BERLIN GOVERNANCE PLATFORM

Re:Match as an innovative tool for the relocation of protection seekers

Insights and recommendations for a participatory distribution and reception in European municipalities utilising algorithm-based matching

January 2024

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The insights and recommendations presented here draw on the evaluation report ↗ ***"Re:Match – Relocation via Matching. An algorithm-based and equitable solution for refugees and welcoming municipalities"***, which discusses findings from the *Re:Match* pilot phase in detail.

At a glance

Re:Match piloted the relocation of protection seekers within the EU through algorithm-based matching procedures.

The project applied data and preference-driven matching methods from April to September 2023 to relocate 78 Ukrainian protection seekers from Poland to six German municipalities. *Re:Match* demonstrates how, in close cooperation with municipalities, sustainable paths of solidarity can be created in Germany and with other EU member states.

We took part in the *Re:Match* pilot project to work towards creating a better distribution and reception process for protection seekers. *Re:Match* takes into account what we consider to be particularly important from a municipal perspective: a well-tailored distribution process that is geared both towards the municipalities' capacities and the needs and preferences of those seeking protection.

Britta Bauer, Assistant to the Head of the Department for Social Affairs, Health, Housing and Sport, City of Kiel

Re:Match's approach **provides protection seekers and municipalities with opportunities for participation and thus fosters their agency in the relocation process.** The successful piloting of *Re:Match* has demonstrated how such an approach can, for example, achieve efficient allocation of personnel resources or more precisely tailored accommodation. By strengthening participation, the project fosters a sense of commitment and readiness while ensuring a suitable fit for protection seekers and municipalities alike. **In this way, *Re:Match* lays the groundwork for successful integration.**

***Re:Match* offers policymakers a solution** that effectively addresses the challenges associated with relocating individuals from the EU's frontline states and creates sustainable, tailored processes, which ultimately lead to improved integration outcomes. Forward-thinking policymakers and practitioners should now decide to support the matching-based relocation model and strengthen European solidarity by scaling up the use of *Re:Match*.

The success of *Re:Match*'s pilot project serves as a compelling proof of concept. Support is now needed from European, national and local policymakers, as well as new funding. Welcoming municipalities must be strengthened, and ongoing dialogue between *Re:Match*, policymakers, researchers and civil society will be indispensable.

→ PARTICIPATING MUNICIPALITIES

PILOT PHASE
10/2022 – 10/2023

PHASE II
Since 11/2023

STAKEHOLDERS
- Berlin Governance Platform in cooperation with Pairity and Salam Lab
- 6 German municipalities from 4 federal states
- Ukrainian protection seekers in Poland

RELOCATION VIA MATCHING
3 cohorts with a total of
78 protection seekers in
34 households

→ HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITIONS

11 SINGLE MOTHER

9 2 + ADULTS

8 SINGLE

4 SINGLE MOTHER + GRANDMOTHER

3 PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

2 COUPLE + CHILDREN

Piloting solutions

Re:Match facilitates more equitable and effective relocation processes for protection seekers across the EU.

The Berlin Governance Platform's pilot project *Re:Match* focuses on creating an individualised and needs-based system for relocating protection seekers from frontline EU states to municipalities throughout the EU. In this context, *Re:Match* has been developing an algorithm-based and needs-driven matching procedure. The main objective here is two-fold: to alleviate the burden on frontline EU states and to provide support to protection seekers and local authorities during the reception and integration phases. *Re:Match* is the product of a collaborative effort that includes international partners, municipalities and protection seekers themselves. As such, it represents an innovative, inclusive approach to improving equitable outcomes in distribution, reception, and integration processes across the EU.

We believe that the participation of municipalities and protection seekers is the key to equitable and effective migration management.

Re:Match's algorithm-based matching process creates opportunities for relocations within the EU to achieve a better fit between protection seekers and municipalities. It does so by taking into account the individual needs and preferences of protection seekers, as well as the infrastructural conditions and capacities of municipalities. Additionally, it factors in local labour market needs. By striving to optimise the alignment of these elements, *Re:Match* brings both sides together to the greatest extent possible.

