this issue).

Governments and policymakers, on the other hand, may at times have a more instrumental view of academic research, seeing researchers as professional data collectors who can provide answers to immediate policy questions and support effective policymaking (see Webster et al. in this issue). In such cases, empirical evidence may be used selectively to support predetermined policy positions, while research that highlights risks, unintended consequences, or the need for long-term thinking may be overlooked. A potential solution could be in conducting large, international, and comparative projects through collaborative, interdisciplinary and intersectoral partnerships, which may help to mitigate these issues to some extent. Nevertheless, securing funding and coordinating large research teams effectively requires substantial efforts. Thus, overcoming these many challenges requires dedicated actions to bridge the gap between the worlds of research and policy.

### Stepping out of the Bermuda Triangle

This special issue emerged from ongoing conversations among migration scholars about how to navigate this Bermuda Triangle of the complex relationship between migration research and policymaking. Through our 'nups-network' ('nups' stands for networking unit paradigm shift) an initiative born in the context of the International Metropolis Conference 2022 in Berlin (IMCB22), we have grappled with questions of how closely academia should engage with policy, and how researchers can best fulfil their social responsibilities, since their research is often funded through taxpayers' money. The papers in this special issue build on the work of the nups-network by offering concrete examples and insights into the challenges and opportunities of research-policy collaboration in different contexts.

A key output of this dialogue was a 'Think piece' we wrote during a nups-writing week in June 2024 on 'what is needed now' to bridge the growing gap between migration research and policymaking (see [nups-network 2024](#)). According to the Think piece:

- It takes time to design and conduct quality research (ethics requirements, data collection, and analysis) and then to publish results. This often conflicts with governments' need to make decisions rapidly and on the basis of the best or most adequate results available at the time of decision-making (i.e., they do not have the luxury of waiting for finalised, fully coherent research results to become publicly available);
- Policymakers often lack access to research findings relevant to the decision-making at hand and have limited time to read and process lengthy academic studies;
- Academic research can be critical, revealing how policies may have detrimental effects or may create new problems, which may leave policymakers with limited choices to make optimal decisions;
- The tendency to use technical language and jargon in academic writing and publications may result in materials that are opaque or unintelligible to policy-makers;

- Mutual suspicion may combine with a lack of familiarity between academic researchers and government officials;
- Academic researchers often have limited or no awareness of the information needs of policymakers;
- And policymakers frequently have limited or no awareness of the information and insights available within the academic community.

Drawing on these assumptions of the nups-network, we asked colleagues to provide meaningful contributions to better understand this Bermuda Triangle. We asked contributors three key questions:

- What are the most pressing research priorities for the coming years?
- What are the most significant policy implications of current migration trends and dynamics?
- Which emerging actors and perspectives need to be engaged in migration research and policy debates?

By addressing these questions and providing concrete examples of research-policy collaboration, the papers in this special issue contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen the dialogue between migration researchers and policymakers, and to develop more effective and evidence-informed responses to the complex challenges of migration governance.

In addition, the papers engage with the three key issues we have identified in complementary ways. Several papers – including McLeman, Iazzolino, and Webster et al. – address the normative assumptions underlying migration research by challenging conventional approaches to knowledge production. Three contributions from Global South contexts (Akanke et al., Handayani et al., and Tirbanie & Pawiński) illuminate the on-the-ground complexities and transnational dimensions of migration by highlighting cross-border dependencies and power dynamics of (im)mobility. Meanwhile, Webster et al. and Salifu and Jørgensen tackle the domestic policy challenges through their analysis of municipal approaches and policy responses to migration, while Patzwaldt and Ette and Duncan propose frameworks for bridging research and policy that acknowledge the multi-scalar and multisectoral nature of effective governance. By approaching these issues from different disciplinary, conceptual and methodological angles, the papers collectively offer pathways for navigating the Bermuda Triangle we have identified. What follows is an overview of the papers and key themes that emerged from this endeavour.

## Unveiling the complexities of migration governance: An overview of the special issue

The nine contributions presented here demonstrate that migration has become, in many respects, a testing ground for policymaking when grappling with significant global challenges. Collectively, the papers shed light on the intricacies of migration governance at various levels and emphasize the importance of fostering dialogue and collaboration between the worlds of research and policy to develop more effective and evidence-informed responses. The papers showcase the value of engaging with scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including geography, environmental science, urban and regional planning, development studies, economics, and political science, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of migration governance challenges and opportunities.

### GRAPPLING WITH GLOBAL CHALLENGES: CLIMATE CHANGE AND TECHNOLOGY

As mentioned, the number of international migrants, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, refugees, and temporary migrant workers has increased significantly in recent years, often as a result of conflicts, wars, and climate-related events and natural disasters ([IOM 2024](#)). Robert McLeman and Gianluca Iazzolino offer a comprehensive overview of the complexities and uncertainties surrounding climate-

related displacement (CRD) and the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in migration management, respectively.

