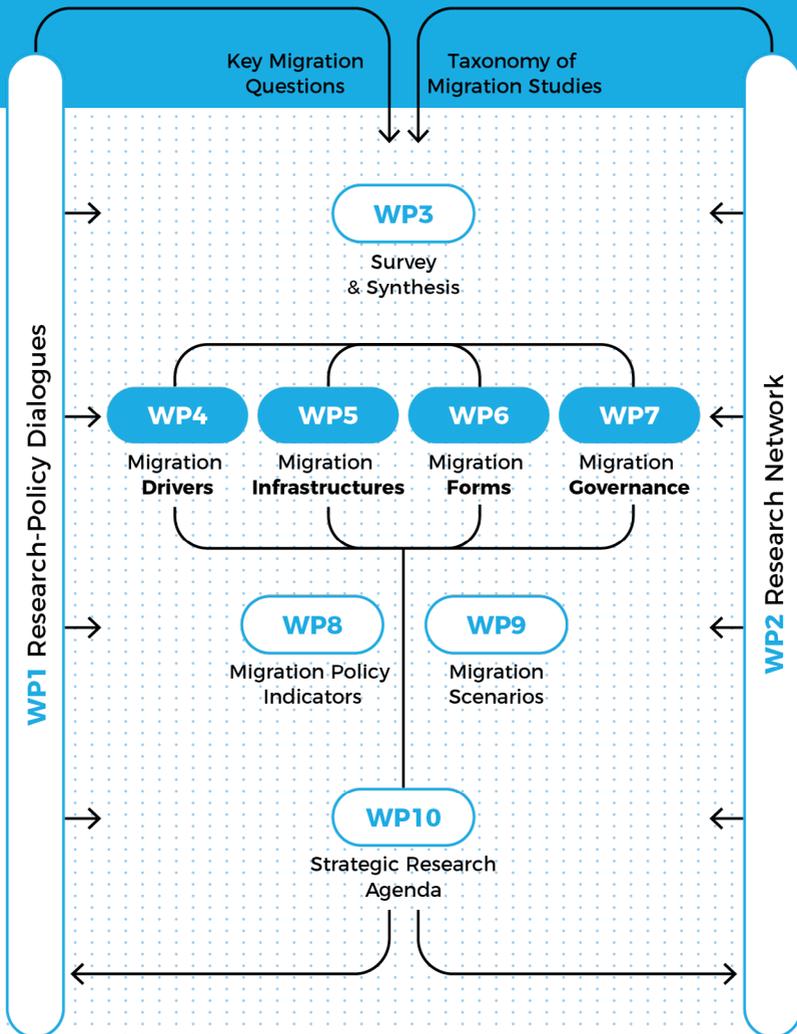


Policy Brief WP5

Key Knowledge Questions Migration Infrastructures



Policy Briefs WP5

Key Knowledge Questions

Migration Infrastructures

by

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Please click [here](#) for the other policy briefs



