

# Qualitative research in support of Euro-Mediterranean migration policies

## POLICY BRIEF

This Policy Brief intends to provide answers and recommendations concerning two main questions:

- **How do qualitative and archival research relate with migration policies at the local, national and international level around the Mediterranean and beyond today?**
- **In the future, how can the relationship between qualitative and archival research and actual migration policies be more collaborative and effective?**

Qualitative and archival research are needed to support effective policies and the work of practitioners working in the field of migration.

This policy brief helps readers to understand how this happens in different contexts, as more than 150 stakeholders among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, migrant associations, governments, civil society/non-governmental organisations and migrants in seven countries around the Mediterranean contributed to answer to the questions above, during the H2020 project ITHACA - Interconnected Histories and Archives for Migrant Agency.

Three main key-findings emerge.

**Qualitative and archival research are tools of social innovation:** conducting qualitative research, based on individual and collective narratives, is a necessary basis to non-emergency policies and to social work planning and evaluation. Research helps to explain the reasons behind the migration phenomena and to contextualize them where it is most needed, whether in political, educational, labour, health or reception settings. Migrant narratives collected and contextualized by qualitative researchers can underline the complexity of the word “migration”, tackling the false and frequent belief that a migrant is a monolithic category.

**Archival research is not just “preservation”:** it shows the potential of providing dynamic and interlinked information, including legal frameworks, policy documents, historical context, and original narratives, capable to support policies in the long term. Besides this, they are a potential tool to foster the agency of migrants.

**Space, time and people are the three main enablers** for better qualitative and archival research-policy relations: qualitative and archival research offers contextual

and comparative tools to investigate in depth local features and to possibly extend them to the national and international levels. On the other hand, synchronicity is needed, with a common program being necessary from the beginning when planning a policy.

Finally, researchers, policy makers and practitioners need to meet more often and regularly, to understand their common research goals and developments.

In the following pages, these three key-findings are further examined, including fresh quotations from the multiple voices of the stakeholders who actively shared their experiences and expectations. Particular attention is given to the results collected in Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco, with particular attention on how, in countries where research-policy dialogue is not as established, qualitative research shows high potentialities to inform policies and to foster the migrants' agency. A set of final recommendations answers our initial questions and offer practical instructions.

## A novel approach

From January to June 2023, the EU-funded H2020 ITHACA project organized a series of Policy Council Events (PCEs). The PCEs were set up to allow a broad group of stakeholders to meet and exchange meaning, views and proposals at the local, national and international levels on the topic of the relationship between research and policies, henceforth 'research-policy relations'.



**Who participated:** policymakers, researchers in migration studies, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, migrant associations representatives, communicators, intergovernmental organization representatives and lawyers, all convened by the ITHACA partners. Around 150 participants took part in 12 meetings.

**Where:** in 7 countries (Italy, Greece, The Netherlands, Morocco, Tunisia, Azerbaijan, Jordan), 12 towns (Rome, Milan, Modena, Athens, Leiden, Rabat, Tunis, Tataouine, Baku, Ahan Village and Amman).

**How:** the local and national meetings were divided into two main parts: during the first part, participants shared meanings of research and archives in their professional and personal experience, opportunities offered and obstacles in conducting and transferring the results; during the second part, participants shared views on the ways to reinforce the synergy between qualitative and archival research and migration policies. Each ITHACA project partner involved provided a report of each meeting, elaborated through a thematic analysis.

**Novelty:** aiming at reflecting on the relations between research and policy, conceptual frameworks have been elaborated for making sense of research-policy relations and the impact on both research and policy at the European and international level (Scholten, 2018), in particular regarding social-qualitative research (WHO, 2022; Iosifides, 2011). They articulate different models based on what the extent are scholars actively engaged in policy processes, or rather stay in the so-called 'ivory tower' protected by scientific objectivity.

In this policy brief, ITHACA enlarges the focus from Europe to the Middle East and North Africa and beyond, and to a unique variety of actors who operate within migration policies and are current or potential protagonists in the fieldwork of qualitative and archival research.

