

Data-Driven Matching of Refugees and Cities

An Implementation Guide



PROJECT PARTNERS



Berlin Governance Platform (BGP) 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. In the field of migration policy, the *BGP* develops new policy concepts for safe migration to and within the European Union. ➔ www.governance-platform.org

Pairity

Evidence-Based, Community-Driven

Pairity is a Canadian-based organisation that applies data and technology driven interventions to facilitate refugee resettlement and community sponsorship, and measure outcomes around integration and social cohesion. ➔ www.pairity.ca



Right to Protection Charitable Fund (R2P) is a human rights organization with a rich history spanning over ten years. Since its foundation, the organisation has been working independently in Ukraine, with a dedicated team of over 1,500 specialists providing comprehensive assistance in almost all regions of Ukraine. Aware of the significant number of Ukrainians displaced abroad, *R2P* opened a representative office in Poland in April 2023 - for supporting citizens who were forced to move as a result of the full-scale invasion and found refuge in Poland. ➔ www.r2p.ngo



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. ➔ www.salamlab.pl/en/

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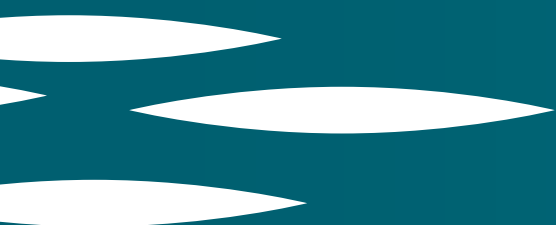
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Introduction and Context



01

Across the European Union, cities and city networks¹ proactively commit to solidarity with refugees² and migrants and to the upholding of human rights. They voice their readiness to welcome people seeking protection, open their ports to sea rescue vessels, unite to demand more progressive migration and asylum policies, and devise local measures to compensate for national shortcomings. With their efforts, they contrast the ongoing restrictive EU and national policies and show that local governments and local solutions are essential for the promotion of a coherent and humane response to the ever-present fact of displacement and migration. The individuals at the heart of these local efforts—people seeking protection—must equally be recognised as stakeholders, bringing with them unique personal backgrounds, invaluable expertise, and an inherent dignity that demands full consideration in the design of inclusive and effective responses.

Inspired by the proactive stance of many European cities, the *Berlin Governance Platform (BGP)* is committed to developing pragmatic and innovative solutions for a more progressive EU migration and asylum governance framework. We base our approaches on the conviction that migration and asylum are not crises in themselves, but rather governance challenges that can be addressed with participatory, human-centred and solidarity-promoting solutions. Consequently, our approaches actively involve cities (that ultimately offer safe harbours and new homes) as well as individuals and families seeking protection.

One of these approaches is our **Re:Match** model which we have developed, piloted and tested for potential scalability over the past years together with our partner *Pairity*. *Re:Match* introduces a data-driven and participatory governance model to facilitate the relocation of refugees from the EU's external borders directly to welcoming cities across the Union. Central to the *Re:Match* model is an algorithm-based matching process that aligns refugees' individual profiles, needs and preferences with the infrastructure, capacities and labour market needs of cities, ensuring an optimal fit for both parties. The model centres equity driven outcomes, by employing an innovative technological tool that is based on fair and just data practices.

The *Re:Match* Pilot's success illustrates the feasibility and importance of actively involving stakeholders—particularly those seeking protection and the welcoming cities- in shaping the processes of distribution, admission, and reception of refugees. By designing a decentralised and data forward reception model, *Re:Match* offers a fairer and more tailored approach to these processes – one that improves refugees' prospects by meeting their specific needs while optimising the use of host communities' resources. This approach not only contributes to the successful reception and integration of newcomers but also supports cities' ability and willingness to endorse national admission decisions and receive refugees.

The *Re:Match* Pilot marks a milestone as the first instance of direct relocation into cities implemented with the active involvement of people seeking protection and local administrations. This publication captures the lessons learned from the Pilot's implementation and provides recommendations for possible replication or scaling in the EU and beyond. It is designed to be a practical resource for professionals in civil society organisations, international bodies, and governmental agencies at both the EU and Member State levels seeking to adopt similar distribution approaches to enhance relocation, resettlement, and other humanitarian programs. The recommendations in this guide could also improve emerging complementary pathways and community sponsorship efforts and the distribution and allocation of people seeking protection within national systems. As you explore the methods and outcomes detailed here, we invite you to replicate and adapt the learnings gained through the *Re:Match* Pilot, and ultimately to contribute to a more humane and rights-based management of migration and asylum.



¹ The term „cities“ is used throughout this Implementation Guide for clarity, though it also encompasses municipalities.

² The term „refugees“ is used throughout this Implementation Guide for clarity; however, it serves as a collective term encompassing all displaced people, including asylum seekers, individuals seeking protection, and beneficiaries of international protection.



“I think Munich’s participation is important because I consider the basic idea of the project to be sensible and targeted distribution can certainly accelerate the integration process.”

Carola Bamberg, Head of Department for Assistance, Integration and Accommodation for Refugees, City of Munich

The achievements of the *Re:Match* Pilot would not have been possible without the close collaboration with our project partners **Pairity**, **Right to Protection Charitable Fund (R2P)**, and **Salam Lab**. Our special thanks go to our eight German partner cities (**Braunschweig, Dinslaken, Düsseldorf, Kiel, München, Rottenburg am Neckar, Salzgitter, Troisdorf**) and their impressively motivated administrations, which engaged with us in the project, co-designed the process, overcame bureaucratic challenges and welcomed almost 140 displaced Ukrainians into their communities. Their participation in the project is a strong sign of solidarity but also an expression of their aspiration for a genuine alternative to current systems and procedures – and demonstrates their willingness to actively contribute to its development. We also want to thank the **Ukrainian participants** who not only entrusted us with their relocation journey but provided valuable feedback that helped us improve our concept design. Their involvement has been instrumental in shaping *Re:Match* into a participatory, solidarity-based model for refugee admission and reception.

Through *Re:Match*, we demonstrate that refugee distribution and reception do not have to be a fiercely contested issue. Instead, we provide evidence – and outline in the following chapters – that it can be a collaborative process in which all stakeholders contribute to localised and inclusive solutions that benefit everyone involved. Together, we can build a truly welcoming and functional EU migration and asylum governance framework, where the admission of refugees becomes a manageable logistical challenge—one that we can pragmatically overcome with solidarity and respect for refugees’ dignity.

The authors of this ↗ **Implementation Guide** and the *Re:Match* team wish you an insightful and inspiring read!

Project Overview

The background features a teal-to-blue gradient. A large, semi-circular shape with a rainbow gradient (from orange to green) is positioned on the right side. In the bottom left corner, there are three white, horizontal, teardrop-shaped elements.

02

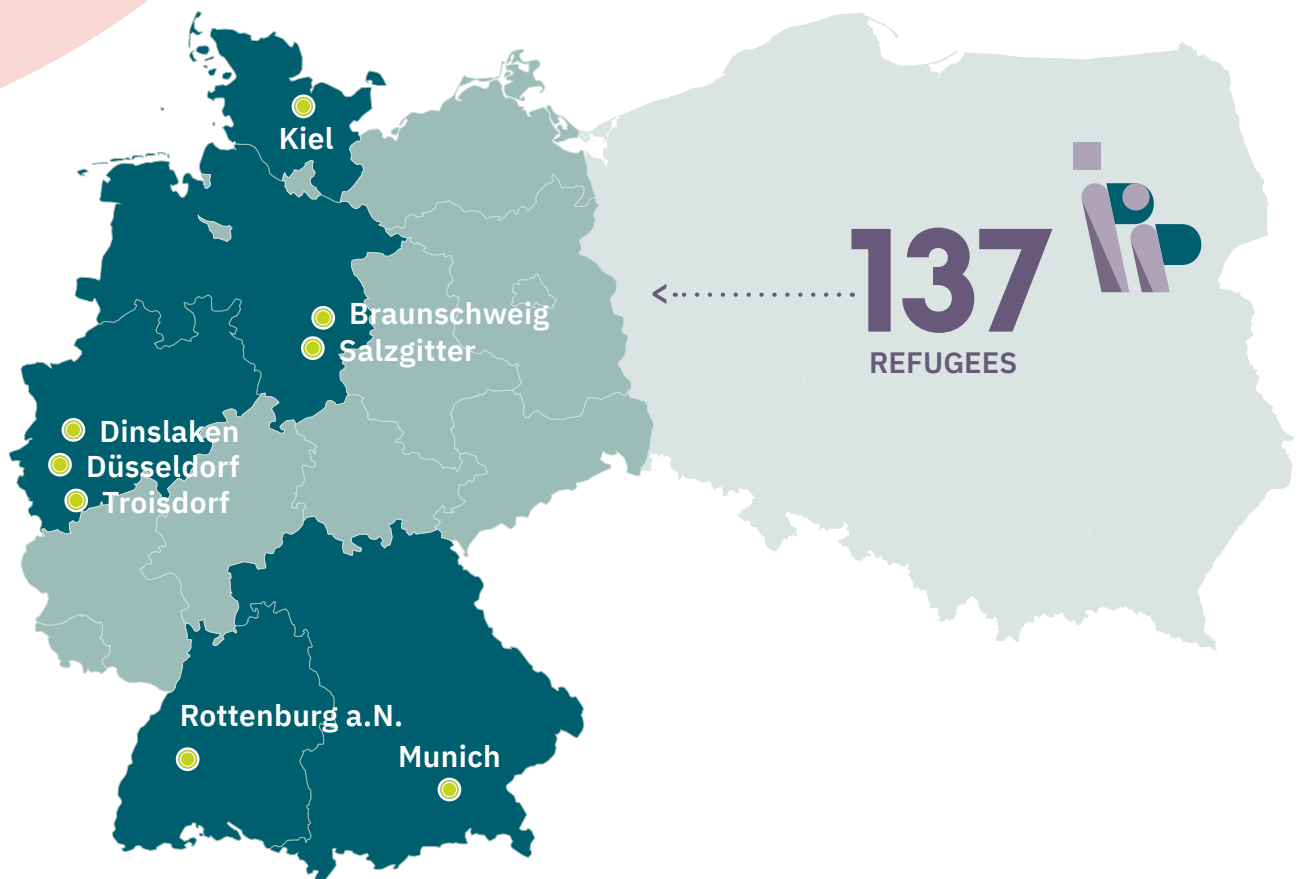
The *Re:Match* project employed a data and preference-driven matching system to relocate a total of 137 displaced Ukrainians (52 households) from Poland to eight German cities over the span of two years (2023-2024).