***Re:Match* has gained unique expertise in the field of Relocation via Matching.**

Leveraging the opportunity presented by *the Temporary Protection Directive* in 2023, *Re:Match* applied its own proprietary matching system to successfully match 78 Ukrainian protection seekers with six German municipalities. As part of the process, *Re:Match* provided support to protection seekers in facilitating their relocation from Poland to Germany, by arranging their individual journeys.

In 2023, *Re:Match* proved that individualised and needs-based municipal distribution and reception of protection seekers by means of algorithm-based matching and relocation can work.

Re:Match's success demonstrates the feasibility of a human-rights-based European migration policy that engages both protection seekers and local authorities as active participants. Relocations can contribute to relieving the burden on EU frontline states. Matching processes facilitate a direct, suitable, and plannable fit of protection seekers and municipalities, thereby supporting the efforts of reception and integration for both sides from day one.

Algorithm-based and needs-oriented matching as a tool for migration management is gaining global traction.

Interdisciplinary teams in several countries are currently exploring various matching-based migration strategies, including resettlement and community sponsorships. Government-funded community sponsorship programmes in Canada, for example, have demonstrated success with integrating refugees into local communities and private households for several years now. Stanford University and ETH Zurich have collaborated on an algorithm currently being tested in a Swiss resettlement programme. The primary objective here is to place individuals in locations that align with their labour market profiles. Meanwhile, in the United States, a pilot project led by the universities of Oxford, Lund and the Worcester Polytechnic Institute utilises a matching algorithm in conjunction with the Annie™ MOORE machine learning software to find resettlement placements for individuals who lack family ties in the United States. The universities of Hildesheim and Erlangen-Nuremberg have been working on the Match'In project since 2021, which aims to manage more effectively the distribution of protection seekers among German municipalities with the help of an algorithm-based matching system. Also, research publications consistently underscore the potential of matching as an effective approach.[1] With the development of a relocation tool for the European level that is based on human rights and strengthens the role of municipalities, *Re:Match* is making a significant contribution to this global trend. As a novel concept and practical approach, Relocation via Matching offers EU member states the opportunity to explore innovative distribution mechanisms alongside their national distribution systems. It also provides them the opportunity to integrate such mechanisms into their long-term strategies.

Preference matching schemes offer the possibility of finding the most efficient matches between refugees and the states (or substate entities) that host them, maximising their likelihood of finding employment, reducing their vulnerability to radicalisation, and minimising the cost to the public purse.

Teytelboym, Rohac & Jones (2017) in Europe's refugee crisis: Pressure Points and Solutions

In 2024, *Re:Match* will push forward with technical development and strategic networking.