Thanks to this project action, ITHACA enlarged the network of migrants/migrant associations and practitioners who operate within different local, national and international policies, not just raising their awareness on this topic, but allowing them to **co-create recommendations for an ethical and effective policy-oriented research.**

*This action is part of the ITHACA project (G.A. 101004539) that aims to analyse migrations from the Middle Ages to the present day, within a rigorous historical framework, and to make its results available through a web-platform. This will allow migrants, researchers, practitioners and policymakers to work with a digital database of narratives, documents and archival sources. The Consortium devotes special attention to providing impact at the political and social level in order to transform narratives and policies on migration.*

*The topics, practices and discourses unfolded in the ITHACA PCEs were related to different geographical, social and economic contexts; however, the feedback by the stakeholders showed some important points of uniformity in terms of problems, opportunities and recommendations.*

*This policy brief represents the views of the ITHACA project partners. The support from the Horizon 2020 program that the project receives for its publications does not constitute an endorsement of their contents, which reflect the views of the authors only. The European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.*

## KEY FINDINGS 1

### Qualitative research relations with migration policies: meanings, challenges and opportunities

There has been a lot of discussion about the differences between quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research deals with numbers and uses statistical models to explain the data; the most known quantitative methods are opinion-pools and surveys. Qualitative research avoids numbers and prefers the analysis of words and images (be they written, audio, video, images, multimedia), deals with “interpreting” social realities. Two well-known qualitative methods include in-depth interviews and focus groups. Whereas quantitative research asks questions about “how much” or ‘how often’, qualitative research asks rather questions such as “what, how, and why”.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are needed **to support effective policies, based on evidences and on a deep knowledge of social realities.**

Qualitative and interpretive research can extend the comprehension of the vastness and complexity of policy processes and facilitate deep, sophisticated and complex understanding, enabling and supporting the policy implementation process.

This policy brief intends to focus on **qualitative and archival research** as it is the main focus of the ITHACA project: Its final aim is to produce a **platform as an interactive space of collection and dissemination of migration narratives, both in the past and in the present**, base of knowledge for policymakers, researchers, practitioners and all the stakeholders involved in migrants’ journey, arrival and assistance. Before being the main recipients of this very document, they were invited to be **its co-producers.**





## 1.1 Qualitative researching and migration policies

*“It is important to remember that official state and international policies are often based only on quantitative considerations. It should be taken into account that the decision to attempt a migration can derive from many personal conditions, at an individual, familiar, cultural, social level and that all these levels must be considered to understand the migratory phenomena. In this sense, an important distinction has been made in our debate between the personal motivations and the social causes of migration, and this distinction can provide the meeting point between qualitative and quantitative research. In every decision to migrate there is a complex of personal reasons, but when migrations become a numerically large phenomenon, it means that something has happened in the society that is not the simple sum of those individual reasons.”*  
— Researcher, Tataouine, Tunisia

Qualitative methods not only assist academic research, but also help make decisions in every step of planning, implementing and evaluating policies and practical activities, which **implies listening before acting**.

These methods are part of various areas of **social work**: ‘We do a lot of meetings, we try to bring people together and let them co-produce solutions with us’, told a practitioner in the healthcare system in one of our PCEs in Italy.

A starting point for agreeing on a common definition of *qualitative research for policies*, is **when** research is needed. A common finding among ITHACA stakeholders is that **research helps to improve knowledge of the migration phenomenon explaining the reasons behind** the phenomena; and to **contextualize** them where it is most needed, whether in political, educational, labour, health or reception settings.

Qualitative research (hereafter QR) helps **assessing migration policies** and making proposals to improve these policies and ensure consistency with other public policies.

Migration policy is a constantly changing series of texts whose expression and interpretation **vary according to the context** in which the policies are being put into practice.

Further evidence is that QR helps to build policies that are not based on abstractions but are instead truly **based on individual and collective stories**, since qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, offer a nuanced understanding of migration experiences, motivations, and challenges.

