




ROUNDTABLE SERIES


MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

Bridging paths towards strengthening protection and participation



The Use of New Technologies for Promoting Mental Health, Accompaniment, and Support to Improve the Lives of Older Persons

 **27** June 2024

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With the support of:

This document has been prepared by the **Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR**, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Fengzhi Huang, Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team and Ms. Julieth Vital and Israel Ledesma, Graphic Designers.

We hope you enjoy it!



MODERATOR

Mr. Alex Mejia

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SPEAKERS

Focus: The future opportunities for digital transformation in an ageing society



Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu

Senior Coordinator Digital inclusion
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

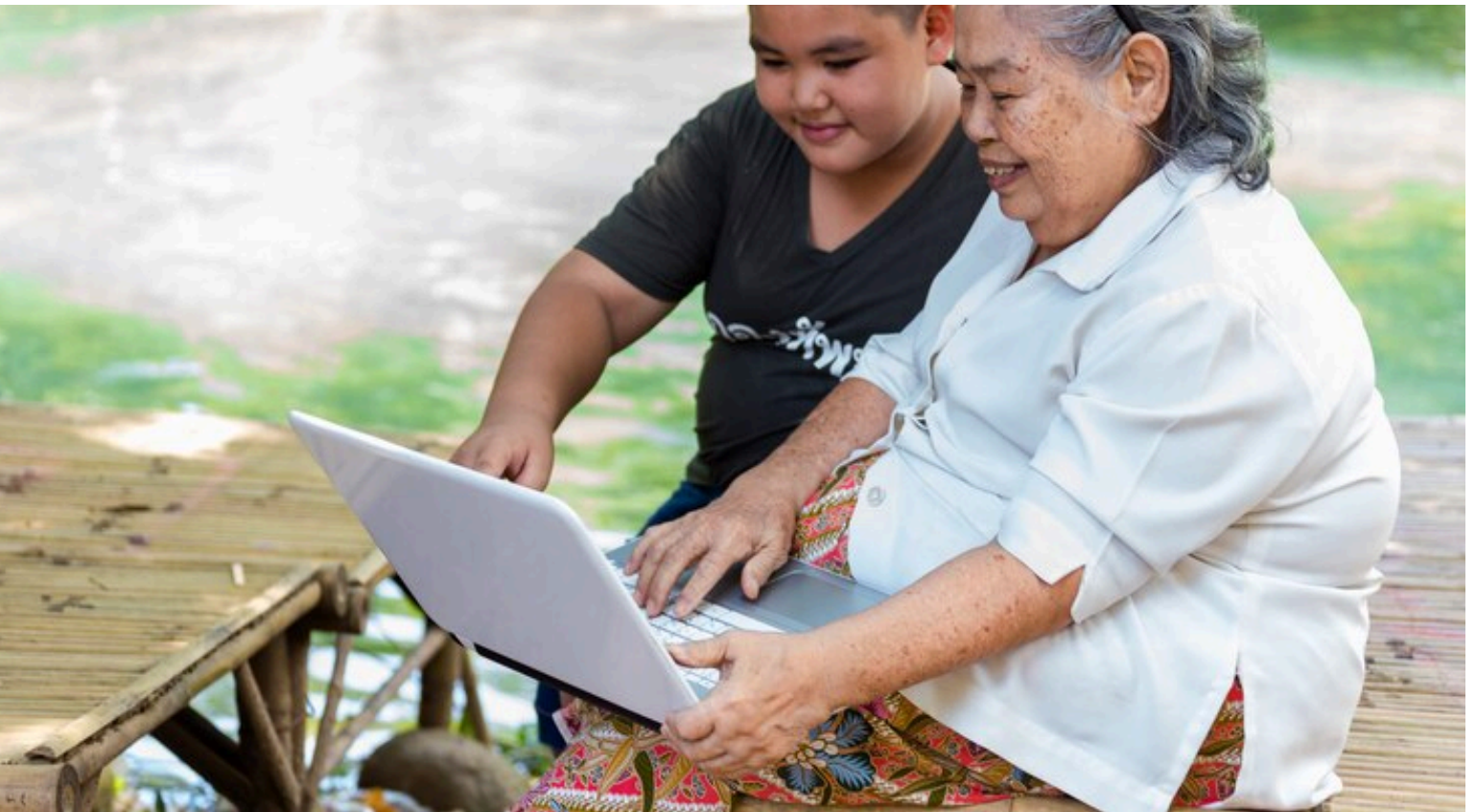
“Information and communication technology, when built with digital accessibility and universal design, can fundamentally transform our digital environment, making it more accessible and affordable, thus contributing to a healthier, more active, and empowered life for all.”

