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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND BORDER TECHNOLOGIES



**Topic of the
Month Europe
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2025**



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Introduction

AI is a constellation of different technologies assembled together to enable machines to sense, integrate information, respond, and learn with human-like quality intelligence. The two important components of AI are machine learning (i.e., developing technology that can improve its efficiency on the basis of its own experience interacting with users) and natural language processing (i.e., optimizing the use of human languages by machines).

Just as AI is being incorporated into different institutions and domains of contemporary life, it is also playing important roles in the management of Europe's external borders.

On 13th March 2024, a new Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) was adopted by the European Parliament. According to the #ProtectNotSurveil coalition, this law not only fails to protect the basic rights of persons on the move but even facilitates their violation. The law establishes limitations on potentially harmful AI systems, but technologies currently used in the migration context will not be subjected to the obligations of this Regulation. This includes biometric identification systems, fingerprint scanners, or forecasting tools used to predict, interdict and curtail migration. AI, used as part of EU large-scale databases in migration, such as Eurodac, the Schengen Information System, and ETIAS, will not have to be compliant with the Regulation until 2030. Moreover, the new Regulation does not limit the exporting of surveillance technology developed in Europe to third countries, such as China and Israel, that could use it to harm human rights.

In this Topic of the Month, we focus on the application of AI and other frontline technologies in the management of borders, and how they interfere with the freedom to move and the right to relocate.

We begin by examining current applications of AI in border and asylum procedures across Europe, along with a closer look at the EU's new Entry/Exit System, designed to register non-EU nationals entering for short stays. We then turn to the use of smart surveillance technologies at the Spanish-Moroccan border. Next, we explore how AI is being used both to spread anti-migration narratives—such as in the recent digital campaign by Italy's far-right Lega party—and to counter disinformation through fact-checking tools. Finally, we reflect on ethical concerns raised by these developments and consider examples of how AI could be used more fairly within asylum systems.

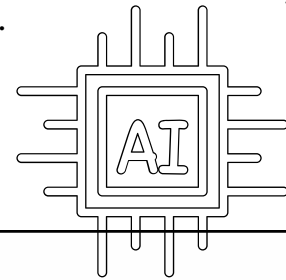


Image sourced from [Unsplash](#)

Applications of AI in EU Asylum and Border Procedures

A range of AI-driven technologies are already being piloted or deployed across EU member states. From translation tools used in asylum interviews to biometric surveillance at borders, these systems are often framed as efforts to enhance speed, consistency, and efficiency. Below are selected examples of current or planned applications in asylum and border procedures, with a focus on the ways these technologies can negatively affect people's cases and rights.

5 AI-driven technologies that are currently being used:



'Casemaatcher' system in the Netherlands:

This uses text analysis to identify similarities in asylum claims to promote consistent decision-making and reduce processing time. While it helps to identify common narratives from past decisions, there are risks which could lead to credibility issues—claims too similar may be seen as false, while unique claims may be seen as implausible[1].

Behavioural analysis and Detention monitoring in Greece:

In Greek detention facilities—such as those near the Evros River—the Centaurus project integrates CCTV cameras with behavioural analysis algorithms to identify group activities deemed illegal, alongside drones that monitor people's behaviour with minimal human oversight. This leaves extreme ethical considerations concerning asylum seeker privacy and well-being as they are placed in intensely monitored, prison-like camps as a result of attempting to claim their right to asylum.

Name transliteration tool in Germany:

This standardises names written in non-Latin scripts to ensure consistency across databases and support country-of-origin determination. One criticism is that it assumes names align neatly with national borders, which may not reflect reality[2].

Automated dialect recognition in Germany (BAMF)

This aims to determine asylum seekers' country of origin using language patterns. However, this also has limitations as it does not consider personal or regional factors.

[1] Ozkul D. *Automating Immigration and Asylum: The Uses of New Technologies in Migration and Asylum Governance in Europe*. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford; 2023. p56.