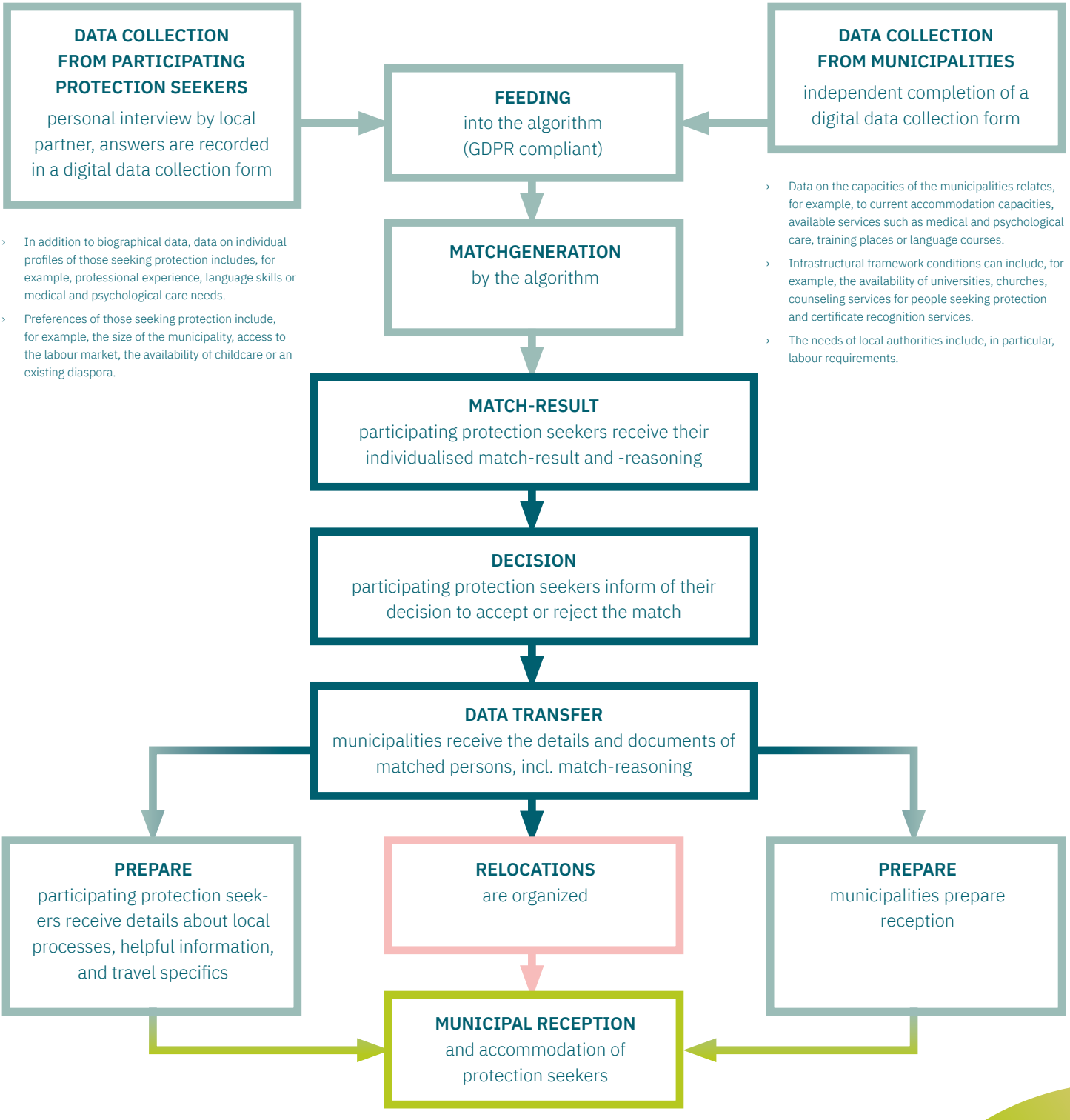
Throughout the year, we will prioritise the further establishment of meaningful partnerships. Collaborative efforts involving protection seekers, municipal authorities, government policymakers, administrative officials, researchers, and various civil society organisations will be essential. Sharing insights and collectively enhancing the matching criteria, algorithm, relocation and arrival procedures will ensure *Re:Match*'s lasting positive impact. Committed to placing *Re:Match* on a sustainable long-term trajectory, we aim to identify potential applications and garner support for our concept through ongoing dialogues with policymakers at the European, national and municipal levels. Additionally, we are exploring the possibility of expanding the matching procedure to encompass other groups of people beyond the scope of *the Temporary Protection Directive*.

[1] Smith, Craig Damian, with Emma Ugolini. 2023. Why Matching Matters: Improving outcomes in refugee spon-sorship and complementary pathways. Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe.
Ozkul, Derya. 2023. Automating Immigration and Asylum: The Uses of New Technologies in Migration and Asylum Governance in Europe" Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.
Teytelboym, Alexander, Dalibor Rohac, und Will Jones. 2017. Europe's Refugee Crisis: Pressure Points and Solutions. American Enterprise Institute.

Relocation is an internal instrument of EU solidarity that facilitates the transfer of individuals with international protection status or those in need of such status from one EU member state to another.

European Commission

The Re:Match procedure



- In addition to biographical data, data on individual profiles of those seeking protection includes, for example, professional experience, language skills or medical and psychological care needs.
- Preferences of those seeking protection include, for example, the size of the municipality, access to the labour market, the availability of childcare or an existing diaspora.

- Data on the capacities of the municipalities relates, for example, to current accommodation capacities, available services such as medical and psychological care, training places or language courses.
- Infrastructural framework conditions can include, for example, the availability of universities, churches, counseling services for people seeking protection and certificate recognition services.
- The needs of local authorities include, in particular, labour requirements.