Re:Match offers managed relocation and illustrates how city-level governments can provide sustainable solidarity mechanisms in Germany and Europe more broadly, while at the same time offering displaced people a say in determining their settlement location. The programme algorithmically matched municipal service availability and needs with refugees' backgrounds, needs, and preferences. The bespoke algorithm maximised collective welfare by assigning the best possible matches given attributes and preferences, and city services and capacities. The process finds optimal allocations of scarce resources across cohorts. Some key evaluation results displayed in → **Figure 1** show positive project outcomes and point towards participants overwhelmingly regarding their participation as a good decision and reporting an early sense of belonging in their match-cities. Furthermore, the participants highly recommend the matching-relocation approach, and most are still present in their match-city.

The January 2024 ↗ **Interim Evaluation Report** provides a detailed account of the programme context, methodology, role of the cities, matching procedures, matching outcomes, relocation dynamics, and satisfaction 30 days after relocation. Subsequent updates provide results from follow-up surveys and interviews with participants on satisfaction and integration outcomes after ↗ six months and 12 months (soon to be published) to understand medium and long-term outcomes.

Re:Match was implemented by the lead organisation Berlin Governance Platform, technical partner Pairity, and Ukrainian-Polish NGOs Salam Lab (Phase I, 2023) and Right to Protection (R2P, Phase II, 2024). *Re:Match* exclusively supported displaced Ukrainians due to their unique legal status under the EU Temporary Protection Directive, which grants temporary protection to people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Unlike other refugees seeking protection in the EU, they are not required to apply for asylum in their first country of arrival. This provision allowed *Re:Match* to efficiently relocate individuals across EU Member States without requiring involvement from national authorities.

PARTICIPATING CITIES AND MATCHED & RELOCATED UKRAINIANS



PILOT PHASE

October 2022 – October 2023

PHASE II

November 2023 – December 2024

MATCHED & RELOCATED REFUGEES

5 cohorts with a total of
137 refugees
78 adults and 59 children
from 52 households

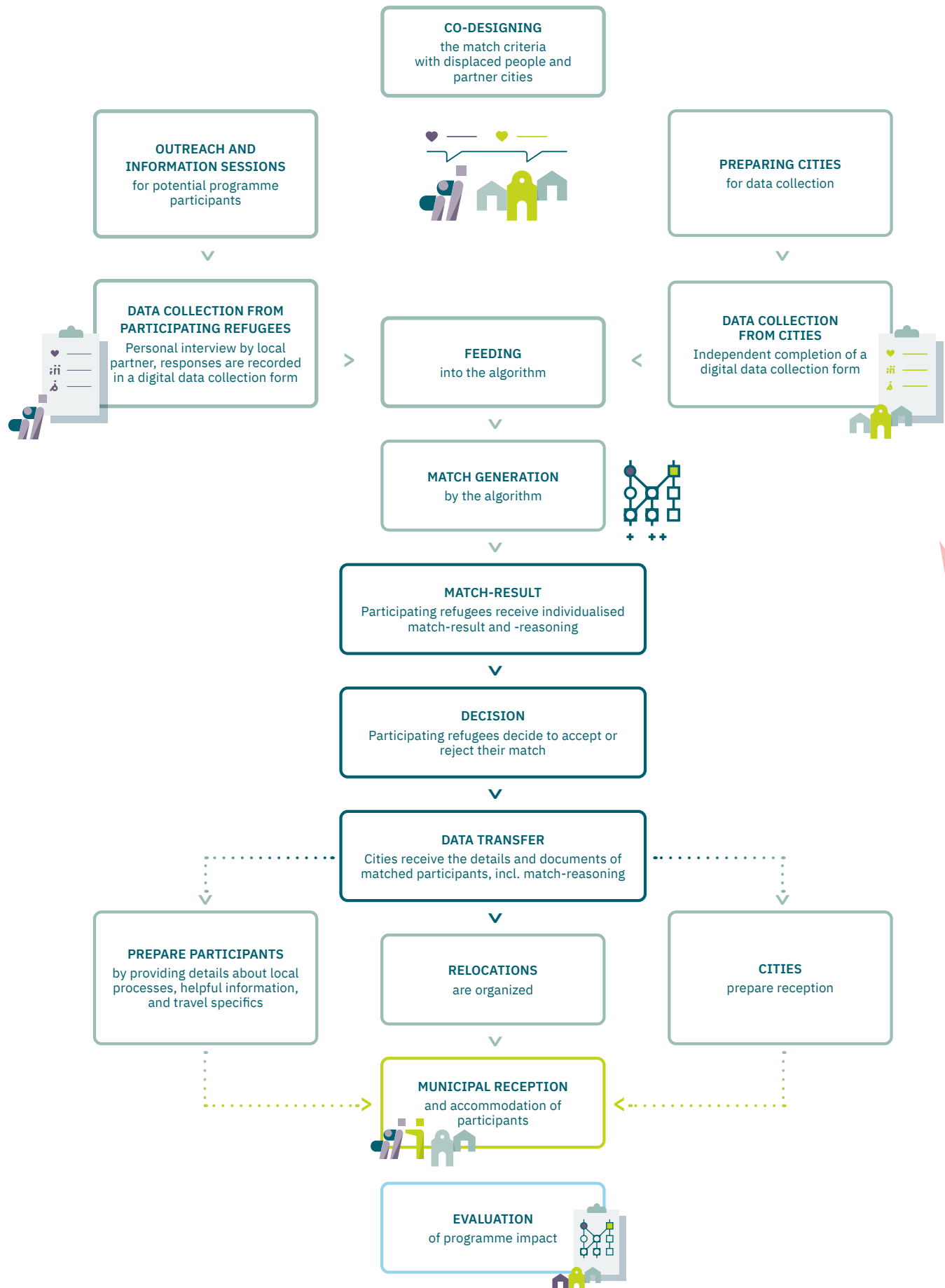


“Sincerely express your needs and interests to receive the right match. The program is designed for more comfortable relocation, with a conscious understanding of the capabilities and needs of displaced persons. Analyzing needs leads to better settlement decisions.”

Ukrainian focus group participant

THE RE:MATCH PROCEDURE

Note: A detailed overview of the stakeholder tasks in a pilot is provided in the Annex of this publication (Table 2).





“From a humanitarian perspective, it is particularly positive that refugees can specify their qualifications and criteria for distribution so that they can be allocated more accurately. The shortage of skilled workers in the cities also plays a decisive role here, as refugees can be deployed according to their qualifications. This is a win-win situation for everyone involved.”

City of Kiel



“The project’s intent is very interesting and the fact that you are improving the conditions for Ukrainian families abroad, as well as trying to make adaptation more ‘gentle’ is very important”

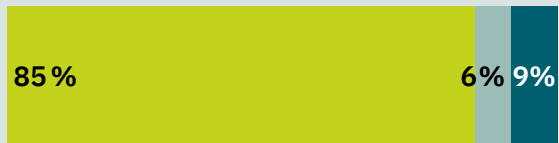
Phase II participant, matched with Dinslaken

Figure 1 → EVALUATION RESULTS FROM PHASE I & PHASE II

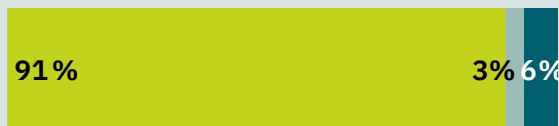
RE:MATCH AS A GOOD DECISION

Based on my experience, overall I would describe the Re:Match program as a good decision for me (and my family)

at 1 month



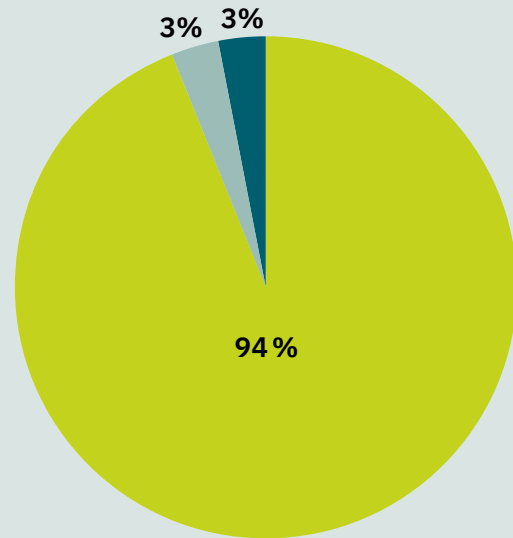
at 6 months



Agree Neutral Disagree

RE:MATCH AS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

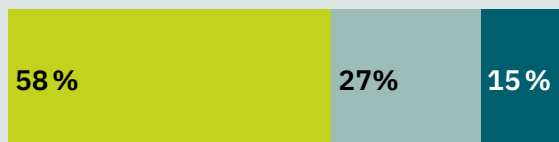
I would recommend Re:Match to other displaced people looking for a way to move between countries (at 12 months)



