Artificial Intelligence at the Margins: Risks and Opportunities for Iranian Immigrant Nonprofits in the Global North

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Abstract

This study investigates how Iranian immigrant nonprofit groups experience exclusion within technology and AI-driven infrastructures. Based on 27 semi-structured interviews, it identifies how legitimacy barriers, capacity gaps, and ethical dilemmas intersect to create a cycle of infrastructural immobility that restricts these groups' participation in the digital nonprofit ecosystem. The findings reveal that generative AI, while providing some opportunities, risks exacerbating these challenges by deepening marginalization and reinforcing inequalities in access, data visibility, AI fluency, and AI-mediated representation. Uncritical adoption of generative AI in the nonprofit domain undermines transparency and human connection in everyday organizational practice and induces bias in AI-generated content in the context of Iranian immigrant nonprofit work. To address these issues, the paper proposes interaction-level design strategies that promote community-driven inclusion, support context-aware capacity building, and leverage AI's augmentative potential to strengthen transparency practices and human connection among Iranian immigrant nonprofits.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → *Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing*.

Keywords

Nonprofit, Charity, Artificial Intelligence, AI, LLM, Immigrant, Inclusion, Informality, Digital Literacy, Legitimacy, Mobility, Infrastructure

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1 Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in the nonprofit sector has created new opportunities in fundraising, operational management, and donor relationship management [86, 93, 131, 150]. However, these benefits are unevenly distributed, with under-resourced nonprofits like grassroots and immigrant-based groups facing unique barriers to adopting AI tools. Existing nonprofit technologies often lack the adaptability to address the resource constraints and socio-political complexities these organizations face [77, 82]. This paper explores the intersection of AI and nonprofit technologies, emphasizing how these tools may reinforce systemic inequities and ethical concerns within the nonprofit practices of immigrants of Iranian descent navigating complex international political contexts. Building on Ahmed et al.'s theory of residual mobilities [20], we treat marginalization not merely as resource scarcity but as a form of infrastructural immobility that emerges when political displacement and digital systems collide. Residual mobilities describe how displaced actors navigate, repair, and reassemble infrastructures that were not built for them. This lens guides our analysis of AI-driven technologies to show how they both constrain and enable legal, technical, and social movement within Iranian immigrant nonprofits [151]

The nonprofit sector has made significant technological advancements throughout the years, from donor relationship management platforms to charitable crowdfunding websites [78]. However, these advancements largely cater to well-resourced organizations, sidelining grassroots and under-resourced nonprofits. These smaller, community-driven groups face systemic barriers, including exclusion from tech platforms, limited online visibility, and inadequate access to scalable solutions [77]. As a subset of such marginalized nonprofits, nonprofits led by Iranian immigrants operating internationally encounter additional challenges, such as political, cultural, and structural obstacles [132]. Despite their potential, tailored technologies for these groups remain scarce, often failing to meet their unique challenges. These groups often operate with limited resources or without official registration, facing significant challenges in building legitimacy and official credibility, which hinders their operations and financial practices. To endure in this context, they resort to creative but unsustainable strategies. For example, they use small-scale email money transfers for fundraising rather than official platforms like PayPal or Stripe, which require formal nonprofit status to offer

their services. For larger transactions, they depend on intermediary organizations, adding logistical and trust complexities. Fundraising efforts remain discreet, using locally crafted websites or messaging apps instead of social media fundraising features. To build credibility, they dedicate substantial effort to communicating detailed reports and proof of authenticity. In this situation, the exclusionary practices by tech and financial platforms perpetuate their residual status [20, 151], showcasing both their resilience and the inequities they must navigate.

Against this backdrop of infrastructural exclusion and adaptive yet fragile workarounds, this study turns to the everyday practices of Iranian immigrant–led nonprofit groups operating in the Global North that often provide monetary and intellectual support to beneficiaries in Iran. Specifically, we ask the following research questions in this study:

RQ1: What socio-technical factors condition how Iranian immigrant nonprofit groups in the Global North engage with computing technologies?

RQ2: How do emerging AI technologies reconfigure opportunities and challenges for immigrant-led charitable nonprofits?

Through semi-structured interviews (n=27) that examine the interaction of Iranian immigrant nonprofit workers with current computing technologies and elicit their opinions about the rapidly rising AI-driven tools and AI-generated imagery, this work underscores the unique characteristics, operational dynamics, and systemic barriers these groups face in engaging with nonprofit technologies and AI ecosystem. Residual mobilities highlight the ways in which displacement, whether physical, social, or digital, can disrupt access to key infrastructures and reinforce systemic marginalization. Our findings, therefore, reveal the systemic exclusion of marginalized nonprofits from technological solutions (infrastructural immobility), the capacity gaps in adopting tech-driven tools (epistemic immobility), and the ethical concerns these organizations face regarding transparency, authenticity, and human relationships in their operational processes (affective mobilities). While many of the challenges identified may apply to a broad range of under-resourced nonprofits, these immigrant groups face compounded disadvantages, being in the intersection of immigrant life, international politics, and the inherent constraints of working in the nonprofit sector [56, 66]. The findings further underscore how the current practices in the tech industry, along with the rise of generative AI, perpetuate the identified inequalities that deepen existing challenges. AI-driven tools that rely on non-inclusive nonprofit databases risk further marginalizing the study group. Additionally, the use of AI-generated content raises concerns about the transparency and authenticity of fundraising activities, diminishes the human touch in relationships with donors and audiences, and negatively impacts trust in nonprofit groups. Finally, this paper makes three contributions: (1) It extends the concept of residual mobilities to the study of immigrant nonprofit infrastructures, showing how fractured systems reproduce immobility and exclusion among immigrant-based groups. (2) It empirically documents how Iranian immigrant nonprofits interact with digital and AI ecosystems, revealing the mechanisms that perpetuate inequities. (3) It translates these insights into concrete interaction-level design implications that advance the democratization of AI through community-driven, context-sensitive, and human-centered design of interactive systems.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Immigrant Identity and Transnational Ties in Nonprofit Practice

Immigrants constitute an increasingly influential part of Global North societies, contributing to cultural diversity, social vitality, and economic development while maintaining extensive ties to their countries of origin [1, 3]. However, their migration is rarely a frictionless process, especially marked by psychological distress, infrastructural disorientation, and challenges in navigating unfamiliar cultural norms and institutional landscapes in the early years [32]. While a major focus of computing research in this area is adapting to host-society expectations [87, 88], migration researchers have also examined how immigrants recompose identity by drawing on memories, values, media practices, and community ties [53, 134]. Material and digital artifacts, such as family photographs, religious texts, messaging groups, and online communities, serve as tools for emotional continuity, cultural grounding, and preservation of meaningful ties to their homelands [134].

Such attachments extend beyond personal networks to the imagining of communities [25]. It emerges not only through political activism but also through subtle, everyday practices like consuming homeland media, participating in online gatherings, engaging with ethnic community groups, or contributing to diaspora knowledge networks [148]. Despite the physical separation from homeland, these practices, supported by information and communication technology (ICT) platforms, make homeland events proximate, emotionally immediate, and collectively actionable. The embedded, relational, and often invisible substrate of these practices, dubbed as infrastructure [94, 98, 114, 118, 152], spans both human and sociotechnical dimensions. Human infrastructures include religious organizations, diasporic community associations, language-specific social groups, and mutual aid networks [90]. Examples of sociotechnical infrastructures include WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, Facebook diasporic pages, remittance platforms, and cross-border messaging systems [123]. Both support diaspora groups and immigrants in navigating the complexities of settlement and in sustaining their ties to their homelands [88, 134]. Besides maintaining transnational communication, coordination across time zones and borders [41, 45, 126, 136], human-computer interaction (HCI) scholarship studied how these infrastructures enable immigrants to sustain both local and transnational senses of belonging [28, 31, 69, 133].

Within this relational and infrastructural landscape, homeland-oriented nonprofit participation becomes a powerful mechanism through which immigrants enact identity, agency, and moral responsibility that often arise from emotional attachment, communal obligation, and aspirations for social change [30, 73, 111, 125, 158]. These contributions can be made through fundraising, informal support networks, volunteer coordination, knowledge transfer, and crisis response, and often serve as modes of identity repair, empowerment, and transnational political engagement [49, 62, 91]. Research on diaspora activism during the Rohingya ethnocide in Myanmar [26], the Indian farmers' protest [115], and political movements in Bangladesh [60–62] has shown how immigrants'

participation in such civic responsibility is riddled with myriad political, moral, financial, and emotional reasoning. In characterizing how these factors shape immigrants' agency in transnational contexts, Das and colleagues introduce the concept of diasporic superposition–migrants' hybrid positionalities in which privilege afforded by mobility and resources coexists with vulnerability to geopolitical constraints and state surveillance–and illustrate how their practices are embedded in moral economies of care, where resource transfers operate as ethical acts grounded in obligation, solidarity, and collective responsibility [62]. Moreover, various structural, geopolitical, and institutional barriers, such as funding precarity, volunteer turnover, and the burden of demonstrating legitimacy in both host and home countries, profoundly shape how immigrant nonprofits operate [29, 112, 124]. Especially, transnational groups navigating politically sensitive contexts face disproportionate constraints: customs restrictions, sanctions, citizenship-related barriers, cross-border financial verification processes, limited access to formal nonprofit status, and heightened risks of surveillance [40, 64, 119].