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About the project

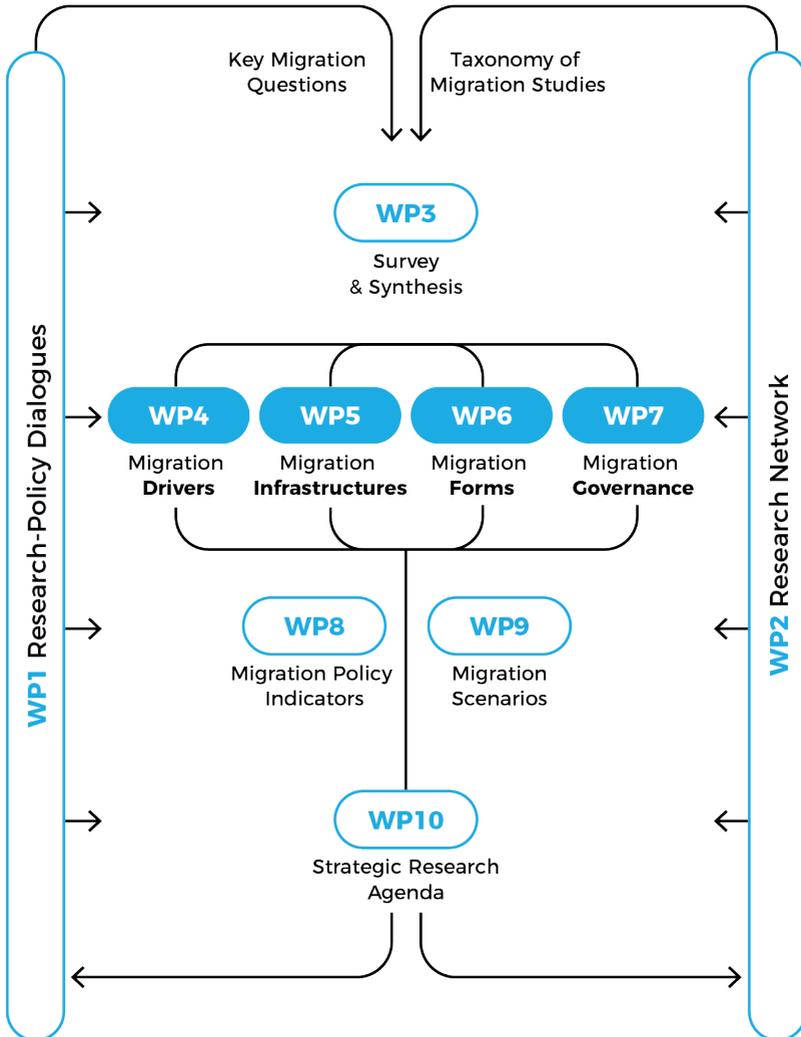
These policy briefs about key knowledge questions on migration are the result of a collaboration between Work Packages 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 of the Horizon 2020 project, CrossMigration. They are intended to introduce new policymakers to what insights existing research can offer for understanding and addressing pressing questions on the topic.

Led by MPI Europe, Work Package 1 set out to define a set of empirical questions that are at the heart of major policy decisions that European policymakers are currently facing and will face in the coming decade. These questions synthesise the key areas of interest based on consultations with over 30 policymakers at EU, national and local level and the CrossMigration research partners. These questions are forward-looking, focusing on what knowledge will be needed to inform policymaking in the field of migration in the next 5 to 10 years.

Work Packages 4-7 bring together leading experts on the themes of Migration Drivers, Migration Infrastructures, Migration Forms, and Migration Governance. They were led by Danube University Krems (DUK), the Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (DeZIM), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), the University of Lisbon (IGOT-UL), the Centre of Migration Research Warsaw (CMR), and the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute (EUI), along with members of the IMISCOE research network:

Migration drivers are structural elements that have the potential to facilitate, enable, constrain, or trigger migration. Migration drivers might increase or decrease the salience of migration, the likelihood of certain migration routes, and the desirability of different destinations. The term is more encompassing than 'migration determinants' or 'root causes' of migration, which generally ignore human agency in the decision to migrate and assume a deterministic and causal relationship between one or more structural factors and migration. Migration drivers, however, affect migration directly but also, and most importantly, indirectly and in combination with other migration drivers, in complex migration driver configurations. While the migration driver environment might be the same for two individuals, different migration drivers affect them differently depending on individual characteristics.