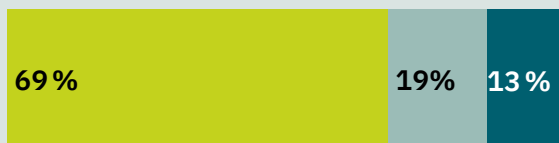
SENSE OF BELONGING

I (my family) ... see a future in this community

at 6 months



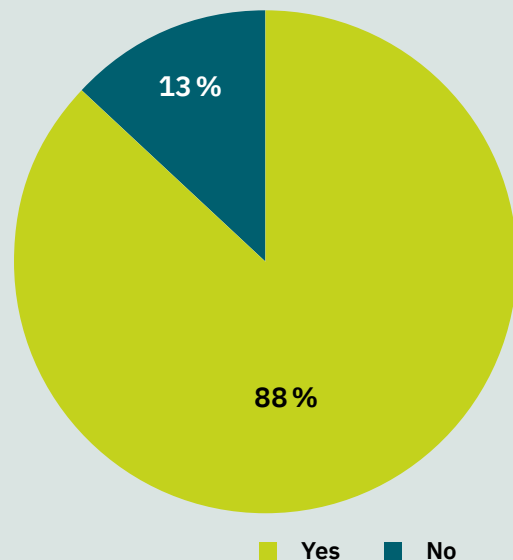
at 12 months



Agree Neutral Disagree

LONGER-TERM CITY MATCH SUCCESS

I am still living in the city I was matched with (at 12 months)



Yes No

Implementation Guide:

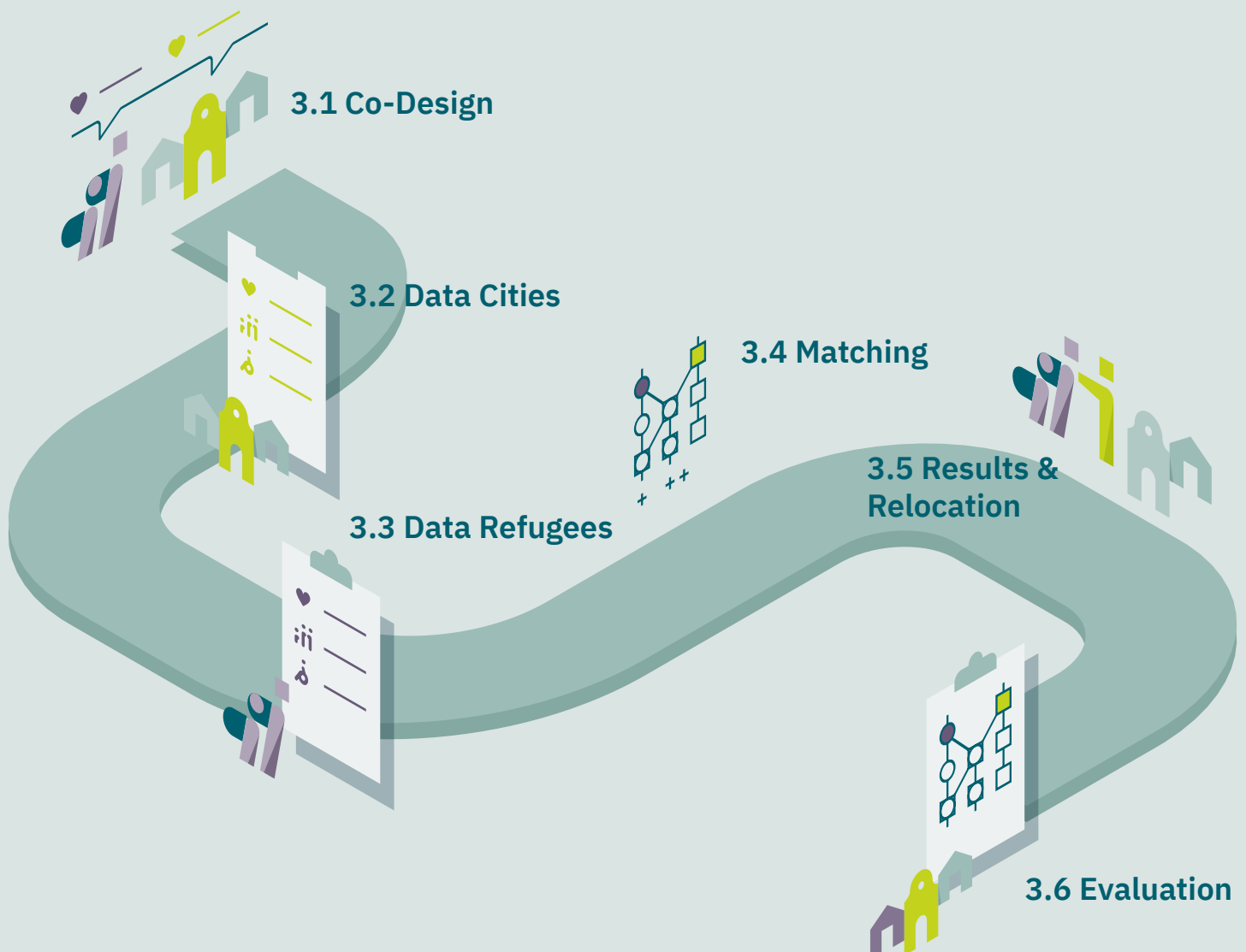
Data-Driven Matching of
Refugees and Cities

03

The following section comprises six sub-chapters. Each chapter is divided into activities (*What We Did*) and important pointers for replication (*What We Recommend*). These chapters are to be understood as building blocks of the process – they, as well as the activities and recommendations, are modular. Depending on your setting and goals, some activities can be initiated, continued, or (temporarily) left aside. Whereas some aspects of the *Re:Match* process, like the participatory element, are fundamental core principles that are essential for success.

The intention of this section of the Guide is to provide you with an overview of activities for implementing transformative innovation in determining settlement locations of refugees.

While we may not give you all the answers, we aim to enable you to design, implement, and evaluate a preference-based matching tool, adaptable to your local context.



3.1 Co-Designing the Match Criteria & Algorithm



What We Did

Why a Matching Algorithm

Algorithms are a set of rules used to achieve optimal outcomes to complex problems - particularly with large amounts of data and many possible outcomes. Using an algorithm enables practitioners to avoid introducing biased assumptions into matching, to balance between individual agency and communal welfare, and to establish a fair and consistent process to match displaced people to cities. Displaced people differ in their needs, capacities, and preferences. Some might prefer to delay immediate economic gains to focus on social goals or family considerations like school enrolment, others might not. A preference-ranking algorithm reduces bias by limiting common assumptions, and instead invites the involved participants to indicate what is most important to them.

Relocation and resettlement are also complex and time-consuming processes. Algorithms provide matches at scale in order to maximise case numbers, find a good fit for diverse types of cities and programme participants, and allow partners to focus on the work of providing settlement services and supporting people. They also allow practitioners to quickly adapt to changing circumstances and find informed solutions to challenges during the relocation process. Moreover, algorithmic matching as a replacement for manual matching could reduce operational costs for partners, allowing personnel to focus on other programme objectives.



“I find the interaction with the cities in the project to be very participatory, transparent and valuing.”

Violetta Seelig-Kiss, Coordination Office for Integration and Participation, Department for Migration, Office for Social Services, City of Kiel

Co-designing the Match Criteria

The *Re:Match* algorithm optimises outcomes for all cities and displaced programme participants and the overall welfare of each matching cohort, and best allocates scarce resources such as housing. The underlying algorithm was developed by *Pairity*, building on years of experience in algorithmic matching of displaced people. It was then adapted in close consultation with implementing partners, and with input from displaced Ukrainians and cities. Specifically, *Re:Match* uses a preference-matching algorithm to centre the capacities, needs, and preferences of Ukrainian participants and cities.

Re:Match took a “do no harm” approach to programme design, and included displaced Ukrainians in codesign to ensure the programme reflected their lived experience and met their needs. This approach focuses on creating a safe and trustworthy environment, to provide participants an opportunity for autonomy, collaboration, and empowerment.

For example, before implementing the matching algorithm, *Re:Match* conducted a focus group with displaced Ukrainians in Germany to understand their perspectives of criteria to be prioritised in the matching process. This group consisted of individuals of diverse ages, genders, marital statuses, and levels of education. Their contributions played a crucial role in shaping the final selection and weighting of matching criteria. Additionally, their participation informed wording and phrasing in matching surveys, and communication and recruitment materials used throughout the project, such as the website.



“I like that you directly ask about people’s needs when building the system – because refugees are humans, they are complex, they are difficult to understand.”

Ukrainian focus group participant

Similarly, *BGP* convened an in-person workshop with representatives from seven cities to discuss their needs and insights regarding matching criteria and the availability of municipal data. These cities were highly motivated to help co-design tools to enhance their effective management and participation in refugee reception processes. Workshops found that the factors driving municipal engagement included the desire to optimise local resource allocation and improve services for the vulnerable populations under their care.

Re:Match refined matching processes several times over the span of two years and six matching cycles based on iterative feedback and in-depth evaluation with both displaced Ukrainians and cities, as well as internal feedback and operational lessons. Data collected included input from former *Re:Match* participants, a second workshop with municipal representatives, and interviews with the key-stakeholders.



“The workshops have strengthened the feeling of togetherness (‘there are other cities that are engaging positively with the topic’) and provided ideas for further improvements that the other cities are trying out or are already implementing.”

Frauke Raßmann, Head of Decentralized Housing,
City of Braunschweig



“Projects aimed at improving municipal administrative processes depend on the participation of cities. This is the only way to ensure that the project is pursuing a legitimate goal and that the changes envisaged in the project also bring about the desired process changes. My goal is to contribute to a digital future in the public sector together with my colleagues and I therefore consider the active participation of my city in such projects to be very important.”

Maulud Amir, Head of Migration and Integration,
City of Troisdorf



What We Recommend

- Co-design with displaced people, cities and other stakeholders to ensure that matching procedures meet the needs of the population being served, and to enhance trust in the digital data collection tool.
- In co-designing with displaced people, follow do-no-harm principles. Further consider consulting people with lived experience on wording and phrasing of data collection tools and communication materials.
- Consult local stakeholders on the, sometimes limited, availability of municipal data and the possibilities for data entry, to inform the design of digital data collection tools.
- Implement participatory developmental steps between matching cycles for an opportunity to adapt and weight matching criteria.
- Make use of preference-matching algorithms that avoid introducing bias (e.g. from historical trends or non-comparable administrative data) and instead prioritise programme participant and city preferences, needs, and goals.
- Ensure technology partners are well-versed in rights-based approaches to technology development so that algorithms and data tools are not disconnected from the realities of settlement and protection.

