Discrimination in AI-Driven HRM Systems: Ethical Implications and Solutions

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Abstract: *The implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Human Resource Management has gained significant traction, offering efficiency and precision in recruitment, performance evaluation, and employee management processes. However, concerns regarding the potential for discrimination and bias within AI-driven HRM systems have become a pressing issue. AI systems, while designed to be neutral, can perpetuate or even exacerbate discriminatory patterns based on race, gender, age, or socioeconomic status due to biased training data or flawed algorithmic designs. The research examines the key factors contributing to discriminatory outcomes in AI-driven HRM systems, including the lack of diversity in training datasets, the reinforcement of historical inequalities, and the absence of transparency in AI decision-making processes. It further analyzes the ethical challenges that arise when these biases result in unequal treatment of job candidates and employees, thus undermining fairness and inclusivity within organizations. To address these issues, the study proposes solutions to mitigate bias and discrimination in AI-enhanced HRM. These solutions include developing more diverse and representative datasets, implementing auditing mechanisms to identify and rectify biases, and increasing transparency in AI systems to ensure accountability in HR practices.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of human resource management (HRM) is not a recent phenomenon. Initially, information and communication technologies were used for administrative tasks and later evolved to support recruitment, selection, and career development. However, ongoing technological advancements have driven a deeper digital transformation of HRM, with artificial intelligence (AI) playing a significant role (Kaur et al., 2023). AI refers to the development of sophisticated technologies that, through vast datasets and complex learning algorithms, can replicate human thinking, often with superior efficiency (Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024; Soni, 2022). When integrated into business operations, particularly within HRM, AI can enhance employee productivity and overall organizational performance (Orosoo et al., 2023).

Artificial intelligence in human resource management (AI-HRM) involves the integration of machine learning concepts and algorithm-driven decision-making based on data provided by managers. AI-HRM is characterized by three key aspects. First, it relies on large volumes of data. Second, it involves the development of advanced software solutions, programs, and systems. Third, it enables the automation of certain HR functions (Pavlović, 2023). However, like any data-driven process, AI-HRM can present challenges if HR managers fail to provide objective, unbiased, and accurate data. Poor-quality or biased data may lead to employee discrimination in various ways, potentially creating organizational issues with ethical implications (Köchling & Wehner, 2020). Based on these considerations, this paper aims to examine the potential forms of discrimination that may arise from AI-HRM and the associated ethical implications, in order to propose solutions that can reduce or eliminate this problem.

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2. AI-HRM

Digitization and digital transformation compel companies to adopt modern technological solutions to stay competitive. This applies to HRM as well, where human resource managers must implement intelligent technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to attract, develop, and retain top talent (Orosoo et al., 2023). At its core, AI automates repetitive and time-consuming administrative tasks, often monotonous. By delegating these functions to AI, HR managers can focus on more strategic and creative responsibilities (Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024).

AI significantly enhances HR functions, particularly in recruitment, onboarding, and performance management. In recruitment, AI automates repetitive tasks like resume screening and interview scheduling, reducing hiring time and improving candidate selection (Islam & Tamzid, 2023). AI-powered chatbots interact with applicants, aligning their profiles with job requirements and enhancing application completion rates (Orosoo et al., 2023). Additionally, machine learning helps rediscover past candidates for new roles, optimizing talent acquisition (Islam & Tamzid, 2023). For onboarding, AI simplifies formalities, personalizes training schedules, and provides key organizational information through chatbots, improving integration and retention (Mer, 2023). AI-driven systems ensure new hires receive relevant information anytime, minimizing administrative burdens (Islam & Tamzid, 2023). AI also enhances performance management by reducing biases in evaluations and providing real-time insights (Orosoo et al., 2023). Amazon, for example, uses AI and machine learning to enhance its hiring process by offering personalized job recommendations and online assessments. Machine learning helps candidates find roles matching their skills and experience early on, while also reducing time spent manually reviewing resumes. AI algorithms suggest suitable roles and online assessments help candidates demonstrate their abilities, driving fairer and more inclusive outcomes. Amazon ensures these tools are developed with fairness in mind, regularly analyzing results to benefit all candidates, regardless of demographic background (Amazon, 2023).