Together, these forces shape an informal, relationally dense, transnationally coordinated, and infrastructurally fragile organizational ecology for immigrant nonprofits, the platformization of which through digital infrastructures mediates those conditions in consequential ways.

2.2 How Immigrant Nonprofit Organizations Cope with Fragility and Legitimacy Demands through Informal Sociotechnical Practices

Immigrant-led nonprofits typically emerge within organizational landscapes that differ from the stable, professionalized, and resource-rich institutions [37]. The precarity of immigrant life, including limited recognition from government, institutions, and philanthropic agencies, the lack of flexibility, low visibility, and geopolitical sensitivities (e.g., sanctions), is reflected in the organizational forms of their nonprofits [40, 64, 124]. The ongoing, behind-the-scenes coordination that holds socio-technical systems together, what Suchman dubbed as articulation work [157], often relies on volunteers and includes multilingual translation across audiences, fundraising, data entry, negotiating cultural sensitivities, coordinating across time zones, and managing uncertainties [77, 99, 154]. Though constant work, repair, and improvisation are central to the maintenance of sociotechnical infrastructure [94, 136, 149], volunteer-led immigrant nonprofits often lack technical expertise, institutional funding, or formalized workflows, even for basic tasks like collecting documentation, storing data, generating reports, and coordinating volunteers [42].

In navigating these constraints, informality emerges not as a sign of organizational weakness but as a vital strategy. Informal structures enable flexibility, rapid adaptation, and culturally attuned decision-making [155]. This is evident through many nonprofits maintaining loose or non-hierarchical structures, as such organizational schemes reduce burdensome compliance processes, allow multilingual and culturally specific practices to flourish, and permit individuals to contribute episodically according to availability and safety [48, 170]. However, such informality leads to reduced eligibility for grants, invisibility in official datasets, limited scalability, and vulnerability to being perceived as unprofessional or illegitimate [112]. In addition to that, the lack of formal legitimacy through nonprofit status due to complex legal requirements, risks associated with homeland politics, or cross-border legal uncertainty [48, 159]. Even with formal status, legitimacy is not guaranteed. Racialized, linguistically diverse, or geopolitically sensitive groups may be deemed risky by funders or excluded from institutional partnerships [29, 112]. Hence, immigrant nonprofits need to continually demonstrate trustworthiness by sharing reports, producing evidence of impact, curating their online presence, and leveraging personal networks, which consumes substantial time and emotional energy, potentially diverting attention from community needs [63].

To address these challenges, immigrant nonprofits increasingly interact with and are reshaped by digital tools, such as crowdfunding platforms, donor-management systems, CRM software, payment processors, messaging applications, and social media [78, 128]. However, such computing systems presume bureaucratically stable organizational settings, rendering them incompatible with the needs of immigrant-led groups. As a result, many nonprofit organizations resort to homebrew databases, spreadsheets, ad hoc coordination practices, and patchworked systems [146, 164, 165]. However, because of computing systems' inherent reductionist impulse, even with internal improvisation, they impose algorithmic and bureaucratic expectations that shape nonprofit visibility, credibility, and discoverability. For example, crowdfunding systems incorporate progress bars, donor metrics, and ranking mechanisms that convert private acts of solidarity into public momentum, influencing which causes receive attention and support [50, 80]. Similarly, platform search and social media recommendation algorithms can suppress content from linguistically diverse, low-resource, or politically volatile communities [109, 139]. Thus, dominant cultural framings algorithmically shape an uneven visibility landscape, which determines which causes and organizations are computationally represented as "deserving," while the needs of stigmatized communities, informal groups, or geopolitically sensitive contexts are continuously marginalized.

The nonprofits respond to these visibility challenges by collecting, curating, and reporting metrics designed for donors or institutions rather than community needs [36, 79]. As a result, organizations move toward quantifiable activities and away from low-visibility but high-impact community care. Meanwhile, financial technology (fintech) systems used for cross-border donations impose identity verification and risk-scoring measures aligned with Global North financial regimes, which can disproportionately affect immigrant-led groups operating informally or serving politically sensitive populations [132, 147]. Thus, digital infrastructures simultaneously enable transnational nonprofit coordination while also embedding bureaucratic and algorithmic constraints that reproduce existing social power inequalities.

2.3 How AI Shapes Inequality and Transnational Precarity in Nonprofits' Sociotechnical Infrastructures

As nonprofit organizing becomes increasingly entangled with data-driven systems and algorithmic classification, AI is emerging not merely as a set of discrete tools but as core to their sociotechnical infrastructure. Machine learning systems now assist in donor targeting [131], generate personalized fundraising messages [150], triage requests for social services [72], optimize marketing strategies [86], analyze community sentiment [93], and classify organizational categories for search and recommendation [128]. These developments reshape the informational terrain and embed the normative assumptions, data hierarchies, and institutional models of the host countries, which often do not align with those in their homelands [112], into automated decision-making.

In such a sociotechnical landscape, groups whose organizational forms fall outside canonical templates risk facing discrimination and bias. Research in public-sector AI shows that various street-level algorithms (e.g., to augment or replace human judgment, eligibility determination, fraud detection, resource allocation, and compliance verification) disproportionately penalize marginalized communities by embedding risk-scoring logics, biased datasets, and inflexible classification schemes [72, 116, 141]. Immigrant nonprofits, especially those operating under geopolitical constraints, informal structures, or multilingual contexts, are especially vulnerable to misclassification by these systems. For instance, sanctions-related heuristics, homeland political conflicts, or transnational volunteer arrangements can trigger false positives in fraud detection or risk assessment pipelines, affecting the organization's ability to receive payments, open accounts, or access formalized financial systems [132, 147]. Thus, the limitations of computing systems serving immigrant nonprofits stem from infrastructural arrangements that center Western bureaucratic norms and financial governance models, rendering certain forms of transnational labor inherently risky.

AI also shapes nonprofit realities through AI-generated or AI-curated humanitarian imagery and textual representation. Prior studies documented how AI systems used in humanitarian contexts tend to reproduce stereotypical, racialized, or sensationalized portrayals of suffering, reinforcing deficit narratives that historically shape Western engagements with the Global South [89]. These systems can disproportionately benefit causes that fit dominant visual tropes while marginalizing those that do not. Therefore, immigrant nonprofits focused on politically sensitive, stigmatized, or less visually sensational causes may struggle for visibility in algorithmically mediated donor ecosystems [140]. Similarly, nonprofits communicating in non-dominant languages or culturally specific registers are likely to face representational biases due to inequalities in language-based technologies (e.g., content moderation pipelines and machine translation systems) [109, 139].

Algorithmic fairness and critical computing scholarship connect these concerns of representation bias and inequality with the interaction of infrastructural, epistemic, and affective mechanisms [34, 55]. Infrastructural inequalities emerge when immigrant nonprofits become and remain less likely to be highlighted in the AI-driven ranking systems due to their lack of similarity with historically privileged organizational infrastructures and normative categories [37]. Epistemic inequalities arise from the lack of representation of immigrant nonprofit organizations in existing knowledge base and the universalist design assumptions that shape data schemas, model objectives, and evaluative frameworks used by funders, platforms, and regulators [55, 59, 67]. Affective inequalities manifest as AI-mediated narratives prioritize engagement-maximizing, sentimental, or stereotypical humanitarian stories [71, 140], rendering the long-term, culturally specific, or advocacy-oriented work of many immigrant nonprofits less algorithmically legible and thus less visible and fundable. These asymmetries exacerbate when nonprofits serve populations targeted by state surveillance, geopolitical tensions, or informational repression [26, 117].

