

Key Findings

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies underpin daily activities around the globe, and migration is no exception. AI is present in every phase of migration, from administrative processing for visa applications and automated border security to surveillance of irregular migration and algorithms for refugee resettlement.
- AI technologies rely on underlying data capture and digital capabilities. “Digitalization” of aspects of migration systems is necessary for the application of AI, but digitalization does not necessarily result in AI technologies being developed and implemented. Compared with digitalization, AI in migration is currently much more limited.
- Chatbots have proved a great resource during migration, and have been developed by many governments and organizations and by migrants themselves to help others navigate complex visa processes for example. Chatbots are also deployed to offer counselling and psychological support to refugees struggling to get support for mental health issues.
- Backlogs of migration-related applications can cause stress for the people affected, and AI systems can speed up the processing of visa- and asylum-related procedures, while also performing security screening. However, this must be a transparent process with recourse for appeal given the margin for error in AI systems.
- AI technology is vulnerable to amplifying human biases, thus it has the potential to systematize and institutionalize these biases, leading to discrimination and exclusion of people based on race and ethnicity. For example, commercial facial recognition systems have proven to be more prone to misidentify faces with darker complexions.
- Some governments are deploying increasingly sophisticated technology including AI-supported surveillance. This raises concerns about the right to privacy of migrants subject to this surveillance, as well as how safely sensitive personal information like biometric data is stored, accessed and shared.
- Technology companies have been positioning themselves in the humanitarian and migration arena for many years, but these public–private partnerships have implications when it comes to data protection, with some arguing that profit-making interests tend to prevail over human rights-related concerns.

- States are increasingly using predictive analytical tools to model future movements of people. While this could be positive if such data assisted authorities in preparing for large influxes of people, it could also have negative implications if States use the information to try to prevent entry, including via unlawful non-refoulement practices.
- AI deployment risks deepening the digital divide and entrenching power asymmetries between States, with the sophisticated technologies that speed up migration-related processing coming at a high cost and requiring significant communications infrastructure.

Takeaway for Policy

Artificial Intelligence and advanced technologies have the potential to revolutionize the migration process, but they are not a neutral tool and can result in systemic bias as well as errors. Therefore, the principle of “do no harm” must be adhered to throughout the design, development and deployment of AI during the migration process.



The full chapter is available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022-chapter-11>.



The WMR interactive platform can be accessed at <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/>.

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