Mer (2023) highlights several positive effects of AI-HRM, including improved employee retention, cost reduction, accelerated business processes through automation, and increased productivity. AI-HRM eliminates routine administrative tasks, which often lead to monotony and the development of negative workplace behaviors. Additionally, it enables personalized learning and facilitates the identification of employee talents, enhancing overall organizational knowledge and human capital (Islam & Tamzid, 2023). However, implementing AI solutions in business is not straightforward. Experts with specialized IT knowledge are required to develop AI systems and train users, making the process time-consuming and financially demanding (Pavlović, 2023). The use of AI also necessitates additional training for managers and users, often encountering resistance to change, which is further exacerbated by various ethical concerns (Soni, 2022).

3. DISCRIMINATION AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN AI-HRM

One of the major challenges in applying artificial intelligence to human resource management is the perception of the HR department as conventional, where existing human resource information systems (HRIS) are considered sufficient (Orosoo et al., 2023). This mindset can lead to resistance from employees and managers, preventing the adoption of AI in employee management and, consequently, resulting in the loss of potential benefits. The resistance is further amplified by the need for additional learning and training, which many employees may not be willing to undertake. It is important to note that the learning process is ongoing, not static, and does not end with the completion of initial training, as AI technology continues to evolve (Islam & Tamzid,

2023). This continuous need for upskilling can lead to negative changes in employee behavior, potentially affecting individual productivity, interpersonal relationships, organizational climate, and overall performance.

Beyond the aforementioned issues, there are more specific problems associated with AI-HRM. The primary concern begins with biased data. The application of artificial intelligence is driven by the need to automate, accelerate, or improve task efficiency. Unlike humans, AI can process vast amounts of data quickly and make intelligent decisions based on specific insights derived from it. To achieve optimal results, however, it is crucial to provide the AI system with high-quality, unbiased data (Fig. 1). But, unlike humans, AI systems cannot think or form beliefs. They operate algorithmically based on their training data, without any inherent capacity for reasoning or reflection. Given this context, users must approach AI outputs with a critical eye and evaluate them with human judgment (Silberg & Manyika, 2019). If the data is flawed or biased, for any reason, AI may favor one group of data and, as a result, discriminate against employees based on gender, age, education, race, social status, or other factors (Tuffaha, 2023). Machine learning algorithms, which underpin the processing and use of large volumes of data, are trained to interpret data as instructed by users. The algorithm itself operates with the data provided, without evaluating its quality (European Network Against Racism, 2020). There are three main types of machine learning algorithms. Supervised relies on labeled input data, where human experts provide correct outputs, allowing the algorithm to learn patterns and make predictions, such as classification or regression tasks. Unsupervised, on the other hand, works without labeled data, identifying patterns and structures independently to group or analyze themes. Lastly, reinforcement learning differs by using trial-and-error interactions with a dynamic environment, learning optimal behaviors based on feedback rather than predefined input-output pairs (Köchling & Wehner, 2020). When properly tested, retested, and implemented, machine learning algorithms can enhance decision-making in many areas, including employee management. However, when working with complex goals, algorithms must be designed with simplicity and care to avoid any form of prejudice or discrimination (European Network Against Racism, 2020).

However, the problem may become even more significant when considering generative AI, a system capable of independently generating text, images, and other content based on the analysis of large data sets and the patterns within them (Ashraf, 2024). Some experts in generative AI predict that, in the coming years, up to 90% of internet content could be automatically generated (Nicoletti & Bass, 2023). The "hallucination" effect in generative AI refers to the phenomenon where AI models generate inaccurate or misleading information, a problem compounded by the influence of misinformation within the training data. As a result, AI systems may uncritically reproduce and amplify these inaccuracies. Detecting disinformation has become increasingly complex due to inadequate filtering mechanisms and low-quality training data, highlighting the need for improved detection methods and stronger regulatory initiatives (Dubois, 2024).