Because QR **bases on discourses**, it allows to explore in depth what are the values and the interpretation of motivations to migrate according to the different cultures and allow to **explain through stories** what element of the migration discourse have different weights and why, how different actors understand experiences and why this understanding affects their decisions, how the different actors perceive the motivation, the journey, the arrival, the practical implications, what risks migrant face, how countries, politics and administrations respond adopting specific receptions procedures.

“Conducting qualitative research, based on discourses rather than numbers, is a necessary **basis to non-emergency policies**, faraway from abstract theories and **based on individual and collective narratives**”, said a policymaker with migration background in Rome.

## 1.2 Research and policies protagonists

Basing on the knowledge objectives that motivate the research, four main groups of actors emerge from the PCEs: those who **fund** research; those who **design, conduct and analyse** the research; those who participate as **subjects**; and those who **exploit the results**.

Besides the more obvious role of researchers and policymakers, one clear finding of the meetings is the necessity to engage a variety of actors. Not only academics produce research and data about migration, but also practitioners, migrant associations, governments, civil society/non-governmental organisations (CSOs/NGOs) and migrants themselves do so, for example through reports, websites but also through their narratives as posts on the social media (see the [First ITHACA Policy Brief](#) on migrants' self-representations and Covid-19).

### **Migrants**

If well disseminated, migrant narratives collected and contextualized by qualitative researchers can show the complexity of the word "migration", tackling the false and frequent belief that a migrant is a monolithic category.

In the ITHACA project, migrant is meant as anyone (individual, group or community) who moves from a place to another, either across an international border (international migration) or within a state (internal migration), voluntary or forced, for economic, environmental, political or religious reasons, including refugees and irrespective of the means, regular or irregular.

Migrants are both subjects of QR and potential users. If properly communicated by researchers, QR findings can facilitate migrant's understanding of the arrival countries and societies, activities and practices of inclusion.

On another side, to give migrants a voice through **periodic consultations** is a necessity that several policymakers have remarked in the ITHACA PCEs, from The Netherlands to North Africa.

If the purpose and the usefulness of research in building better policies are well transferred to potential migrants in their **countries of origin**, their willingness to participate raises: "rural dwellers are open in providing personal information about themselves when it concerns migration. Sharing information with us researchers through interviews means for them to raise more attention to their problems. Many communities were not involved in any projects of non-governmental organizations or international projects before", told a geographer during a meeting in Ahan, a small village in the Ismayilli district in Azerbaijan.

On the other side, in regions where the research-policy relationship is more advanced, a key-argument is the **representativeness of migrants in the political life of cities, regions and states**. "Right now, we are experiencing a low involvement of migrant communities in the local political life, also due to the feeling that their participation has no impact on public affairs", said a politician with African origins and council member of the Municipality of Turin, in Italy.

### Civil society organizations

Across all the seven ITHACA countries that hosted PCEs, fundamental subjects of QR are **civil society actors**, including communicators, mediators as well as associations and NGOs as active players in the field. “They are experts in the field, more so than researchers” claimed a researcher in Leiden, in The Netherlands, while discussing governmental, academic, practitioners’ roles in the reception of LGBTQ+ migrants.

QR also helps **preserving data for the future**, activity that allows to better plan and evaluate their work. In conjunction with local, national and international institutions, this can finally help to design new and effective migration policies.

On the other side, “studies and research are a **basic working tool for NGOs**”, told a practitioner and activist in Italy. For example, a recent careful analysis of data on the topic of sea rescue has deconstructed the representation of NGOs as pull factors of irregular migration; as well, the work of *forensic architecture* conducted in a joint effort of academia and civil society organizations showed its effectiveness in addressing effective humanitarian actions and in evaluating them.

Paramount, in analysis the discourses of ITHACA stakeholders who were asked about their role in QR and how do they use it, is the **need of collaboration among the different actors**.

### 1.3 QR and policies in practice

QR starts from documents and stories, told, listened to, analysed and re-narrated. It allows those who use it to immerse themselves in its results. These data, in turn, must be transformed and channelled into practices and policies.