- 1 Technology provides exciting opportunities for everyone, including older persons, enabling a healthy ageing environment. Essential services like telehealth and mobile applications ensure that older persons can maintain good health. This digital transformation is crucial as it offers new ways to support the ageing population, improving their overall well-being and quality of life.
- 2 The private sector, particularly the technology industry, sees these opportunities as attractive business ventures, driving innovation and growth in this market. With two-thirds of the global population projected to be 60 and above in the next 30 years, there is a clear business incentive to develop digital services and applications for older persons.
- 3 The silver economy underscores the need for countries to adapt to this digital evolution. In 2017, the global market for older care technology was valued at \$5 billion, and by 2022, it reached \$30.6 billion, with a growth rate of nearly 20%. This transformation requires integrating human rights into digital components, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity.
- 4 Emerging technologies like AI can significantly enhance mental health support for older persons by providing easy access to professional services and personalized applications. These technologies facilitate social interactions, reduce loneliness, and offer cognitive and memory support through virtual companions and smart home systems. ICT (Information and Communications Technology) advancements ensure consistent mental health care, promote independence, and improve overall well-being by making health services and daily tasks more accessible and efficient.
- 5 Joint efforts from organizations, government, the private sector, and academia should ensure accessibility for all individuals, regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic status. Inclusive digital policies and strategies can be developed with an intersectional approach, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and partnership.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF ITU

The ITU is fully committed to contributing to the success of the UN Decade on Healthy Ageing by advocating for inclusive digital policies and strategies, raising awareness, developing guidelines and strategy advice, sharing good practices, and strengthening the capacity of its members to use ICTs. These efforts aim to develop innovative solutions with economic and social benefits, turning the ageing society challenge into a significant opportunity.





DID YOU KNOW?

In Singapore, older persons have the opportunity to return to school and interact with their grandchildren or students from neighboring schools to learn basic digital skills, enhancing digital literacy and promoting digital wellness among the elderly population. Initiated by Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) in 2010, the Intergen IT Bootcamp was created in collaboration with schools and community partners to bridge the digital divide.

The Intergen IT Bootcamp, in collaboration with the Council for Third Age (C3A) and organized by Family Central, aims to foster intergenerational bonding by matching youths and older persons in a group learning environment. Youths from various educational levels act as cyber-guides, teaching older persons basic computer skills and social networking tools like Skype and Facebook. This initiative not only helps older persons stay digitally connected but also allows youths to apply their knowledge practically, building character and values such as respect for their elders.

REMEMBER

Inclusive digital policies are essential in an ageing society to ensure that older persons can fully participate in the digital world. As technology increasingly becomes integral to everyday life, it's vital that older persons are not left behind. These policies promote accessibility, addressing barriers that may hinder older persons from using digital tools effectively. By fostering an inclusive digital environment, we empower older persons to maintain their independence, improve their quality of life, and stay connected with family and friends. Moreover, inclusive strategies encourage innovation that caters specifically to the needs of older persons, ultimately benefiting society as a whole by leveraging the skills and experiences of this growing demographic.

USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about "Ageing in a digital world" by visiting the official webpage of the ITU | [Link](#)
- The Intergen IT Bootcamp by Infocomm Media Development Authority | [Link](#)



Focus: Cyber risks for the ageing population in the use of new technology



Mr. Belisario Contreras

Coordinator
Digi Americas Alliance

“Since new technology is, and has been, a game changer, privacy protection is crucial not only for the ageing population but for everyone.”