Detailed information on individual steps and aspects can be found in the ↗ **evaluation report**.

Focusing on matching

Policy-relevant findings from the *Re:Match* pilot phase.

1. Relocation via Matching offers a solution for achieving a more equitable distribution of protection seekers among EU member states and European municipalities.

Historically, the allocation of protection seekers between EU states and their municipalities has been characterised by significant imbalances. This disparity arises from various factors, including the reluctance of member states and municipal authorities to accept an equitable share of protection seekers and the inadequacies of existing distribution keys in addressing the needs of both parties. Moreover, the arrival rates of protection seekers vary widely among EU member states and those seeking protection often prefer specific regions and municipalities. Larger cities, metropolitan areas, transit regions and transit cities tend to be favoured choices, resulting in heightened reception demands in these areas and major challenges in terms of housing. These preferences can, at times, strain local resources and systems.

At the same time, other member states and municipalities may receive fewer "admission requests" even though they possess available capacities and may even be interested in immigration. It is evident that there is a pressing need to reconsider the processes of distribution and admission of protection seekers. A matching process that aligns the specific needs and capacities of municipalities with the individual needs and preferences of protection seekers can pave the way for a more equitable distribution.

→ **When Relocation via Matching favors distribution to less burdened regions and municipalities, people seeking protection can be distributed more evenly and regional developments, for example in rural areas, can be taken into account.**

By allowing protection seekers to indicate their personal preferences, *Re:Match* was able to test how protection seekers respond to being matched with a smaller host municipality than initially desired. This part of the pilot revealed that preferences were often based on misconceptions about local conditions.

> **Even a small city can meet my needs and I recommend people to go and not be afraid. It [the city] is innovative. It is modern. It is touristy.**

Ukrainian protection seeker, matched to Rottenburg a. N.

In more rural towns like ours, it sometimes happens that buses arrive with people seeking protection and they almost want to turn around because they don't know the town and think there are few opportunities here. That didn't happen with *Re:Match* because they already know what to expect. There is a clearer idea of our city and people know that they will also find a good infrastructure here and that they can quickly get their own apartment, for example. It is also very important that the people seeking protection were involved themselves, were asked and made a conscious decision to do so - that is a completely different attitude.

Christiane Johner, Head of Department, Foreigners Office / Accommodation, Rottenburg a. N.

→ **Informing protection seekers about the conditions in the various European municipalities can increase their readiness to arrive and live well in smaller municipalities.**

2. With its deliberate municipal focus, *Re:Match* strengthens the competencies and capacities of the municipalities as the main actors in the reception of asylum seekers.

Matching acknowledges municipal expertise by providing local authorities with the opportunity to integrate considerations regarding their resources, available services, and needs into distribution mechanisms for protection seekers. This approach enhances their ability to plan more effectively, both internally and in terms of accommodating protection seekers. With their participation in *Re:Match*, municipalities send a strong political signal in support of solidarity and innovation in the distribution and reception of protection seekers.

Re:Match provides municipalities with valuable participation opportunities, allowing them to co-develop matching criteria and define their own capacities and needs. This gives them a sense of influence over the process. Moreover, *Re:Match* shares relevant information and documents of protection seekers with receiving municipalities before their arrival. This proactive approach enabled local authorities to take preparatory measures, such as streamlining the registration process and providing necessary medical care for protection seekers with special needs. Already in the pilot project this approach at times proved to allow for faster and more targeted actions than the German regular system. This relieves the burden on local authorities and ensures a smoother arrival process, especially for the most vulnerable protection seekers.

Everything was very fast and almost without any problems with the documents and paperwork. I mean, I was told where I need to go today and tomorrow. Everything was quickly arranged. As I hear from other people here, they suffered so much with the documents and the integration courses.

Ukrainian protection seeker, matched to Braunschweig

→ **Participation opportunities and pre-arrival information about incoming protection seekers enable a more effective reception and integration process, benefitting both parties involved.**

Informing local authorities about matched protection seekers prior to their arrival has proved to be immensely valuable for the welcoming municipalities. As the process of long-term integration continues, the true quality of these matches and their associated advantages will become more visible to municipalities.