The experiences taken by the ITHACA stakeholders highlight opportunities and obstacles in their implementation.

#### Qualitative research as a tool of social innovation

Offering a deep knowledge of migrants’ true stories, qualitative research can provide organizations and policymakers with **new solutions and new programs**, as well as **raise awareness** on the true conditions of migrants.

Gathering stories, experiences and testimonies from migrants and from practitioners working in the field, as well as from those who design and evaluate migration policies, means **reflecting on complexity**, being able to **deconstruct it**, and then thinking about **solutions**.

“Sometimes data indicate that migrants’ or, in any case, foreigners’ have difficult access to services given their culture of origin; they have different representations of health, fragility, prevention, care. Research opens up new pathways that start from the institution and goes towards them, seeking all those spaces, structures, informal environments where foreigners live and where they can be reached” — Healthcare practitioner, Modena, Italy

“Being able to access qualitative research data makes it possible to carry out interventions that are more adherent to the territory where we live, to go beyond prejudices that, even with the best intentions, each of us holds. For example, if I have to manage the reception of a migrant person, I

have to ask myself what characteristics the person has, what are his or her specificities, what are the consequences of not having a home.” — Practitioner, NOG, Modena, Italy

“A research team from the University conducted a QR to study the access of migrants to social services. The results led to design a new application form, aimed to ease the everyday lives of migrants as it offered valuable and updated information regarding available services, with the possibility to give a feedback and, therefore, to open a dialogue with the administration ”  
— Ministry of Migration and Asylum officer, Athens, Greece.

In pushing innovation, QR findings give the opportunity to:

- **discuss stereotypes**, exploring the multifaceted experiences of migrants
- pose **new questions** to decision makers and practitioners (“to be there is not enough, you have to *know*”)
- **monitor and evaluate** existing policies
- **improve and create new ones**
- **base decisions on the complexity** of the phenomena and, as is often the case, **not on emergency**
- **save money**, avoiding starting from scratch (situations and solutions are often already studied and policy options can take advantage of existing experiences)
- **network with relevant stakeholders**, available to share with practitioners, researchers and policymakers, their stories and suggestions, and make the access to migrant communities easier.

### From research to policies, from policies to research: obstacles along the pathways

The nature and types of obstacles in QR-policy relationships are grounded in *structural/practical* and *political* reasons.

Across ITHACA countries, among the **structural obstacles** that prevent policies to use research results, stakeholders mention:

- **regulatory gaps;**
- **local specificities;**
- **administrative practices;**
- **different timeframes.**

“Much valuable and important research data is not used depending on the agenda of each government. As for how the administration works, many services are shared between ministries and therefore we cannot always monitor what is happening in different offices. The public administration lacks an inclusive institutional framework that connects the different actors.”  
— Practitioner, NGO, Athens, Greece

“On the one hand, international and national institutions are run by administrative-bureaucratic structures, very much oriented towards themselves. On the other hand, they are the subject of continuous negotiation, in an attempt to hold different needs and tendencies together.”  
— Researcher and international policy maker, Rome, Italy

“The legal framework must be adapted to local realities and to know these specificities it is necessary to collect data on the ground... the relations and communication between migrant associations and the government became more complex since the time of the cabinet reshuffle.”  
— Stakeholder, Rabat, Morocco



Among the reasons of an ineffective relationship between research and policies is **politics**.

Policy planning and decisions vary according to the political agenda of each government and the consideration of research results, especially if not aligned with the current government programs, is not taken into consideration. “There must be a political wish to listen to stories of migrants. Listen to them directly implies a political responsibility... The logic of power is hardly discussed, making policies disconnected from the reality on the ground”, shared a researcher at the PCE in Tunis.

**From the research side**, some of the practitioners and policymakers call for more policy-oriented research. Their findings need to be challenged, debated and tested before they can provide a reliable basis for recommendations.

The above structural and political gaps cause the **underutilisation** of existing and potential QR.