- 1 The ageing population represents a significant portion of the GDP in several countries. For both economic and inclusion reasons, proactive actions are needed to raise awareness about the unique needs and challenges faced by this demographic. This includes enhancing technology safety, identifying potential risks, and making technology easier to use for older persons.
- 2 Mental health is crucial for the well-being of older persons, who often face isolation and loneliness. Early proactive engagement and the use of new technologies, like telemedicine, are transformative, significantly improving care delivery, enhancing quality of life, and promoting longer, healthier lives through remote professional assessments.
- 3 However, the increasing reliance on technology also brings vulnerabilities, especially regarding the privacy and security of data collected from older persons using wearable devices and telemedicine. Ensuring proper safeguards, privacy regulations and consent mechanisms is essential to protect this sensitive information from misuse by third parties, especially for older persons relying on devices for personalized care.
- 4 The combination of mobile applications, wearable devices, and telemedicine serves as a game changer, significantly changing people’s mindset and life. Most internet interaction occurs through mobile devices, which include numerous applications designed to supporting mental health and well-being, such as reminders for physical activities and meditation practices accessible through wearable devices.
- 5 Government and the private sector are urged to join forces in fostering comprehensive frameworks of proper standards, regulations, and robust risk management procedures. These efforts are essential to effectively harness technology for safeguarding the well-being and security of older persons.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE DIGI AMERICAS ALLIANCE

The Digi Americas Alliance is a multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary network of organizations from diverse sectors interested in cyber and digital issues. It aims to gather and coordinate input from its members to shape digital policy and address technical issues throughout the Americas.





DID YOU KNOW?

Telemedicine has become more prevalent in Latin American countries, broadening access to care in both public and private systems, allowing patients to access care at a lower cost than an “in-person” visit to a medical office. It has even been found to aid in early diagnosis of diseases and reduce recovery time. Within Latin America, Ecuador, Chile, and Uruguay have been pioneers in the application of telemedicine services, including the development of legal frameworks to regulate its use.

Latin America’s demographic composition can be viewed as advantageous for the use of new technologies in the implementation of healthcare, as the presence of many young people in the region may reflect a greater willingness to use these technologies. However, older persons and residents of rural areas may require educational processes to adapt to new technological tools such as telemedicine services.

REMEMBER

Older persons have significant health needs and concerns. Due to cognitive ageing and Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Diseases (ADRD), they are more susceptible to deceptive marketing. These factors make them prime targets for online health scams, with disadvantaged older persons at the highest risk of privacy-related harms. Given these risks, ongoing research and advocacy must be paired with efforts to identify and address threats to their data privacy.

USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about cybersecurity lessons from Latin America's battle against ransomware threats | [Link](#)