Moreover, the *Re:Match* pilot programme has underscored an additional significant benefit of the matching process for municipalities – it has greatly enhanced internal cooperation among relevant local stakeholders.

The *Re:Match* process has made us more aware locally of what is important for people seeking protection – and of who all needs to be brought to the table to make reception and integration a success.

Rabeja Walte, Social Services and Senior Citizens, Team Leader for Refugee Social Work/Account Coordination, Salzgitter

→ **Pre-Arrival information about protection seekers enhances internal municipal cooperation and targeted resource deployment.**

It has been shown that the development of municipal matching processes, alongside national distribution systems, is feasible and offers substantial added value. Municipal processes are complex and shaped by local factors. The voluntary participation of municipalities in the pilot project facilitated the gathering of local data that corresponds to current needs and capacities.

The decision to collect digital data from participating municipalities has proved effective. Efforts to collect digital data could be expanded in a scaled version. Currently, discussions regarding the potential of a digital platform that could automatically capture municipal data from relevant areas, such as the availability of beds or accessible accommodations, are underway. Building this kind of database would not only reduce the administrative burden on municipal authorities but also ensure that the information remains up-to-date with current conditions.

3. *Re:Match* provides opportunities for protection seekers to participate and have their voices heard. This is both equitable and effective, as participation fosters willingness and commitment.

Re:Match collaborated with protection seekers in Germany in the context of a focus group to develop its matching criteria. A questionnaire based on this collaboration was then created that enabled participating protection seekers to provide their biographical information and indicate their individual preferences. Once the algorithm generated matches, protection seekers – unlike municipalities – could review and either accept or decline the match, thus allowing them to make a conscious choice in determining their relocation.

> **The opportunity offered by *Re:Match* to have a say and the conscious decision to accept the match in a municipality creates a noticeably increased commitment and readiness to integrate among those seeking protection. We really appreciate that.**
>
> Frauke Rassmann, Coordination of the Accommodation of War-Displaced Persons from Ukraine in the Department of Social Affairs and Health, Braunschweig

When expanding the use of *Re:Match* to accommodate groups other than Ukrainian protection seekers, evaluating the accept-or-reject match option will prove critical and require taking political and technical issues into account. Nonetheless, it remains imperative to preserve the protection seekers' agency within the parameters of conceptual feasibility.

→ **Successful integration requires willingness on both sides. The avenues for participation offered by *Re:Match* have significantly enhanced the commitment and interest demonstrated by protection seekers with regard to their matched municipality.**

Prior to their arrival in the matched municipality, protection seekers received an 'Arrival Guide' containing information about the local environment, procedural processes, and a list of crucial offices and contacts. Initial data shows that this kind of preparatory information has newcomers more easily prepare for and acclimatise to local conditions. Municipalities have also noted that the 'Arrival Guide' was valuable in terms of pre-integration.

→ **Pre-arrival information about welcoming municipalities streamlines protection seekers' arrival and orientation process, ultimately alleviating the burden on municipal support services.**

4. It is already clear: *Re:Match* is paving the way for the successful reception and integration of protection seekers in European municipalities.

Successful integration, which is essential to achieving a harmonious community, poses complex challenges for welcoming municipalities and protection seekers alike. Success is more likely when the needs and preferences of protection seekers align with local resources and infrastructure, which can include accessible housing, robust social networks, and educational opportunities. It is particularly valuable when municipalities' needs match the protection seekers' profiles. This might involve the desire to maintain specific school class sizes in municipalities with fewer children or addressing workforce gaps.

The participatory approach, grounded in comprehensive municipal data and the individual preferences of protection seekers, cultivates a strong sense of ownership in the process. This approach enhances the quality of relocation and establishes a solid foundation for future integration success, ultimately improving the prospects for protection seekers. The municipalities have reported back their impression that protection seekers who arrived via *Re:Match* were satisfied with the arrival process and seemed to integrate quickly and well. Feedback from the protection seekers themselves corroborates this impression.