In his paper ‘Coming to terms with deep uncertainty in the study of climate-related displacement’, **Robert McLeman** draws attention to the lack of progress in addressing the root causes of climate-related displacement (CRD) and the growing potential for catastrophic population displacements. He argues that the levels of uncertainty in some areas are so high, researchers are perhaps not even asking the correct questions or seeking answers in the best way. To better navigate this deep uncertainty, McLeman advocates for more ‘wildly imaginative and creative’ thinking to predict future phenomena combining qualitative, quantitative, and geomatics-based approaches, to experiment more with our curiosity and consider exploring various combinations of future climatic, economic, social and political trends to ‘illuminate one of those unknown unknowns lurking in the dark.’

**Gianluca Iazzolino’s** contribution, ‘Trading efficiency for control: the AI conundrum in migration management’, highlights the problematic application of AI tools in migration policymaking. He stresses the opacity of the datasets used to train AI models and the computing procedures that yield the final outputs. Drawing on case studies from the data justice and algorithmic accountability literature, he identifies two key dangers: function creep and the entanglement between problematic data and prediction in machine learning. Iazzolino also points to the risk of reproducing bias through datasets previously used to improve the model. Humanitarian crises and displacement are often turned into ‘living labs’ that serve to test predictive or generative models of AI. He argues that AI systems must be recognised as inherently political, as they enshrine specific views of power and relations of subordination.

Together, these papers underscore the need for more innovative, interdisciplinary, and forward-thinking approaches to migration research in the face of deep uncertainty and rapid technological change. They highlight the importance of recognizing the political nature of seemingly neutral tools like AI and developing big-data scenarios and modelling, and their potential to exacerbate power imbalances, particularly in the context of humanitarian crises and displacement. Both authors call for independent research, creative thinking, and a willingness to experiment with new methods and questions.

## INSIGHTS INTO THE MACHINERY: MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN PRACTICE

The papers delve into the complex machinery of migration governance, offering ground-level perspectives and experiences from diverse contexts.

### Perspectives from the Global South: Navigating complexity and fostering collaborations

Three contributions shed light on the governance of migration in Global South contexts. The paper by **Rashidat Sumbola Akande, Hauwah K.K. AbdulKareem, Sodiq Jimoh, and Taofeekat Temitope Nofiu**, ‘Informal Employment and Inequality: Implications for Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa’, examines the individual and combined effects of informal employment and inequality on migration flows across 43 Sub-Saharan African countries. They speak about the difficult everyday conditions driving many to leave their home countries. The study finds that both informal employment and inequality positively influence migration flows, while their interaction has a negative effect, suggesting that higher inequality may limit the migration propensity of those in informal employment. The authors call for policies aimed at reducing inequality and promoting inclusive formalization initiatives to enhance the well-being of informal workers and manage migration flows in the region.

The study by **Wiwandari Handayani, Citra Tatius, Felicitas Hillmann, Landung Esariti, Amy Young, and Laely Nurhidayah**, ‘(Im)mobility and Environmental Change in the Coastal Sinking Cities of Java, Indonesia’, investigates the factors influencing immobility in three coastal cities facing multiple environmental pressures. Using a comparative case study approach and adopting a gendered lens, they focus



on how adaptive capacities, shaped by policy and governance, influence immobility patterns. The findings show that the adaptation capacity of these coastal populations is shaped by inclusive and multi-scale policymaking and participatory governance. Their qualitative, multi-stakeholder methodology offers an innovative, out-of-the-box approach to understanding the complexities of climate-related displacement and the nuances of immobilities.

Thirdly, **Shelly Ann Tirbanie and Michał Pawiński**'s paper, 'The Challenges of Immigrant Policy Formation in Trinidad and Tobago: A Civil Society Perspective', examines the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the development of migrant integration policies in the context of Venezuelan migration to Trinidad and Tobago. Their analysis reveals key challenges relating to legislative frameworks, political will, and limited CSO involvement in policy consultations, underscoring the importance of CSO expertise and grassroots knowledge in informing evidence-based policymaking.

These three papers offer rich insights into the complex realities shaping migration patterns and policy responses in diverse Global South contexts. They highlight the interplay of socio-economic factors in driving migration flows, the need for context-specific understandings of (im)mobility and adaptation, and the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches to migration governance. They underscore the potential for evidence-informed and multi-stakeholder approaches to migration governance that are responsive to the unique needs and realities of developing regions, while also speaking to broader theoretical and often Western-dominated policy debates in the field of migration studies ([Piccoli et al. 2023](#)).

#### Local perspectives: Municipal responses to migration

The two papers in this section further the debate on how policymaking at the municipal level interacts with migratory patterns in North-Western European countries with mature welfare states and developed migration-related bureaucracies.

