# UK government’s AI plan for asylum claims sparks human rights concerns



The UK government’s recent decision to employ artificial intelligence (AI) in processing asylum claims is framed as a necessary measure to alleviate the overwhelming backlog in the system. With 90,686 cases awaiting initial decisions by the end of 2024, according to official statistics, the administration aims to expedite a process that has left many asylum seekers waiting months for a ruling. Yet, this ambitious plan is not without substantial controversy, particularly regarding the implications for human rights and the potential for life-altering consequences arising from AI-driven determinations.

Amid a backdrop of unprecedented migration, with net arrivals hitting 728,000 by mid-2024, the decision to incorporate AI reflects a growing reliance on technology to manage increasing pressure on immigration systems globally. Critically, rights groups caution that this approach may unnecessarily dehumanise vulnerable individuals navigating the complexities of seeking asylum. Legal director Laura Smith from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants articulated that outsourcing such high-stakes decisions to machines is fraught with ethical peril. “Relying on AI to help decide who gets to stay here and who gets thrown back into danger is a deeply alarming move,” she stated, emphasising the importance of well-trained human decision-makers over automated systems.

In a pilot scheme assessing the proposed AI tool designed to assist caseworkers, concerns emerged around the tool's efficacy. Reports indicated that less than half of the participating caseworkers found the AI-generated summaries reliable, noting issues such as inaccuracies and a lack of references to essential interview transcripts. Martha Dark of Foxglove stressed that “the wrong decision can put lives at risk,” highlighting how inaccuracies in AI summaries could have devastating outcomes for asylum seekers. The potential for what rights advocates describe as "algorithmic bias" further complicates matters of fairness and accountability, as AI often perpetuates existing inequalities in its training data.

While the government insists that final decisions will always involve human review, critics remain sceptical. The risk that these humans may perceive AI outputs as authoritative could lead to a troubling “robo-caseworker” scenario, wherein automated systems unduly influence crucial decisions regarding deportations and asylum grants. This phenomenon is particularly concerning in light of previous governmental attempts to employ technology for immigration processing that have faced legal and ethical scrutiny, including the controversial scrapping of a risk assessment tool that had disproportionately affected certain demographic groups.

As pressures mount, the Labour party’s commitment to hiring additional asylum caseworkers and forming a new returns and enforcement unit seeks to address both public concerns and operational inefficiencies. However, previous initiatives aimed at streamlining processes have arguably created more complications, with studies suggesting they resulted in hasty decisions and an increase in appeals, leading to further court backlogs.

The landscape of immigration policy is also shifting under wider global trends, where governments are increasingly turning to digital technologies as a solution to migration-related challenges. Similar approaches can be observed in countries like the United States and Germany, where AI tools assist in monitoring and assessing asylum seekers. However, these methodologies raise critical questions about accountability and transparency, especially when it comes to technologies potentially leading to "rubberstamped" decisions without meaningful oversight.

As automation creeping into asylum processing raises alarms, advocacy groups like Privacy International argue that the lack of transparency regarding AI's involvement in decision-making processes undermines the rights of individuals subjected to its outcomes. Such calls for scrutiny are echoed by legal experts, who underline the challenges immigration lawyers might face as they work to contest decisions generated or influenced by AI.

In summary, while the UK government's adoption of AI could, in theory, enhance the efficiency of asylum processing, it poses significant risks that must be carefully navigated. The charge towards digitisation in a system already under strain requires a balanced approach that prioritises human judgment and oversight—qualities that are essential in preserving the dignity and rights of those seeking asylum amid a rapidly evolving political landscape.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraphs 2, 4
3. Paragraphs 3, 4
4. Paragraph 4
5. Paragraph 2
6. Not used

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.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-stop-foreign-sex-offenders-receiving-refugee-protections-2025-04-28/> - On April 28, 2025, the UK government announced that foreign nationals with sex offense convictions qualifying them for the sex offenders register will be excluded from receiving asylum protections. This measure aims to address public concerns over the number of asylum seekers and associated housing costs. The government also plans to introduce new efficiency targets to expedite the asylum process and will begin using artificial intelligence to support caseworkers by improving access to relevant information and summarizing asylum interviews. As of the end of 2024, the UK had 90,686 asylum cases awaiting initial decisions.
3. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/rights-groups-warn-uk-home-office-ai-tool-risks-rubberstamped-migrant-deportations/3392227> - Rights groups have raised concerns over the UK Home Office's new artificial intelligence tool, the Identify and Prioritise Immigration Cases (IPIC) system, which uses personal data to decide on enforcement actions. Critics argue that this technology could lead to 'rubberstamped' decisions, potentially affecting both adults and children facing deportation. Privacy International expressed concern that the AI system could create a 'robo-caseworker' effect, making automated decisions that greatly affect people's lives. The Home Office, however, defends the tool as an essential means to handle rising immigration demands, allowing them to prioritize high-risk cases and improve efficiency while keeping human review in place.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/nov/11/ai-tool-could-influence-home-office-immigration-decisions-critics-say> - The UK Home Office's AI tool, the Identify and Prioritise Immigration Cases (IPIC) system, is being used amid a rising caseload of asylum seekers who are subject to removal action, currently about 41,000 people. Migrant rights campaigners have called for the Home Office to withdraw the system, claiming it was 'technology being used to make cruelty and harm more efficient'. A glimpse into the workings of the largely opaque system has become possible after a year-long freedom of information battle, in which redacted manuals and impact assessments were released to the campaign group Privacy International. They also revealed that people whose cases are being processed by the algorithm are not specifically told that AI is involved.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/aug/25/register-aims-to-quash-fears-over-racist-and-biased-ai-tools-used-on-uk-public> - The UK government has established a register to address concerns over the use of AI tools that may be racist and biased. This move is a victory for campaigners who have been challenging the deployment of AI in central government in advance of what is likely to be a rapid rollout of the technology in the public sector. Caroline Selman, a senior research fellow at the Public Law Project (PLP), an access-to-justice charity, said there had been a lack of transparency on the existence, details, and deployment of the systems. 'We need to make sure public bodies are publishing the information about these tools, which are being rapidly rolled out. It is in everyone's interest that the technology which is adopted is lawful, fair and non-discriminatory.'
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-joins-forces-with-big-tech-to-fight-ai-child-sex-abuse-images> - The UK government is collaborating with big tech companies to combat AI-generated child sexual abuse images. The Home Secretary emphasized that AI poses opportunities to improve the way child sexual abuse is tackled. Together with the police and other partners, the Home Office has developed the world-leading Child Abuse Image Database (CAID), which is already using AI to grade the severity of child sexual abuse material. The AI tool helps police officers sort through large volumes of data at a faster pace, bringing certain images to the surface for the officer to focus on to aid investigations. This enables officers to more rapidly identify and safeguard children, as well as identify offenders.