Figure 1
Overview Work Packages

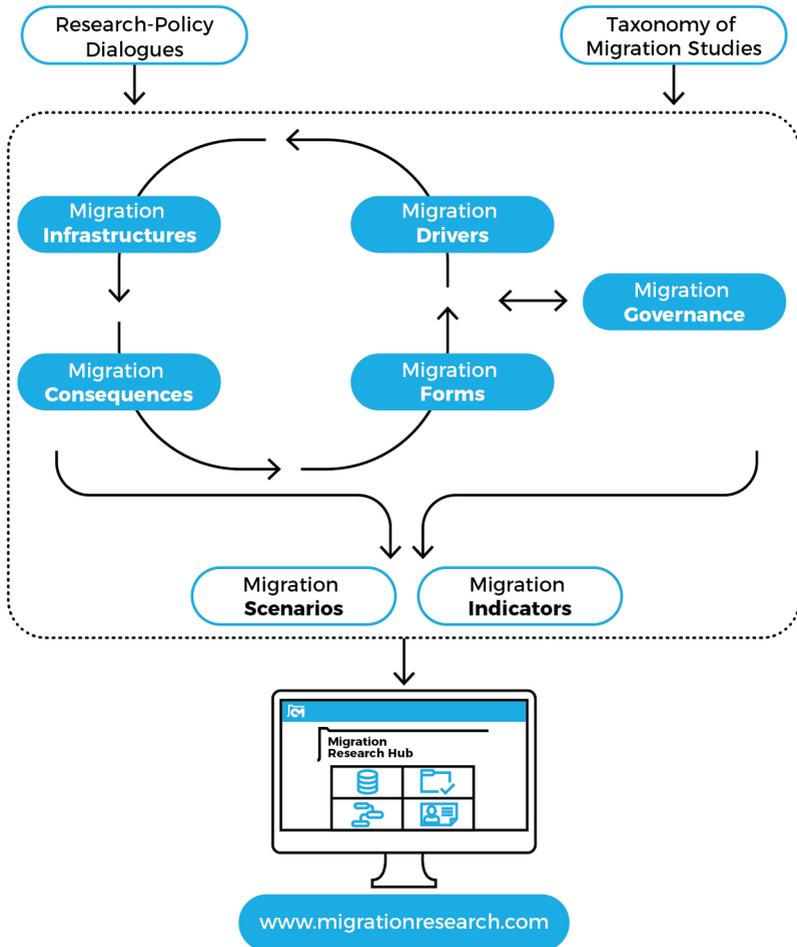


The emerging field of **migration infrastructures** sheds light on the processes that occur between the decision to migrate is made and arrival in the receiving country. It primarily asks the question of how people migrate, taking the perspective of the receiving country in three different angles: First, it focuses on regular and irregular, commercial and non-commercial actors facilitating migration, including visa brokers, work recruitment agencies, marriage migration platforms, human smugglers and humanitarian organisations. Then, it looks at the logistics of migration, exploring the role of routes, transit hubs and means of transportation. Finally, it investigates how digital technologies like the internet and social media shape mobility and influence migratory pathways.

The notion of **migration forms** concerns the question of who migrates. Global migration forms, or flows, include regular and irregular migrants who migrate for a broad array of reasons. Different migration forms are characterized by multiple and dynamic aspects. The differences between migration forms relate to variations in migration drivers, infrastructures, policies and experiences that shape migrants' journeys. The Migration Research Hub encompasses a research on a range of different migration forms – a specific set of migration forms are included in the database as they reflect the existing body of knowledge and focus regarding migration research on forms. While these are differentiated in a categorical manner, migration forms – and motivations – are rarely straightforward. Indeed, migration forms and flows are increasingly highlighted as mixed, as individuals' motivations can be multiple and constantly developing throughout migration processes.

Migration governance includes, but is broader than, migration policies. While the latter refers to laws, regulations, decisions or other government directive related to migration, governance encompasses these elements as well as the factors related to decision-making processes and implementation. While the term governance is frequently used in the field of migration studies, it remains ill-defined. Definitions of governance typically focus on the observable outputs of governance processes: i) norms, rules, policies, laws and institutions that can be binding or non-binding norms and frameworks, at the global, national or subnational levels.; ii) actors, institutions and institutional mechanisms; and iii) processes or methods of decision-making and of governing processes (including implementation and monitoring) that can be formal or informal and occur at different levels (local, national, global) and among diverse actors.

Figure 2
Simplified overview of project conceptual framework



We hope that you find these guides useful for navigating these key questions. For more information on the knowledge accumulation work of CrossMigration, please visit the [YouTube channel](#) to watch interviews with the authors. To find an index of knowledge and experts on migration all under one roof, be sure to visit and register at the Migration Research Hub (migrationresearch.com).