There are two key aspects of algorithmic decision-making: first, the need for quality, objective, and unbiased data; and second, the importance of careful system design (Miasato & Reis Silva, 2020). If the data does not meet these criteria, bias can occur. In the context of AI, this bias manifests in three forms: data bias, methodology bias, and socio-cultural bias (Tuffaha, 2023). The primary cause of these biases lies in the input data. Since algorithms learn from historical data, they begin with a neutral stance, not assessing the quality of the data itself. Therefore, it is the responsibility of managers or employees to evaluate the data's adequacy and quality. For example, consider a candidate recruitment system. In developing this system, HR managers use a large dataset of CVs from previous applicants. Based on patterns in historical data, the system may inadvertently

continue to discriminate, reducing the chances for certain groups. For instance, if a particular position has historically been dominated by men, the system may be more likely to favor male candidates for selection, potentially overlooking a woman who may possess more knowledge and experience (Köchling & Wehner, 2020).
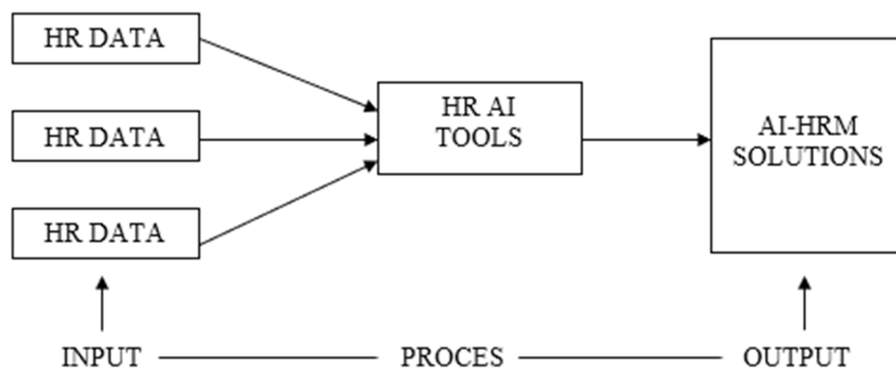

Figure 1. AI-HRM
Source: Hinge et al. (2023, p. 558)

Discrimination and ethical dilemmas also arise in other areas of HRM. For instance, when publishing job vacancies, the issue of targeted job advertisements must be considered. Digital job ads allow companies to create tailored ads aimed at attracting specific candidates. While targeted advertising can increase reach and attract more applicants, it also reduces the diversity of applicants. Certain socio-demographic groups may be unaware of job opportunities, and if targeted attributes are used as proxies for race, gender, or other socio-demographic and cultural variables, qualified candidates may be excluded from consideration (European Network Against Racism, 2020). In this way, AI-HRM can prevent companies from accessing valuable human capital. Once targeted candidates are reached, HR managers often face a large volume of data, which can be fed into the AI system. This introduces another ethical dilemma. To function effectively, an AI system needs a large volume of high-quality data. However, this data is often sensitive, subjecting its collection, storage, and processing to strict legal regulations. There is a risk that AI systems may misuse this data in various ways. On the other hand, employees may choose not to provide this information, hindering the development of AI-HRM (Du, 2024; El-Ghoul et al., 2024). A notable example of AI bias in HR is Amazon's AI recruitment tool, which was biased against women. The tool, designed to automate the recruitment process by evaluating CVs and recommending the best candidates, favored male applicants due to its training on CVs that primarily came from men. As a result, the system penalized CVs containing the word "female" and downgraded graduates from women's colleges (Du, 2024). Amazon's managers eventually concluded that the recruitment system was not gender-neutral. This issue arose because the AI models were trained using patterns from a decade of CV submissions (Larsson et al., 2024; Miasato & Reis Silva, 2020). To resolve such issues, strong transparency in the collection and use of employee data is crucial. Bloomberg used Stable Diffusion to generate thousands of images related to jobs and crime. The model created visual representations of workers in 14 professions, generating 300 images for each - seven high-paying and seven low-paying jobs in the U.S., along with three crime-related categories. The analysis revealed that images associated with high-paying jobs often depicted people with lighter skin tones, while those with darker skin tones were more frequently shown in categories like "fast food worker" and "social worker" (Nicoletti & Bass, 2023).