3.1 Co-Design



3.2 Data Collection: Cities



What We Did

City data was collected through capacity surveys, including information on city demographics, diaspora populations, housing capacity, available services, and labour market needs, among other variables.

Municipal staff, whose roles and departments differed across local contexts, were responsible for entering data via digital survey tools through a personalised access point at the start of the project. Each city initially input static data—such as contact information and the population. In addition to this static data, cities had the opportunity to enter dynamic data between each matching round. This dynamic data was a core component of the matching process and included details on currently available accommodation facilities, their minimum and maximum capacities, and specific features like private bathrooms, accessibility for individuals with disabilities, or suitability for children. They also included updates on labour market needs and available medical services, among other relevant details.

One of the key early challenges lay in consolidating data from multiple sources for entry into a single survey. The method of gathering this data—whether from various departments, agencies, databases, or specific personnel—was left to the discretion of municipal partners. One of the more positive, and unforeseen aspects of this process was that it fostered interactions between actors and branches involved in the reception, registration, and housing of displaced newcomers. Several municipal representatives highlighted the positive impact of this collaborative approach during the evaluation.



“The participation in *Re:Match* also has important effects for the people directly involved in the city and, ideally, for other municipal stakeholders:

a) Questions and experiences that are brought to the city through participation in such a project give those involved new food for thought and perspectives that can also initiate internal processes.

b) More intensive networking within the city (triggered by the tasks resulting from participation).

c) Increasing the work motivation of the colleagues involved through the new suggestions, especially due to the aspect of bottom-up participation in the shaping of migration policy.”

Frauke Raßmann, Head of Decentralized Housing,
City of Braunschweig



“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,
City of Salzburg

All data requires review for completeness, potential errors, or inconsistencies. In the *Re:Match* pilot, *Pairity* and *BGP* staff cross-checked data, and in certain cases, cities were asked to clarify entries—often resolving data discrepancies. Tools including automated data validation flagging, cross-referencing databases, and non-manual data imports will allow for both data quality and scaling in future programming.

All participating cities voiced a strong desire for a more digitalised solution of migration management in general, and for the municipal data entry for *Re:Match* specifically. They especially recommend utilising interfaces between departments and offices more and better, as well as finding more practical solutions for data protection.



“Digitisation is a major topic in administrations, including the city of Dinslaken. Interfaces should definitely be used better. Unfortunately, this often fails due to data protection, even though the technical conditions and programming already in place would make it possible and would even make work on site easier. There is still a great deal of scope for development and expansion in this area.”

Natascha Betke, Refugee Coordinator for
the City of Dinslaken



What We Recommend

- Close and trusted collaboration and regular communication between programme staff and municipal partners during data entry period, to ensure data accuracy and completeness – especially in a pilot setting.
- The municipal representative responsible for entering the information should have a comprehensive understanding of all phases of newcomer reception at the local level, including the essential steps for successfully integrating relocated individuals into standard systems. It is important that the enumerator consults with the relevant departments and offices for expert guidance when inputting specified data.
- Ensuring the design of the data intake survey is suited and comprehensible for a non-technical audience and providing support during (first) data entry. In a pilot setting support can be guaranteed via direct assistance during data entry, in a scaled setting, this could be replaced with more dynamic tools like a Q&A-format or supported by an introduction video.
- Reviewing all data entries for completeness, potential errors, or inconsistencies – by employing human oversight and, in the future, automatic checks.
- Systematizing data collection. For instance, ingesting data directly from a partner's database or customer relationship management software. More flexible digital platforms allow for data to be collected from multiple sources and 'scraped' or extracted from public domains using APIs in a streamlined manner. This would reduce the need for manual data entry and ensure the most up-to-date data is used at the time of matching. *(See Box 1 for details about the proposed digital platform and processes)*

3.2 Data Cities



Box 1 →

Digital Platform & Processes

Development of an intuitive online analytics platform provides cities and other stakeholders with interactive dashboards (→ **Figure 2**), charts, and maps to inform data-driven decision-making and drive impact.

Building on valuable learnings and feedback, the current digital platform can be enhanced to better support the needs of refugees, cities, and other stakeholders.

This enhancement strategy includes:

01 Advanced Analytics Platform:

An intuitive online analytics platform with role-based access controls providing cities and stakeholders with interactive dashboards and real-time metrics. Such a platform would improve transparency for cities and refugees, providing more data to help them better understand the project, and would allow project partners to make project adjustments and decisions based on real-time data.

02 Automated Information Dissemination:

Enhancing information dissemination through technology and automation. Automated workflows, customised portals, and chatbots driven by *Artificial Intelligence* (AI) can streamline match result translation, facilitate communication, and provide personalised support. This enables efficient, scalable, and effective expectation management, pre-integration, and agency empowerment for refugees and cities.

03 Intelligent Data Collection:

Leveraging AI and machine learning to replace or augment traditional data collection methods such as surveys, streamlining and enhancing data collection through automated text analysis, predictive modelling, interactive chatbots, and error detection and validation. This scalable solution enables efficient data gathering across large populations, supporting expanded outreach and informed decision-making without increased manual effort.

3.3 Data Collection: Refugees



What We Did

To reach potential Ukrainian participants, local partner organisations conducted broad outreach through different channels. Recruitment via word of mouth, flyers at local NGOs, and Facebook proved most effective. The crucial next step was to provide extensive project information in several information sessions. These sessions were held in person and digitally to provide a forum for comprehensive discussion around enrolment and procedures, and address questions or concerns of potential participants. Outreach sessions and direct contact with trusted project staff were crucial for managing expectations and ensuring future programme satisfaction. These efforts were highly effective, with an average of 82% of participants expressing satisfaction with the information provided about the programme and the relocation process, as well as the communication from project staff.

After enrolling in the project, participants were invited to personal interviews where they provided their identification information such as passports, and other supporting documents including essential medical information and any special need for support or housing.

Participants' data is derived from streamlined demographic and preference-ranking surveys, which collect biographical information, key information like education and employment backgrounds, and preferences for placements including city size, housing type, and cultural supports among other variables.

Surveys were administered in approx. 30–40-min. interviews per participating family in Ukrainian by local Polish-Ukrainian partner organisations. Interviews were conducted by enumerators, trained Ukrainian staff with lived experience of displacement, in a transparent and participatory manner. Enumerators were trained with a trauma-informed approach and informed consent, with explicit guidance on safeguarding issues to ensure participation was voluntary and conducted safely.

Lessons drawn include that the duration of interviews is flexible, and iterations utilising shorter interviews, or rolling data collection into existing procedures may be feasible for programme iteration. Likewise, self-directed data-input may be feasible, though interview settings are highly recommended. Phase I intake interviews helped identify common requests for clarification or more information, and enumerator observations on areas for improvement. Phase II surveys incorporated these changes, particularly providing more context for participants as they indicated preferences. Surveys were also translated into Ukrainian to ensure consistency and transparency while streamlining intake interviews.

Data protection for *Re:Match* meets and exceeds all *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* requirements. Personal information is protected during transmission by using leading encryption technology and software. *Sensitive Personally Identifiable Information (SPII)* is only collected when strictly necessary for project administration or implementation. De-identified data is used for matching and analysis.



What We Recommend

- Providing comprehensive, plain language information about matching, relocation, and arrival processes prior to data collection. This process should include the opportunity for participants to ask questions, which is important for expectation management.
- Training of enumerators and deploying of staff with relevant language and cultural skills to ensure trust and ethical data collection.
- Including protection and safeguarding training for enumerators, including trauma-informed interview techniques, anti-harassment, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), anti-fraud and corruption, and a signed code of conduct.
- Securely sharing administrative data so that intake interviews can focus solely on preferences to avoid data redundancy and consistency issues between systems, ensuring a cohesive and efficient experience.
- Streamlining all data collection and storage into a single, secure digital platform to minimise the risk of data breaches and unauthorised sharing. (See Box 1 for details about the proposed digital platform and processes)



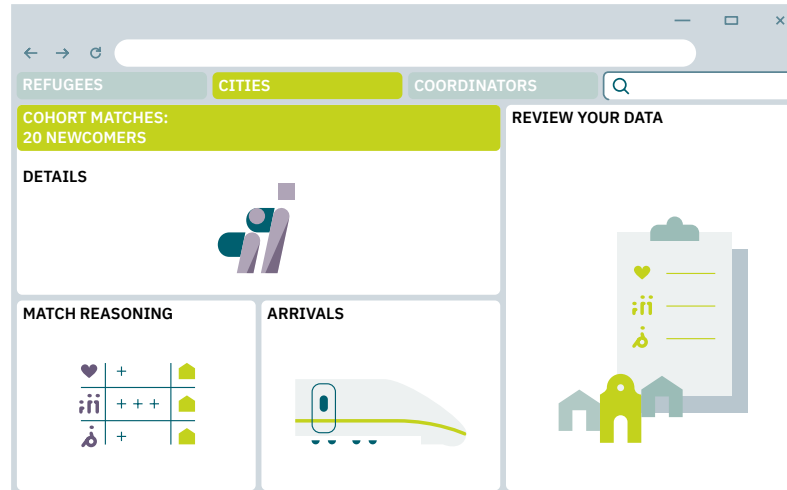
Figure 2 → EXAMPLE OF A DIGITAL DASHBOARD

Figure 2 shows examples of what the front-end of the digital platform could look like, with customised portals for each key group (a) **refugees**, (b) **cities**, (c) **coordinators**. Such portals would include data collection tools, customised match reasoning, and dissemination of pertinent programme information. Design and functionality of the digital platform should be co-developed through user-testing with each stakeholder group.

