

Update from ITFLOWS coordinator

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We have reached the halfway point of this exciting project, both modelling and predicting migration flows to EU Member States, as well as providing tools for the successful integration of migrants into our societies. I am proud to report that ITFLOWS has already produced some insightful results as we mark month 18.

One very tangible achievement is that we were able to provide the preliminary version of our EUMigraTool (EMT) for our Users Board to test and validate. They explored the various interfaces and features the EMT promises to offer so far. This EMT release has been perhaps one of the most challenging accomplishments for this first half of the project. Given the difficulties inherent to this kind of work and to research on migration, we encountered various limitations in the use of some of the selected data sources. Ultimately, however, we have successfully managed to integrate some of our predictive models into the EMT, and are inspired to continue improving it.

Another important milestone has been the completion of interviews with migrants arriving to the EU, which were conducted in various municipalities in Greece, Italy and Spain, thanks to collaboration and great work with our partners Red Cross Italy and Oxfam Italy, and Open Cultural Center (Greece and Spain). These interviews provide key information as to decision-making and dynamics in all stages of the migration journey, as well as regarding choices and preferences as to destination countries within the EU. Incorporating real experiences of migration processes and offering migrants a voice is central to the spirit of the ITFLOWS Project.

I would like to particularly thank (once again) the members of our 14 Partner Institutions for their excellent teamwork and ongoing commitment. Our strong and multidisciplinary Consortium keeps demonstrating the importance of combining our diverse set of skills and knowledge in order to offer new solutions in the field of migration.

We look forward to the start of this second half of the project and we are committed to share further relevant results in the near future.



PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

- **Preliminary Exploitation Plan** (February, 2022). Anna Pappa (Terracom), George Gogolos (Terracom), Konstantinos Kalampokis (Terracom).
- **Analysis of the role of contextual factors and dynamics of attitudes on social media, especially hate speech** (February, 2022). Mehwish Alam & Yiyi Chen (FIZ-Karlsruhe), Tobias Heidland & Finja Krueger (IfW).
- **Manual for Software Prototype of Social Media Analysis Tool to Monitor Public Attitudes towards Migration** (February, 2022). Mehwish Alam (FIZ-Karlsruhe); Yiyi Chen (FIZ-Karlsruhe); Afli, Haithem (MTU).
- **Time sequence of forced displacement into neighbouring countries** (February, 2022). Mattia Di Salvo (CEPS), Alexandre Ounnas (CEPS) & Doina Postica (CEPS).
- **Preliminary release of the EMT** (February, 2022). Georgios Stavropoulos, Nikolaos Gkevrekis, Ilias Iliopoulos, Garyfallia Papadopoulou (CERTH).
- **Details of the big data used in predicting country instability and model description** (February, 2022). Haithem Afli & Adam Zebrowski (MTU), Mehwish Alam & Yiyi Chen (FIZ-Karlsruhe).
- **Reports on (1) The impact of family migration and family reunification of refugees and other migrants (2) Secondary movements within the European Union** (February, 2022). (1) Lena Detlefsen (IfW), Andreas Backhaus (BfB) & Heidland, Tobias (IfW), (2) Sergio Carrera, Ngo Chun Luk, Friederike Mager & Marco Stefan (CEPS).
- **Overview report on relevant socio-economic situation in EU Member States** (November, 2021). Colleen Elizabeth Boland (UAB), Daniel Morente (UAB), Tobias Heidland (IfW), Finja Krüger (IfW).
- **Analysis on migration drivers and trajectories along the Eastern Mediterranean Route (South Central Asia & Middle East); Central and Western Mediterranean Routes and the Western Africa Route (North, West, and the Horn of Africa), and the Atlantic Route (South-Central America)**. (November, 2021). Asli Selin Okay, Luca Barana, Luca (IAI) Colleen Boland (UAB), Silvia Colombo (IAI), Flavia Fusco (IAI), Daniela Huber (IAI) Daniel Morente (UAB), Jacopo Resti (IAI), Elena Sánchez Montijano (UAB).
- **Developments along the route - The role of transit countries in shaping mixed-migration flows to Europe** (October, 2021). Mattia Di Salvo, Alexandre Ounnas & Doina Postica.

CONNECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

UNHCR Data and Information Management

ITFLOWS partners from WP1 and WP6 met with UNHCR information management staff to learn more about UNHCR data on refugee flows to the EU. UNHCR representatives overviewed their Refugee Data Finder, and discussed data sources. In particular, the colleagues explained how they obtained their data for arrivals to the EU, which largely only account for Mediterranean routes. They noted that they share data and consolidate it at the country level, and work with IOM colleagues who obtain data from host countries. This provides a limitation that ITFLOWS has encountered in the development of its own EUMigraTool, in that the discretion of national authorities is often problematic. The meeting was a useful way to collaborate in brainstorming data sources.

JRC Demography, Migration and Governance

ITFLOWS partners from WP1 met with members of the European Commission Joint Research Centre's Demography, Migration and Governance unit. The fruitful discussion included sharing knowledge on the ITFLOWS Project and discussing advantages and limitations of different migration datasets. JRC members also pointed to other contacts that would be useful for ITFLOWS synergies, and explored the possibility of participating in future ITFLOWS policy events.

MigMood Project

ITFLOWS partners from WP1 and WP4 met with the "Migration mood" project, in discussing public sentiment towards migrants in Europe and potential collaboration. The MigMood project representative explained their current work, which generates quantitative time series of migration mood, both long-term (based on survey data) and short-term (based on Twitter). In a similar manner as the ITFLOWS Project, they explore the policy implications of public mood. They offered tips as to other avenues in utilizing data within the EUMigraTool, and expressed interest in future collaboration.

META

ITFLOWS technical partners met with META to exchange views how META and ITFLOWS can mutually benefit from a potential integration of services. META project representatives showed Data for Good their cutting-edge solution which maps census data to geographic locations using satellite images. The technology identifies densely populated areas, and it can estimate, e.g., purchasing power to a very small area. They also demonstrated how social media connections between residents of different countries can help flow analysis like the spread of COVID, or migrations.



NEWS AND CALENDAR

ITFLOWS POLICY CONFERENCE 21-22 June, 2022 Brussels (Hybrid)

The two-day conference will engage policy-makers at national and EU levels in productive dialogue on the innovative tools and measures for migration and asylum reception and management. The Conference will have a modular structure and will consist of **five interactive workshops** and one keynote speech, allowing for productive discussion and networking among selected NGO representatives and policy-makers with relevant expertise.

[Details and registration...](#)

ITFLOWS REVIEW MEETING 1 April, 2022, online

The consortium presentation will take place on the progress of the running Work Packages, their highlights, results, and challenges. In the end, the consortium members will outline a clear vision of the directions to take and on the objectives to accomplish in the next months.

NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING FOR POLITICAL SCIENCES WORKSHOP 24 June, 2022, Marseille

The workshop will explore the multifarious aspects of effective Natural Language Processing techniques for socio-political data. It aims at providing a research platform dedicated to new methods and techniques on text processing of socio-political content and exploring the use of such methods on information extraction and analysis.

[Details and registration...](#)

3RD USER BOARD WORKSHOP September, 2022 .

We will present the updated version of EuMigraTool. The goal is to keep us coordinated on the general progress of EuMigraTool, and carry out some administrative and technical sessions that will allow us to stay aligned on the work as well as sharing achievements, identify needs and improvement actions, and agree next steps.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