Today, chatbots and video systems are widely used in HRM. Chatbots help candidates by providing information, scheduling interviews, and evaluating applications. However, they have limitations in understanding the language nuances of certain groups. For instance, a system designed to work in

English may unintentionally exclude a candidate if their accent causes them to pronounce words differently than what the system expects. As the European Network Against Racism (2020) highlights, speech recognition software is more prone to errors with Black individuals, misinterpreting 25-45% of words, which makes accurate communication challenging. Similarly, AI systems that analyze video interviews assess both verbal and non-verbal signals. If certain groups of employees with specific speech and gesture patterns were favored in the past, the algorithms may continue to favor candidates exhibiting similar characteristics, reinforcing existing biases.

AI-HRM can also create challenges within the employee reward system. While HR managers may use AI to create more intelligent and fair compensation decisions, biased data can lead to several potential issues (Sachan et al., 2024; Tuffaha, 2023):

- Neglecting the overall picture of an employee's productivity: the system may overlook certain employee performances, potentially skewing the data on overall productivity. As a result, an employee might receive either more or fewer rewards than they deserve.
- Reduction in fairness in the reward system: biases in the data can result in unfair compensation distribution, undermining the system's effectiveness.
- Diminished reliability of the performance evaluation process: if the AI system relies on biased or incomplete data, it can impact the accuracy of performance evaluations, which are key to making fair compensation decisions.
- Increased anxiety among employees regarding future rewards and job security: employees may become concerned that AI-driven systems could unfairly impact their rewards and job stability.

At the same time, using AI-HRM systems to improve employee safety can have unintended negative effects. According to the OECD (2024), AI safety monitoring systems can increase pressure on workers, leading to stress and encouraging them to neglect safety standards. For instance, if the system determines that tasks can be completed more quickly, it can place pressure on employees to work faster, even when this is not justified. Additionally, unfair or non-transparent decisions without a clear appeals process further exacerbate stress. Automating routine tasks can also eliminate short breaks, making shifts mentally exhausting and increasing the risk of physical injury. A similar situation occurred with Uber's AI tracking systems, which monitored employee speed based on movement, braking, and other parameters. The system concluded that women drove slower on the same routes than men (Pavlović, 2023). However, various factors on the same route can affect driving speed, making it unfair to conclude that men are inherently better drivers and should receive more rewards than women. To meet the system's expectations, women might feel pressured to drive faster, which could increase the likelihood of accidents.

Problems can also arise during employee training and development. AI-HRM can help identify knowledge gaps and create personalized learning systems to facilitate employee training and career growth. However, issues may arise with personalized learning. Mistakes in defining training needs can occur when performance evaluations and employee characteristics are inaccurately linked to the required knowledge, skills, and abilities, such as training style, personality type, prior knowledge, or professional experience. Misidentifying an employee's preferred learning method and style can also reduce the effectiveness of training (Tuffaha, 2023). Similarly, AI-HRM can create challenges when evaluating performance. An algorithm trained using biased ratings from an HR manager may generate systematically biased predictions about future job performance (Kim & Bodie, 2021). If the system is fed data from employees who achieve "top performance", it can set unrealistic standards that other employees can struggle to meet. As a result, the system may discriminate against employees who don't meet these high-performance standards, excluding them from rewards or career advancement opportunities (European Network Against Racism, 2020).