[2] *Ibid.*, p 41-42.

AI-Driven Maritime Surveillance:

The EU-funded project COMPASS2020 and PROMENADE promote the use of AI for maritime monitoring, extending civilian maritime surveillance reach and AI-supported data collection in a more scalable way. The NESTOR project combines optical, thermal, and radio frequency spectrum analysis, deploying AI-powered drones to detect and track moving targets.

2 AI-driven technologies that are being piloted/tested:

Speech-to-text transcription in Italy:

This is used as a support tool for human transcribers in asylum interviews. Risks include misinterpretation of subtle language nuances that can impact credibility assessments[3].



AI Facial analysis for risk assessment:

iBorderCtrl explores the use of a virtual border guard avatar to interview travellers from third countries. Through AI facial analysis, the system aims to detect deception and assess potential risk based on individuals' expressions during questioning. It appears that it could be the latest iteration in a long history of questionable lie detection technology[4], with parallels being drawn between these AI systems and the unreliable polygraph test. Without rigorous testing, this type of technology could easily have devastating consequences on people trying to enter Europe.

The examples above illustrate how AI is already influencing key stages of the asylum process and border control across Europe. Importantly, many of these technologies are not isolated systems. These tools are increasingly being connected through shared databases and interoperable infrastructures. Another of the key elements of this technological net is the EU's new Entry/Exit System (EES), a large-scale automated border surveillance mechanism.

The New Entry/Exit System

What is the EU's Entry/Exit System (EES)?

EES is the name for the EU's soon-to-be-implemented automated IT system across the following European countries:

Austria	Estonia	Iceland	Malta	Slovakia
Belgium	Finland	Italy	Netherlands	Slovenia
Bulgaria	France	Latvia	Norway	Spain
Croatia	Germany	Liechtenstein	Poland	Sweden
Czech Republic	Greece	Lithuania	Portugal	Switzerland
Denmark	Hungary	Luxembourg	Romania	

Screenshot taken from travel-europe.europa.eu

It will register non-EU nationals that are travelling for a short stay (up to 90 days within a 180-day period).

[3] Ozkul D. *Automating Immigration and Asylum: The Uses of New Technologies in Migration and Asylum Governance in Europe*. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford; 2023. p 49.

[4] Suchotzk, K. Gomer, M. *Detecting deception with artificial intelligence: promises and perils*. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. 2024. Vol 28. 6. Pp481-483. ISSN 1364-6613. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2024.04.002>.



These EES border systems will record data (stored for up to five years) such as:

- Name,
- travel document information,
- biometric data (such as fingerprints and facial recognition data),
- entry and exit dates,
- and record refusals of entry.

On top of this, if someone wanting to cross the border refuses to provide the above data, they will be denied entry. In essence, it seeks to replace the current system of entry and exit passport stamps with a system that demands a large amount of personal data of all non-EU travellers, all in the name of preventing “irregular migration and help protect the security of European citizens”.

According to the EU, the implementation of these automated border systems will bring the following benefits:

1. The Entry/Exit System **modernises** the management of the EU's external borders, gradually improving the experience for travellers.
2. It identifies **overstayers** and provides reliable data on entries, exits, and refusals of entry.
3. This system will effectively **combat identity fraud** by collecting biometric data.
4. **Security** within the EU will be strengthened thanks to improved border checks, use of electronic records and biometric data.
5. The EES promotes real-time information sharing, ensuring that **border authorities** across the EU have the right information at the right time.

Screenshot taken from travel-europe.europa.eu

On top of the unsurprising yet damaging lean into the language of securitisation and border paranoia, the EES has received criticisms of violating people's fundamental right to privacy.

More specifically, when it comes to refugees and asylum seekers, research has highlighted that there is a racial bias when it comes to biometric identification, as it is more likely to fail to correctly identify people who aren't white, and it exacerbates existing issues of ethnic profiling. These kinds of errors can have disastrous consequences for those trying to claim asylum, as they may be erroneously refused entry due to a false identification.