“Research is often not used, one does not take the time to make sense of it, to repeat it over time. I’ll give an example: almost thirty years have passed since the research by a colleague was conducted under the title “What do you do on Sunday?” He had interviewed 40 or 50 people. Back then, the migration phenomenon [in Italy] was much smaller, numerically and also in terms of origin. Migrants had found a job and an accommodation. Though, in current policies, they were considered only from Monday to Friday; Saturday and Sunday weren’t part of the program. Integration is not just into the work environment. There is still room to think about how to involve people who have arrived in Modena and ensure that there is a Sunday for them, that they are not just workers” — Practitioner, reception centre, Modena, Italy

## **1.4 Ethics aspects**

Words as “transparency”, “respect”, “independence”, “ethics”, “honesty” are recurrent in the arguments taken by ITHACA stakeholders when discussing how to use QR.

**The main ethical risk** in the relationship between research (all fields and methods of research) and policies is **instrumentality**. Knowledge can be used primarily to substantiate specific political claims or ideas, or to foster populism.

Biases are everywhere: a communicator and activist in Rome explained that “there are those who consider themselves anti-racist but have not deconstructed their way of thinking. Instead, it is necessary to deconstruct internalised racism. Sometimes important events on racism have all-white panels”.

**The main opportunity ensured by responsible research** is to open questions and views that help to **dismantle stereotypes**, with benefits covering not just the ethical issues behind a research and its use, but also the **development of better practical solutions and services**. Indeed, stereotypical representations are recurrent during policy design and implementation; planning housing, education and health policies is often grounded in pre-understandings. To use responsible research results helps

practitioners and policymakers to adopt a critical lens and question this approach: it is necessary “to make migrants participate as active subjects in a research, listen to their discourses, their representations of the city and how they live it, with the aim of building services that are better suited to them”, explained a practitioner in the healthcare sector during the Dutch PCE.

To maintain a critical and ethical approach in all phases of the WR-policies relationship, from design to the use of results, **basic questions to pose are:**

“Who is behind this project, who is the funder?  
What is the purpose of the research?  
Who owns the collected data?  
What are we going to do with the data collected?  
What were the risks for the participants?  
Who reaps the benefits of this data collection?  
Is the research disseminated, how and to whom?  
Do we recognize and value the participation of the associations that collected the data and the people who agreed to share their stories and experiences?”  
— Stakeholder, Rabat, Morocco

## 1.5 Communicating research

In the QR-policy relationship, communication is discussed at two levels: that of contents and that of *communication flows*.

### **Contents**

At the first level, QR results offer to communicators life stories, experiences and complex contexts. Engagement through stories is a possible, practical use of responsible QR.

For **practitioners working in communication**, QR can be a space to address migration policies and to encourage migrants to speak out; it can be an effective channel for information and dissemination of issues that are not adequately known by the public.

QR can be the base on which to **overturn negative narratives**, “to argue how in every migration path there is a complexity and not just a division between good and bad” (migrant, Amman). In media – and especially social media, undoubtable is the **effect of fake news and stereotypical images of migrants and migrations**.

A testimony is offered by a lawyer during the PCE in Milan, Italy: “communication made people used to stereotypes. Since years there has been a growing tendency to accept the human costs of forced migration”.

Free **training of journalists, education campaigns** and the use of **art and video** as tools to giving voice to migrants, disseminate QR results and engage a wider audience are proposed to improve the use of QR findings in communication.

“Artists produce ‘educational material’. Art is accessible and can be disseminated to a wider audience. Combining art and research seems to be a good way of getting messages across and reaching people in a different way than reading a research report ” — Stakeholder in Morocco

Moreover, research, and media studies in particular, can offer critical approaches to explore the **multifaceted environment of social networks** and discuss one-way interpretations of reality, as in this testimony by a Tunisian university student in Tataouine:

“Sometimes the very first subjects who misrepresent the reality of migration could be the migrants themselves. Family members of migrants are encouraged to think that their relatives living abroad are making their dreams come true. Returning from Europe for the holidays, some migrants build and share their own narrative of personal fulfilment, overlooking what their real life is like. Sometimes, the migrant narrative is presented as a success story even though there are no successes at all. Social media play an important role in spreading these stories.”