The aforementioned issues with discrimination and ethics can lead to legal consequences. Poorly implemented AI-HRM systems can expose companies to legal risks related to data collection, discrimination, labor relations, and labor laws (Du, 2024). At the same time, these issues can trigger unwanted changes in employee behavior. For example, AI may reduce employees' autonomy, dignity, and equality in relation to their colleagues (OECD, 2024), which can result in a decline in motivation and job satisfaction.

4.   POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

In identifying potential solutions to the challenges of applying AI-HRM, it is essential to prioritize the knowledge and skills of both system developers and human resources managers, as well as ensure the use of objective, precise, and high-quality data. The various activities and functions for which AI-HRM is employed require a tailored approach to problem-solving, addressing each area with specific strategies and considerations.

The use of AI-HRM has streamlined hiring processes, but it also presents risks of bias and discrimination. To ensure fairness and inclusivity, organizations must implement strategies to reduce these issues at different stages of recruitment. One major concern is online targeting and CV screening, where AI systems may unintentionally reinforce existing biases by relying on historical data. To prevent this, companies should incorporate diverse data points beyond their existing workforce characteristics. Additionally, they should carefully vet the criteria used by AI to ensure that it does not disproportionately exclude certain demographics. Instead of eliminating sensitive attributes like gender or ethnicity, organizations should monitor how often candidates from diverse backgrounds are being rejected to identify potential bias and make necessary adjustments. Another challenge lies in interview scheduling and initial candidate interactions, which are often handled by automated systems such as chatbots and email automation. To maintain fairness, companies must ensure transparency by clearly stating when candidates are communicating with AI instead of humans. Additionally, candidates should be asked for their consent before engaging with automated hiring tools. Providing an option to override AI-based communication and interact with a human recruiter can further enhance fairness and accommodate applicants who may face challenges with automated systems (European Network Against Racism, 2020).

Organizations must ensure that AI-HRM systems are fair, transparent, and compliant with regulations. One key approach is using diverse datasets to train AI, reducing bias and discrimination in hiring. Regular audits should be conducted, and multidisciplinary teams, including data scientists, ethicists, and HR professionals, should oversee AI implementation to ensure fairness. Data privacy is another critical concern. Organizations should adopt strong data protection measures, such as encryption and anonymization, while ensuring transparency in data usage. Informing employees about how their data is collected and processed fosters trust and compliance with regulations like GDPR. AI systems must also be explainable. Providing clear documentation on AI decision-making helps build trust among employees. Additionally, organizations should establish mechanisms allowing employees to challenge AI-driven decisions, promoting accountability. To address job displacement due to AI, companies should invest in reskilling and upskilling programs. Career transition support and the creation of new AI-related roles can help mitigate job insecurity. Open communication about AI's impact is essential to reducing employee anxiety and resistance. From a policy perspective, organizations must ensure compliance with AI-related regulations. Regular reviews of AI systems by compliance teams or legal experts help align practices with evolving laws. Developing ethical guidelines for AI use, covering bias, privacy, and transparency, provides a framework for responsible decision-making. Lastly, stakeholder engagement is crucial. Involving employees, regulators, and AI experts in discussions ensures diverse

perspectives are considered. Regular feedback sessions can help organizations anticipate challenges and align AI practices with ethical and societal expectations (Du, 2024).

When using AI for relationship building with candidates, it is crucial to inform applicants that they are interacting with an AI system rather than a human. Providing opt-out alternatives for biometric data collection helps protect candidate privacy and prevents potential discrimination. Additionally, addressing structural biases by incorporating more diverse candidates in the development of AI criteria ensures that hiring models do not disproportionately favor certain groups over others. In video interview screening, companies should offer alternatives for biometrics and avoid platforms that use unreliable facial or voice analysis tools. Ensuring structured and consistent interviews, where all candidates are asked the same questions and evaluated using a standardized scorecard, reduces the risk of bias. AI-based assessments must be carefully analyzed to counterbalance any psychometric limitations that may disadvantage underrepresented groups. For performance evaluation, organizations must differentiate between the gold standard used in recruitment and benchmarks for regular performance assessments. AI algorithms should be designed with this distinction in mind to ensure fair staff retention and career progression opportunities (European Network Against Racism, 2020).

