



Addressing Refugees and Migration Issues through Critical Information Systems Research

Special Issue Guest Editors

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports¹ that there are approximately 110 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, as of mid-2023, because of persecution, conflict, war, violence, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order. These include 36.4 million refugees and 62.5 million internally displaced people (IDP), asylum seekers, and several other people in need of international protection. There is a strong history of research highlighting the issues faced by refugees, ranging from accounts of violence in the developing world (Zolberg *et al.*, 1989), exploring the gendered experience of refugees (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2000), questioning racist thinking about immigration (Dummett, 2002), case studies of asylum seekers (Whittaker, 2006), and philosophical inquiry into the fair treatment of refugees (Miller and Straehle, 2021). The global refugee and forced migration crisis and the persistent challenges faced by these vulnerable communities call for an urgent need for innovative solutions that foster social inclusion and empower these populations.

In our field, information systems (IS) researchers have been acutely aware of the refugee and migrant crises. Researchers have examined the critical issues related to social inclusion of refugees (Díaz Andrade and Doolin, 2018, 2016), social inclusion and activation of refugee agency (Bock *et al.*, 2020), information and communication technology (ICT) enabled refugee integration (AbuJarour *et al.*, 2019; AbuJarour and Krasnova, 2017), refugees and pedagogy (AbuJarour, 2022), digitization and refugee settlement (AbuJarour *et al.*, 2022; AbuJarour *et al.*, 2021), refugee women and information-precarity (Berg, 2023), and migrant identity (Hultin *et al.*, 2021; Hultin and Introna, 2018). Researchers in sister fields have explored digitally mediated

¹ UNHCR Refugees statistics, see <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>

experiences of refugees (Talhouk *et al.*, 2018), building a technology-oriented humanitarian research framework for field researchers (Fisher, 2022), the emergence of new digital landscape in refugee management (Masso and Kasapoglu, 2020; Akhmetova *et al.*, 2021), new forms of data colonialism and humanitarian response to refugee crises (Madianou, 2019), data governance and data justice (Witteborn, 2022), datafication and refugees subjectivities (Tazzioli, 2022), feminist and decolonial approaches to examine displacement issues (Singh *et al.*, 2021), and participatory design and decolonization in the context of refugee account (Clarke *et al.*, 2022).

Nonetheless, recent research in refugee studies has shown that critical areas at the intersection of technology, refugees, and broader migration crises have remain underexamined, for example, social media and device vetting (Bolhuis and van Wijk, 2020), digitally mediated lived experiences of minority refugees (Lenette and Boddy, 2013), refugees and a sense of uncertainty in the digital age (Miellet, 2021), refugee aid and digital capitalism (Henriksen, 2024), and networked refugees (Maitland, 2018; Hajj, 2021). Technological advances like AI-based refugee settlement applications² and Blockchain-based fundraising solutions³ and identity management⁴ solutions have started to emerge, and it is unclear how critical technological advances will shape issues related to technology, power, and control in the sensitive context of refugees and migrants. Further, new forms of sociopolitical digital problems have started to emerge within refugee contexts such as digital colonialism and refugees (Singh *et al.*, 2021; Madianou, 2019), gender violence and sexual minority refugees (Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, 2014), and critical race issues of refugees and digital coloniality (Kwet, 2019).

We observe that despite some progress in our field, much remains underexplored in addressing these pressing issues, underscoring the need for rigorous research. This special issue aims to explore how IS research could contribute to illuminating the refugee crises and alleviating the deterioration of refugee and migrant social circumstances. These sensitive topics are situated within the broader debate on digital inclusion and empowerment (Pandey and Zheng, 2023; Zheng *et al.*, 2018) and the discussions related to inequality (Zheng and Walsham, 2008) and demarginalization and decolonization in our field (Chughtai, 2023; Chughtai *et al.*, 2020; Ortiz *et al.*, 2019). Exploring the critical research questions surrounding IS and migrant/refugee populations is essential for developing comprehensive and 'good' IS solutions and making the world a better place for all of us (Davison *et al.*, 2022).