At PCEs in each ITHACA country, practitioners/policymakers asked researchers to adopt a **more understandable, concise and simplified language**.

### Communication flows

When QR meets policy making, it requires **dedicated communication channels**. In particular, there is a lack of **common platforms** where academics and policymakers might exchange policy needs and research results.

**Local, national and international** platforms where different parties could meet would support a more effective dialogue between migration policymakers and researchers, and would allow **monitoring and following-up** on findings and collaborations.

Organised and recurrent meetings prevent the so-called “**silo effect**” (characterised by a lack of communication or common goals between actors in an organisation); rather, with organized and recurrent meetings allow for opening the dialogue, avoiding multidirectional flow of information and fostering cooperation among all the actors in the research-policy flow.

An example is offered by the Dutch PCE, mainly focused on LGBTI+ refugees’ reception. “It is rare that NGOs speak together in a transnational platform”, told a practitioner. “Most work is done at the national or city level by activists, NGO workers, and volunteers. Imagine a platform that unifies the vast network of people that make up an LGBTI+ refugee’s first year: lawyers, social workers, therapists – how can these people work together? They should be able to access information from each other in the interest of the refugee’s case”.

## KEY FINDINGS 2

### Archives Multiple meanings towards collaborative efforts

“Archive is custody, care, relationship. It is like a padlock that closes or opens a door. By entering you can discover what is inside, by closing it you cannot see what it holds. It is a memory pathway, a tool to hold together different stories with something in common. Quoting Saverio Tutino, it is a “memory cradle”, serving to make future generations being aware.”  
— Archivist, Rome

The word “archive” is often meant as a technical space, difficult to consult and inaccessible except to researchers, administrative personnel, specialized professionals.

Instead, when connected to migration policies during ITHACA PCEs, archival research shows the potential of providing dynamic information, legal frameworks, policy documents, historical context, and fresh narratives that are capable to support science and policies **in the long term**.

While **research participants** emphasised the aspects related to the “preservation” qualities of archives and the technical possibility of linking different sources and data for policies, **practitioners** and those who work in the world of activism raised the issue of opportunities and problems related to their effective and efficient use and concluding that, through archives that collect individual experiences and social contexts, it becomes possible to devise more respectful policies.

In the view of **policy and decision makers**, the potentiality of archives lays in providing a powerful **decision-making tool**.

“Archiving is the most primordial step in any journalistic, anthropological, sociological, or research enterprise because, without a specific and thorough database, no one can reach any conclusive results.” — Researcher, Tunis, Tunisia

“Take the issue of housing: a main question is how could an archive that keeps record of migrants’ state of housing crosses also information about issues such as health, education, working opportunities, working conditions legal matters, interaction with the local community. If unified in an archive, these items could provide information, as well as monitoring of policies, revealing, for example, discrimination due to gender, age and ethnicity” — Researcher, Athens, Greece

Archives have a high communicative potential, being therefore **a tool to foster the agency of migrants**, as they are a “means of negotiation, documentation, and awareness-raising that contributes to the strengthening of civil society. Archives are perceived as an essential tool for studying migration, documenting migrants’ journeys, supporting research, and mobilizing in favour of migrants’ rights”, as a stakeholder participating at the Amman PCE clarified.

Regardless of where the PCEs took place – from East to West, from Europe to North Africa - our results show the importance of **building and maintaining archives in a responsible manner**.

Given the power that archives have in preserving histories of migration and providing information on the base of which decision are taken, main issues to consider are:

- since culture and identity are shaped by memory and historical records, **who enters** (is allowed to enter) the records of the past and of the present?
- **who shapes** the narratives and archive?
- since we can retain good practices and ways of handling emergency situations and turn them into opportunities for social cohesion through archives, **what** do we choose to keep?