To examine how AI impacts immigrant nonprofits, we draw on the analytic lens of *residual mobilities* [20]. Building on Star's notion of residual categories–those left out of institutional classification systems [151]–residual mobilities describe how displaced populations navigate infrastructures not designed for them. Immigrant nonprofits often operate in these "leftover" spaces: they are neither fully legible to host-country institutions nor fully integrated into homeland governance. Their cross-border activities place them outside standardized bureaucratic categories, leading to exclusion from data schemas, compliance frameworks, and algorithmic models. At the same time, residual mobilities foreground migrants' creative adaptations: building informal infrastructures, developing workaround practices, leveraging multilingual networks, and improvising sociotechnical solutions to bypass structural barriers [149, 168]. Through this lens, we examine how Iranian immigrant nonprofits' infrastructural invisibility, informal governance, and diasporic orientation in the Global North are systematically mismatched with the normative assumptions of AI infrastructures. This perspective examines AI's role in amplifying inequality, identifies design implications, and outlines community-centered AI approaches that foreground community autonomy, contextual expertise, and entrenched power relations.

3 Methods

Nonprofit efforts span a wide spectrum of organizations, each with distinct missions and legal classifications. These include charitable organizations focused on community benefit and poverty alleviation, religious organizations such as churches, mosques, and temples, and advocacy groups involved in public policy, labor rights, or political activism [14]. In this study, the term "nonprofit groups" refers to a specific category involved in charitable giving, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment. In particular, this study examines the charitable efforts of Iranian immigrants residing in the Global North. We use the terms "nonprofit" and "charitable group" interchangeably in this study, as the technologies designed for this domain are largely shared across various sub-sectors of the nonprofit field. Also, these subgroups frequently encounter similar challenges stemming from their volunteer-driven and not-for-profit structures. The nonprofit groups also vary in formality levels, defined as follows: *formal* groups are government-registered and can issue tax-deductible receipts. *semi-formal groups* are registered with

entities with simpler approval processes, like universities or community centers. *Informal groups* lack legal registration but may have some organizational structure.

This study is based on semi-structured interviews with leaders or active members of nonprofit groups run by Iranian immigrants living in Canada, Europe, the UK, and the USA. We position these Iranian-led diaspora nonprofits as a case of immigrant organizations from politically complex contexts, illustrating how such groups navigate technology-driven infrastructures under transnational and geopolitical constraints. This research involved four main phases: (i) participant recruitment, (ii) semi-structured interviews, (iii) interactions with AI technologies to further assess the data collected from participants and gather complementary data, and (iv) thematic analysis of the interviews and complementary data. This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board of a North American academic institution.

3.1 Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a notice posted in the first author's Telegram story section, inviting nonprofit practitioners to participate in this study (please see 3.5 for reflections on the authors' positionality). The notice included a brief introduction of ourselves and the research. Initial responses came from acquaintances, later extended via snowball sampling [33], as initial respondents referred additional participants from their networks. In total, we recruited 27 participants from 17 distinct nonprofit groups. Please refer to Table 1 and Table 2 for the demographic and background information of the participants and their organizations.

All recruited participants were informed of their rights, including the voluntary and unpaid nature of their participation, their freedom to decline answering any questions, and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants were also informed about how their data would be used in the study and provided informed consent before the interview sessions began.

3.2 Interview Design

Our study began with the broad goal of examining how Iranian immigrant nonprofit groups interact with technology and AI. The data collection was conducted through online semi-structured interviews. The researchers' backgrounds informed the development of preliminary questions, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the subject matter. Participants were asked about their groups' mission and management structure, fundraising methods and payment gateways, social media interaction, communication with audience and beneficiaries, collaboration with other nonprofit groups, volunteer coordination, project management, long-distance nonprofit work, and the challenges associated with each of these aspects and the role of technology in either facilitating or exacerbating them.

We also explored the role of AI in their work processes, asking whether it has offered any help or introduced new challenges. Additionally, we examined whether these groups have faced concerns or discussions surrounding the emerging uses of AI in the nonprofit sector. While the interviews began with a set of prepared questions, the discussions were guided by the flow of the conversation, allowing for flexibility and depth in exploring relevant topics.

During interviews, we used a set of twelve AI-generated fundraising photos that we had previously encountered and gathered while interacting with online charity and nonprofit social media, websites, and discussion forums. We showed these images to participants and invited their reflections on emotional resonance and ethical acceptability of using such visuals in fundraising and charity settings. These discussions helped surface participants' interpretations of AI-mediated representation and trust. No private data or proprietary system access was used in this component. All queries were publicly accessible, and no sensitive organizational names were inserted. This approach allowed us to explore algorithmic representation while minimizing participant and organizational risk.

In total, these sessions yielded 38.5 hours of interview data (averaging 86 minutes) and 351 pages of transcription. Interviews were conducted in the participants' first language, Farsi, encouraging a flexible flow of information. Interviews were transcribed and translated into English manually by the first author, without the use of AI.

3.3 Complementary AI Landscape Explorations

To complement participants' accounts of algorithmic exclusion, we conducted a small-scale exploration of the AI landscape to examine how widely used language-based systems represent and categorize nonprofits run by Iranian immigrants. The purpose of this component was not to generate quantitative performance metrics, but to trace interactional patterns that illustrate how AI interfaces reinforce or disrupt existing infrastructural mobility. We selected four publicly accessible models, namely OpenAI GPT, Google Gemini, Anthropic Claude, and DeepSeek, representing dominant general-purpose conversational systems at the time of the study (July 2025). Each model was queried with five standardized prompts derived from key interview themes, asking about the introduction of nonprofit groups helping different causes in Iran, like healthcare, education, and welfare, such as: "Find charities in North America that help underserved communities in Iran."

Each prompt was run twice per model in identical conditions to observe stability. We qualitatively analyzed the textual responses using open coding to assess the visibility and representation of the nonprofit groups of the participants in these models: whether diaspora-based Iranian nonprofit groups appeared among the suggested entities or examples. These outputs were compared inductively to themes from interview data, allowing us to interpret how language-based AI systems mediate visibility and credibility for marginalized nonprofits. This qualitative AI landscape exploration was designed not as a performance benchmark but as a means to interpret the socio-technical processes through which AI tools impact the nonprofit ecosystem.

3.4 Data Analysis

Analysis of data involved a rigorous review of interview transcripts. An iterative process was employed, during which each transcript was carefully reviewed by the first author to isolate and emphasize segments relevant to our research questions while eliminating irrelevant portions. Frequent virtual team meetings were held between the authors to discuss and verify the excluded segments, ensuring no significant excerpts were overlooked. Following this

Table 1: Distribution of Age, Gender, and Occupational Background Categories Among Interview Participants

Number of Participants: 27 (Female: 12, Male: 15)		
Age Range (in Years)	Gender	Occupation Background of Participants
20–30: 5	Female: 12	Engineering: 14
30–40: 11	Male: 15	Management & Business Administration: 5
40–50: 6		Health Sciences: 4
50–60: 3		Psychology & Education: 2
60–70: 2		Art & Design: 1
		Finance & Accounting: 1

Table 2: Distribution of Participants' Nonprofit Groups Across Nonprofit Types, Service Areas, and Technology Use (* Please note that some groups are focused on more than one area of aid and support)

Number of Distinct Nonprofit Groups: 17			
Formality Level	Size of Nonprofit Group	Areas of Aid and Support	Technologies Currently Used by Nonprofit Group (Example)
Formal: 5	1–10: 2	Education & Literacy Support: 7	Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, ...): 12
Semi-formal: 6	10–20: 4	Health Assistance & Medical Infrastructure: 8	Donor-Relationship Managers (Bloomerang, Bonterra): 3
Informal: 6	20–50: 8	Nutrition & Food Security: 7	Messaging Apps (Telegram, WhatsApp): 17
	100–200: 2	Refugee & Newcomer Settlement Support: 3	Website (Wix, WordPress): 13
	300–400: 1	Community Development: 5	Financial Technology (PayPal, Donorbox, Email Money Transfer): 17
		Empowerment & Career Development: 4	Event Management Platforms (Eventbrite, Zeffy):6
		Crisis Response & Humanitarian Relief: 4	Accounting Software (QuickBooks, Custom-made Software): 4
		Drinking Water Access: 1	Collaborative Information Management Clouds (Google Drive): 17
			Content Creation Platforms (Canva, Adobe): 16

initial review, the anonymized data were analyzed using open coding [156] and thematic analysis [39]. This approach was deliberately inductive, avoiding predetermined themes and ensuring openness to emergent insights. The data were grouped into patterns based on similarities and differences, which were subsequently synthesized into themes presented in our findings. We conducted multiple rounds of rigorous analysis to refine the codes and themes iteratively. This collaborative process culminated in the development of the final themes presented in the findings section.