Focus: Human rights of older persons in the digital world



Ms. Silvia Perel-Levin

INPEA, ILC GA, & Geneva NGO Committee on Ageing

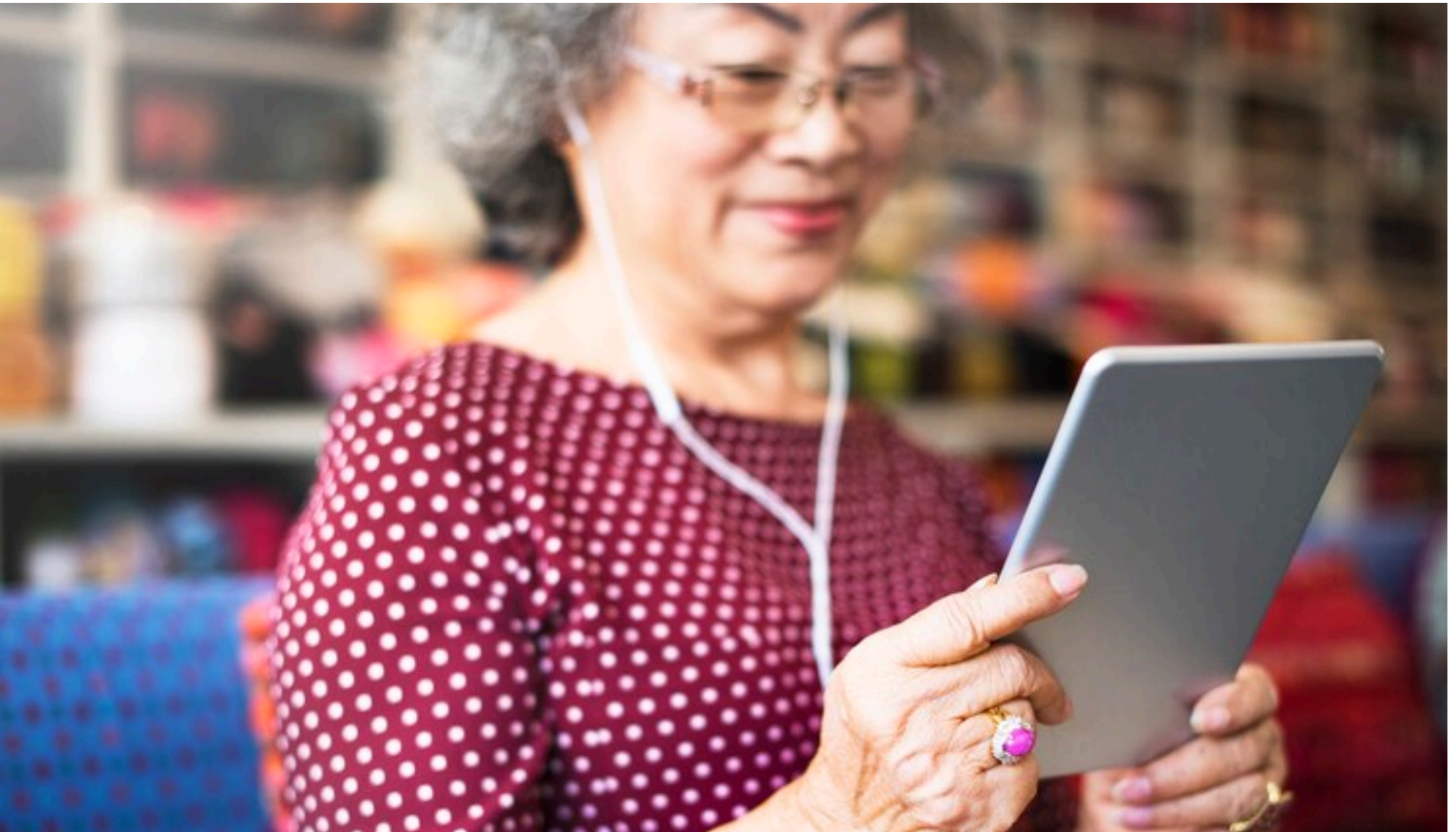
“A human rights-based approach that emphasizes participation and accountability would ensure that technology serves as a means for inclusion rather than a tool that risks further segregation and exclusion.”

- 1 Technologies have the potential to enhance the well-being of older persons by improving social connectivity and reducing isolation. A human rights-based approach ensures technology promotes inclusion, while over-reliance on technology risks increasing social isolation.
- 2 Older persons should actively participate as co-designers and co-producers of new technologies rather than being seen merely as passive users. Inclusion in the design and use of these technologies ensures they meet the actual needs and preferences of older persons, rather than treating them solely as a market for selling new apps and devices.
- 3 Informed consent is crucial in using assistive technologies, allowing older persons to opt out at any time. Respect for autonomy and consent is essential for maintaining dignity and protecting human rights. Consent should be appropriately obtained without undue influence, ensuring older persons are fully informed about technology use.
- 4 Older persons are not merely recipients of tech knowledge from younger generations; many excel in tech careers and educate peers of all ages. Digital literacy encompasses media literacy, addresses biases, and ensures access to training in tech tools, challenging ageist stereotypes about their ability to learn and understand technology effectively.
- 5 Governments must uphold human rights principles by ensuring service providers comply accordingly. Adopting a convention on the rights of older persons, encompassing emerging technologies and addressing biases, is essential to combat discrimination and promote digital inclusion for all ages.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE INPEA

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) is a nonprofit organization that aims to increase society's ability, through international collaboration, to recognize and respond to the mistreatment of older persons in whatever setting it occurs, so that the later years of life will be free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation while at the same time acknowledging the diversity of culture, background, and life style of the world population.





FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As technology evolves rapidly, it brings both opportunities and challenges for older persons. Including provisions for emerging technologies within a convention on the rights of older persons would ensure that older persons have equitable access to and benefit from advancements in areas such as digital healthcare, communication tools, and assistive technologies. It would also safeguard against potential risks such as data privacy violations, algorithmic biases, and digital exclusion due to age-related barriers.

Such a convention will establish a universal standard for protecting the rights of older persons in the context of emerging technologies. It compels governments to develop inclusive policies that promote digital literacy among older populations, support their access to technology, and ensure their voices are heard in technology design and implementation processes. This not only enhances the quality of life for older persons but also contributes to building more inclusive societies where technological advancements benefit everyone, regardless of age.

DO NOT FORGET

A human rights-based approach guarantees that older persons have the right to participate in and benefit from the digital society without discrimination or barriers. It ensures that older persons' privacy and dignity are preserved in the digital realm, safeguarding against risks such as data exploitation and algorithmic biases. By embedding ICTs access within a human rights framework, governments and policymakers can create policies that promote digital literacy, bridge the digital divide, and foster an inclusive society where older persons can thrive and contribute actively.

USEFUL SOURCES

- Report on “Strengthening Older Persons’ Rights: Towards a UN Convention” | [Link](#)



Focus: Attention on brain health in the ageing society



Mme. Silvia Neira

Vice President
Global Initiative on Ageing Foundation (GIA)

“The growing number of older persons, including more 80-year-olds than ever before, presents an opportunity that should be embraced with effective health-focused prevention strategies, despite any prevailing negative sentiments.”

- 1 Addressing brain health is essential for fostering an inclusive society and ensuring individuals of all ages feel valued and purposeful within their families and communities. Brain health, spanning from youth anxiety to senior dementia and Alzheimer's, directly impacts personal well-being and work capacity. The substantial financial losses due to brain health disorders underscore the urgency of comprehensive strategies to promote cognitive well-being.
- 2 Technology should be developed to educate older persons on preventative measures and self-care, easing the burden on their families and communities amidst numerous severe Alzheimer's cases. Empowered by the new technology, primary healthcare providers such as nurses and caregivers can offer timely diagnostics and preventive care, enhancing brain health and quality of life while reducing healthcare costs through accessible, effective solutions.
- 3 Teaching youth simple brain health methodologies empowers them for the future, creating a knowledgeable community. Prioritizing brain health from a young age improves physical health, community involvement, and inclusivity, ensuring they can continue contributing to the workforce and society as they age.
- 4 Labor inclusion provides older persons the opportunity to remain employed as long as they wish, promoting inclusivity. People's mindsets must shift to recognize that older persons can continue working and offer solutions to many crises. Valuing their knowledge and experience is crucial, as those who came before have much to contribute to current and future challenges.
- 5 Private and public sectors can collaborate to advocate for inclusive policies and technologies that support older persons' financial independence and active labor market participation. Addressing age-based discrimination and leveraging digital solutions like flexible working hours can enhance opportunities for aging and longevity. Cross-sector collaboration accelerates the global implementation of these initiatives, helping evaluate effective strategies.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE GIA

The Global Initiative on Ageing (GIA) was conceived by a group of civic leaders in several countries, in coordination with different institutions of the United Nations. The objective of GIA is to work on an articulated strategy to address the issues of ageing from different perspectives that take into account human rights, labor issues, health, education and science. GIA's outreach is enhanced by partners in several countries and by virtual learning and policy platforms.