→ **Active participation by protection seekers fosters a sense of belonging. Their intent to stay and invest in a future within the welcoming communities is instrumental in justifying municipal investments and reducing secondary migration within Germany or Europe.**

In the context of the pilot programme, participating municipalities were provided non-earmarked financial resources to aid in the reception and integration of protection seekers admitted through *Re:Match*. This marked a first step in linking matching efforts with the testing of a new incentive and support system for municipalities.

The state capital Düsseldorf is happy to participate in *Re:Match* because we are convinced of the idea and see the opportunity for integration and participation. Although the funding provided by the project was not a decisive incentive for us, it did enable us to support an important project: our cooperation partner "Hispi – Hilfe bei der sprachlichen Integration" [Language integration assistance] was able to implement an integration course in the form of the "Hispi4U" project for those seeking protection in Düsseldorf via *Re:Match* and other people, which was very well received and strongly supported integration.

Miriam Koch, Deputy for Culture and Integration of the state capital Düsseldorf

Naturally, the presence of family ties or friends in a welcoming community significantly enhances the prospects of successful integration, regardless of the specific profiles of municipalities or protection seekers. For this reason, the questionnaire specifically asks about this integration-promoting factor in its preferences section, and the issue is accordingly taken into account by the algorithm.

Creating new opportunities in the relocation of protection seekers

How policymakers, administrative authorities, civil society and municipalities can support *Re:Match*.

The success of the *Re:Match* pilot has showcased the potential of matching-based relocation processes, both in technical and political terms. Drawing on the insights and results delivered by the initial project phase, the aim now is to take *Re:Match* to the next level, focusing on its technical development and broader application.

01
Pioneering innovation

EU member states are urged to assume a pioneering role in implementing the Relocation via Matching pilot. By embracing matching procedures, they can translate solidarity with EU frontline states, European municipalities, and protection seekers into concrete actions. Matching processes present an appealing solution for relocation efforts as they streamline planning and promote a more seamless integration with welcoming communities, thereby improving outcomes for both municipalities and protection seekers. Additionally, the participatory nature of matching procedures grants municipalities more agency in the admission of protection seekers, potentially fostering municipal support for relocation schemes decided by EU member states.

→ Political and administrative decision-makers

02
Applying and scaling matching

Expanding implementation presents a substantial opportunity to advance the development of the matching procedure. We therefore recommend that policymakers responsible for the distribution and reception of protection seekers consider having EU member states pilot matching procedures for state-level relocation efforts. *Re:Match* can play a role as either a cooperating partner or a supporting organisation in this endeavour. The ongoing and planned state-level relocations offer valuable opportunities to test and refine matching procedures, ultimately facilitating an innovative solution for the direct reception of protection seekers arriving in EU frontline states.

For example, matching could also be used to support reception through the **EU Solidarity Mechanism**, the **admission of people rescued at sea** in cooperation with the *European Union Agency for Asylum*, and other **admission programmes**.

→ Political and administrative decision-makers

03
Communicate support

The current momentum in the field of matching should now be fuelled by comprehensive communication toward the concept of Relocation via Matching. This applies to communication with or among municipalities, political negotiations and planning, and exchanges with civil society and international organisations.

→ Political, administrative, civil society and municipal decision-makers

04
Provide funding

The insights gleaned from the initial pilot phase have outlined a clear roadmap for advancing the *Re:Match* model. Adequate funding is now required to translate these findings into scaled practice - with state participation or in the project's own further development.

→ Political, administrative and civil society decision-makers

05
Strengthen municipalities

Municipal expertise and the potential of their greater agency should be acknowledged, (legally) recognised and promoted in migration policy. This leads to a sustainable strengthening of local actors and efficient utilisation of local expertise.

→ Political and administrative decision-makers

06
Invite *Re:Match* to the table

Given the success of the *Re:Match* pilot and our unique expertise in implementing Relocation via Matching, we are enthusiastic about providing support to political, civil society and research-community stakeholders in the planning and execution of matching projects. We are eager to share our experiences, build networks and develop innovative approaches in collaboration with others.

→ Political, administrative, civil society and municipal decision-makers

COMPONENTS OF A MIGRATION POLICY BASED ON SOLIDARITY

Voluntary municipal reception is a key element of the Berlin Governance Platform's conceptual framework. It has developed a number of features that support this aspect.