3.5 Author Positionality

In politically sensitive contexts, it is crucial to account for the tensions participants may navigate [103] and to consider how these dynamics shape researchers' motivations, engagement, and interpretive stances in relation to their positionality vis-à-vis participants [142]. All the researchers in this study are immigrants in North America or closely engaged with immigrant communities. Also, their disciplinary background is in the fields of HCI, design, and social computing, focusing on the design of technology and infrastructure for marginalized communities. They are also actively involved in nonprofit and charitable giving activities, with the primary researcher bringing over a decade of leadership and volunteer experience, including roles such as group leader, HR manager, public outreach, technology manager, and content generator. Her extensive field experience, spanning work with beneficiaries and direct and indirect collaboration with over 20 charity groups, informed the interview design and analysis and enabled the integration of contextual insights into this article, including explanations about specific websites, tools, and platforms used in the nonprofit sector.

3.6 Limitations

This study has some limitations that constrain the broader applicability of the findings. Participant recruitment primarily occurred through the authors' professional networks and was concentrated in North America and Europe, given the scope of this research. This resulted in limited representation from Iranian diaspora communities in East and South Asia, Turkey, Arab countries, and Australia. The participant pool included only individuals of Iranian origin, even though transnational and cross-cultural philanthropy also manifests in contexts of other nationalities and regions. Moreover, we centered donors and volunteer organizers, excluding perspectives from end-beneficiaries, state actors, and intermediary nonprofits in Iran. As with most qualitative inquiries, certain sampling biases are unavoidable; our goal, therefore, was not to achieve statistical generalization but to generate contextually grounded insights [110, 144]. The results should thus be understood in relation to the specific communities studied. The findings, however, highlight socio-technical

patterns that may resonate with other under-resourced, volunteer-driven, and politically constrained nonprofit groups operating in similarly complex environments.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This research raises important ethical considerations given its focus on Iranian immigrant nonprofit groups operating amid complex international politics. While the study aims to amplify marginalized voices and critique systemic exclusions perpetuated by AI technologies, we recognize that publicly discussing the vulnerabilities of these groups, such as a lack of formal registration or capacity gaps, may inadvertently expose them to reputational harm, increased scrutiny, or misinterpretation by funders, platforms, or regulatory bodies. To mitigate these risks, all participant data and related figures were anonymized under the oversight of a university research ethics board, securely stored in a password-protected digital repository, accessible only to authorized members of the research team. For the same reason, we refrain from including participants' demographic details when quoting their interviews in the findings section and instead present aggregate demographic information only in Tables 1 and 2. We also employed reflexive methods to clarify the authors' positionality and the study's limitations, particularly regarding access to participants and sampling. The paper does not portray these groups as lacking or inadequate; instead, it highlights their community-building practices, cultural resilience, and informal strengths.

4 Findings: Residual Mobilities in AI-Mediated Nonprofit Infrastructures

This section presents findings from our analysis that proceeds along two complementary strands through the lens of residual mobilities. First, we present the findings from semi-structured interviews with participants about how AI and digital tools are integrated into their routine nonprofit operations, alongside their reactions to a set of twelve AI-generated fundraising images designed to elicit reflection on the emotional resonance and ethical acceptability of AI-produced content in fundraising and public communication. Second, we present insights from a small-scale exploration of existing language-based AI systems, focusing on how these systems currently represent Iranian immigrant nonprofits. Throughout the findings, we situate participants' perspectives within the collected evidence from the broad landscape of nonprofit-oriented technologies.

Several recurring themes emerged from the data, highlighting systemic exclusion of Iranian immigrant nonprofits from technology and data platforms, capacity gaps in AI adoption, and ongoing dilemmas about transparency, informality and AI-mediated representation in Iranian immigrant nonprofit work. We organize these findings across three interrelated dimensions -infrastructural, epistemic, and affective residual mobilities- to show how barriers to legitimacy, knowledge circulation, and affective flow shape the everyday nonprofit practices of the study population. Collectively, this empirical data provides a grounded understanding of how AI intersects with, and often amplifies, the structural and infrastructural challenges within the nonprofit ecosystem. We elaborate on these challenges in the sections that follow.

4.1 Infrastructural Residual Mobilities: AI, Legitimacy, and Platform Access

This subsection focuses on infrastructural residual mobilities, highlighting how geopolitical scrutiny, legitimacy requirements, and platform dependencies constrain Iranian immigrant nonprofits' access to digital and AI-enabled nonprofit services. As AI systems increasingly rely on existing nonprofit databases and platform signals, these exclusions are reproduced, leaving active organizations structurally immobilized within infrastructures that presume legal stability and data legibility they cannot readily achieve.

4.1.1 Verification and Legitimacy Barriers. A major theme that emerged from the interviews is the hard path of achieving **legitimacy** faced by Iranian nonprofits due to the strong impact of international politics on complicating this path. P6, a lifelong activist immigrant, collaborates with a nonprofit in her home country, Iran, supporting vulnerable children from abusive families, providing them with literacy, basic healthcare, and occasional warm meals. After immigrating, she ran fundraising campaigns for the organization and sought government registration to access digital financial platforms, social media fundraising, and corporate fund-matching programs. She explains her experience, saying:

> *"We talked to a lawyer about registering, but she told us that once 'Iran' appeared on the file, requirements became stricter and more complicated. The requirements were beyond our time and funding limits, so we decided not to move forward with group registration."* (P6)

Another leader, P5, explained the difficulty of finding co-signers willing to risk scrutiny from both U.S. and Iranian authorities.

> *"We have looked into the registration, but we have not registered our activities because it needs three people to co-sign the legal responsibilities. One person is me, but I haven't found the other two people. The reason is that finding someone willing to commit time and risk scrutiny from the US and Iranian governments is very hard."* (P5)

These accounts illustrate how geopolitical tensions translate into infrastructural immobility: political suspicion interrupts the flow of legitimacy and freezes transnational charities.

4.1.2 Geopolitics and Platform Recognition. The analysis of participants' interviews shows that the tech industry's services for nonprofits are insufficiently inclusive, marginalizing informal groups that forgo formal legal registration due to resource constraints and political complications. Most nonprofit technology tools, such as nonprofit evaluation platforms, financial management software, and nonprofit-specific social media tools, require formal governmental registration numbers to provide access, which is very hard to obtain for the population of study. We interpret these legitimacy struggles as instances of residual immobility, referring to the ways in which displaced groups are excluded from official infrastructures that presume stable citizenship and institutional presence. This disconnect underscores a critical gap in how technology is designed to support, but often fails, the diverse realities of nonprofit practice.

Examples of services limited to formal nonprofits include Facebook's Fundraiser feature, Amazon Smile and Google's Fund-Matching

Programs, and Microsoft 365 Nonprofit, which offers discounted or free access to products and training. Financial platforms like PayPal and Stripe waive fees only for formal nonprofits, discouraging informal nonprofits from using them. More importantly, databases and service platforms specifically designed for charities and nonprofit activities, such as Charity Navigator [8], Guidestar [13], CanadaHelps [6], Benevity [4], and Zeffy [19], exclusively serve organizations with government registration number, leaving informal and semi-formal groups without access. Ironically, these services, designed to support marginalized communities, exclude unregistered nonprofits operating at the margins of the sector.

To illustrate this point, a participant identified as P10, who is part of a semi-formal nonprofit group, shared their experience about this. She discussed how their group has been excluded from financial technology services because they do not have full legitimacy recognized by the government.

> *"We use Donorbox [11] and Stripe [17] for setting up our online donation. They take processing fees. So, we encourage donors to send direct money transfers to our bank accounts because we want to be loyal to the donors' money. For event ticketing, we use free services like Google Forms, ask attendees to send the fees through direct transfer, and then a volunteer manually matches the transactions and sign-ups. There's always a discussion about this in the team."* (P10)

Similarly, P1 from a university-based nonprofit noted that their PayPal fundraising account was tagged and blocked, prompting them to initiate the process of formally registering their nonprofit five years ago, which remains incomplete to this day. These examples demonstrate how the high barriers to achieving formal legitimacy systematically pose ongoing challenges for informal and semi-formal groups.

