COMMISSION for SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Where Generations Meet:
A Joint UN DESA Programmes on Youth and Ageing Side Event

Bridging the Intergenerational Equity Gap: Discussing Inequality in AI Access, Use and Benefits

Friday 14 February 2025, 1:15 to 2:30 p.m.
Conference Room 9, UN Headquarters, New York
Watch Live: UN Web TV

Background

Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds the potential to transform healthcare, education, and social services, offering new solutions to pressing challenges. However, unequal access to AI technologies, potential biases in their development, and the uneven distribution of their benefits pose significant risks of deepening existing inequalities and creating new forms of exclusion across generations. For young people struggling with mental health issues, the use of AI in mental health apps and other automated support processes might produce generalized advice that does not take into account age-specific issues and contextual backgrounds of young users. This could lead to ineffective or harmful guidance for youth from different backgrounds, increasing vulnerability rather than providing proper support. When it comes to distribution of social

services, AI can inadvertently exclude vulnerable youth if it uses an algorithm that misinterpret the complexity of a young person's situation due to their very short data history, and therefore it may deny them access to critical support like housing or food assistance. For older persons, inequality in AI access, use, and benefits arises from multiple barriers that limit their ability to fully engage with and benefit from technological advancements. They often face challenges such as lower digital literacy rates, limited access to affordable technology, and ageist biases embedded in AI systems. For example, older persons are frequently excluded from market research, design processes, and testing phases for AI technologies. This exclusion is often rooted in ageist stereotypes, such as the perception that older persons are forgetful, rigid in thought, less motivated, less dynamic, frail, ill, dependent, or incompetent. A common stereotype is that older persons lack interest in digital health technologies or are not capable of using AI tools. Such biases lead to unilateral exclusion, disempowering older persons and perpetuating stigmatization within the AI sector.[1]

These risks, if left unaddressed, threaten social cohesion and highlight the urgency of bridging the equity gap in AI to ensure it benefits all members of society, regardless of age.

Objective

This side event is sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Chile and Portugal to the United Nations in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Global Coalition on Aging (GCoA) and Tech Runway Africa. It aligns with the priority theme of the 63rd session of the Commission for Social Development, on strengthening solidarity, social inclusion, and social cohesion, and focuses on discussing the intersection of AI and social equity through an intergenerational lens.

Organized by the UN DESA Programmes on Youth and Ageing, it aims to foster dialogue among experts and advocates to examine how AI can be leveraged to address the potential risks of AI-driven inequality that affect both future youth and older persons, ensuring that technological advancements contribute to social cohesion and equitable development for all generations.

This event also aligns with the current focus of the ECOSOC presidency on ethically harnessing artificial intelligence to drive progress on sustainable development.

Global Campaign to Combat Ageism, WHO Policy Brief on Ageism in AI for Health (2022)

Expected Outcomes

This side event aims to:

1. Increase awareness of the intergenerational dimensions of inequalities that may be exacerbated by AI.
2. Discuss recommendations to bridge equity gaps and position AI as a tool for social cohesion.
3. Contribute to the broader agenda of strengthening solidarity and inclusion through equitable technological advancement.

Featured Speakers

Welcome remarks	**Ursula Wynhoven**, Director and Representative to the United Nations, ITU New York
Opening remarks	**H.E. Rui Vinhas**, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations
	Francisca Gallegos Jara, Deputy Secretary of Social Services, Social Development and Family Ministry, Chile
Moderator	**Li Zhou**, Human Rights Officer, OHCHR
Panel members	**Abi Yumeng Liu,** Programme on Youth Unit, DESA
	Osa Omokaro, Founder & Co-chair, Tech Runway Africa
	[Speaker TBD], MIT AgeLab
	[Speaker TBD], Honor Care
	Moderated interactive discussion
Closing	**Masumi Ono**, Chief of the Social Inclusion and Participation Branch, DESA