A) REFUGEE HOMEPAGE



B) CITY HOMEPAGE



B) COORDINATOR HOMEPAGE



3.4 Generating Matches: How the Algorithm Works



What We Did

How does *Pairity's* Algorithm for *Re:Match* Work?

The algorithm optimises the collective welfare of programme participants by assigning best possible matches given their attributes and preferences, and the services and capacities of participating cities. The matching process finds the optimal allocation of scarce resources across a given cohort of participants. Data from participants and cities informs the matching algorithm (→Table 1), which is part of the overall *Re:Match* matching and placement system. The algorithm accounts for implications of all possible matches on the overall welfare (or the total positive outcomes) of each matching cohort, and entails two primary steps.

The first step determines the range of **feasible pairings** between refugees and cities based on a series of inclusion and exclusion rules. These rules take into account whether it is possible for cities to support certain cases based on characteristics including total household unit size, medical needs and available accommodation types and their min./max. capacities.

Table 1 → MATCHING COMPONENTS

	Refugees	Cities
	BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS e.g., education, employment history, household composition, language skills	CITY CHARACTERISTICS e.g., location, education availability, language course availability
	Participant preferences*	City capacities / needs
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	e.g., interest in higher education, employment/training experience & area of expertise, credentialing needs, language classes.	e.g., proximity to higher education institutions, labour market employment/training opportunities, credentialing services.
HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY	e.g., rapid access to private housing, type of accommodation, desired city size.	e.g., (estimated) timeframe to secure private housing, type of accommodation & min./max. capacity, city size.
CULTURAL SUPPORT	e.g., presence of diaspora community, proximity to friends or family in Germany, availability of religious and special interest organisations.	e.g., presence of diaspora community, availability of religious and special interest organisations.
FAMILY / MEDICAL SUPPORT SERVICES	e.g., childcare needs, medical needs, support for disabilities & mental health.	e.g., (speed of) availability of childcare, availability of medical and support services for disabilities & mental health.

* to be ranked according to personal relative importance

For example, a single mother with a child who uses a wheelchair requires accessible and child-friendly housing. The algorithm ensures that any proposed match meets their needs (e.g., this family will never be matched to a third-floor apartment with no elevator). Other exclusion criteria may be more nuanced, such as a five-person family, with one person requiring a private bathroom due to a medical condition. In this case, the algorithm would exclude all options for housing that do not meet these needs (e.g., it would never suggest a match to a dormitory with shared bathroom facilities). Any accommodations that do not meet a family's needs are excluded from the possible matches calculated for that family.

The second step evaluates the **quality** of each feasible match, and identifies pairings that maximize match scores and allocation of scarce resources (e.g., housing) for all cases. Each case in a cohort is measured against all feasible pairings, and the algorithm optimises match scores across the cohort. Put otherwise, the algorithm avoids awarding the most resources to a single “best” match and proceeding “down” a ladder of match scores. Importantly, the decision to match one case changes options for others, implying a complex set of calculations. For example, a cohort of 50 cases means calculating **several million** possible combinations. The algorithm simulates possibilities to maximise welfare outcomes for all parties.

**Figure 3 → THE ALGORITHM PROCESS:
FROM DATA INTAKE TO PROPOSED MATCHES**

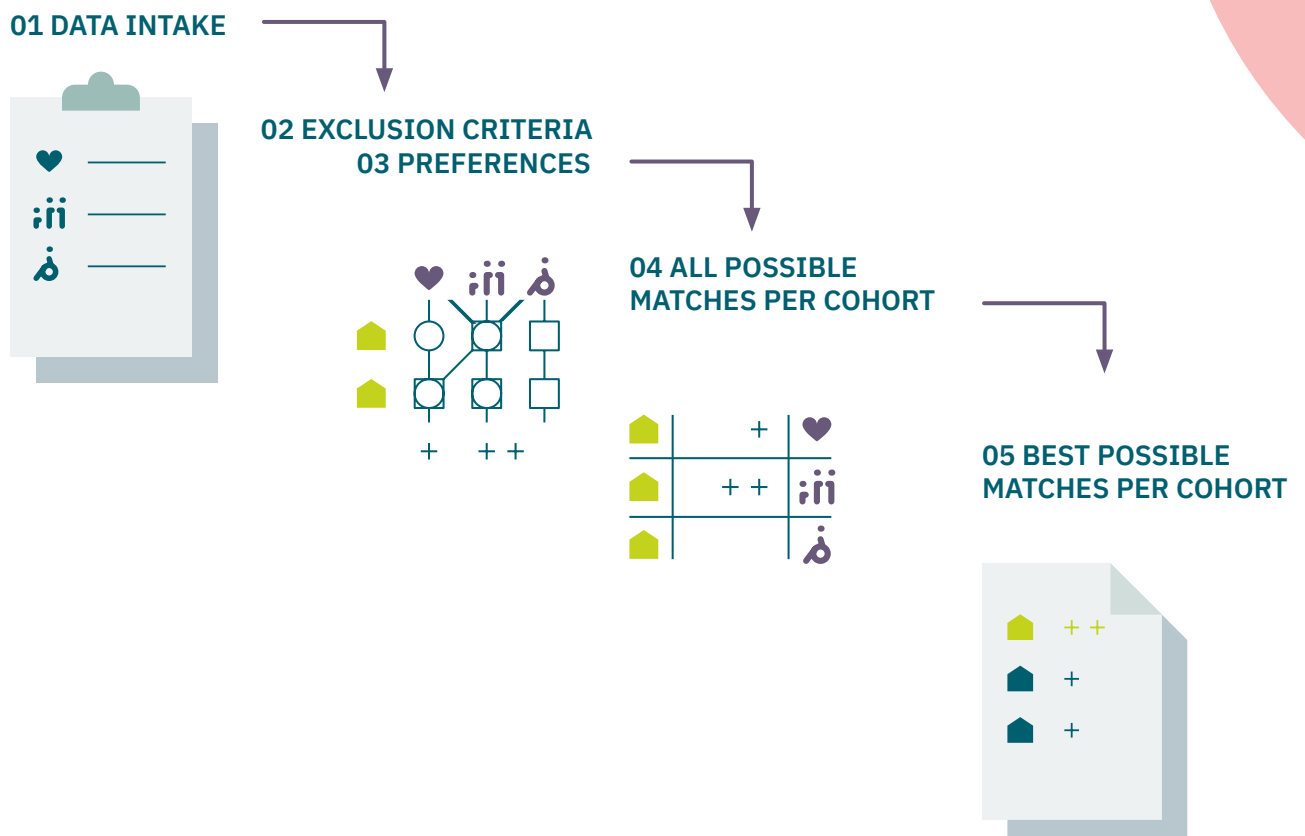


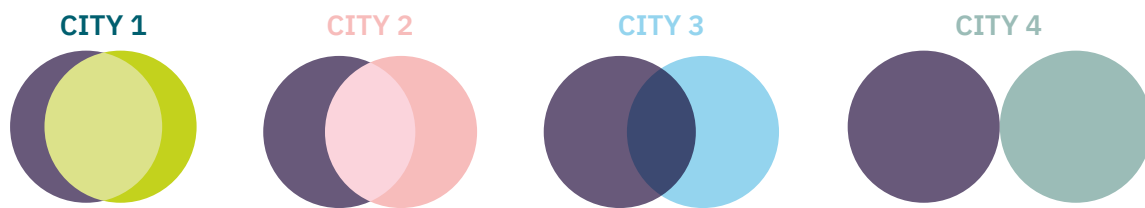
Figure 4 → MATCH SCORES

Example: Match Scores for a Participant Case among all Feasible City Pairings

Graphics show city alignment with preferences of one family unit/single person (case) across all dimensions combined, the bigger the overlap, the better the match. Full overlap = 100% alignment with the case preference, and no overlap = 0% alignment with the case preference.

A. ALL POSSIBLE CITY PAIRINGS TOGETHER

CASE A: PREFERENCES



B. BEST MATCH



CASE A

- ✓ Close to family
- ✓ Wheelchair accessible accommodation needed
- ✓ German A1 class needed
- ✓ Access to Higher Education
- ✓ Speech Therapist needed

- X Large City
- X Daycare needed (age 3)

CITY 1

- ✓ Close to family
- ✓ Wheelchair accessible accommodation available
- ✓ German A1 class available
- ✓ Access to Higher Education
- ✓ Speech Therapist available

- X Medium City
- X Daycare waiting time longer than 6 months (age 3)

How Does the Algorithm Account for Bias?

Pairity's data collection and algorithm proceed from the assumption that participants' characteristics and preferences should be prioritised in the relocation process. It specifically avoids bias about different factors informing relocation. Put simply, we do not assume specific weights on variables after the first step in the matching process. This also ensures unvarnished data for outcome

analysis. For example, comparative evidence is mixed as to whether destining refugees to locations with established diasporas contributes to better integration and social cohesion with receiving societies, or whether it limits the development of broader social ties outside of co-ethnic, co-national, or co-linguistic communities.

How Is the Algorithm Adaptive?

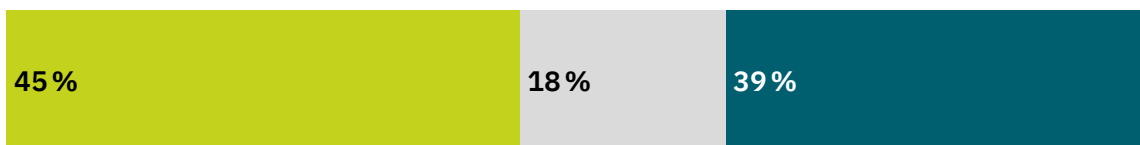
Re:Match Phase II allowed space to adapt data inputs and matching criteria to reflect the realities participants face. For example, during the development of intake surveys, displaced Ukrainians in focus groups noted the importance of living in a city close to friends or family in Germany, which we incorporated into preference scores. Phase I, however, provided more nuanced feedback that some participants cared about being close to family over and above any other criteria, while others who had family in Germany did not want to sacrifice their other priorities (such as job opportunities) to be close to family. We used this finding to update the Phase II surveys and matching criteria to allow for more nuance. Phase II participants could indicate if they wanted to be close to friends/family, over and above all other preferences, and if so, this criterion was then re-weighted in the matching algorithm. → **Figure 5** demonstrates the increase in satisfaction from Phase I to Phase II (45% to 71%) after this update.