INTERESTING PRACTICE

In recent years, a noticeable trend has emerged in the entrepreneurial landscape: more and more ageing individuals are starting new businesses and achieving remarkable success. This shift challenges conventional wisdom about retirement and ageing, highlighting a dynamic and resilient demographic eager to contribute their skills and experience to the business world.

One of the key reasons behind the success of senior entrepreneurs is their wealth of experience. After decades in various professions and roles, older persons bring a deep reservoir of knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and industry insights that are invaluable in starting and growing a business. This experience often gives them a competitive edge, allowing them to identify gaps in the market, understand consumer needs, and make informed decisions based on years of real-world experience.

The rise of senior entrepreneurs reflects a broader societal shift towards embracing the capabilities and contributions of older persons in the workforce and beyond. As they defy stereotypes of ageing and retirement, senior entrepreneurs demonstrate resilience, creativity, and a determination to remain actively engaged in economic and social spheres.

IMPORTANT

Shifting societal mindsets to recognize that older persons can continue working is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and productive society. With years of experience, wisdom, and expertise, older persons can offer unique insights and skills that complement those of younger generations. Embracing their continued participation in the workforce not only strengthens businesses by diversifying their talent pool but also enriches workplace culture through intergenerational collaboration. Moreover, enabling older persons to remain active in their careers enhances their financial security, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. By challenging ageist stereotypes and creating inclusive work environments that support older persons, we create opportunities for lifelong learning, professional growth, and sustained economic contributions across generations.

USEFUL SOURCES

- Find information on the Global Initiative on Ageing (GIA) | [Link](#)



Focus: Technology transition in ageing



Prof. Andrew Sixsmith

Director, STAR Institute
Professor, Department of Gerontology,
Gerontology Department,
Simon Fraser University

"The main challenge in addressing ageing is not the research itself, but rather transforming that research into products and services that will make a real-world impact."

- 1 Efforts should be taken on the whole range of technologies that supporting an ageing society, not just technologies about health and ageing. These include inclusive technologies for living at home, smart home solutions, community-based technologies, and workplace innovations for an increasingly ageing workforce adapting to rapid technological changes.
- 2 The workforce is ageing rapidly, and the world of work is evolving swiftly, presenting significant adaptation challenges for both individuals and the workforce as a whole. Inclusive technology is essential to address these changes, rather than relying on exclusive approaches. Embracing inclusive technology will ensure that all members of the workforce can participate fully and benefit from advancements, fostering a more adaptable and resilient working environment.
- 3 Despite significant research efforts, the primary challenge remains translating research findings into real-world products and services. Many related projects did not progress beyond the initial stages, highlighting the gap between theoretical research and practical application, which calls for the need for better mechanisms to bridge this critical transition.
- 4 The focus needs to be on supporting research and connecting it effectively to the innovation pipeline, from initial stages through to commercialization. Small and medium enterprises and startups often face challenges like the "valley of death" and geographic barriers in this process. It is crucial to help them overcome these hurdles and develop products that attract investment while maintaining an ethical focus on improving the quality of life and health of older persons.
- 5 Training program emphasizes understanding technology within its socio-technical context. Technologies should be tailored to individual needs, considering their living situations and social contexts. The contextual awareness is crucial for effective technology application.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF GERONTOLOGY DEPARTMENT, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

The faculty members of Department of Gerontology, Simon Fraser University are internationally known researchers in the areas of population aging, health care and health promotion, built environment, dementia care, families and community, technology, and the study of ethno-cultural and vulnerable group topics. They are active in knowledge translation activities and other engagements with various entities in the broader community, such as seniors' care and service providers, non-profit organizations, regional health authorities, local and federal governments.





TO BEAR IN MIND

As the global population ages, inclusive technology emerges as a vital solution to the challenges faced by older persons. By prioritizing accessibility and user-friendliness, inclusive technology enables them to navigate essential services, maintain their independence, and enhance their quality of life. From telehealth platforms that facilitate healthcare access to smart home devices that promote safety and security, these innovations address the specific needs of the ageing population. By harnessing the power of technology to create an adaptable and supportive environment, we can empower older persons to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

DO NOT FORGET

Training is essential for raising awareness of the context in which technology is applied in an ageing society. As the demand for innovative solutions to support older persons grows, training programs help stakeholders—including older persons, caregivers, and investors—grasp the unique challenges and opportunities within this demographic.