WP5

Key Knowledge Questions on Migration Infrastructures

Definition and Conceptualisation of Migration Infrastructures

Most migration research is taking a receiving country perspective that is post hoc, hence after migration has already occurred. Less attention is paid to the processes between the decision to migrate is made and the arrival in a receiving country. The concept of migration infrastructures sheds light on migration processes and analyses how people migrate. Migration infrastructures can be defined as an ensemble of actors and structures that facilitate migration. More precisely, the concept consists of the following five dimensions:

- regular and irregular actors and structures,
- state, quasi-state and non-state actors,
- commercial and non-commercial actors and structures,
- material, architectural, technical and digital infrastructures,
- practices of and experiences with these infrastructures, including issues such as exploitation or crime.

This implies that migration infrastructures are multidimensional as they consist of persons and materials, nature and technology, structure and agency, and knowledge (verbal or written and more or less publicly available). These multiple dimensions are the conditions under which people migrate and travel, the material resources and knowledge required to complete a journey, the organisations, businesses, or platforms that hold resources and provide information or services with regards to migration and the individuals who populate these.

Migration infrastructures represent an important element of the opportunity structure that shapes peoples' capability to migrate. It acknowledges the challenges of travel and migration including natural features (distance, natural obstacles such as rivers, mountains, deserts and the sea) and political constraints (borders, bureaucratic requirements and control agencies). It sheds light on the actors and structures that help to navigate the given conditions and acknowledges the complex and dynamic processes between them. The concept does not include the infrastructures that seek to impede migration such as systems of border control or racialized visa regimes. However, infrastructures can shape who migrates or who is excluded from migration, for example through pricing schemes, where individuals migrate, or how they migrate.

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The key research questions in the study of migration infrastructures include the following:

- How do people migrate?
- Who and what facilitates the migration of people?
- What do facilitators do? Which characteristics do they have?
- How do migrants interact with and use infrastructures?
- How do migrants experience infrastructures?

Migration infrastructures is a relatively new concept that has only been introduced around the early 2010s (Lindquist, Xiang & Yeoh 2012). However, the study of its individual elements dates back at least to the early 2000s and is based on the 'mobility turn' in social sciences, a paradigm shift towards more scholarly attention on the systematic movement of people (Sheller & Urry 2006).

There are various similar but slightly divergent concepts, notably migration industries, migration networks and migration drivers. The concept of migration infrastructures is partly different from the migration industries in that it also includes non-commercial actors but does not cover actors primarily controlling and/or preventing migration. In addition, migration infrastructure is different from migration networks in that it does not cover inter-personal and social but only organised structures. Personal networks can become part of migration infrastructures, for instance, when former migrants provide information or advice on digital platforms, acting as intermediaries or running migration businesses. Meanwhile, there is a certain overlap between migration infrastructures and migration drivers in that actors providing information or services in person or on digital platforms may incentivise prospective migrants.

Overall, migration infrastructures refer to the meso-level of migration processes linking macro-level conditions (demography, economics, policies or climate) and micro-level factors (migrant characteristics, cognitive processes, individual decision-making). In general, the concept relates to the processes between departure and arrival (see Crawley et al. 2016); in the future, migration infrastructures could be complemented by integration infrastructures.

Why the topic matters

The concept of migration infrastructures recognises that migration pathways cannot be described as a line connecting two places but that they are complex, multi-faceted spaces of mediation. They include a vast range of actors and structures such as visa brokers, recruitment agencies for workers and students, marriage agencies, travel agencies, providers of pre-departure health screenings, human smugglers as well as carriers, routes, roads, hubs, bus and train stations, (air)ports, hotels or safe houses and digital platforms. Access to migration infrastructures – and knowing how to navigate them – is an important resource determining individuals' opportunities to travel and/or migrate. Without the mentioned infrastructures in place, migration would not be possible. Acquiring and drawing on knowledge on the linkages and dynamics playing out within and between the sending, transit and receiving context is essential in order to inform effective policymaking on migration, both at home and abroad.

Several types of migration infrastructures have begun to feature prominently in policy debates on migration. This includes the role of human smugglers and traffickers who facilitate migration with and without an individual's consent, respectively, when crossing the Sahara Desert or the Mediterranean Sea. Yet, as previous research on migration infrastructures has shown, the attention paid to smugglers and smuggling networks appears to be somewhat disproportionate as these actors or infrastructures only account for less than one per cent of all migration. Indeed, a vast majority of people on the move avail themselves of regular migration channels. Such regular immigration infrastructures are, however, sometimes used to enter and overstay, for example by people working in breach of their visa requirements. Even though they may facilitate irregular immigration, regular features, structures and types of migration remain partly overseen in the public and political debate.