4.1.3 Data Visibility and Platform Exclusion. Like the current exclusionary practice of tech platforms towards marginal informal nonprofit efforts, the future landscape appears similarly unpromising. AI tools are trained on existing, often non-inclusive or questionable internet data to generate responses and create visual or textual content. This reliance on incomplete and unverified information could harm marginalized nonprofits by rendering them invisible or misrepresenting them. Related to this issue, P23 explains her worry about the impacts of AI's reliance on the current state of the non-inclusive nonprofit databases:

> *"We have provided drinking water systems in tens of remote villages and sent nutrition and drugs to thousands of kids who were dying from malnutrition. But we don't usually get the time to put the reports on social media. Maybe AI does a better job of reporting our impacts. But how does AI find us? I wonder what we can do to help AI [find us]?"* (P23)

The result of our complementary exploration of the AI landscape on nonprofit and charity-related questions (described in 3.3) validates the concerns of Participant 23 about the lack of representation. Figure 1 shows an example query and the generated response from ChatGPT. This query evaluates Iranian Charities in North America, and the result is far from the realities of existing groups' performances and impact, predominantly highlighting websites with high online visibility due to strong Search Engine Optimization (SEO), rather than those specifically accepting donations from Canada, as requested in the prompt. Since LLMs generate responses by predicting word sequences based on probabilities and patterns derived from vast internet data -instead of a targeted list of functioning, high-impact organizations trusted by donors- the response consists of generic references, such as Wikipedia-listed entities or generic keywords like "Relief," "Foundation," "Zakat" [Islamic Donation], "Serving," or "Development." This outcome underscores a key limitation of AI-generated responses, where visibility often outweighs relevance and efficacy, leading to the exclusion of nonprofit groups that provide meaningful channels for charitable contributions but do not have digital footprints.

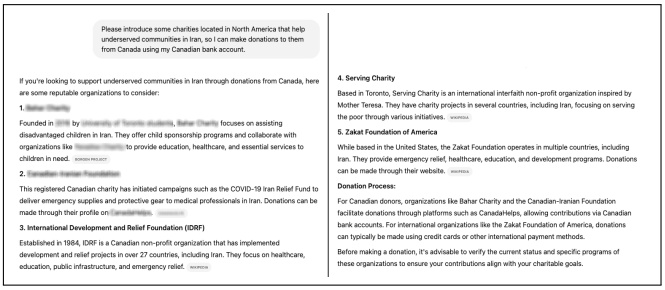

Figure 1: Representative example from our four-model AI landscape exploration. The query asked for suggestions of Iranian charities in North America. The response, dominated by SEO-optimized entities and generic categories, illustrates how AI outputs mirror existing visibility hierarchies.

In addition to delivering inefficient or incomplete information in the context of study, the language models reproduce the misinformation available on online data. P19 is a computer engineer who is also the president of a semi-formal charity group supporting the education of children. As he describes, not all the data available online is credible; the internet data often includes misinformation that puts heavy mental pressure on nonprofit volunteers and organizations.

> *The online data about charities is mixed with incorrect information. This type of conversation often gets out when a controversial incident happens that heats up the news. We are not connected to anyone. I'm worried about how AI is going to deliver this information.* (P19)

These findings show how legitimacy requirements and platform dependencies embed exclusion and alienation into nonprofit-specific tech platforms, shaping who becomes visible and legible to AI-mediated systems.

4.2 Epistemic Residual Mobilities: AI, Capacity, and Knowledge Circulation

Analysis of the interview data reveals that Iranian immigrant nonprofits often lack the capacity to adopt and maintain new technologies. Many rely on a few overstretched volunteers, leaving little time to explore or integrate technological tools. Language and

Cultural barriers, high volunteer turnover, and uneven AI fluency further hinder the adoption of the emerging AI technology. As a result, these organizations lag technologically, constraining their competitiveness and innovation. We conceptualize these capacity gaps as epistemic residual mobilities, as these groups continuously learn and experiment with new technologies, yet they must do so without stable access to training infrastructures, professional networks, or institutional support. As a result, their ability to adopt and shape AI technologies remains structurally constrained. It is a condition that reflects how mobility in knowledge, rather than physical movement alone, is unevenly distributed and persistently negotiated. We explain these capacity barriers below.

4.2.1 Language and Cultural Access. Language and cultural differences between immigrants and their host country, combined with limited digital literacy, create significant barriers to accessing nonprofit-related resources and professional support. To illustrate this point, Participant 9 shared an experience of connecting with an active member of a nonprofit networking association who was from a different racial and linguistic background. Her story highlights how added layers of separation, like language, race, and culture, hinder natural networking and complicate resource navigation, including technological resources.

> *"A friend of mine connected me to a member of the Doctors Without Borders organization, who knew a forum of resources beneficial to Nonprofit Organizations. They had an active community supporting each other for management, education, legal advice, available financial and tech resources, etc. I set up a meeting with her, and we had a nice chat. But the connection didn't continue. It's usually not the case with fellow-Iranians...sometimes the cultural and communication style differences make it harder to sustain these professional relationships"* (P9)

Such accounts highlight that these divides produce epistemic immobility, which impacts equal access to socio-technical infrastructure.

4.2.2 Volunteer Turnover and Knowledge Loss. As participants report, high Volunteer turnover and the subsequent loss of organizational knowledge are also key challenges for Iranian immigrant nonprofits. Participant 3 is the president of a large Canadian community-based charity that supports children in slums and remote areas by funding their education and basic needs. She shares her experience working with Iranian immigrant volunteers, who often face language barriers and higher turnover rates due to unstable living conditions.

> *"Many volunteers are newcomers struggling with English and unfamiliar with available resources. Once they settle, they often move on to other jobs, taking their knowledge with them. For example, a volunteer once suggested the Amazon Smile [donation matching] program, but left before we could follow up."* (P3)

Each volunteer departure severs the informal knowledge pipelines, leaving organizations perpetually re-learning lost skills. This turnover exemplifies residual epistemic immobility: knowledge trapped in transient personal networks rather than durable infrastructures.

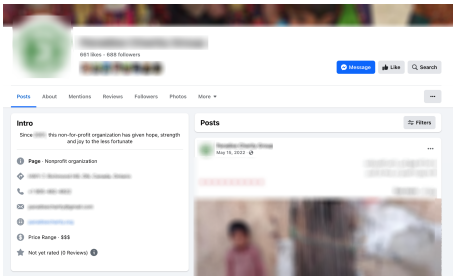

Figure 2: The profile of a leading charity organization on Facebook, led by immigrants of Iranian descent in North America. The profile has lacked content for three years, has a low number of followers, and currently holds no rating.

4.2.3 Uneven AI Fluency. The barriers mentioned above, along with digital literacy and age gaps, lead to uneven fluency in joining the AI technology train. While many nonprofit leaders are dedicated advocates for change and philanthropy, their limited digital literacy can hinder their use of digital tools. Explaining this point, participant 17 notes:

> *"We use [mobile] applications in our group, but the use is limited. I even sometimes use ChatGPT, but not all members are comfortable. When I mention a software, they say wait, I'll ask my son to install it for me."* (P17)

This disparity in AI proficiency within the study population persists while the influence of AI advancement grows across the digital world. Related to this broader pattern, P10 shared their experience using Instagram to advertise fundraising campaigns and how the platform's new AI-powered algorithms have affected their visibility:

> *It's becoming harder and harder to create content that reaches our audience. We struggle to design a poster or clip that gets attention. Most of the time, our posts don't get enough views because people's feeds are already filled with colorful, professionally made clips from other accounts, which don't give our posts a chance. It's almost a professional job now.* (P10)

P10's account highlights how AI-driven algorithms favor accounts with greater resources for producing polished digital content, placing additional burdens on nonprofits with inadequate capacity, and further marginalizing their visibility in competitive online spaces. Due to the uneven AI and digital fluency, these groups are further excluded from social media, nonprofit-specific digital tools, and AI-driven platforms [120, 122]. This pattern creates a vicious cycle of disempowerment, where the diminished digital presence limits their ability to attract volunteers, community support, and skilled personnel, further constraining their digital fluency and growth. As this cycle repeats, marginalized nonprofits become increasingly invisible.

Showing an example of this case, P13 mentions the Facebook fundraiser profile of a formally registered, high-impact charity run by Iranian immigrants with nearly two million dollars in revenue annually, illustrated in Figure 2. Despite its success, the page remains outdated, lacks engaging content, and is unrated, revealing

that even established Iranian nonprofits fall behind since they lack the human resources and the digital fluency to sustain a dynamic online presence. This is the representation of a large, officially recognized, and high-impact organization, signaling that the situation for informal groups is far more precarious, with many of them excluded from nonprofit databases and lacking a digital footprint. As the next wave of innovation driven by generative AI builds upon the existing internet data, participants fear a continuation of past patterns of exclusion -either due to lack of official status (discussed in 4.1.3), or due to systemic capacity gaps discussed in this section- where they remain invisible in the digital sphere and risk erasure from future technological landscapes.

4.3 Affective Residual Mobilities: AI, Trust, and Emotional Labor

The interviews with participants reveal recurring dilemmas in the day-to-day management of nonprofit organizations, which appear to be common across different types of groups. These dilemmas often involve trade-offs, requiring leaders to navigate competing factors. Below, we first outline some of the key dilemmas identified through the interviews, followed by an explanation of the role of AI technologies in this context. We conceptualize these dilemmas as affective residual mobilities, referring to the uneven and constrained circulation of trust and emotional labor that persists under conditions of residual mobility.