Participants ranked services and characteristics (noted in → **Table 1** - Matching Components) in terms of their preference to be matched with a city that provided those services. “Top-ranked preferences” refers to the services that received the three highest scores, ranked by each participant. Top-ranked preferences were consistent across Phase I & II: German language training (98%), access to rapid private housing (97%), a desirable city size to participants’ preferences (90%), and availability of job training/apprenticeships (88%). Across both phases, top-ranked preferences were met 69% of the time. The most frequently satisfied preferences were accommodations for disabilities, certification/degree credentialing services, employment opportunities, accessibility to daycare, and Christian Orthodox community, all met over 90% of the time.

Figure 5 → ADAPTIVE ALGORITHM

Example of the Adaptive Algorithm: Satisfaction with Proximity to Friends/Family (for those applicable)

Phase I (n = 31)



Phase II (n = 21)



■ Satisfied ■ Neutral ■ Dissatisfied



What We Recommend

- Ensure that the matching process is clearly explained to participants in order to adjust their expectations and inform them about the trade-offs inherent to matching decisions.
- Implement preference-based matching algorithms to maximise match scores and allocation of scarce resources and avoid bias.
- Commit to a flexible approach with the willingness to learn from the data and review the accuracy and effectiveness of data inputs.

3.4 Matching



“Overall, I am very satisfied with the city choice and your immense help. Your programme has greatly facilitated my adaptation as a mother of three children.”

Participant, Phase II, Matched with Troisdorf



“The city is quiet and peaceful, not very densely populated, and meets our needs and preferences. It has all the necessary institutions, interesting places for walks, supermarkets, and shops.”

Participant, Phase II, Matched with Rottenburg a.N.

3.5 Match-Results Delivery & Relocation



What We Did

BGP staff translated match result data into targeted information for each participating person or family, and each city. The information provided to each side and resulting preparation for arrival and reception is a core part of the *Re:Match* project. It proved to have significant benefits with regards to expectation management, pre-integration, and sense of agency.

UKRAINIAN PARTICIPANTS

All participants received an email explaining matching results. *Salam Lab* (Phase I) and *R2P* (Phase II) staff in Poland phoned each household to provide more context and discuss the outcomes.

Match result emails included:

- 01 Identifying the matched city.
- 02 A recap of indicated preferences from the interview.
- 03 A detailed description of the *match rationale*, outlining which preferences were satisfied or not, and why.
- 04 Available information on their accommodation (shared facilities, furnishings, length of stay at the first housing, etc.).³
- 05 A *city flyer*, providing an overview of the city, including photographs and links to context videos.
- 06 An outline of pre-departure processes once the match is confirmed.

Point 3, the *match rationale* proved to be the most crucial, and was significantly broadened in Phase II, after feedback highlighted the need for more detailed match result explanations (see 3.6 for more details).

Providing individualised explanations of the algorithm's logic and how preferences expressed during the interview might inter-relate with each other, and why one was matched with a particular city led to increased newcomer satisfaction. However, balance must be struck between providing enough reliable information and expectation management as it is impossible to effectively convey the local circumstances to each personal need and true to the on-the-ground reality with absolute certainty. To achieve the required level of personalised reasoning and maintain the balance described, scaling would require an automated process for creating individualised *match rationales*. Employing AI could offer a practical solution for this.



“The information provided was very helpful regarding the formation of realistic expectations and explaining the city choice.”

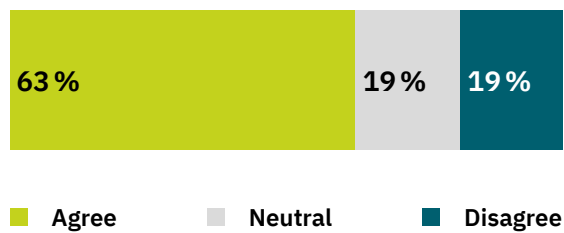
Participant, Phase II, Matched with Munich



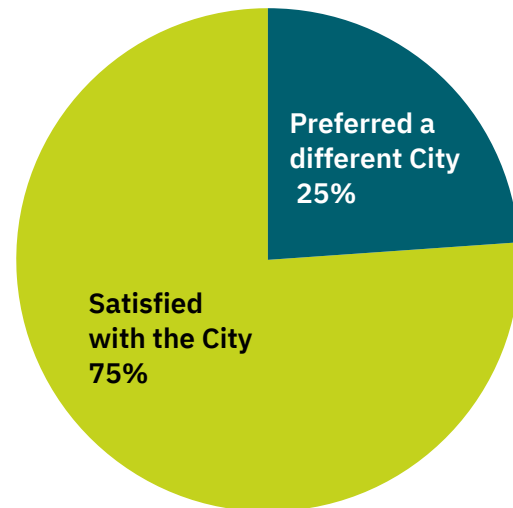
³ Detailed accommodation information continuously was the most challenging to convey, as the information provided by cities was limited (mostly, because it was not possible for the cities to give more information pre-arrival), but newcomer desire for housing details is understandably great.

Figure 6 → OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH CITY MATCH & MATCH CRITERIA

AVERAGE MATCH SATISFACTION



CITY MATCH SATISFACTION



Participants made the informed decision to accept or reject matches within a few days. In a scaled programme, or a different context, optional match rejection might not be possible. In this case it is even more important that the programme design is truly participatory, and communicating match results is transparent and comprehensive.

Participants received detailed information about their travel arrangements and a comprehensive *Arrival Guide*. It offered essential details on the first steps post-arrival, such as accommodation information and an outline of steps to be taken during the first few days. It also contained valuable contacts and information about support services, including social and counselling resources, cultural activities, medical services, public transportation, and other locally relevant details. The broad scope of information facilitated positive pre-integration outcomes, especially in smaller or lesser-known cities for which managing expectations was particularly important.

Understanding the rationale behind the match to a particular city and being informed about local conditions helps participants build resilience for future challenges.

As an example: if a participant prioritises “access to childcare” during their interview but learns before relocating that a matched city has a long childcare waiting period, they are better prepared to handle this upon arrival. Ideally, the information should also include more accessible alternatives to institutional childcare for the transition period before arrival, such as volunteer childcare or activities for children on-site at the accommodation facility.



“Re:Match staff explained everything very well: how you do it, why you do it, and what a person who comes here needs to do.”

Participant, Phase I, Matched with Salzgitter

The benefits and significance of the *Arrival Guide* were confirmed through evaluations of Phase I and Phase II. Feedback from a focus group and surveys highlighted the value of the information provided and the need for even more detailed guidance, particularly regarding additional support services and designated points of contact.

By providing newcomers with thorough information both before and after arrival, they are better equipped to settle into and adapt to new, often challenging circumstances more quickly. This proactive approach also helps ease the demand on social services, reducing the need for resource-intensive initial consultations and enabling newcomers to receive more targeted support as they navigate various aspects of their new environment.



“I was told more about the place, and about the challenges that I could face, and it wasn’t scary. Yes, it’s uncertain but everything was very clear.”

Participant, Phase I, Matched with Salzgitter

CITIES

Once a cohort of matched relocation candidates was confirmed, *BGP* delivered an information package to participating cities detailing matched beneficiaries.

The information package included:

- 01 Biodata (Names, Birthdates, scans of passports / ID cards)
- 02 Family relations
- 03 German and English language levels
- 04 Education and employment history, and desires for employment in Germany of each adult in the beneficiary unit
- 05 Phone numbers and e-mail addresses (if available)
- 06 Information about relevant health conditions and / or special vulnerabilities (especially if relating to needing mobility impaired housing)⁴
- 07 An overview of the *match rationale*.⁵

With this information in hand, an individualised process at the city level commenced. Each local circumstance required a unique approach for ingesting the received data into the internal systems and set off the process of registration and reception.

Cities shared available information on accommodation conditions and post-arrival protocols with the *Re:Match* team, which was in turn shared with Ukrainian beneficiaries before they travelled. This step is key to effectively managing newcomer expectations.



“The prior information made it possible to better prepare the arrival process - for example, it was possible to organise a medical consultation in advance in the case of known illnesses. Another example would be places in schools for children.”

Miriam Koch, Councillor for Culture and Integration,
City of Düsseldorf



⁴ Only if the condition/vulnerability is relevant for the city in terms of requiring medical support after arrival. In certain cases, information was supplemented by supporting medical documents.

⁵ A list of the newcomer preferences that matched, as well as some relevant preferences that did not match, with the information provided by the city, ranked by importance to participants. See ↗ “Interim Evaluation Report” for details on match criteria.



“Using an algorithm-based matching process, the personal needs and wishes of those seeking protection are compared with the capacities and conditions in the participating cities. Taking part in such an innovative pilot project is great. In addition, the refugees already get a small impression of the city after the matching process. In contrast, commonly ‘allocated’ protection seekers only know that they will be forwarded to this one city. Whether this is what they want is not the focus of the current reception practice. The administration finds this unfortunate, as people often (have to) come to our city who do not want to be here. This hinders the integration process in the city and affects the psychological situation of those seeking protection. Protection seekers who are ‘assigned’ via the *Re:Match* project arrive in the city in a better condition and without completely false expectations.”