→ Strengthening European networks of solidarity cities and civil society
Partnerships across Europe facilitate the development of a coherent strategy for a sustainable change in European migration and asylum policy.

→ *Re:Match*
The individualised and needs-based relocation of protection seekers through algorithm-based matching creates participation opportunities for municipalities and protection seekers, giving them greater agency in the distribution, reception and integration processes.

→ Municipal development councils
Policymakers can use these bodies to engage in dialogue with interest groups, local businesses, and residents regarding long-term municipal development issues. Councils can also be used to begin discussing the creation of well-crafted reception programmes.

→ A European integration and development fund
In addition to the costs associated with reception and integration (support), welcoming municipalities should receive additional funding in the same amount, to be applied to their own municipal development (incentive).

Concluding remarks and outlook on next steps

Re:Match can proudly look back on a successful year that is marked by the collaborative development and testing of matching criteria and procedures. Through algorithm-based matching, we facilitated the relocation of 78 Ukrainian protection seekers from Poland to German municipalities. The promising findings of our initial evaluation phase are detailed in the preceding pages and within our **evaluation report** titled **"*Re:Match* – Relocation via Matching. An algorithm-based & equitable solution for refugees and welcoming municipalities."**

Knowledge and expertise

Re:Match's expertise includes:

- **The development and adaptation** of matching criteria, algorithms, and processes.
- **The substantive and technical implementation** of Relocations via Matching.
- **Collaboration with municipalities** in the distribution, reception, and integration of protection seekers.
- **Approaches of transparent protection seeker participation.**
- **The evaluation** of matching projects.

As experts in the field of Relocation via Matching, *Re:Match* is now focusing on expanding its knowledge. We happily provide advice and support - in Germany as well as in other EU member states.

Priorities in 2024

Looking ahead to 2024, *Re:Match* will focus on further technical advancements and enhanced collaboration with researchers, civil society organisations, politicians, protection seekers and municipal authorities. Our priorities include:

- **Adapting the matching criteria, processes, and algorithm to**
  - enable the application of *Re:Match* to protection seekers with different legal statuses and personal backgrounds, extending beyond those fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
  - ensure *Re:Match* can be successfully scaled.
- **Ensuring transparency and trustworthiness** in data processing and transmission to facilitate scaling up *Re:Match*.
- **Exploring potential applications** for *Re:Match* in 2024, particularly within the context of state partnerships.
- Conducting further result evaluations and **facilitating accompanying** scientific research, with a particular focus on integration effects.
- **A second matching and relocation phase** with other groups of people in order to test technical advancements and gain valuable data and insights for further development.

Re:Match holds considerable potential for a more equitable and effective migration policy in the EU. Relocation via Matching is the tool with which political commitments and obligations of international treaties can be realized in an innovative way. _Re:Match_ is at your disposal, both as a cooperation partner and in an advisory capacity.

As we continue to develop *Re:Match*, questions, ideas and open exchange with those active in politics, research and civil society are expressly welcome! Our team can be reached at

rematch@governance-platform.org

Stakeholder

BERLIN GOVERNANCE PLATFORM

Berlin Governance Platform is an independent think tank based in Berlin that develops, promotes and tests transparency-oriented and participatory governance in order to develop sustainable and human rights-based solutions to societal challenges. Inspired by numerous welcoming municipalities in Europe, the BGP pursues a participatory and municipal approach to European migration and asylum policy. BGP is the initiator and leader of *Re:Match*.

PAIRITY

Pairity is a Canadian-based organization that applies data and technology driven interventions to facilitate refugee resettlement and community sponsorship, and measure outcomes around integration and social cohesion. As part of *Re:Match*, Pairity advised on the development of questionnaires, developed the customized matching algorithm and supported the monitoring and evaluation of *Re:Match*.

SALAM LAB

Salam Lab (Peacebuilding Laboratory) is a well-known Polish association committed to promoting civil society and human rights. For years Salam Lab has been working with the most vulnerable communities and educating on equality and inclusion. As part of *Re:Match*, Salam Lab informed people seeking protection from Ukraine about the project. The Ukrainian-speaking project coordinator of *Re:Match* personally interviewed protection seekers on site.

Imprint

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