4.3.1 Transparency and Moral Accountability. Nonprofit groups are often expected to share detailed beneficiary information to enhance transparency and build trust, but this poses significant privacy risks to the beneficiaries. Sensitive data, such as photos and personal stories about critical illnesses or domestic abuse, can expose donation recipients, especially children, to long-term vulnerabilities, potentially impacting their future opportunities. This risk is amplified in the digital age, where content is permanently archived. Nonprofit executives must carefully balance transparency to encourage donations and protect beneficiaries' privacy to ensure dignity and respect. P3 shared a story illustrating how their organization navigated this trade-off:

> *"Once, I printed photos of the children and took them with me to a gathering with friends...everyone got so excited, and the majority of the children got people to send them funds monthly. However, we are constantly concerned about the dignity of the kids. Once, I asked beneficiary families for consent to use their child's photo in fundraisers, but some were very uncomfortable, even for the highest amount of money. Ultimately, we decided to use two generic photos found on Google for our fundraising campaigns: one depicting a little girl and the other a little boy. Then, we privately share a few real photos of the children only with individuals who have agreed to be recurring donors."* (P3)

The trade-off between transparency and privacy is particularly acute for immigrant nonprofits operating transnationally, where donors and volunteers are geographically distant from end beneficiaries. In these contexts, donors often lack opportunities to physically visit project sites or independently verify organizational claims, increasing their reliance on detailed information of beneficiaries and program outcomes. At the same time, such information is primarily conveyed through online channels, heightening risks to beneficiary privacy and dignity. This tension creates both pressure and opportunity for AI-driven solutions, yet also introduce new ethical and affective complexities. We discuss this point in greater detail in Section 4.3.3.

4.3.2 Informality and Trust-Building. Another dichotomy in nonprofit management lies between informality in operations [48] and systematization. By systematization, we refer to a more structured approach involving increased organizational structure, greater use of technology and automation, and/or formal legal standing. The term emphasizes not only the structured nature of this model but also its potential to widen the gap between leadership and the audience. It also highlights the added complexity compared to the flexible, informal management style that prioritizes ease and adaptability. In explaining this contrast, P8 highlights the importance of informal interactions in having trust in charity cases. She mentions the process of choosing a charity group for her birthday fundraiser as below:

> *"I think people trust my name better than a charity group profile that shares a fundraiser [so I posted the cause on my own profile]. I think the human touch is very important in trust. I even received donations from online friends whom I had never met in person."* (P8)

It is important to note that immigrant-led nonprofit collectives often serve a secondary function beyond advancing causes for external beneficiaries. These groups also operate as spaces of socialization, community building, and emotional replenishment for nonprofit workers themselves, many of whom are immigrants navigating life in a host country. This relational function is central to group sustainability, yet it introduces additional organizational complexity. Reflecting on this dynamic, P7 explains:

> *"I joined this group and found many volunteers to be close friends of each other, going to each other's homes and having camping trips. As an immigrant, it felt nice to find a new community to fill my emotional voids."* (P7)

At the same time, participants articulated tensions between informality and the need for systematization in managing core organizational tasks. P4 emphasized the importance of structure and rigor across website management, accounting, and content production, noting that excessive informality can undermine professionalism and accountability. Yet, he also underscored that volunteer-driven informality is indispensable to the organization's mission, given its affective and relational value:

> *"Volunteers are the 'embassies of trust' for our work. They're like the spices to the food. If you remove them, all the good feelings of the charity projects go away. That's a key element."* (P4)

Across participants, volunteers' human presence was consistently described as a bridge between the managerial core and the broader community, informally communicating trust and credibility. The importance of this relational layer calls for the cautious use of AI technology in automating the nonprofit operational tasks, to

avoid eroding the social and emotional infrastructures that sustain immigrant-led nonprofit work.

4.3.3 AI-Mediated Representation. Integrating AI into nonprofit workflows holds significant promise for enhancing efficiency, especially for labor-constrained organizations. All participants noted they already use AI to brainstorm event ideas, draft social media captions, seek preliminary legal advice, create contracts, and write grants. They also expressed aspirations to leverage AI technologies to train volunteers in social work principles, as well as to empower beneficiary families and youth by equipping them with AI-driven tools to develop new skills. Nevertheless, they expressed concerns about the rising use of AI algorithms, particularly through Large Language Models and automated content creation tools for generating images and text, which risks undermining essential human connections among nonprofits, volunteers, donors, and beneficiaries, as discussed in 4.3.1, and 4.3.2. They worried these efficiencies might compromise authenticity and transparency, diminish the community and human aspects around nonprofit work, and ultimately exacerbate disparities faced by marginalized nonprofits.

As explained in detail in section 4.3.1, nonprofits have long grappled with the dilemma of whether to use authentic photos of their beneficiaries in reports and social media posts to promote transparency, or to prioritize their privacy and dignity. During the interviews, participants were shown a curated set of twelve AI-generated fundraising images that had previously circulated in online nonprofit campaigns. This exercise invited reflection on how synthetic visuals shape perceptions of authenticity, emotion, and ethics in humanitarian communication. While some participants recognized the potential of such imagery to protect beneficiary privacy and also address nonprofits' graphic design needs, the majority described these images as lacking transparency, human touch, and emotional authenticity. They worried that the artificial aesthetics of AI visuals might alienate donors and erode the trust that authentic storytelling usually builds. Illustrating this point, P12 explained:

> *I don't think it's right to use AI to create posters. It doesn't have the human feelings necessary in our type of work. It's fake, and people recognize that. Above all, I don't think it's right to use people's emotions based on fake content. To protect their privacy, I'd rather show real photos of the beneficiaries with their faces blurred, or just show photos of our group's volunteers and the goods distributed, rather than using pictures made by ChatGPT.* (P12)

Among the photos were a set of publicly circulated AI-generated fundraising images that had appeared after the 2024 Bangladesh flood disaster (Figure 3) [161]. These images depicted children, pregnant women, and families in distress and were widely shared on social media to elicit sympathy and donations. Several participants immediately learned the images were synthetic and described feeling uneasy. They noted that the scenes seemed "too cinematic" or "too perfect," and that learning they were fabricated made them question the campaigns' integrity. The responses aligned with the global public backlash after these images were revealed as AI-generated, raising concerns about transparency, consent, and donor manipulation in humanitarian contexts [160]. This dialogue reinforced participants' belief that while AI could help protect privacy, its uncritical use risks eroding trust and emotional connection between donors and beneficiaries.

Participants' concerns about authenticity and emotional truth are closely intertwined with deeper representational biases embedded in AI systems. The same mechanisms that allow models to fabricate convincing humanitarian scenes also draw upon skewed and stereotypical data sources. As a result, AI content generation not only risks misleading audiences emotionally but also reinforces existing cultural, racial, and geopolitical biases in its depictions of suffering and need. To express this concern, P15 mentioned:

> *The recommendation systems are already unfair. Look how they are omitting the posts and stories about controversial political news. I believe many of the posts coming from nonprofits are already being filtered through their algorithms or de-prioritized. Now, imagine you use photos designed with AI in them. The AI will produce something with stereotypes, and then the algorithms filter the same thing.* (P15)

These dynamics of bias and misrepresentation were further exemplified in a recent case involving a UK-based charity that used AI-generated images to raise funds for Ethiopian children affected by the region's worst drought in fifty years (Figure 4). The images circulated on social media, where viewers quickly noted unrealistic visual details such as distorted hands, inconsistent jewelry, and even the presence of Ukrainian flag colors on clothing, and questioned the campaign's authenticity. Participants in our study raised similar concerns when shown these examples, questioning how donors could trust claims about the use of donations if authentic photographs of beneficiary children could not be shared. They further noted that such imagery not only felt deceptive but also reproduced stereotypical portrayals of poverty and helplessness in the Global South. This incident underscores how AI-generated visuals can encode geopolitical and cultural biases, perpetuate harmful tropes about marginalized groups, and blur ethical boundaries in humanitarian communication.

In addition to their impact on transparency, authenticity, and bias, AI-driven tools also affect another dichotomy nonprofits often navigate, as discussed in section 4.3.2: informality vs. systematization. AI can efficiently handle various tasks, such as brainstorming for events and fundraising campaigns [9], creating posters and video clips [7], responding to donor inquiries [16], and automating accounting processes [10, 15, 18, 44], among other tasks. It can also take over the task of customer relationship management (CRM), such as giving reports to donors or automatically following up with them to seek funds, which usually takes a considerable amount of time and energy from the nonprofit group members [5, 12]. AI-powered tools enable nonprofits to streamline operations and reduce reliance on human labor, a feature many participants expressed enthusiasm about for improving organizational efficiency. However, they also voiced concerns about the potential erosion of the informal, community-driven culture that fosters volunteer connections, builds trust, and unites people around a shared mission. As discussed in the section 4.3.2, a diminished volunteer presence threatens this community spirit, impedes the organic spread of

Figure 3: The AI-generated pictures circulated on social media following the Bangladesh flood disaster, raising controversies about the use of AI in a humanitarian context [161].

