

- SUMMARY -

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Summary

MPP and the appearance of improper influence

The long-range production forecast (*Meerjaren Productie Prognose, MPP*) is a recurrent survey of official forecasts for the executive services in the migration chain, including the *IND, COA, DT&V, KMar*¹ and other chain partners. The MPP is used for the financial cycle and provides annual forecasts that are updated every six months on behalf of various processes (such as asylum, immigrant detention or naturalisation). The MPP is drawn up by a working group of chain partners and therefore it is a product of the migration chain. Due to this, questions may arise about its independence and the possibility of improper influence. To anticipate discussions, the Dutch Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) commissioned a study on the pros and cons observed by those involved if the MPP would be executed by a research institute outside the migration chain. The study was carried out between June and October 2020 and included a document study, interviews with chain partners and representatives of independent research institutes outside the chain (particularly government institutions) and an expert meeting. The findings mainly reflect the experiences and opinions of the chain partners most deeply involved and of representatives of research institutes, who are not well-informed of each other's work processes. Therefore, the report should not be regarded as a reflection and analysis of all possible pros and cons of the execution of the MPP within and outside the chain.

Realisation of the MPP

The MPP-process runs in three phases. In the first phase, asylum inflow forecasts are drawn up by an expert at the ministry of Justice and Security, and regular inflow forecasts are drawn up by the IND. The MPP working group translates the inflow forecasts into an estimate (a figure). Starting from this estimate, in the second phase, production data of chain partners are attuned by means of a calculation model. In the third phase, the estimates are decided on. If it turns out later that considerable deviations of the estimates occur (more than 15%), or in case of large changes in the international setting, the forecast can be revised between times.

The most important moments at which choices are made that may influence the results are:

- when the asylum forecast is drawn up by the expert (the sources used, the construction of scenarios, estimating probabilities);
- when the asylum forecast (a probability density function) is translated into an estimate (a figure) by the chain partners;
- when production data are provided and processed (at the operational level);
- when the MPP is set up (at the administrative level).

Analytical framework

Pros and cons of execution within or outside the migration chain have been studied by means of an analytical framework with the following dimensions: quality, support, efficiency and independence or avoidance of appearance of improper influence. The outline of the analytical framework was highlighted with information on the execution of several forecasts in other policy areas and insights on independent policy research.

Because it was taken into account in advance that pros and cons might not clearly indicate whether execution should occur within or outside the migration chain, conditions for independence that could be met both within and outside the chain were also investigated.

Pros and cons of executing the MPP within the migration chain

Strengths of executing the MPP within the migration chain concern the quick availability of current data, the detail knowledge of chain partners which may be essential to the correct interpretation of data, up-to-date and extensive knowledge of policy and international developments (including a large international network of contacts) and the possibility to timely observe deviations of the estimates (**quality dimension**). Within the chain, there is support for the current working method: chain partners speak the same language, know how to find each other, know that practical knowledge is available and have ample opportunity to provide input and discuss it in the MPP working group, in sub-consultations and in the (managerial) top consultation (**support dimension**). In the view of the respondents, the good access

¹ IND: Immigration and Naturalisation Service; COA: Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers; DT&V: Repatriation and Departure Service; KMar: Royal Netherlands Marechaussee.

to the registration systems, a great familiarity with the registered data and the relative ease with which sensitive or confidential information can be shared, leads to efficient execution (**efficiency dimension**). Mentioned disadvantages of executing the MPP within the chain are the limited verifiability of production data, the dependence on a limited circle of (methodical) experts, a smaller chance of (methodical) innovation and a certain sluggishness in reacting to deviations of the estimates, partly due to divergent interests of chain partners (**quality dimension**). The support is negatively influenced by the limited insight of chain partners in each other's production data (in particular when political desirability plays a part) (**support dimension**). The experience is that source systems are not always suitable to derive data from on behalf of the estimates and that there is less pressure within the chain to stimulate improvement in this regard. This leads to a labour-intensive working method (**efficiency dimension**).

Pros and cons of executing the MPP outside the migration chain

In the view of the respondents, advantages of outsourcing the execution of the MPP outside the migration chain are a better scientific basis, more extensive methodological expertise, broader experience with making data mutually consistent and better possibilities to secure, discuss, improve, and innovate methods (**quality dimension**). When execution occurs outside the chain, the influence of possible discrepancies between chain partners is lower and it is expected that they can be called to account more easily on quality and the reliability of data. Reports are more often public documents, which may increase transparency and confidence in the outcomes (**support dimension**). Outsourcing may lead to enhanced insight into costs and cost containment, and the execution can be more effective with less loss of time due to consultation and coordination (**efficiency dimension**).

Mentioned disadvantages of executing the MPP by a research institute outside the chain are a larger distance to the subject matter (less knowledge of data, the network, the relations between the chain partners), problems with the transfer of data (including restraint due to sensitivity of data, delays) and fewer possibilities to react ad hoc to deviations (that are less often observed) (**quality dimension**). A larger distance and less knowledge of details may result in a less authoritative forecast, with less input of the chain partners and a smaller commitment. A (greater) risk is also identified that discussions on production and capacity unintentionally become public (**support dimension**). In the view of the respondents, efficiency could suffer from limited detail knowledge at external research institutes, the related necessity of communication, the possibility of work duplication and privacy issues related to data sharing. External institutes could also be less capable to assess the quality and integrity of the supplied information (**efficiency dimension**).

Expert meeting

During an expert meeting with chain partners, interim results were presented to representatives of research institutes and an advisory body, and the pros and cons of in- and outsourcing of the MPP were discussed. One of the main discussion points was that independence and preventing an appearance of improper influence are not so much connected to the internal or external institutes that execute the forecast, but to the way execution is organised and the safeguards that are set up to maintain the quality and integrity. The main concerns in this regard are transparency, involvement of parties with conflicting insights or interests (to counteract bias) and involvement of external experts and interested parties.

Foreign experiences

A short inventory in other European countries revealed only few comparable forecast models. In Norway, a somewhat comparable forecast is made within the migration chain. It appears there is no discussion in Norway on (an appearance of) improper influence and a different type of governance.

Conclusion

The MPP is a special forecast, in the sense that it is made within the migration chain on a politically sensitive policy area, with migration movements that may fluctuate heavily in a short period of time and with consequences for the capacity of executive organisations that are frequently closely scrutinised by politics and the media. It is not strange that questions should arise on (an appearance of) improper influence.

Within the migration chain, the current working method in drawing up the MPP is described by the chain partners of the MPP working group as sufficient to good when it comes to aspects such as quality, support, and efficiency. At the same time, the chain partners acknowledge that an appearance of improper influence may occur. In the interviews with the chain partners, the gathering and processing of production data was considered to be the most vulnerable part. Respondents deem it possible they may be tainted by political wishful thinking and their reliability is difficult to assess by (other) chain partners. In general, respondents consider the execution of the MPP by an independent research institute as less vulnerable to appearance of improper influence. With regard to the dimensions of quality, support and efficiency, there is a mixed picture of the expected pros and cons of execution of the MPP within or outside the migration chain. The opinions and expectations of the respondents on these dimensions do not clearly indicate specific pros or cons regarding execution within the chain or by an independent research institute. In this study, however, these opinions and expectations have not been tested against literature or in other ways, for example by means of a multi-criteria analysis. If this is deemed necessary, additional research should be conducted.

In the study possibilities are indicated to avoid an appearance of improper influence as much as possible by means of various measures, that are unrelated to the way the execution is contracted, within or outside the chain. The fundamental issue is to increase transparency and the involvement of independent experts outside the chain.



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