As emerged from the international PCE held in Ifrane (Morocco) at the crossing of research and policy making, **an archive that supports migration policies most effectively should be:** open, sustainable, accessible, user-friendly, plural, participative, multi-language, referential, transparent (giving recognition to the subjects), holistic (including metadata, contextual data), and responsible (giving recognition to individual and collective narratives).

It is clear that, in order to develop archives effectively used by policy making, the **priority is the training of professional archivists.**





## Focus on the Mediterranean: Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia Qualitative and archival research for agency

### Jordan

The Jordan PCE focused on the role of archiving and narrating for enhancing political and humanitarian actions. Independent archivists, researchers from Jordan and international institutions, activists and volunteers for refugees' rights and representatives from UNRWA took part in the meeting. The main questions focused on the **value of agency**, raising fundamental questions: *who talks about migrants and why? Who are the protagonists and mediators? How do power relations shape the production of the narratives? In what way are migrants' unheard and invisible histories captured? Who benefits from these narratives and what is their impact on social representations and interaction between refugee and host communities?*

Researchers, archivists and policymakers have the great responsibility to choose who is included and excluded from the database that shapes history and drives humanitarian and political decisions. Moreover, because **preserving memories through research and archives can be a way to affirm rights**, it is crucial for researchers and participants to share decisions on **how the research results will be used**.

**"Being recorded means to exist. We want it to be protagonists, not just reported by NGOs or governments"**, affirmed one of the migrant participants.

### Tunisia

Against a certain scepticism of the role played by research in shaping migration policies because of the scarce interest by policymakers, most of the participants claimed that qualitative and archival research can prove helpful for the **wealth of information** collected, its **innovation potential** in suggesting new solutions and in **raising awareness on the true conditions of migrants**.

They appreciate the effort of activist groups and believe that scientific research can help their effort. The weakness of a quantity-only based approach to the understanding of migration were identified, concluding that migration policies and strategies cannot be based only on quantitative information. **For example**, they identified the cause of the recent migratory wave from Tunisia, using an alternative entry route to Europe, is caused by a vast 'defeat' of young people's aspirations and hopes for a better life, issues better studied by qualitative than quantitative research.

**Qualitative and archival research resulted as tools to give their voice back to migrants.**

### Morocco

The local and national PCEs held in Morocco emphasised the **importance of research in shaping inclusive migration policies**. It called for increased collaboration and communication among actors, the dismantling of discriminatory practices, and the recognition of migrants' contributions to Moroccan society.

While research is recognized as playing a potential crucial role in informing migration policies, a **greater collaboration and involvement of policymakers, as well as public**

**institution employees**, in the research process **from the beginning** is recalled. Often, migration policies are disconnected from the reality on the ground **because of lack of dialogue**, that should go in both directions, **not only in the planning of migration policies but also in their evaluation, once they have been implemented**. As stated by a participant: “Data collection must be done downstream but also upstream. Few studies tell us about how these public policies are implemented, and more resources are therefore needed to carry out longitudinal studies”.

The creation of permanent, structured networks of migration researchers at national level to improve the organisation and pooling of research efforts and to centralise scientific production in this area was discussed.

For the participants, conducting research in the most neutral, reliable and transparent way can foster positive forms of **agency, dismantling discriminatory laws and practices through scientific evidence**.



## KEY FINDINGS 3

### Enhancing research-policy relations

What factors can facilitate a better collaboration between research and migration policies?

Three key areas emerge.

#### 3.1 Coverage

Talking about migration is a vast and multidimensional issue, varying according to the political, economic, cultural, societal conditions of host and origin countries, from the individual motivation to migrate and the meaning that the *freedom of movement* is assumed by the governments implied in migration flows.

The usage of qualitative and archival research in migration policies crucially depend on the **geographical dimension** where it operates. The dialogue that policymakers and practitioners/migrants have with researchers in small towns might be more direct and frequent than at an international level. Still, to design policies effectively, QR and archival research offer **contextual** and **comparative tools** to investigate in depth local features and extend them to the national and international levels, covering the **global-local nexus**.

