



UNCLASSIFIED

MEMORANDUM FOR ACTION

TO:	The Minister of Foreign Affairs
CC:	The Digital Inclusion Lab, Office of Human Rights Freedoms and Inclusion
SUBJECT:	Artificial Intelligence to Support the Rights of Refugees

SUMMARY:

In the March 2018 draft of the Global Compact on Refugees, the UNHCR acknowledges the importance of harnessing technology in support of refugees (paragraph 2). Artificial Intelligence (AI), which aims at the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, including machine learning and deep learning, offers innovative and creative opportunities to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights for refugees. Depending on its application, AI systems can be used to advance or obstruct the rights of those who have been forced to flee their homes. By partnering with its high-tech community, Canada has an opportunity to lead on the implementation, operationalization, and oversight of the Global Compact through AI-driven solutions that are designed to support the human rights of people on the move.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- Press for ethical digital/technological cooperation on migration and human rights within the Global Compact on Refugees
- Negotiate a shared, digital information protocol and identity management system
- Create multistakeholder accountability and feedback mechanisms
- Form an accreditation scheme to reward AI quality and accessibility
- Allocate funding for future innovation of needs-based tools

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- I wish to discuss
 I concur I do not concur

Minister

BACKGROUND:

1. *Predicting the Movement* - There is potential for AI to be harnessed to help fulfill the Compact's goal of managing migration as it can be used to predict forced displacement by analyzing big data and offering insight into the root causes of forced displacement. AI utilizes particular algorithms to complete large amounts of otherwise overbearing tasks, such as image/facial recognition, translation, and decision-making. AI systems are further used to predict patterns and trends in forced displacement factors such as climate change, the economy, and political stability. AI can be applied in the context of forced displacement in so far as it can predict the rise and fall of the fundamental factors that cause people to leave their homes. Subsequently, it can be applied in ways that mitigate or offset these factors. The main goal for the use of AI technology would be to identify when forced displacement is going to occur so that states can be better prepared to manage huge influxes of people, ensuring responsible and ethical treatment, international protection, and overall organization of people on the move and their claims for protection. In short, AI has tremendous potential as a tool to assist with scenario planning.

2. *The Journey* - "On the move" refers to the period after the point of departure, during the journey across different borders and states and upon arrival in the country of destination. The mobility of people on the move makes it difficult to develop programs to support and protect them and prevent or punish human rights violations while they are in transit. Most protective services are statically located in one place and are not designed with mobile populations in mind. As a response, AI may provide innovative, rapid, adaptive and mobile opportunities for recognizing the legitimate security concerns of host states and to uphold international protection of people on the move in line with the global compact on refugees. Overall questions in this context are concerned with which laws are applicable regarding the transnational issue of people on the move, whether and how AI systems make distinctions based on specific international or national laws? Altogether, clear international legal and ethical frameworks on AI and migration could serve as a basis for international cooperation since migration is a transnational and a cross border issue.

3. *Integration* - Once refugees reach their host state, their challenges evolve from remaining safe in transit to achieving more permanent resettlement. Although the issues faced are highly individualised, integration namely involves finding housing, securing credit, and gaining employment or education. AI technologies can assist these endeavours in its instant delivery of accurate and up-to-date information, in its ability to connect people and networks, and in its elasticity in providing personalised responses. Indeed, many private and civil society technological developers are working to provide new uses for their AI technology in this area, creating chatbots, facial recognition systems, translators, banking platforms, and enabling sharing economy networks. Within this sector, in accordance with the Global Compact on Refugees, it is important to consider the government's roles and responsibilities, as well as the relationship between policymakers, technological developers, and their target audience: refugees.

CONSIDERATIONS:

4. *Ethical Questions* - Several ethical questions are raised when discussing the topic of AI advancement, many of which have implications for refugee protection and livelihoods. Questions revolve around unemployment, inequality, humanity, privacy, security, fallibility, bias, and unintended consequences, all of which could exacerbate the mass movement of people either directly or indirectly. Questions of privacy and bias are perhaps the most significant ones

that arise when discussing the implications of AI technology. AI may have a more advanced speed and processing capacity compared to that of humans, but it cannot always be relied on to be fair and neutral, something that is essential for the integrity of asylum processes. It is not difficult to imagine that certain actors could harness AI to undermine the rights of refugees. Protecting the information that AI machines access is another area of concern. Hackers can reverse-engineer user data out of machine learning models quite easily and protecting data and increasing privacy becomes a priority.

5. To mitigate the potential harmful effects of AI on refugees, Canada should press for language in the Compact that establishes that ethical cooperation on AI is a form of refugee responsibility sharing. To help implement the Compact, it should lead in the negotiation of a shared, digital information protocol and identity management system, and call for the creation of a multistakeholder accountability and feedback mechanism, residing either within or independent of UNHCR, to monitor the uses of AI within the refugee regime. Along with members of the high-tech sector, Canada can help to develop an accreditation scheme to certify applications of AI that support refugee rights and allocate funding for future innovation of needs-based tools.

6.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS/ACTIONS:

7. The scale and nature of recent forced displacements indicate that not one type of actor – governments, humanitarian organizations, technological entrepreneurs, civil society groups/organizations, or individual people on the move – has a complete overview of the situation or the ability to develop innovative and comprehensive solutions to the complex set of problems on its own. In consonance with the Global Compact on Refugees, more effective intergovernmental agreements, responsibility sharing, and public-private partnerships for security and protection are required to use AI to support human rights of refugees.