Figure 4: The AI-generated pictures used by a UK-based nonprofit organization, fundraising for Ethiopian children who are struggling with the worst drought in 50 years. It raises questions of bias and transparency [2, 85].

the nonprofit's message, and undermines the critical role volunteers play as unofficial ambassadors who build trust and credibility in ways that AI cannot replicate. Reflecting on this managerial dilemma, P11 shared:

> *During my time as a leader, I tried to push volunteers to be as organized as possible, asking them to use Slack channels for discussions and Google Docs for documentation. But after a while, they naturally reverted to informal ways of working. Then I realized that this informality, this sense of casual community among like-minded people, is actually part of what motivates volunteers to join these projects. So I stopped pushing. Now, I have the same concern with AI. The mere presence of volunteers creates a positive vibe in the group. Should we replace them with AI, even though we need the efficiency AI offers for our tasks?* (P11)

In summary, participants' reflections and visual elicitation with AI-generated fundraising photos in this section illustrate the risks and opportunities of AI-mediated nonprofit work in the Iranian immigrant population. Across these strands, a consistent pattern emerges: technologies that promise efficiency might compromise human authenticity and emotional attachment and reproduce bias if deployed uncritically. We interpret these tensions around AI-mediated nonprofit work as a condition of affective residual mobilities, in which emotions and representation circulate unevenly across human and algorithmic infrastructures. While AI tools enable Iranian immigrant nonprofits to operate more efficiently under severe labor constraints, they simultaneously disrupt the fragile affective flows through which trust, care, and human connection are produced and sustained. Under conditions of geopolitical marginalization and limited institutional legitimacy, these organizations must rely heavily on informality and affective work to establish trust; yet when mediated by AI, this work becomes vulnerable.

5 Discussion

In the preceding section, we identified three central themes emerging from the interviews and the complementary evidence that shape the experiences of Iranian immigrant nonprofits: the systemic exclusion of the studied groups from technological infrastructures and rising AI developments due to legitimacy barriers (infrastructural immobility), persistent capacity gaps and uneven AI fluency hindering technology adoption (epistemic immobility), and concerns surrounding transparency, informality, and AI-mediated representation in group management (affective immobility). Figure 5 shows a diagram that summarizes the key concepts in this study.

Taken together, these forms of infrastructural, epistemic, and affective immobility illustrate not isolated challenges but a patterned sociotechnical condition: immigrant nonprofits remain differentially exposed to the rigidities of algorithmic infrastructures while lacking the institutional legibility required to contest them. This dynamic positions AI not simply as a tool within their workflows that raises ethical concerns, but as a mobility-sorting force that amplifies dominant organizational forms [163], renders informal or marginal actors in the nonprofit sector algorithmically invisible, and reorganizes their possibilities for action. Building on this understanding, this section analyzes the implications of recent AI advancements within fractured nonprofit infrastructures, which are particularly critical given the disproportionate impact that algorithmic systems can exert on society's most vulnerable actors. As Alkhatib and Bernstein articulate in their seminal work on street-level algorithms [21], algorithmic systems often lack the reflexivity and contextual sensitivity characteristic of human decision-making in complex and situated contexts [108], despite the far-reaching consequences of their outputs. Below, we discuss the important role

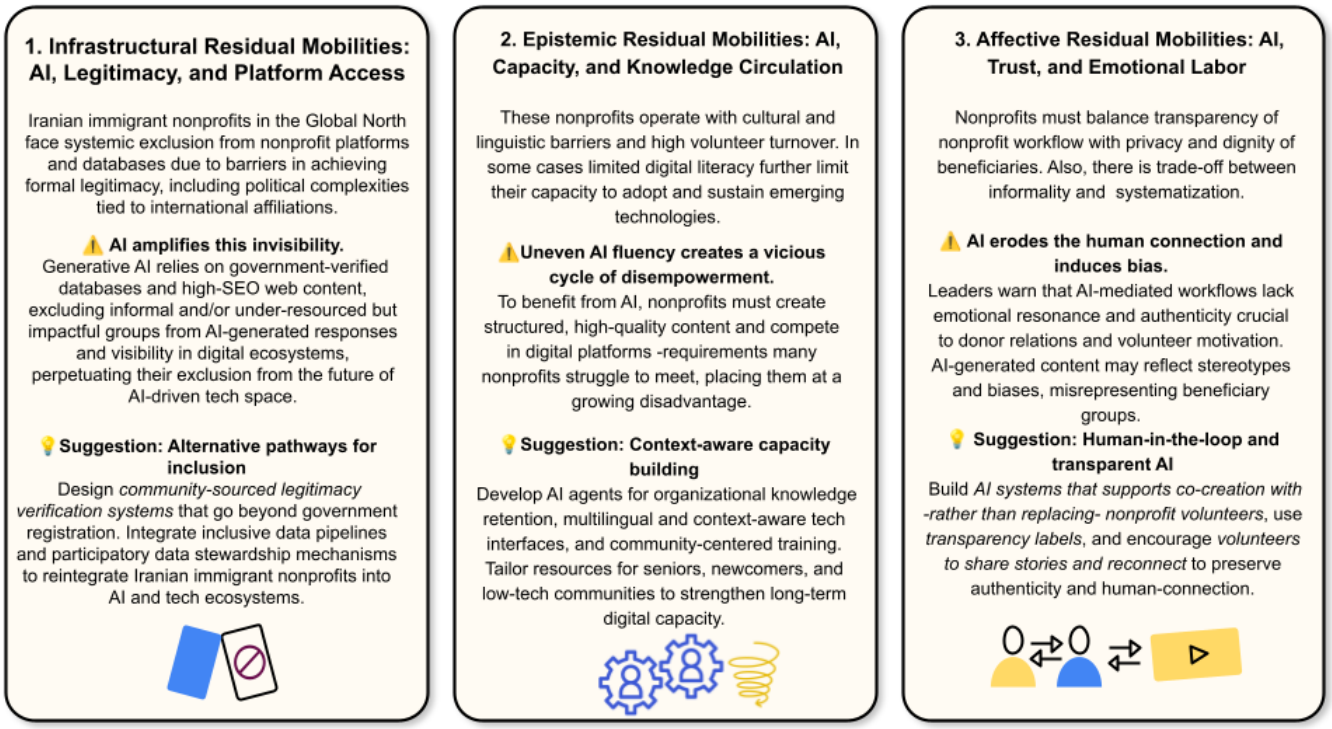

Figure 5: Socio-technical challenges faced by Iranian immigrant nonprofits, the marginalizing effects of AI, and design strategies for problem mitigation.

of design in addressing the challenges above, along with broader lessons for the HCI community.

5.1 Designing for Visibility, Knowledge Continuity, and Human Connection in Nonprofit Infrastructure

We next turn to the design implications that emerge from our findings. First, our study shows that contemporary nonprofit-specific digital platforms overwhelmingly operationalize the legitimacy of nonprofit groups through state-centric verification mechanisms. While these mechanisms are often presented as neutral safeguards of trust and accountability, they reproduce existing patterns of exclusion. This policy of technology platforms directly impacts the data visibility and representation of such informal groups in rapidly growing AI systems, especially Large Language Models (LLMs). These LLMs rely on training data to generate responses, often favor nonprofits with high online visibility, having more footprint on nonprofit-specific digital platforms, and better search engine optimization. They are, therefore, at risk of under-representing organizations that are high impact but less visible due to their formal legitimacy issues. We argue that the lack of data visibility is more severe for nonprofits working with non-English-speaking volunteers or immigrant communities, whose limited or non-English online presence further reduces the effectiveness of LLMs. This finding aligns with prior work demonstrating how standardized data infrastructures and verification regimes tend to privilege already-legible organizations while rendering alternative forms of collective action invisible or illegitimate [27, 38, 48, 120, 132]. Rather than treating legitimacy as a fixed attribute conferred solely through state-channels, our findings suggest the need for design approaches that recognize legitimacy as relational, situated, and co-produced within communities. One promising direction is the design of *network-of-trust* interfaces that surface and operationalize community-based forms of validation. Building on recent work [83], nonprofit-specific digital systems could learn trust signals from peer endorsements, volunteer histories, or collaboration traces among known organizations. Importantly, this approach shifts the locus of verification from centralized authorities to distributed social relations, while still allowing platforms to reason about credibility in structured ways. Complementing this approach, we could mention *participatory data stewardship* mechanisms that allow nonprofit actors to actively shape how they are represented within nonprofit datasets and AI systems. Consistent with long-standing traditions in participatory design [98, 143], such systems should be developed through meaningful engagement with nonprofit stakeholders, particularly those operating under political vulnerability. By verifying legitimacy through community networks, nonprofits can contest universalist or utilitarian design logics [34, 35] that marginalize non-dominant actors, a practice well aligned with and extending prior HCI and citizen science trends in community-based validation and disturbed governance systems [51, 95, 97, 145, 166].