The first implementation of EES at the “Technified” Spanish/Moroccan Border



“[W]ith the incorporation of new artificial intelligence tools, Ceuta and Melilla have become real test laboratories where the new detection tools are tested on a daily basis.”

The Spanish/Moroccan border at Melilla is fortified with 3 separate fences, of 6, 3, and 6 meters high, as well as the use of digital border controls such as drones, thermal cameras, laser illuminators, which combined create an integrated surveillance system across the land, sea and air.

The Melilla land border is controlled entirely by the Spanish authorities; however, there is a long history of collaboration between Spain and Morocco, as well as significant amounts of European funding being dedicated to this border.

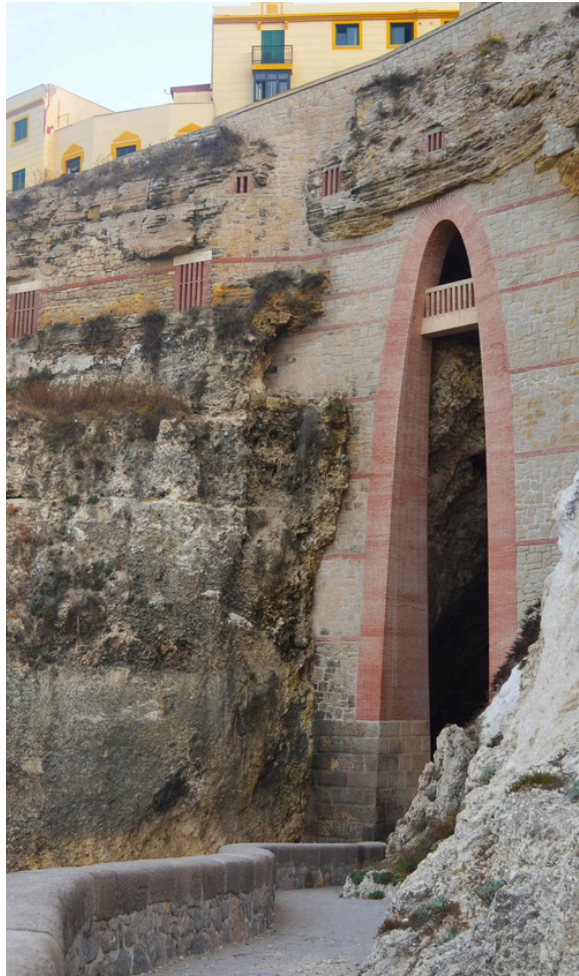


Image sourced from [Unsplash](#)

This border is also known for its climate of violence, especially after the Melilla Massacre on the 24th of June 2022, where it's reported that 27 people died. The 2024 collaborative report from EuroMed Rights and Algorace indicates that events such as this led to a dramatic change in migration routes, where the number of entries into Spain through the Melilla border decreased.

Alongside this, another EuroMed Rights report from 2023 describes how

"The 'technification' of the southern Spanish border... has become central to the external fortification of the European Union, with sophisticated systems of video surveillance, artificial intelligence and biometric technology to close the way to migration and control the entries and exits of the population of third countries."

Now, with an investment of 11 million euros, the EES system or "smart border" is the latest iteration of this "technified" border, where biometric data for all non-EU nationals will be used to automate the control of crossings. This new system was recently inaugurated in February 2025, with expectations to have it fully up and running by October 2025.

AI, Migration and Disinformation

Migration is often framed in ways that fuel fear and create division. Disinformation campaigns take advantage of societal insecurities, spreading falsehoods that distort public understanding and weaken trust in the realities of migration. According to the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Risks Report, disinformation has emerged as the most pressing global threat[5]. The report underscores how false and misleading information is now a defining feature of public debates on major global challenges; including forced displacement and migration.

A clear example is the use of AI generated images in a digital campaign in Italy.