² Refugees AI, see <https://www.refugees.ai/>

³ Blockchain for Refugees, see <https://unrefugees.ch/en/blockchain-refugees>

⁴ Cardano Foundation 'How Blockchain Can Help in the Refugee Crisis,' see <https://cardanofoundation.org/blog/how-blockchain-can-help-in-the-refugee-crisis> also <https://www.technologyreview.com/2018/04/12/143410/inside-the-jordan-refugee-camp-that-runs-on-blockchain/>

Scope and Expectations

For this special issue, we encourage submissions from diverse researchers with multidisciplinary perspectives, including experts in IS, social sciences, public policy, humanitarian studies, and other relevant fields. Such interdisciplinary collaborations will contribute to a holistic understanding of the problems and foster innovative solutions.

We seek submissions that focus on real-world issues at the intersection of refugees and migrant crises and technology. We are particularly interested in works that incorporate a unique IS perspective in addressing this topic, considering critical societal issues such as those related to mobility, marginality, integration, segregation, identity issues, empowerment, subjugation, control and management, coloniality, and highlighting the role of technology in these complex and dynamic social phenomena, and the impact of digital interventions on the lives of refugees and migrant communities. Authors are encouraged to explore and address these issues in their submission.

This special issue aims to provide valuable theoretical and practical contributions to scholars, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers by delving into the multifaceted dimensions of technologies and their role in addressing specific issues related to refugees and migrant populations. We invite high-quality research papers that shed light on the innovative applications, challenges, and opportunities presented by technology in the context of refugees and migrant communities.

Topics of Interest

We invite contributions that investigate the role of information systems in the subjugation and empowerment of refugee populations. The main topic of research should be refugees or migration *and* the manuscript should have a strong IS component.

We welcome diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches from a wide range of disciplines and fields of studies. Contributions should be made to *both* IS research *and* refugees (or migration related) research.

Some examples of topics that would be appropriate include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Critical analyses of the interrelated themes of identity, refugeeeness, and belonging.
- Exploring the ethics of (forced) migration.
- Analysing the politics of responsibility and the integration of refugees and migrants in digital contexts.
- Technology, racial marginalization and refugees experience.
- Digital biopolitics, identities, and datafication of migrants and refugees.
- Online activism and digital social movements in the context of refugees or migrants.
- Agency, resistance and coping mechanisms of migrants and refugees.

- Examining the issues at the intersections of gender, technology, and migrants/refugees (including queering migration and issues of gender-based violence).
- Digitally-entangled lived experiences of minorities among refugee populations.
- Datafication of borders and algorithmic management of migrants and refugees.
- Decolonial justice and/or for migrants and refugees.
- Digital justice and human rights issues affecting migrants and refugees.
- Digital and data surveillance and control on migrants and refugees.
- Issues related to power and exploitation of migrants and refugees.
- Critical narratives of displacement.
- Digital accounts and narratives of refugee experience.
- Technology and the political philosophy of migration and refuge.
- Novel theoretical lenses to study migration and refugee issues such as decolonial theory, spatial and temporal perspectives, Indigenous viewpoints, critical race theory, and feminist approaches.
- Novel methodological approaches to examine refugee issues such as visual ethnography, visual research, and digitally mediated bodily experiences.
- Application of novel technologies such as Blockchain and AI.

Submission and Review Process

We welcome all types of original completed research, including theoretical, empirical, practitioner, and method papers. Stand-alone reviews and opinion pieces will not be considered. We strongly encourage first-time authors and interdisciplinary teams.

All submissions should be made via the ISJ's manuscript submission portal. For submission guidelines, authors should refer to the ISJ website⁵. When submitting your work, please select the relevant special issue and indicate in your cover letter that the paper is intended for this special issue. For formatting criteria, please refer to the ISJ guidelines.

All manuscript submissions will go through an initial round of screening by the special issue's Senior Editors to ensure their suitability for the special issue and guarantee their compatibility with the Information Systems Journal. Subsequently, submissions will be assigned to an Associate Editor from the provided list. Manuscripts that pass the initial screening will go through the ISJ review process, with at least two reviewers assigned. The review process will begin immediately upon receipt of the manuscript, even for manuscripts received prior to the deadline.

There is no quota for the number of papers that can be accepted in a special issue. Our basic principle is that if a paper deserves to be accepted, it will be accepted.

⁵ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/13652575/homepage/ForAuthors.html>

Deadlines

The special issue deadlines are below and will not be extended.

Submission of extended abstract (optional): November 30, 2024

Submission of manuscript: March 30, 2025

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