Second, the findings illustrate that the Iranian immigrant nonprofits experience persistent knowledge discontinuity driven by language and cultural barriers, volunteer turnover, and uneven AI fluency. We argue that rather than framing this challenge as a lack of skill or expertise in this population, we need systems that recognize the immigrants' diverse needs, acknowledge the volunteer-run nature of the nonprofit sector, which induces some uncertainty and knowledge loss, and actively support context-aware empowerment of nonprofit workers in the fast-changing digital world. One design direction inspired by prior work emphasizing proactive documentation and organizational learning [57] involves *AI-supported knowledge-retention agents* that proactively capture and summarize volunteers' experiences and workflows, transforming them into organizational resources that preserve contextual insights for incoming volunteers, mitigating the fragmentation of institutional memory [162]. In parallel, digital tools should offer *context-sensitive technology interfaces* that adapt to users' linguistic, cultural, and digital proficiency levels, to promote equity and inclusion in the nonprofit sector. Such a design, which is substantially supported in HCI scholarship [58, 74, 96, 113, 127, 138, 153], ensures accessibility for those often excluded from standard digital training materials. Finally, capacity building should be understood as a collective, not individual, endeavor. Building on the vast literature on learning and capacity building [52, 84, 100, 169], and prior work that encourages immigrants to build skills and knowledge through peer networks overlooked by formal institutions [105], we recommend *community-centered learning hubs* - whether virtual or physical - that connect similar nonprofit groups to share resources, mentorship, and administrative knowledge. Collectively, these strategies transform technology from a tool of automation into an enabler of continuity and community resilience, extending prior work on infrastructuring as an ongoing, relational practice [94, 98].

Finally, we turn to the implications of our findings for how AI systems may mediate nonprofit activities of Iranian immigrant groups. Our study shows that while generative AI is often adopted for operational efficiency, it poses concerns about diluted human connection [89], inauthentic representation, and the amplification of stereotypes through algorithmic bias [43, 47]. These concerns echo broader critiques of AI systems that prioritize automation at the expense of situated knowledge, authenticity, and meaning [89, 93, 137, 171]. Our findings inspire design directions that foreground nonprofit members as active co-creators and final decision-makers within AI-mediated workflows, preserving human feeling in the system and safeguarding ethical values in response to algorithmic bias and artificiality in AI-generated content. Preserving human connection is particularly important for immigrant-based nonprofit groups, where organizations function not only as sites of service provision but also as spaces of collective care, and where collaborative work plays a relational role in supporting volunteers' well-being and identity formation. Moreover, the transnational nature of this work -marked by geographical distance between donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries- heightens demands for transparency and underscores the continued importance of human involvement in nonprofit workflows. One key design direction - inspired by substantial literature in HCI -is to embed *human-AI co-creation practices* that allow nonprofit members to review, refine, and approve AI-generated outputs, ensuring that contextual knowledge and ethical judgment guide automated content [22, 23, 65, 76, 107, 129]. In parallel, responsible interaction design urges designers to make AI's role transparent and legible [70, 75, 104]. *Transparency toolkits* that label or certify AI-generated content, distinguishing synthetic from authentic materials, can help mitigate concerns around authenticity and misrepresentation, aligning with recent calls for stakeholder-centered responsible AI design [92]. Finally, our findings caution against using AI to replace the relational labor at the heart of nonprofit work. Instead, intelligent systems should sustain community participation by prompting volunteers to share stories, reflect on their contributions, or reconnect through gentle nudges. This perspective -grounded in human-centered AI research that highlights augmentation over automation and preserving human agency in human-AI co-creation [46, 81, 130]- repositions AI as a co-creative partner that supports ethical transparency while safeguarding the authenticity and trust that underpin nonprofit action.

5.2 Designing for Immigrant Identity, Collective Collaboration, and Recognition

Our study contributes to the growing body of work on migration within HCI by extending the analytical lens from individual migrants' experiences, especially those of settlement, to the organizational practices of immigrant-led nonprofits. Prior research has emphasized the challenges of immigrants' settlement, trust, belonging, and access to civic infrastructures at the level of individuals and households [24, 87, 101, 133]. Scholars have documented how newcomers develop trust through hybrid online-offline interactions [87], how older migrants maintain social convoys across life courses [101], and how young forced migrants adapt to participatory design settings under precarious conditions [24]. By contrast, our work focuses on immigrant-led charitable organizations; entities that operate at once as infrastructures of belonging and collective care work. In doing so, we respond to recent calls to broaden migration-HCI beyond the individual subject toward infrastructural and communal perspectives [133, 135, 167].

In this work, we also argue that the central struggle of Iranian immigrant nonprofit groups extends from a lack of access to digital platforms to questions of recognition, infrastructural invisibility, and AI-mediated exclusion. Prior HCI research has documented how migrants face bureaucratic entanglements and opaque digital systems in accessing welfare or legal services [54, 68]. We extend this line of work by demonstrating how Iranian immigrant nonprofits become subject to these bureaucratic frictions. Similar to prior work that enabled civic participation in refugee accommodation processes [121], we argue that the use of AI in the nonprofit sector must function as participatory infrastructure, supporting informality, inclusion, and shared governance across communities and institutions.

5.3 Designing for Residual Mobilities in Immigrant-led Nonprofit Work

Across interviews, interactions with AI-generated imagery, and system-level exploration, our findings reveal that Iranian immigrant nonprofits experience marginalization not as isolated administrative failures and resource constraints, but as residual immobilities within digital and bureaucratic infrastructures [20, 151].

Residual mobilities highlight how displacement, whether physical, social, or digital, can disrupt access to key infrastructures and reinforce systemic marginalization. The majority of Iranian immigrant nonprofits, similarly, operate on the periphery of technological systems [106], navigating exclusions that render them invisible in databases and deprive them of equitable access to critical tools. In this system, AI-driven technologies are not merely tools or biased classifiers; they function as infrastructures that actively govern mobility by determining who becomes visible, trusted, and recognized, and who remains at the margins.

These residual immobilities are not limited to formal exclusion from registries or platform infrastructures; they also shape the knowledge discontinuities that define everyday nonprofit operations. Volunteer turnover, uneven AI fluency, and fragile organizational memory are often framed as internal deficits, yet our findings show that they emerge through what Leonardi terms imbrication–the mutually shaping relationship in which human routines and material technologies progressively constrain and enable one another over time [102]. Iranian immigrant nonprofits continually improvise documentation practices, repurpose generic digital tools, or work around rigid interfaces, and these situated accommodations recursively reshape how their infrastructures function. Thus, residual immobilities accumulate not only from displacement or geopolitical constraints, but also from the frictions generated when flexible, volunteer-driven routines meet inflexible or under-designed technological systems. This perspective reframes capacity gaps as infrastructural effects rather than human shortcomings and underscores the need for systems that co-evolve with the adaptive, relational, and transnational nature of immigrant-led nonprofit work.

By connecting the concept of residual mobilities with interactive system design, this paper repositions democratization from a policy goal to a design practice, suggesting democratizing design implications that allow users to challenge and improve the current state of technology and AI in the margins of the nonprofit sector.

6 Conclusion

This study sheds light on the systemic challenges faced by nonprofit groups run by immigrants of Iranian descent in adopting AI-driven tools and navigating the tech-enabled nonprofit ecosystem. These groups encounter exclusion from nonprofit-specific platforms, inequities in tech adoption, and ethical dilemmas exacerbated by AI technologies. Through the lens of residual mobilities, this study demonstrates how AI systems mirror and magnify infrastructural immobilities in the nonprofit sector, bridging migrant studies and interactive AI design. We emphasize the risk of perpetuating existing disparities as AI evolves, privileging well-resourced nonprofits over those struggling with digital visibility or lacking formal status. To address these inequities, we propose inclusive design approaches such as community-driven verification mechanisms, capacity-building initiatives, and AI frameworks that value human connection in this sector. By doing so, the nonprofit sector can better integrate emerging AI technologies while safeguarding its human-centric values. This work contributes to ongoing discussions on migration, collaborative technologies, and responsible AI design, ensuring technology serves as a tool for collective agency rather reinforcing marginalization.

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