Case study: AI images for anti-migration policy

Between May and June 2024, Italy's far-right Lega party, led by Matteo Salvini, launched a controversial digital campaign using AI-generated images to fuel anti-immigration sentiment ahead of the European elections, **to simulate realistic, yet fictional events as a deliberate political strategy.**

[5] World Economic Forum. *The Global Risks Report 2024: Insight Report*. Geneva: World Economic Forum; 2024.

Published across Facebook, Instagram, X, and on Salvini's own social media accounts, the visuals included a bearded man with a pregnant belly, veiled children allegedly refusing to study Dante's Divine Comedy, arab men burning copies of Dante's Divine Comedy, and Black men attacking women or police officers.

Designed to resemble real photographs, the images featured pixelated faces and were posted without disclaimers, **misleading viewers** into believing they depicted real events. **Over just two months in 2025**, at least **17 AI-generated posts were shared** on Salvini's social media, frequently portraying fabricated assaults or crises allegedly involving **migrants***. These images support populist themes like national identity, anti-EU sentiment, and linking migration to crime. While they aim to appear authentic, telltale signs—like distorted hands, pixelation, or errors in faces—often reveal their artificial origin. They also typically don't appear in reverse image searches, confirming they're not from real events.



Screenshot taken from [Instagram](#)



Screenshot taken from [Instagram](#)

These posts often called for the **expulsion** or **punishment** of foreign nationals, reinforcing Lega's long-standing depiction of **migrants*** as threats. Though the people and events in these images are entirely fictional, the emotional responses they provoke—fear, anger, and resentment—are real. This is precisely the function of propaganda.

Public Backlash and Legal Response:

Italy's opposition parties condemned these as dangerous propaganda and filed a formal complaint with the national media regulator, Agcom, accusing Lega of spreading racist, islamophobic, and xenophobic content intended to incite public fear and anti-migration sentiments.

Agcom is now investigating whether the Lega's posts violate the **EU's Digital Services Act (DSA)**, focusing on **preventing the spread of disinformation and hate speech**; the DSA allows regulators to order the removal of harmful content, suspend offending accounts, and fine platforms like Meta for failing to adequately moderate such material.

[5] World Economic Forum. *The Global Risks Report 2024: Insight Report*. Geneva: World Economic Forum; 2024.

* In this section, we use the term migrant to inclusively refer to people on the move, newcomers, refugees, and others in Italy, reflecting the complex, overlapping reasons for mobility in the Italian context.

Experts warn that this phenomenon is not unique to Italy. Similar uses of AI-generated disinformation have emerged across Europe. In Germany, the far-right AfD shared AI-generated images portraying **migrants*** as criminals, while in France, far-right campaigns used synthetic visuals of people on the move arriving on beaches, accompanied by slogans stoking fears over border security.

Meta's Oversight Board, Watchdog, investigated Facebook's handling of posts flagged by users for anti-immigrant content, identifying inconsistencies in the platform's hate speech policy enforcement and noting a sharp rise in appeals across the EU related to immigration content.

The Lega case underscores the urgent need for coordinated EU enforcement of the DSA to uphold truth, accountability, and the dignity of all communities, especially migrants, who are too often targeted in political rhetoric. It also serves as a wake-up call for stronger transparency requirements for AI-generated media in electoral campaigning.

How AI can fact-check misinformation and disinformation on migration online

Nevertheless, artificial intelligence (AI) is also emerging as a powerful ally in the effort to uphold truth. By harnessing advanced algorithms and machine learning, AI can rapidly detect patterns linked to disinformation, flag misleading content, and prevent harmful narratives from gaining momentum. When developed and deployed responsibly, AI offers enormous potential to protect the integrity of online information.

Collaboration is key. By working together, technologists, policymakers, and civil society can ensure AI becomes a force for accuracy, transparency, and accountability. Encouragingly, recent research by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), through the EU-funded CORE and Co-Inform projects, shows how digital tools can promote media literacy without resorting to censorship[6].