Many countries develop national regulations to guide AI development, ensuring its ethical and responsible use. These regulations also shape AI applications in human resource management. In the Republic of Serbia, the *Ethical Guidelines for the Development, Implementation, and Use of Trustworthy and Responsible Artificial Intelligence* provide a framework for AI governance. These guidelines apply to various stakeholders, including AI developers, users, and those affected by AI systems. This includes individuals using AI in their professional work, those impacted directly (such as public service recipients), and those indirectly affected (such as participants in medical research). Additionally, the general public is considered within the ethical framework. For AI systems to be trustworthy, they must be explainable, verifiable, and accountable to humans. The guidelines emphasize dignity, harm prevention, and compliance with core principles such as oversight, technical reliability, data protection, transparency, non-discrimination, societal well-being, and accountability. Meeting these conditions ensures that AI in HRM and other fields is used responsibly and fairly (National AI platform, 2023).

5. CONCLUSION

The integration of AI in Human Resource Management presents both significant opportunities and considerable challenges. While AI systems can streamline processes such as recruitment, training, and employee performance evaluation, they also raise ethical concerns, particularly regarding bias and discrimination. The most prominent issue is the use of biased data, which can perpetuate existing inequalities in recruitment, compensation, and performance evaluation. As AI systems are trained on historical data, they can inadvertently reinforce discriminatory practices unless careful attention is paid to data quality and the design of algorithms. Additionally, AI-driven HR practices such as targeted job ads and automated interviews can inadvertently exclude qualified candidates from underrepresented groups, further limiting diversity in the workplace. To address these challenges, organizations must prioritize fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in the development and deployment of AI-HRM systems. This includes using diverse datasets, conducting regular audits, and involving multidisciplinary teams to oversee the design and implementation of AI tools. Ensuring transparency in AI decision-making and allowing employees to challenge AI-based outcomes can help maintain trust and fairness. Moreover, companies must protect sensitive employee data through robust privacy measures while complying with relevant legal frameworks. Ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in shaping the responsible use of AI in HRM. By adhering to principles such as non-discrimination, accountability, and societal well-being, organizations can mitigate the

risks of AI bias and discrimination. Ultimately, the successful adoption of AI in HRM depends on a balanced approach that combines technological innovation with a commitment to ethical standards.

This paper contributes to the theoretical understanding of AI's ethical implications in Human Resource Management. It explores how biases in data and algorithmic decision-making affect various HR processes. Analyzing the ethical dilemmas of AI-HRM, provides a conceptual framework for identifying discrimination types - data, methodology, and socio-cultural bias, highlighting the intersection of technology, ethics, and HR practices. This work advances existing theories on AI ethics by offering a detailed examination of its potential risks and challenges in organizational settings, guiding future research in this evolving field. This study offers practical insights into addressing AI-related discrimination in HRM. It provides actionable strategies for organizations to reduce bias, such as using diverse datasets, conducting regular audits, and ensuring transparency in AI decision-making. Additionally, it suggests developing clear guidelines for AI deployment, including employee consent and alternatives to automated interactions. The paper highlights the importance of robust data protection measures and stakeholder engagement in shaping responsible AI practices. By proposing these practical solutions, the research serves as a valuable resource for HR professionals and organizations seeking to implement AI technologies ethically and effectively within their workforce management systems.

The limitation of this study is its focus on theoretical frameworks and ethical implications without extensive empirical data from organizations actively using AI in HRM. The findings are based on existing literature, which may not fully capture real-world challenges and solutions in diverse organizational contexts. Additionally, the rapid development of AI technology may result in the proposed solutions becoming outdated as new algorithms and methodologies emerge. Future research should explore empirical case studies of AI-HRM implementation, evaluating the effectiveness of bias-reducing strategies in different industries. Moreover, ongoing updates to ethical guidelines and AI algorithms should be explored, ensuring they remain relevant in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

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