Natascha Betke, Refugee Coordinator for the City of Dinslaken



What We Recommend

- Guarantee a minimum level of refugee agency in the process. Depending on the implementation circumstances, agency can range from
 - (a) the option to opt-in or opt-out of the matching,
 - (b) the ability to reject/accept a match,
 - (c) indicating one's preferences, and/or
 - (d) receiving honest and comprehensive information about the match outcome and preparation for the local circumstances.
- Focus on individualised communication during matching process, especially the result delivery, as key to expectation management and ease of relocation/settling in.
- Adapt match communication to target group specific needs.
- In case of scaling, automated *match rationales*, e.g., via employment of AI, to ensure individualised and needs-based information provision.
- A platform solution for transmitting results and documents to both, refugees and cities – to guarantee encryption of SPII and improve participant experience.
- Incorporate existing digitalised integration support information, e.g., arrival information apps for newcomers⁶, for enhanced pre-integration and a smoother setting-in process. (See Box 1 for details about the proposed digital platform and processes)

3.5 Results & Relocation



“The Re:Match referral procedure has shown that by sending documents prior to referral to a city, a process can be set in motion that ensures an uncomplicated and, above all, pragmatic arrival of people in the respective city. Our case manager was able to complete and have applications for benefits ready before the people arrived.”

Maulud Amir, Head of Migration and Integration,
City of Troisdorf



“Thanks to the comprehensive ‘portfolio’, the city had a better overview of the people assigned. In the conventional referral process, the data situation is often more difficult due to data protection constraints.”

City of Kiel



⁶ e.g., web-based applications like ↗ “Integreat”, ↗ “Ankommen” (Arrival), ↗ “Welcome App Germany”, or a more localised approach, like ↗ “Kompass Kalletal”.

3.6 Continuous Developmental Evaluation



What We Did

The *Re:Match* programme included a developmental evaluation, which is well suited for innovative social change initiatives. This type of evaluation incorporates real-time feedback to allow for continuous adjustments during implementation, ensure safeguarding, and improve integration outcomes. In practice, it offered the chance for dynamic reaction to new realities from participant experiences. For instance, by matching in cohorts, we were able to swiftly evaluate and implement learnings from one cohort directly into the next.

The co-design process is a core principle of *Re:Match*, where refugees and cities were consulted throughout the programme design, and their expertise shaped and improved our work. With the developmental evaluation, the programme also revisited feedback from all those involved to make programmatic updates between cohorts and phases.



“The participatory aspect of the project and the direct communication channels are considered remarkable. In particular, we see the workshop before the start of the pilot phase and the implementation of comments in the subsequent phases as particularly positive.”

Lisa Kamphoff, Department of Culture and Integration,
City of Düsseldorf



“The questionnaire was adapted to the circumstances of the cities through feedback with the cities, and it was possible to clarify how the surveyed circumstances in the city can be reflected most clearly and uniformly. This presumably resulted in more comparable answers to the questions from the cities and less distortion in the matching process.”

Frauke Raßmann, Head of Decentralized Housing,
City of Braunschweig

At the start of Phase II, *Re:Match* partners conducted interviews and focus groups with former and prospective participants to better understand how the programme could be improved, and then to receive feedback on planned changes.

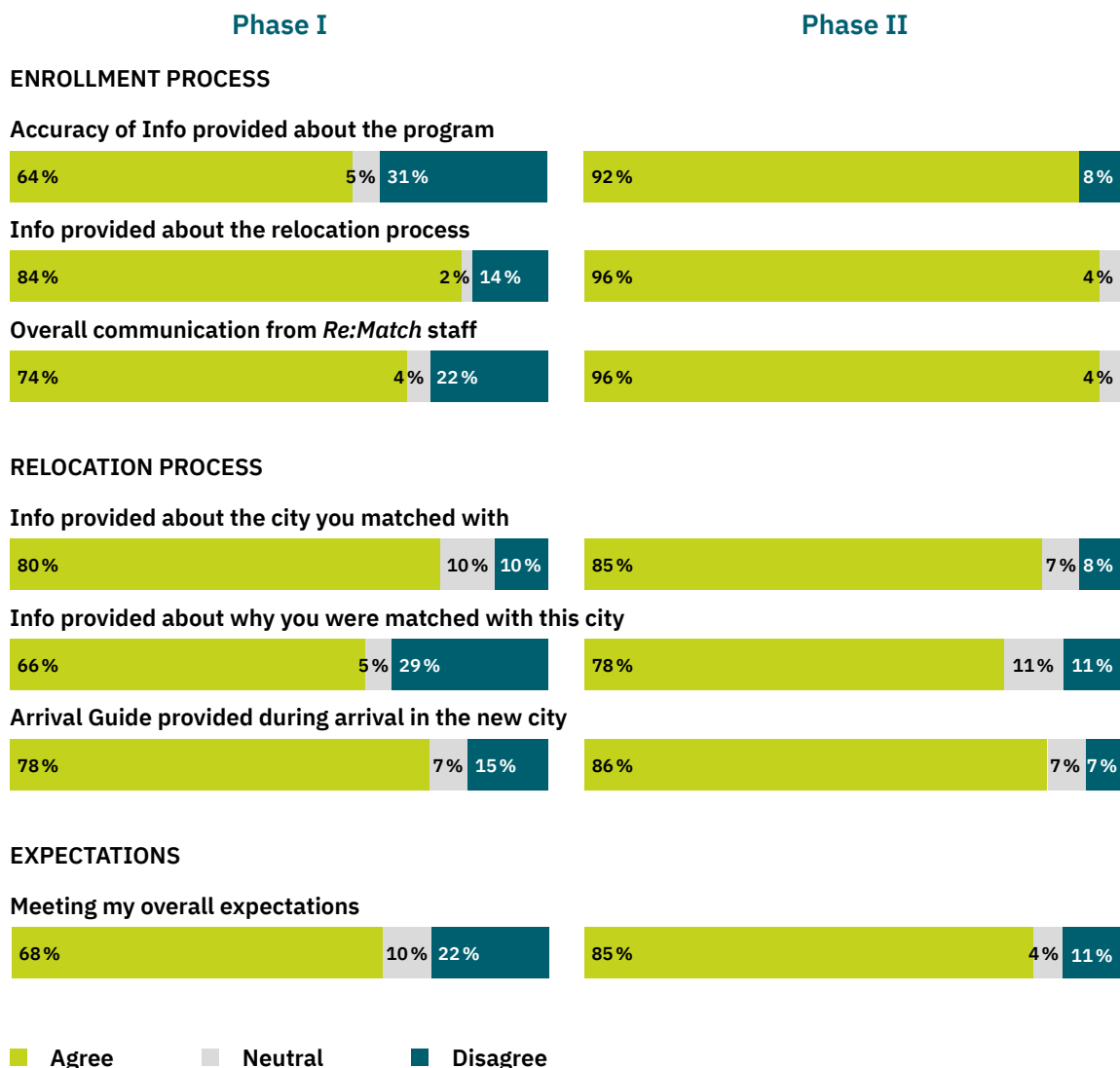
On the refugee side, 10 Ukrainian women came together in Warsaw to discuss how *Re:Match* is to explain the algorithm, matching, and outcomes to best empower an informed decision-making process for displaced participants.

The focus group discussions highlighted the importance of clear communication and adequate support for arriving newcomers, particularly regarding accommodation, healthcare access, and basic necessities. Participants emphasised the need for transparency in the matching and relocation process and underscored their importance for effectively managing expectations.

The conversation also addressed broader issues, such as the role of organisations in providing support to refugees and the challenges associated with receiving assistance at the local level. Participants expressed concerns about the uncertainty surrounding the availability of resources and services, emphasising the need for clear instructions and proactive communication.

In conclusion, most participants wanted more information, more communication, and a better understanding of what to expect when they arrived in their new city. The focus group recommendations were directly incorporated into various stages of the Phase II process, which meant a larger focus on improving communication and expectations management. While many aspects of relocation are out of the control of participants and cities, we found providing more information pre-relocation helped better manage expectations across the board. This can be seen in → **Figure 7**.

Figure 7 → IMPROVEMENT OF INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOUT THE PROGRAMME & EXPECTATIONS





What We Recommend

- A flexible evaluation approach that allows innovative programming to respond to the realities on the ground. This requires built-in feedback mechanisms to allow for any learnings to be quickly incorporated.
- Be sure to seek feedback before, during, and after each programme stage to maximise learning impact.
- There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to relocation, so programmes should be based on a commitment to flexibility and continual adaptation and process improvement. Building flexibility into programmes will be even more important when working with different populations in different locations, and with different governmental structures and regulations.

3.6 Evaluation





Box 2 →

Areas for Additional Research

- 01** Alignment and automation of municipal data collection across various databases, digitisation of databases, cloud-based data sharing opportunities.
- 02** Adaptation of match criteria + weighting to:
 - A. refine specific aspects of the matching, such as labour market and medical-support components, and enhance specified considerations surrounding the interests of women, the elderly, or children;
 - B. represent varying needs and preferences of diverse refugee populations, such as other countries of origin, gender, age, family composition, vulnerabilities;
 - C. focus matching on specialised pathways, such as education, labour market, or humanitarian pathways (e.g., vulnerable/medical emergencies, unaccompanied minors, Afghan local staff, community sponsorship).
- 03** Integration of local support services into the matching, to supplement the placement decisions: e.g., directly allocating social workers and other support/advise services, such as volunteer groups, local buddies/mentors, or translators.
- 04** Ingesting supplemental public data (i.e., census data) to inform and improve matching.
- 05** Further using emerging technology to improve and streamline the programme, such as leveraging AI to assist with the data intake process at scale and providing rationale behind matches to cities and participants.