The paper by **Natasha Webster, Esther Veen and Sofi Johansson**, 'The Importance of Thinking In-Place with "Vulnerable" Neighbourhoods for Policy Making', emphasizes the need for policymakers and decision-makers to consider how they may be privileging certain forms of data and to embrace more diversified ways of knowing. Through case studies in Sweden and the Netherlands, they demonstrate how in-depth, experiential data based on the perspectives of neighbourhood residents can provide alternative narratives to top-down, homogeneous definitions of neighbourhoods, particularly in areas labelled as 'vulnerable.' The authors maintain that embracing this complexity is necessary for creating sustainable and socially just policies.

In their paper 'Immigrant Inclusion and Municipalism in a Danish Context,' **Mashudu Salifu and Martin Bak Jørgensen** explore the potential and limitations of municipalism – defined as a form of progressive localism that seeks to develop alternative policy frameworks at the municipal level – in relation to immigrant inclusion in three Danish cities (Copenhagen, Aarhus, and Aalborg). They find that, while Danish municipalities have implemented some innovative and pragmatic socio-economic and cultural policies and practices, their room for manoeuvre is constrained by the strong welfare state model and top-down governance structure. The authors develop a typology of forms of municipalism and conclude, however, that the issue of inclusion of irregular and illegalized migrants is not perceived as a pressing concern at the municipal level.

These two papers provide crucial perspectives into the challenges and opportunities of municipal-level policymaking and practices related to immigrant inclusion in different European contexts. They highlight the importance of considering local specificities, lived experiences, and diverse forms of knowledge in developing sustainable and socially just policies, while underscoring the constraints imposed by national policy frameworks and institutional arrangements, which can limit the transformative potential of 'municipalist' approaches.

## Forging connections: Promising practices for research-policy dialogue and collaboration

The final two papers offer important observations into the dynamics between scientific research, evidence, and policymaking in the context of managing refugee arrivals (Patzwalt and Ette) and fostering effective migration policies through governance tools (Duncan).

The paper by **Katja Patzwaldt and Andreas Ette**, ‘Communicating Science for Migration Policy: Refugee Protection in Germany 2015 and 2022’, examines how the German federal government utilized scientific evidence during the refugee arrivals in 2015 (primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq) and in 2022 (from Ukraine). The authors find that the selection of evidence was influenced by the political convictions of policymakers, with research being utilized to support legislation or programs only if it aligned with the governing parties’ political ideas. Professional experience and institutional mindset also played a role. They conclude that the research landscape in Germany evolved significantly between 2015 and 2022. The migration events in 2015 effectively served as a training ground for the subsequent arrival of Ukrainian refugees.

**Howard Duncan**’s paper, ‘Commentary: Enhancing Immigration Policy Through Research’, discusses the relationship between research and policy, drawing on insights from the Metropolis Project in Canada. He emphasizes the importance of building trust and collaborative working relationships between researchers and policymakers through regular communication and engagement. Duncan analyses how the Metropolis Project established regular communication channels that helped build mutual understanding, trust, and appreciation between researchers and policymakers, enabling researchers to provide timely input to policy processes while maintaining academic integrity. His paper also underlines the added value and significance of involving civil society organizations and NGOs in the research-policy dialogue.

These papers underscore the complex interplay of political, institutional, and temporal factors that shape the use of scientific evidence in migration policymaking. They highlight the importance of building bridges between research and policy communities through dedicated efforts to foster communication, trust, and shared purpose, advocating for more out-of-the-box thinking and interdisciplinary approaches to better understand the messiness of migration governance ([Triandafyllidou 2022](#)).

## Concluding Thoughts

Our special issue highlights migration as a multifaceted phenomenon that requires attention to global dynamics, local realities, and the interplay between knowledge production and decision-making at different levels. Collectively, the papers point to the need for and potential of more inclusive, evidence-informed, and adaptive approaches to migration governance. Such approaches must be responsive to rapidly changing realities on the ground and can help navigate the abysses of the Bermuda Triangle metaphor, ultimately allowing migrants to realize a dignified life abroad. They demonstrate the value of engaging with scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and regional contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of migration governance, challenges and opportunities. The papers also underscore the importance of fostering sustained dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge exchange between researchers, policymakers, and civil society actors to bridge the gap between research and policy and develop more effective responses. As we look ahead, it will be crucial to build on these insights and continue to strengthen the connections between migration research and governance to navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain landscape.

Despite the persistent dangers of a Bermuda Triangle in our migration system, exacerbated by diverse migration governance repertoires, biased media and information, and questionable assumptions, we believe the system can and must be reformed. Migration challenges are expected to increase rather than decrease in the near future. Moreover, it is unlikely that a single overarching theory will suffice to grasp the complexity of the issue. What is needed is incremental action involving various stakeholders and enhanced

communication between policymakers, researchers, civil-society and migrants themselves. Through this collaborative approach, we hope that humane solutions can emerge, making the world a more welcoming place for all.

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