State of the Art

The concept of migration infrastructures provides answers to five main questions. Three out of these will be discussed in the following and should be considered when designing migration policies.

1 Which intermediaries and services do migrants rely on?

As mentioned above, research concerned with human smuggling and trafficking is relatively broad focusing on routes, modalities, business models and migrant experiences (e.g. Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2012). However, organisations or businesses enabling migrants to leave their countries are much more diverse. Intermediary services range from facilitating student mobility and marriage migration to labour recruitment or visa brokerage.

Migration Infrastructures

How do people migrate?

Aspects

- Intermediaries, brokers, agents, and other actors
- Logistics and means of transportation
- Routes, (transit) hubs and sites of migration
- Digital infrastructures
- Tourism and Migration

Main Questions

- Which intermediaries and services do migrants rely on?
- Which means of transportation do they use?
- Which routes, hubs and sites do they frequent?
- How do tourism and migration intersect?
- To what extent do digital infrastructures facilitate migration?

Cranston's (2018) work on high skilled migration to Singapore or Thieme's study (2017) on student mobility agents in Nepal are only two examples that illustrate the variety of actors in the field.

Empirical evidence indicates that it is difficult to clearly distinguish between regular and irregular actors and practices. Instead, actors often find themselves in a semi-regular space where they provide different services according to their clients' needs, current visa requirements and immigration policies. Alpes' (2017) study on agencies and intermediaries offering both irregular and regular migration services reveals the sometimes hybrid spaces between legality and illegality.

Whilst smugglers are often depicted as immoral and exploitative in media and policy discourses, research suggests that the relationship between smugglers and migrants is more complex and can also be based on solidarity, and moral or religious duty (see Achilli 2018). Another distinction that is blurred in the public discourse is that between human smugglers and traffickers. While human smugglers by definition act in consensus with migrants, traffickers usually use violence, deception or coercion. Many scholars, politicians and journalists are not aware of this differentiation which leads to a general suspicion against smugglers and middlemen, many of which might be even perceived as heroes by their clients (Belloni and Jeffrey 2014).

These aspects show that it is necessary to avoid simplifications and gain a nuanced understanding of the actors in the field. In order to design migration policies efficiently, it is important to take into account that there is a variety

of actors active in migration mediation that are not limited to smugglers and traffickers. Likewise, there are many private actors who may find themselves in semi-regular spaces providing services that are influenced by and adapted to immigration policies and entry requirements.

2 Which means of transportation and logistics do migrants utilise?

The public discourse on migration is often dominated by boat arrivals on the coasts of Greece, Italy or Spain. Meanwhile, conventional migration and the means of transportation and logistics used has been almost entirely overseen. However, as previous research indicates, many migrants rely on low cost carriers such as budget flights, long-distance coaches or trains and use shuttle services, public transportation or taxi services in order to reach airports and stations (Teunissen 2018; Hirsh 2017). The emergence of relatively cheap flights has led to frequent back-and-forth travel between source and destination countries, notably of labour migrants travelling between Eastern and Western European countries. Exploring this overlap between migration and tourism logistics is crucial to understand the variety of migration routes to Europe which are far from being limited to boat crossings of the Mediterranean. These different regular and irregular migratory pathways need to be kept in mind, notably when seeking to manage entries into the European Union.

3 To what extent do digital infrastructures facilitate migration?

The majority of migrants travelling to Europe, as research on migration infrastructures suggests, rely on digital technologies. Refugees use smartphones and other devices to seek information and contact peers, smugglers and loved ones via phone calls, social media or SMS. GPS tools helping migrants to navigate also play a crucial role. Empirical evidence shows, for example, that the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) significantly reduces migrants' dependency on migration intermediaries including human smugglers (see Alencar et al. 2018).