By equipping individuals with knowledge about the specific social and health needs of older persons, training fosters a more informed dialogue around technology deployment. This awareness not only enhances the effectiveness of technological applications but also demonstrates to investors the potential for impactful and profitable innovations in the ageing sector. As a result, strategic training initiatives can create a compelling case for investment, driving advancements that benefit both society and the economy.

USEFUL SOURCES

- Article “Technology, aging, and mental health: opportunities and challenges” | [Link](#)



Focus: Prospects of ongoing technological development for ageing society



Dr. Michael Ashley Stein

Co-founder and Executive Director of the Harvard Law School Project on Disability, Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School

"It's a vastly different world in 2024 compared to the early 1990s when email emerged as a groundbreaking innovation. Back then, we had the choice to opt in or opt out of using technologies. Soon, however, we may find ourselves with no choice but to embrace them."

- 1 The digital world has become integral to daily life, with technologies like smartphones and apps becoming essential for accessing services such as medical records and banking, leaving us with little choice but to adapt, despite the need for more inclusive options.
- 2 Marginalized older persons often lag behind in technology adoption in today's rapidly advancing technological landscape. The complexities inherent in digital devices, coupled with concerns over privacy and the prevalence of exclusionary practices, contribute to their difficulties.

While technology enhances social connections and access to information, it also risks increasing social isolation and loneliness, particularly if physical interactions decrease. Despite the benefits of digital communication, it cannot replace the need for real-world social connections, as humans are social animals.
- 3 Inclusivity is essential because many technologies exclude people with disabilities and older persons. Given human diversity and complexity, technology development must involve experienced individuals to ensure equitable and inclusive solutions for everyone, which prevents AI from reinforcing inequalities by favoring privileged individuals.
- 4 The rapid advancement of technology and science has outpaced regulatory frameworks, creating a significant gap that leaves many people excluded. This lag in regulations underscores the challenges in ensuring inclusivity, as people are struggling to keep up with the evolving technological landscape. The effort to make technology inclusive is falling far behind, leaving marginalized groups without the necessary support and access.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PROJECT ON DISABILITY

HPOD has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to empowering civil society and other actors by fostering knowledgeable and discerning advocacy for Human Rights. Their endeavors encompass a range of activities, including the provision of comprehensive human rights training and education, the facilitation of international law and policy development, the promotion of inclusive practices in development, the dissemination of technical assistance pertaining to strategic litigation, and the cultivation of innovative perspectives regarding the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their entitlement to human rights.





FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In an increasingly digital world, the need for physical interaction remains essential from a humanist perspective. While technology offers unprecedented connectivity and convenience, it cannot fully replicate the depth and richness of face-to-face interactions that form the foundation of our social and emotional well-being. Physical presence fosters empathy, strengthens relationships, and nurtures a sense of community, all of which are vital for our mental and emotional health. As human beings, we thrive on the subtle nuances of body language, touch, and shared experiences that digital interactions often lack. By valuing and maintaining physical interaction, we uphold the core humanist principle that our connections and communal bonds are fundamental to a fulfilling and meaningful life.

IMPORTANT

Technology and science have advanced at an unprecedented pace, outstripping the development of corresponding regulations designed to govern their use. To ensure that technological and scientific developments benefit everyone, it is crucial to implement inclusive regulations that address accessibility, equity, and ethical considerations. By aligning regulatory measures with the cutting-edge nature of today’s innovations, we can create a more inclusive and just society, where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from technological progress and scientific breakthroughs.

USEFUL SOURCES

- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | [Link](#)





Decade of healthy ageing



Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



With the support of:



GLOBAL ALLIANCE
INTERNATIONAL LONGEVITY CENTRE
Designing the Future of Ageing

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