- **2nd User Board Meeting**, 1 February, 2022. The improved version of EMT was presented to the User Board. Potential usage and application areas, further developments were discussed in a fruitful conversation between the members of the User Board and the consortium. New nice to have features and extension of relevant geographic regions, and territories were considered.
- **The EU Pact on Migration: A New Framework for Predicting and Anticipating “Crises”?**, Policy Webinar, 16 November, 2021. The webinar focused on a number of key thematic focuses within the EU’s approach to ‘crisis anticipation and response’, which are derived from previous experiences in which the EU tackled a declared ‘crises’. The Webinar focused on the broader implications of the EU crisis management system laid down in the Pact, especially in relation to the Pact’s proposal on a Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation. [Event website for details.](#)
- Roundtable eu-LISA Industry Roundtable **“Artificial Intelligence and Large-Scale IT Systems: Opportunities and Challenges”**, 4 November, 2021. Dr. Blasi’s ITFLOWS presentation in the event’s first session, “AI for Advanced Data Analytics and Forecasting to Support Business Processes in the Area of Internal Security,” benefitted from feedback in the follow up Q&A. Attendees first asked if and how the project’s EUMigraTool would include conflicts or events driving migration that are not specified or included in databases. Dr. Blasi explained that the tool would benefit from a manual entry system in which technical partners would add in these specific events. Interested parties also wondered whether the EUMigraTool would provide information from origin and destination countries beyond those currently included. [Event website for details.](#)
- Webinar on **“Drivers, patterns and governance of mixed migration in the EU and its wider region”**, 29 September, 2021. Webinar aimed to take stock of current developments unfolding in different parts of the world that might have a bearing on migration and displacement trends, and discuss their potential implications for future drivers, patterns, routes and governance of mixed migration in Europe and beyond.



PUBLICATIONS

Eva Vilà Sánchez, Colleen Boland, Linda Cottone. **Covid-19 implications for migrant care workers.** Quaderns Institut d'Estudis Europeu 1(1), 2022, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. 31 January, 2022, (<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/quadernsiee.9>)

Cristina Blasi Casagran, Colleen Boland, Elena Sánchez-Montijano, Eva Vilà Sanchez. **The Role of Emerging Predictive IT Tools in Effective Migration Governance.** Politics and Governance, 9(4), Cogitatio, Lisbon, Portugal. 28 October, 2021. (<https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i4.4436>)

Yiyi Chen, Genet Asefa Gesese, Harald Sack, and Mehwish Alam. **Temporal Evolution of the Migration-related Topics on Social Media.** Proceedings of the ISWC 2021 Posters, Demos and Industry Tracks: From Novel Ideas to Industrial Practice co-located with 20th International Semantic Web Conference (ISWC 2021). Virtual Conference, October 24-28, 2021. (<http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-2980/paper375.pdf>)

Georgios Stavropoulos, Ilias Iliopoulos, Nikolaos Gevrekis, Konstantinos Moustakas, Dimitrios Tzouvaras. **A novel migration simulation and prediction tool.** In Proc. of INTAP 2021, 4th International Conference On Intelligent Technologies And Applications, 11-13 October 2021, Grimstad, Norway. (http://jdconline.net/intap_2021_papers/INTAP_2021_paper_4.pdf)

Georgios Stavropoulos, Dimitra Triantafyllou, Elpiniki Makri, Zoltán Székely, Dimitrios Tzouvaras. **Border Management Systems: How Can They Help Against Pandemics.** In: Yildirim Yayilgan S., Bajwa I.S., Sanfilippo F. (eds) Intelligent Technologies and Applications. INTAP 2020. Communications in Computer and Information Science, vol 1382. Springer, Cham. 15 March, 2021. (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-71711-7_27)

Colleen Boland. **European Muslim Youth and Gender (in)Equality Discourse: Towards a More Critical Academic Inquiry.** Social Sciences 10(4):133 9 March, 2021. (<https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10040133>)



LATEST ON MIGRATION...

Since ITFLOWS started the world faced an ever-growing number of serious challenges. The COVID pandemic changed our lives all around the world. Valuable lives were lost forever in almost every family, some suffered deep and permanent wounds, jobs, sometimes hopes. While general response for the pandemic closed the borders, and by that the migration and the regional conflicts were paced more slowly for a while, it also magnified the scale, the depth, and the gravity of our problems both locally and as a human race.

