

Aging Fast, Governing Slow:

Building Region-Contextual AI Frameworks for Older Adults in Asia and the Pacific

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UN SDGs cannot be achieved without older people.

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Population ageing meets AI deployment

1.3 billion

people aged 60+ by 2050
in Asia and the Pacific

About one in four people

Private-sector applications

- Care robots and conversational agents
- Health monitoring and smart homes
- Financial and mobility services

Public-service applications

- Welfare check-ins and care coordination
- AI-supported access to public services

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The governance lag has three faces

1 **Most instruments do not name age at all**
Of roughly forty global, regional and national AI ethics and governance documents, only two engage older persons deliberately.

2 **The evidence base is geographically skewed**
A systematic review of AI in long-term care found no acceptability or effectiveness trials in low- or middle-income countries.

3 **Governance attaches to products, not to service ecosystems**
Certification assesses a device or a model. The harms arise from the arrangement through which that device reaches an older person.

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Two AgeTech Cases

Companion robots

Developed by a domestic small enterprise

Funded by district and national government programmes

Delivered by public welfare centres and community non-profits

Collects inactivity sensing, voice recordings, inferred mood; retained three years

AI-powered check-up calls

Developed by a large AI corporation

Funded by local governments through procurement

Delivered by welfare officers and non-profit organizations

Collects conversational transcripts; automated reports routed to caseworkers

Different developers, identical architecture:

- Private development, public financing, community delivery
- Older user who is neither a consumer who chose the product nor a citizen exercising a defined entitlement

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Five questions

1. Who owns the data that older users generate?
2. Is consent meaningful when the system arrives as a welfare benefit from a trusted community worker, rather than as a purchase one could decline?
3. Who is accountable when an alert is not generated, or is generated and not acted upon?
4. Is a non-technological alternative offered, so that acceptance is a genuine choice rather than the only available form of contact?
5. Were older persons involved in specifying what the system should ask, and what it should never ask?

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Many hands, no owner

National government

Sets standards and data protection rules

Rarely procures the service itself

Local government

Holds the budget and the contract

Judged on units distributed, not on rights protected

Developer

Builds the model and the device

Small firms lack compliance capacity; large firms keep models closed

Community organization

Holds the relationship and the operational knowledge

No bargaining power at contracting

Older person and family

Bears the data, the home and the routine

No identified counterparty at all

Accountability dissipates at each handover. In practice, procurement is the region’s de facto AgeTech regulation. Yet it is seldom treated as a governance instrument.

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What the region’s frameworks say about age

2 of 40

instruments engage older persons deliberately

UNESCO Recommendation (2021) — dignity and non-discrimination; its IRCAI companion study is the only sustained treatment

Japan, Social Principles (2019) — names the ageing society as a motivating condition

EU AI Act, article 5 — prohibits exploiting age-related vulnerability; reaches the region extraterritorially

ASEAN Guide (2024, 2025) — human-centred framing, no age-specific provision

Republic of Korea, Framework Act — in force 22 January 2026; health and public decision-making are “high-impact”, yet no age provision

Binding law protects children explicitly. Older persons attract no equivalent treatment

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Three commitments, five measures

Life course

Consent as a process with review points and revocation, not a single signature; supported decision-making instead of the competent-or-incapable binary

Intergenerational

Families are co-users, not bystanders; recognize the digital support partner in design and in policy

Rights-based

Autonomy, dignity, informed consent, non-discrimination and the meaningful participation of older persons

Age-disaggregated data, in training sets too

A named responsible actor at every stage

A guaranteed human alternative

Older persons on oversight bodies

Shared regional procurement capacity

Whether AI in later life extends autonomy or quietly erodes it will depend less on the capability of the models than on choices made now about procurement, consent, accountability and voice.

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Thank you!

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