From the methodological side, one example is how ITHACA's PCE's were conceived and implemented: they started from the local and expanded their findings to national and international levels. In this way, commonalities and differences emerged and resulted in practical recommendations.

#### 3.2 Timeline

To enhance the research-policy relation, **synchronicity is needed**, with a common program being necessary from the beginning. This would help both researchers and policymakers to better understand the field and make more informed decisions. Being that migration is a long-term phenomenon, research should be addressed as an integral part of the political life of a city, region and state.

As one economist in Italy explained: "If politics is short-term, emotional, incapable of planning, it is also incapable of posing long-term questions to research. We have brought politics to be no longer based on values and interests, but on emotional states. Research must study, analyse, communicate migrations, showing that policies shouldn't be decided on the basis of dramatic events or extemporaneous reactions, but that we must look at the long term".

### 3.3 Togetherness

Thinking of research as a tool for collaboration, **research and politics need to meet** more often and regularly, to understand what the common goal, development and end are.

“An effort must be made to reposition politics with respect to research, but also by those who do research. There is not a ready-made project, but the tools, the meanings, the development built together. This requires efforts on both sides, a common recognition”, clarified a practitioner during the international PCE in Ifrane. In this frame, the degree of liberty of expression and democratic participation of citizens and civil society organizations change substantially between European and other MENA countries involved in the PCEs, resulting in a limited possibility of constructing a real dialogue between, researchers, migrants, practitioners and policymakers.

At many meetings, the need for **platforms** that allow regular consultations, joint working groups, and knowledge-exchange is mentioned.

By establishing **open channels of communication**, stakeholders can benefit from each other’s expertise, insights, and perspectives, leading to more informed decision-making, policy formulation and evaluation.

Finally, in QR and archival research, policymakers and academics should always involve **migrants** and **migrant communities** in a collaborative effort, ensuring their voices are heard and integrated into policy discussions, services planning and decisions.



## RECOMMENDATIONS TO FOSTER BETTER QUALITATIVE AND ARCHIVAL RESEARCH-MIGRATION POLICY RELATIONS

### For policymakers, practitioners, communicators, researchers

- Consider qualitative and archival research for more **substantive and nuanced understandings of the complexities** of policy implementation.
- Consider qualitative and archival research as a chance to **formulate the “right” questions** in one’s daily work.
- Consider **existing research results and archives**.
- **Before participating or using research resources, clarify your role** (policymakers might see research in instrumental terms, while researchers might investigate the intrinsic value of policy).
- Clarify the **underlying problem, where** it comes from and **how** it is understood **locally, nationally, internationally**, according to your objectives.
- Build a research-related **stakeholder map** (including universities, research centres, foundations, CSOs, NGOs, journalists and communicators).
- Identify the **power relations** in the context you study/operate.
- Understand the (local, national, international) **policy-making process** in order to provide relevant and timely advice.
- Consider **what might affect the implementation** of policy, such as feasibility, implementation process, key barriers/enablers.
- In formulating research questions and in analysing data, pay attention to the **gaps**.
- **Maintain a critical approach**.
- **Use research results to deconstruct** mainstream narratives.
- **Declare what analytic lens** you use to read through the narrations collected.
- **Be specific**: the more prevalent a specific topic is, the greater is the likelihood of finding and interest from the government or other organizations.
- **Thinking interdisciplinary**: historians, sociologists, anthropologists, archivists, ICT researchers should work together with practitioners, policy makers and other interest parties.
- Respect the **ethics requirements**. Build a **safe research space** (also mentally) for both sides/needs of research.
- Pay attention to **where the money for research comes from**. You may be **useful to/usable by the government/private sector**.
- Enable **self-led migrant research and archive projects**.
- **Be ready to communicate your results!** A main weak link between research and policy is communication. Involve media experts, communicators, influencers.
- Research is essentially unfinished unless the **findings are synthesised and applied in practice to improve the situation**.



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