Just for the first two months in this year European Union faces a political crisis driven displacement of people around the Belarus borders. An open war is started after more than 75 years of relative peace which forced more than a million people to leave their homes. The pandemic showed us that people have new reasons to pursue happiness out of their homeland. There are an increasing number of catastrophes around the world. Tonga was ruined by a volcanic eruption followed by a tsunami, there are severe floods in Ecuador, Haiti, Congo, Zambia, Iraq, Iran, Malaysia, Madagascar, England, there are prediction for food crisis in Afghanistan, Mali, or Kenya. According to IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), the known number of displaced people doubled since 2009. Just from 2017 to 2020 it is increased further by 8 million (by 20% of total number of known displacements).

PROGRESS ON EMT...

We have limited resources and capabilities to tackle the challenges. We need viable, sustainable, and reliable solution to listen for others' problems, to prevent escalations by simulating the alternative scenarios, predict what will happen if displacement takes place, monitor the situation periodically, and help the integration by listening, and policy makings. ITFLOWS aimed at helping stakeholders all along this process cycle. How far did we get on this road?

We built and tested the first version of the EuMigraTool (EMT in short) which is a solution-oriented tool with two main functions: **it predicts migration flows**, and **it detects risks of tensions** related to migration. The EMT includes analysis of media content from TV-news (video content), web-news and social media (text content) using deep learning and proposing novel deep architectures in generative modelling and forecasting using sequential data. Predictions incorporate algorithms that consider the two key challenges associated with prediction of migration: (a) adequate selection of relevant data sources, and (b) correct selection of the potential drivers to be monitored and to the warning thresholds to be set. EMT is now able to account for entry quote when forecasting migratory flows, having a real number of migrants arriving to a particular country and region, helping NGOs understand the human effort and material resources that need to be allocated in that territory before the arrival.

What territories are we covering right now?

Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Venezuela and Syria.

What languages are we monitoring right now?

Arabic, English, French, Finnish, German, Greek, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Spain, Swedish.

RESEARCHER OF THE SEMESTER

Each issue, the ITFLOWS Newsletter spotlights its “Top Researchers of the Semester,” as a way of recognizing our researchers’ work and effort that goes above and beyond. Given the recent, excellent output of several deliverables from WP3, WP4, and WP5, as well as the intense workload this entails, we want to draw attention to their outstanding respective WP leaders, Asli Okyay, Tobias Heidland and Lenka Dražanová, who also offer invaluable input as part of the ITFLOWS Steering Committee.



Asli Selin Okyay

Asli Selin Okyay, a senior fellow at the Istituto Affari Internazionali, has conscientiously and expertly handled WP3, investigating the drivers of EU-bound irregular mixed migration in countries of origin and transit. This has included organizing an expert workshop at the ITFLOWS second annual meeting, the ongoing task of designing and analysing interviews with migrants and asylum seekers in Spain, Italy and Greece, as well as providing the recent milestone of a conceptual paper framing the entire WP. Her proactive and thoughtful contributions are essential to the project as a whole, which benefits from her collaboration in several other WPs. Dr. Okyay brings a wealth of experience and exemplary work on migration and border management, and serves on the G20 Migration Task Force of Think20.

Tobias Heidland, Professor of Economics at Kiel University, where he heads the “International Development” research centre of the Kiel Institute, efficiently coordinates WP4 on the location and drivers of integration of migrants across EU Member States. His professionalism, leadership and excellent work have resulted in several recent deliverables, including D4.2 on family migration and reunification, and D4.3 on relevant socio-economic situations in ITFLOWS select Member States. These deliverables only form a part of the overall, crucial support and direction that Professor Heidland provides in informing the EUMigraTool.



Tobias Heidland



Lenka Dražanová

As leader of WP5 on public attitudes of EU citizens towards migration, **Lenka Dražanová**, Research Fellow at the European University Institute’s Migration Policy Centre, has also been essential in the development of the EUMigraTool. As part of this, via her dedicated involvement and exceptional output, she guided the recently produced D5.1 and continues to oversee further deliverables on micro and macro-level factors affecting attitudes to immigration, with upcoming submission dates. Her expertise lies in analyzing political behavior, public opinion, and individual attitudes formation, specifically towards historically disadvantaged groups. She also serves as an Advisory Board Member of the E-Mindful Project.