Stakeholder Tasks in Pilot Setting

	Project–Coordination, incl. Technical Team	Refugee facing Field Organisation	Refugees	Cities
DEVELOPMENT	- Set up algorithm & match criteria. - Create data entry surveys. - Identify partner cities. - Design M&E plan and prepare measures. - Establish data sharing channels, incl. data protection procedures.	- Identify and train enumerators for direct contact with refugees. - Set up solid outreach and interview framework.	- Refugee representatives participate in co-design of match criteria/preferences. - Inform project design and communication materials.	- Designate municipal contact person for data entry. - Participate in co-design of match criteria and process.
PRE-MATCHING	- Create project materials (consent forms, outreach materials/FAQs etc.). - Prepare general match communication materials (City information, Arrival Guides). - Provide comprehensive and relevant municipal information to the Field Organisation. - Prepare cities for data entry and monitor for accuracy/completeness.	- Hold outreach & information sessions. - Provide personalised project information to (potential) participants and manage expectations. - Screen eligibility criteria, identify participants, and compile participant documents. - Hold interviews with participants.	- Get informed about project processes and what (not) to expect. - Receive comprehensive information about the algorithm and matching procedures. - Provide ID and supporting documents. - Enter data and preferences in a personal interview.	- Inform general match communication materials (City information, <i>Arrival Guides</i>). - Establish municipal reception plans (quota imputations, potential special solutions inside regular reception system etc.). - Compile and enter data into digital municipal surveys.
MATCHING	- Validate and clean data via automation. - Match municipal and refugee data via algorithm. - Convert match results into appropriate individualised communication materials. - Deliver matches to refugees and cities. - Transmit participant documents to cities.	- Provide support and information during match delivery procedures. - Answer refugee questions.	- Receive match results and city information. - Optional: match rejection/confirmation. - Prepare for travel.	- Receive information packages on each arriving refugee unit. - Initiate arrival and reception procedures, incl. preparation for special needs/ requirements.
POST-MATCHING / ARRIVAL	- Organise travel. - Perform evaluation (post-arrival surveys, interviews etc.). - Conduct impact assessments – especially on integration outcomes. - Implement process & algorithm adjustments. - Optional: Contact beyond evaluation to refugee participants ends at this point.	- Provide support and information during departure/travel. - Contact with participants ends at this point.	- Travel to and arrival in matched city. - Settling in and integration commences. - Voluntary: Provide feedback and insights in evaluation surveys and interviews.	- Physical reception of matched refugees. - Direct contact to refugees begins at this point. - Provide feedback and insights in evaluation surveys, interviews, workshops.

**Ideas for
scaling at the EU
level – *Re:Match*
and the *Solidarity
Mechanism***

04

Cities play a vital role in refugee reception, and refugees strive to maintain agency and dignity amidst challenging conditions. However, broader EU mechanisms, such as the reformed *Common European Asylum System (CEAS)* and the Pact on Migration and Asylum, set the framework for how refugees are admitted across the Union, and ultimately welcomed into cities. Part of the reform is a new – no longer voluntary – *Solidarity Mechanism*. As with the preceding *Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism* launched in 2020, relocation continues to be a key instrument for solidarity, requiring Member States to relocate at least 30,000 asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection annually.

While the previous chapters of this guide have equipped practitioners with the tools to implement data-driven and preference-based matching in different protection pathways, this chapter outlines how the *Re:Match* approach could be used within the new EU framework, specifically regarding the relocation programs under the *Solidarity Mechanism*.



Relocation is an example of concrete solidarity between EU countries in the area of migration management. Through relocations, asylum applicants and beneficiaries of international protection are transferred from their current host European country, normally their first country of entry into the EU, to another European country. If an applicant for asylum is relocated, the new host country takes over the examination of their asylum application. Through such relocations, EU countries help each other to alleviate the pressure on local reception and asylum systems of countries who manage the EU's external borders.

European Commission, DG Home

Experiences from previous relocation programs and schemes make it clear that new approaches and technical adaptations to existing processes are crucial if relocation is to succeed – both quantitatively and qualitatively. The *European Union Agency for Asylum's (EUAA)* strengthened mandate presents an opportunity to enhance its matching system for better alignment between relocating states and individuals.

However, from piloting *Re:Match*, we've learned that we must go beyond the EU's current plans for matching refugees with relocating states based on narrowly defined meaningful links. Direct and individualised relocation to cities provides significant advantages over nation-level relocation approaches:

- 01 Cities—not Member State governments—are ultimately responsible for providing refugees with shelter and new homes.
- 02 Cities are best equipped to assess their own resources, capacities and infrastructure. Acknowledging their expertise is likely to enhance their willingness and ability to support national relocation decisions.
- 03 Refugees know best what they need to arrive and integrate well in host communities. Incorporating refugee needs and preferences is essential to ensure they can and will stay in the welcoming cities. The *Re:Match* pilot evaluations show this approach curtails secondary migration, while fostering easier adaptation, an earlier sense of belonging, and a quicker path to self-sufficiency.⁷



⁷ Insights into evaluation results six months after arrival can be found in: "From Arrival to Belonging: Six Months Results" (10/2024).

Innovative Ideas to Improve the EU Relocation Mechanism

Having gathered unique expertise in matching-based relocation, *Re:Match* could be scaled up to maximise impact. We propose two large-scale pilot projects to further refine the algorithm and processes while gaining crucial insights for continued development. For these pilots, we seek to engage EU institutions, Member States and additional cities to bolster support for our approach and the potential of relocations through practical involvement.

1. A COALITION OF WELCOMING EUROPEAN CITIES

A pilot involving a coalition of welcoming cities across multiple European countries, modelled after *Re:Match*, could bring our approach to the next level. Refugees would be matched to participating cities across a wide range of European countries and relocated directly from their location to the new community, bypassing the usual initial allocation on the member state level. To incentivise participation, the European Commission could offer cities direct funding, potentially sourced from the financial contributions under the *Solidarity Mechanism*. This funding would be particularly beneficial to smaller cities with limited resources, enabling them to welcome newcomers. Beyond optimising refugee distribution, this pilot could revitalise local economies and address population decline and related challenges in certain regions.

2. COMPLEMENTING THE EUAA'S MATCHING WITH A SECOND ROUND

While the first scaled pilot focuses on city-led efforts, the second explores how European states, in partnership with their welcoming cities, can take a pioneering role in relocation via matching. This scaled version would apply the *Re:Match* approach to refugees who have already been assigned to a particular Member State through the EUAA's matching mechanism. Complementing this first round of matching, a second round of matching to cities within the assigned country – modelled after the first *Re:Match* Pilots – would ensure the best possible fit of refugees and cities, thereby optimising the distribution of refugees admitted through the *Relocation Mechanism*. Ideally, the two matching steps should be conducted quickly one after the other through streamlined data-intake. This allows people to be informed early on about their final destination, enabling them to prepare while host communities simultaneously pre-arrange a smooth reception process.

A robustly tested matching tool for relocating refugees from the EU's external borders directly to cities across the Union will significantly enhance the impact of the EU relocation mechanism.

Re:Match offers a solution that effectively tackles the challenges of relocating individuals from the EU's frontline states, creating a sustainable and tailored distribution processes, that ultimately enhances integration outcomes.⁸ Moreover, projects that leverage matching at both the city and Member State level send a strong message of solidarity among Member States and local communities. The new position of the *EU Solidarity Coordinator* – as well as policy makers and practitioners at all levels – could endorse large-scale expansion of *Re:Match* to proactively support and promote innovative solidarity solutions.



⁸ More context can be found in: "*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*"

Concluding Remarks



05

This Implementation Guide consolidates learnings and recommendations from the *Re:Match* Pilot, offering clear guidance on how to replicate, adapt, and scale the innovative approach of preference-based matching between refugees and cities. While *Re:Match* is developed in light of the EU *Relocation Mechanism*, preference-based matching bears the potential to optimise the allocation of displaced families and individuals via established programs, complementary pathways or within national systems. Wherever matching is integrated into refugee distribution, admission, and reception practices, it can complement the efforts of numerous actors and help refugees transition from uncertainty to communities where they can rebuild their lives.

The preceding chapters have explained in detail how we relocated nearly 140 Ukrainian individuals to eight cities by aligning participants' needs and preferences with cities' infrastructure and capacities. The lessons learned highlight the value of data-driven, human-centred solutions that meet the needs of displaced individuals while optimising municipal capacities.

Practitioners as well as advocates should consider the following key take-aways from the *Re:Match* Pilot as they advance in implementing matching-based systems as part of migration and asylum governance.

1. Human-Centred Design and Participation:

The *Re:Match* Pilot's success can be attributed to its participatory approach, which centres the voices and preferences of displaced people. Refugees are viewed as active contributors to processes of distribution and reception, ensuring that their personal backgrounds, needs, and aspirations are respected. This participatory design fosters trust and engagement, leading to improved satisfaction and more effective integration.

2. Data-Driven Matching for Equity and Efficiency:

A key element of the *Re:Match* model is its algorithm-based matching system, which minimises bias and ensures that both refugees and cities benefit from well-optimised placements. By aligning individuals' preferences and municipal capacities, a preference-based matching algorithm improves the relocation process and offers a replicable model for similar admission programs. The ability to adapt the algorithm and criteria based on real-time feedback ensures that *Re:Match* remains responsive and effective.

3. Managing Expectations Through Clear Communication:

One of the most significant lessons learned from *Re:Match* is the importance of managing expectations—both for refugees and cities. By providing comprehensive, transparent information throughout the process, the *Re:Match* approach helps individuals prepare for potential challenges and sets realistic expectations for what their new communities can offer. This clear communication reduces misunderstandings and fosters smoother integration.

4. Collaboration with Cities:

Local governments are indispensable partners in the process, and *Re:Match*'s collaboration with cities has shown how local actors can drive successful refugee reception. By engaging cities in the design and implementation of the Pilot, *Re:Match* has fostered a sense of ownership and solidarity that strengthens the overall outcomes.

Re:Match is committed to continuously evaluating and adapting its model to better support cities in refugee reception and integration, leveraging new technologies and improving data-sharing practices. Insights gained from the ongoing analysis of the *Re:Match* Pilot inform the development of matching principles and both our technical and policy recommendations in response to emerging challenges and opportunities.

The *Re:Match* Pilot has laid the groundwork for a more equitable and humane EU relocation system – one that emphasises collaboration, equity, and the participation of both refugees and host communities. Looking ahead, *Re:Match* remains focused on scalability, flexibility, and ongoing improvement, with the aim of integrating its matching approach into the broader migration and asylum governance framework as a viable alternative to current practices in the EU and beyond.

As we continue to develop *Re:Match*, questions, ideas, and open exchange are expressly welcome! Our team can be reached at **rematch@governance-platform.org**

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RE:MATCH

