# Britain’s AI asylum plans spark fears over accuracy and human rights



Britain is poised to implement artificial intelligence (AI) in the processing of asylum claims, a strategy intended to mitigate the ever-expanding backlog of applications that has swelled to alarming levels. This move aims to leverage technology to arm caseworkers with pertinent information and streamline the decision-making process. However, critics are raising red flags regarding the potential human cost of such automation. Rights groups contend that outsourcing critical life-and-death determinations to algorithms is fraught with peril, particularly amid growing numbers of people seeking refuge from conflict and persecution.

The UK currently faces an unprecedented influx of asylum seekers, with net arrivals reported to have reached approximately 728,000 for the year ending June 2024. Many of these individuals arrive in the UK via small boats, a path that has surged by 40% compared to the previous year. The government has acknowledged a backlog of 90,686 cases awaiting initial decisions. With many applicants waiting six months or longer for a ruling, the financial burden on taxpayers is forecasted to exceed £15.3 billion over the next decade due to housing costs linked to this inefficiency.

Under the backdrop of this pressing issue, the government plans to set new performance targets and hire additional caseworkers. However, rights advocates argue that these measures do not address the fundamental flaws inherent in applying AI to such critical processes. Laura Smith, a legal director at the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, articulated this concern, stating, “The government should focus on investing in well-trained, accountable decision-makers—not outsourcing life-or-death decisions to machines.” The government’s approach has drawn attention not only for the ethical implications but also because of the alleged inadequacies of existing AI systems.

According to a pilot study run by the Home Office, dissatisfaction among caseworkers regarding the proposed AI tools is significant. Less than half of the participants felt confident that the AI summaries accurately reflected the asylum seekers' testimonies. A troubling 9% of summaries were found to be inaccurate, raising substantial concerns about the reliability of such technology in contexts where the stakes are human lives. Martha Dark, founder of tech rights group Foxglove, cautioned, “There are therefore potentially lethal consequences resulting from these faulty summaries.” She further emphasised the dangers of proceeding with decisions based on AI outputs that could misinform human decision-makers.

Moreover, the implications of biases embedded within AI systems cannot be overlooked. Critics highlight the risk of reinforcing historical prejudices against vulnerable populations, particularly given that training data may reflect past discriminatory practices. In fact, Britain once abandoned a tool that calculated risk scores for visa applicants after legal challenges emerged regarding its fairness and transparency. This case underscores the potential for technology to propagate rather than mitigate bias.

The ethical concerns surrounding AI in asylum application processing are compounded by the psychological toll it may take on individuals who are already experiencing trauma. Caterina Rodelli of Access Now lamented that summarising sensitive interviews into automated outputs diminishes the humanity of these processes. “People have to undergo so much re-traumatisation with these processes,” she stated, underscoring the dehumanising aspect of relying on technology in such personal matters.

Amidst international trends, governments globally are increasingly adopting digital technologies to manage migration flows. Notably, countries like Germany have experimented with tools for determining asylum seekers' countries of origin. Yet, there is a growing outcry from human rights and digital advocacy groups who warn that the implementation of such technologies requires stringent accountability and cannot be treated as testing grounds for unproven methodologies.

As Britain navigates this complex landscape, the use of AI in asylum claims must be approached with caution and reflection. The push to refine the asylum process must not compromise the quality or fairness of decisions that impact lives. Missing the mark in these instances could have ramifications far beyond immediate bureaucratic efficiency, shaping the moral fabric of society and the fundamental rights of displaced individuals. The stakes are high, and the call for a compassionate, humane approach to handling applications is more urgent than ever.

While the government's intentions may be framed as progressive, the realities of AI's limitations and the moral responsibility to uphold human dignity in the asylum process necessitate a thorough examination and a critical response from all stakeholders involved.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraph 2
3. Paragraph 4
4. Paragraph 3
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6. Paragraph 5
7. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.context.news/ai/ai-will-help-make-life-or-death-calls-in-rammed-uk-asylum-system> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2024/how-many-cases-are-in-the-uk-asylum-system--2> - As of December 2024, the UK asylum system had 90,686 cases awaiting an initial decision, with 31% of these cases having been pending for over 12 months. This backlog has increased over fourfold in the last decade, from 55,814 cases in June 2014 to 224,742 cases in June 2024. The government is implementing measures to expedite processing, including hiring more caseworkers and setting up a new returns and enforcement unit to fast-track removals for applicants without the right to stay.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/dec/08/home-office-says-only-half-of-uk-asylum-decisions-meet-its-quality-standards> - An internal Home Office report from June 2023 revealed that only half of UK asylum decisions met the department's quality standards. The report highlighted insufficient activity to identify risks and a potential for incorrect or unsustainable decisions. This quality assurance downgrade occurred during efforts to clear the legacy backlog, raising concerns about the accuracy and fairness of asylum decisions.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/16/number-uk-asylum-seekers-awaiting-appeals-up-two-years> - The number of asylum application appeals lodged at the first-tier tribunal in 2024 increased by 71% year-on-year. This surge follows a rise in refusals, with the grant rate for asylum applicants falling to 47%. Critics attribute this trend to the Home Office's efforts to clear the asylum backlog, which have led to a rise in errors and omissions in decision-making.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/oct/17/uk-asylum-backlog-rwanda-plan-hotels-deportations> - The UK government's decision to scrap the plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda and accelerate claims processing has led to a reduction in the asylum backlog. By the end of June 2024, the backlog stood at 118,882 people, with projections indicating a decrease to 118,063 by January 2025. This policy shift aims to create a fairer and more humane asylum system.
6. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-latest-immigration-figures-reveal-disgraceful-asylum-backlog> - Amnesty International has criticized the UK government's handling of asylum claims, describing the backlog as 'utterly disgraceful.' As of June 2023, 175,457 people were waiting for an initial decision on their asylum applications, marking a 44% increase from the previous year and the highest figure since records began in 2010. The organization calls for urgent reforms to address the backlog and improve the asylum process.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/dec/08/home-office-says-only-half-of-uk-asylum-decisions-meet-its-quality-standards> - An internal Home Office report from June 2023 revealed that only half of UK asylum decisions met the department's quality standards. The report highlighted insufficient activity to identify risks and a potential for incorrect or unsustainable decisions. This quality assurance downgrade occurred during efforts to clear the legacy backlog, raising concerns about the accuracy and fairness of asylum decisions.