Tools like browser plugins and fact-checking dashboards are being used to encourage users to think critically, question sources, and seek out reliable information. Instead of blocking content outright, these innovations gently prompt reflection, helping to break the cycle of overreaction and uncritical sharing[7].

The integration of AI into the fight against disinformation brings real hope. It not only boosts the speed and precision of identifying harmful content but also helps shape smarter, more targeted responses. As AI continues to evolve, so too does our ability to foster a more informed, thoughtful, and resilient digital public space — one where facts, not fear, shape our understanding of migration.



[6] Komendantova N. Co-creating digital tools to address misinformation in the social media age. Laxenburg: International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis; 2021

[7] Pilati F, Venturini T. The use of artificial intelligence in counter-disinformation: a world wide (web) mapping. Front Polit Sci. 2025;7:1517726. doi:10.3389/fpos.2025.1517726

Can AI Be Applied Ethically in the Asylum Process?

As discussed throughout this article, the use of Artificial Intelligence and Border Technologies in EU asylum processes often fails to protect, and in some instances, violates basic human rights.

Despite these concerns, governments and statutory bodies frequently promote AI as a means of improving efficiency and fairness. For instance, the language being used around the implementation of the New EU Pact notes that it aims to make the system “fair and more efficient”. Similarly, governments, such as the UK’s Home Office, have described the deployment of AI in the asylum process as being a way of “support[ing] caseworkers to make swifter decisions on asylum claims...and streamlining asylum processing...”

As in many other sectors today, the emergence of AI in migration governance is creating new possibilities, as well as raising important ethical questions around its impact on migration flows and systems: Can AI be applied responsibly? And can it be harnessed as a positive force to support people who are coming to Europe to seek asylum?

Several researchers are exploring these questions of ethics, including the following collaborative groups:

The Centre for the Study of Emotion and Law, which is part of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, brings together scholars across a variety of disciplines, including social care, law, psychology, migration and charities, to reconsider the role of emotion within law and practice. One of the projects their members are currently working on explores the “Use of Technology and Artificial Intelligence in Asylum Decision Making”.

The project runs from January to July 2025 and aims to “hold a series of focus groups and round table events to identify the potential consequences of introducing such technologies as well as ethical and practical considerations”, and to develop guidance for professionals and those seeking asylum.

The collaborative Algorithmic Fairness for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (AFAR) is an international collaborative project that involves researchers at the University of Copenhagen, University of Zagreb, University of Oxford, and at the EUI/MPC. They aim to analyse public perceptions regarding the use of new technologies in migration and asylum governance, as well as develop an executive training program for policymakers and practitioners.



However, the majority of their work explores and analyses potentially unethical and harmful applications of AI.

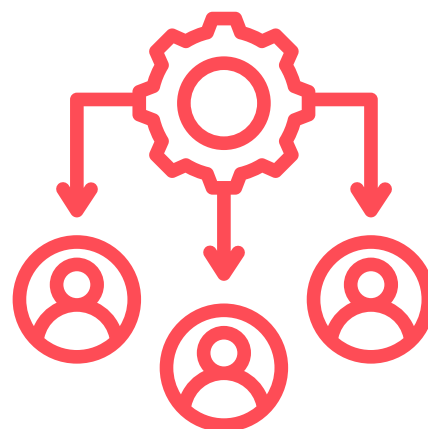
In an editorial published in the April 2024 edition of *Medicine, Science and the Law*[8], a number of scholars wrote about their recent research on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the asylum system. This paper came about from a discussion organised by the Centre for the Study of Emotion and Law and the Helen Bamber Foundation, and it reviews the existing and emerging applications of AI in the context of asylum, giving several examples in Europe.