However, the use of these technologies also bears risks and challenges. Many migrants indicate that it is often difficult to verify information provided online. As refugees find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position, relying on false information can cause serious harm or even death (see Borkert et al. 2018). Many migrants prefer to rely on information given by people they know personally or by government actors (see Dekker et al. 2018). In addition, connectivity is not always available during flight (UNHCR 2016). Network coverage and electricity to charge batteries are sometimes not available. Phones and mobile data can be relatively expensive for people on the move without a regular income. Besides this, crossing several borders during the journey often makes it necessary to buy new SIM cards and recharge one's phone credit in every single country. These

obstacles result in an increased dependency on smugglers and the risk to fall in the hands of human traffickers (Latonero and Kift 2018).

In terms of policy implications, literature suggests that humanitarian services for displaced persons should not be limited to food and shelter but include digital connectivity services such as charging stations, free cyber cafés or WIFI spots along migration routes (Gillespie 2018). Besides this, access to reliable information in the form of online campaigns provided on channels that are trustworthy and well-known to migrants, notably also Facebook and WhatsApp, can prevent migrants from harm and abuse (Borkert et al. 2018). As research by Mason and Buchmann (2016) on the island of Lesbos suggests, forced migrants tend to use social media and communication apps rather than webpages, often lacking the knowledge on how to access them. Oeppen's (2016) article on German campaigns seeking to prevent Afghans from migrating underlines that campaigns are not likely to be believed by migrants if they are perceived as biased and will be ignored particularly by those fleeing from war and terror.

4 Main research gaps

Research on migration infrastructures allows policymakers to gain a more holistic understanding of migratory pathways and devise migration policies taking into consideration actors, structures and logistics on the ground. So far, migration infrastructures is a rather fragmented field. Research is hugely imbalanced in that some issues have received scholarly attention whereas others are almost completely absent. It is crucial to fill knowledge gaps in order to genuinely understand migratory pathways and design evidence-based migration policies that efficiently impact pathways and protect migrants from harm.

First, notably in the European context, several studies address migration industries, i.e. the commercial aspects of facilitating migration. However, this research does not specifically take into account broader migration facilitation infrastructures in which such commercial activities are embedded. In terms of geographic focus areas, research on Asia is comparably more advanced than research of other regions. Second, there is a strong focus on human smugglers and traffickers, and to some extent also on sites and routes of what is denoted as transit migration. There is, however, less research on regular agents such as work recruitment agencies, student mobility consultants or marriage agents. Third, while digital migration studies are an emerging field of interest, unequal access to resources and the so-called digital divide as determined by class, gender, age and country of origin remain under-researched areas. And finally, as mentioned above, there is little research on the interface of migration and tourism or travel logistics. Notably, means of transportation, such as carriers, (air)ports or bus and train stations are so far widely neglected in migration

research, yet they play a role in terms of mobility patterns of people migrating to the European Union or elsewhere. A key obstacle is the predominantly containerised thinking in the different fields related to mobility. We would recommend improving exchange and mutual learning between research fields such as transport economics, tourism studies, logistics or legal studies.

References to the main EU policy frameworks

There are very few EU or indeed international policy frameworks addressing aspects of migration infrastructures. So far, the main focus lies on human smuggling, human trafficking, the responsibilities of carriers and the tourism industry more broadly. There is an inherent tension between the objectives of these four policy areas, which has become evident in research on migration infrastructures. While certain privileged kinds of movement like tourism and cheap airfare have become more affordable and available to some people, others are excluded from this type of mobility and face a regime of increased security, control and immobilisation.

The main EU policy frameworks are:

- Council Directive 2001/51/EC of 28 June 2001 supplementing the provisions of Article 26 of the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement of 14 June 1985, short Carrier Sanctions Directive;
- EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015 - 2020), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, 27 May 2015, COM(2015) 285 final;
- Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, short human trafficking directive;
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe, COM/2010/0352 final.

Recommendations for key readings

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The Migration Research Hub, developed in the CrossMigration project, supports the systematic accumulation of knowledge in migration studies. It aims to be the go-to resource for finding knowledge on migration, from the latest literature to the most appropriate topical experts.

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