When discussing the capabilities of AI in processing asylum cases, it mentions the following ways in which AI's utilisation "allows for improvements in the speed, efficiency and reliability of decision-making", which again echoes the idea that AI can improve efficiency, rather than taking a more human-centred approach:

- The AI streamlining of asylum casework through real-time language translation potentially enables efficient communication between applicants and officials, regardless of language barriers, thus saving costs on translation services.
- Artificial Intelligence can assist in translating and organising vast quantities of documents, such as personal testimonies or legal paperwork, ensuring accuracy and consistency across multiple languages.
- Advanced AI translation tools are also capable of learning from context, which may facilitate greater understanding of the nuances and cultural specifics of an applicant's narrative.

While these advances could potentially be positive for people, for example, if cases are processed more quickly, there are also potential risks, like the examples we listed above, be it through a breach of human rights, data protection, or due to limitations of the technology when assessing someone's case. These groups of researchers are therefore working towards providing training and guidance for fair and ethical uses of AI.

An example of an innovative approach to using AI to positively impact displaced people is currently being researched at the Stanford Immigration Policy Lab. Researchers Kirk Bansak and Elizabeth Paulson are developing AI-driven algorithms that aim to find suitable new locations for people seeking asylum and those who are part of refugee resettlement programmes, based on predicted employment outcomes and balanced distribution[9].



They conducted pilot programmes in the USA and Switzerland using two AI algorithms. The first aimed to help newly resettled individuals find employment more quickly, while the second focused on placing people in a wider range of locations to ensure that all communities could play a meaningful role in the resettlement process. In both cases, results showed that using AI increased employment rates compared to placements made without the assistance of AI [10].

[8] Memon A, Given-Wilson Z, Ozkul D, Richmond K, Muraszkiwicz J, Weldon E, Katona C. Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the asylum system. *Med Sci Law*. 2024;64(2):87-90. doi:10.1177/00258024241227721

[9] Bansak K, Paulson E. Outcome-Driven Dynamic Refugee Assignment with Allocation Balancing. *Oper Res*. 2024;72(6):2375-2390.

<https://doi.org/10.1287/opre.2022.0445>

[10] For more information see <https://www.library.hbs.edu/working-knowledge/how-ai-could-ease-the-refugee-crisis-and-bring-new-talent-to-businesses>

Conclusion

AI holds significant potential to support displaced people and the communities they join—by enabling safer migration pathways, improving access to essential services, and easing pressure on host systems. Tools such as translation, transcription, and decision-support algorithms may enhance the processing of asylum applications and access to work, housing, and education.

At the same time, the use of AI in border and asylum systems raises serious ethical concerns. Automated systems are increasingly deployed to collect personal data, assess claims, and even judge individuals based on appearance, language, or incomplete information—often without transparency or oversight. When applied without fairness or safeguards, these technologies risk reinforcing bias, undermining trust, and restricting mobility. Moreover, while AI can amplify disinformation, it also offers tools to detect and counter it.

Ultimately, ensuring that AI serves as a force for protection rather than control depends on centering human rights, involving affected communities, and using technology to complement—not replace—fair and informed decision-making.

Technology is human-made and it is our responsibility to develop it and use it in ways that preserve, protect and promote the fundamental rights to privacy, due legal processes and human rights. Europe Must Act's commitment to support people on the move and newcomers to Europe includes watching for an adequate use of technology to guarantee asylum rights, the dignified reception of refugees and freedom of movement.



Image sourced from [Unsplash](#)

Further Resources...

This report is published to coincide with the webinar **“Dignity in the Digital Age? AI, Migration and Surveillance in Europe”**, where Europe Must Act will be joined by:

- [Algorithm Watch](#),
- [Migrants Rights Network](#),
- [EDRi](#), and
- [Activists Without Borders](#).

Please check out and support their work through the following links:



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***We're volunteers and asylum and migration is a complex topic. This means we try to include a variety of opinions and approaches to a topic. We do our best to research and use our expertise accurately however, we also believe it's vital to encourage healthy discussion and stop misinformation. Therefore we encourage any feedback or constructive criticism of our work.**

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Europe Must Act (EMA) is a growing grassroots movement, bringing together volunteers and NGOs to campaign for the humane and dignified reception of refugees in Europe.



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