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Protecting the rights and dignity of older persons in the digital age: international human rights standards and their application to AI and data governance

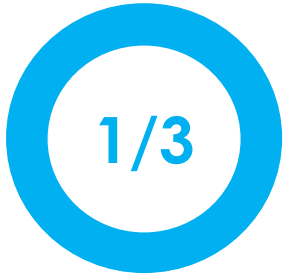
Chitralekha Massey

Chief of Section for the Rights of Older Persons Unit

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

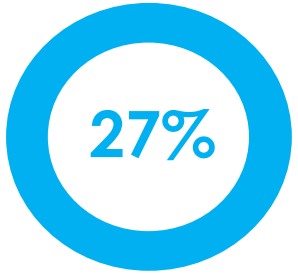
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The Digital Divide



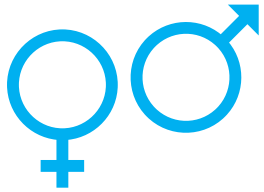
of the world's population had no access to the Internet

Internet penetration reached only

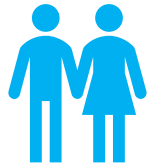


in low-income countries

Job markets in digital sectors still are marked by gender disparities



Gender divides remain



particularly pronounced in

low-income and lower-middle–income countries



Marked divide between rural and urban areas



Poverty generally means lower access to Internet



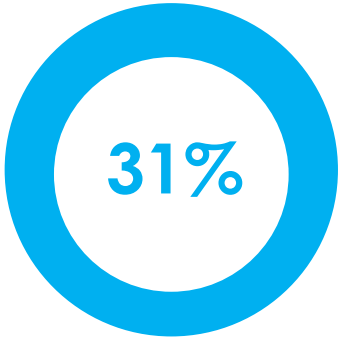
All data from A/HRC/60/45

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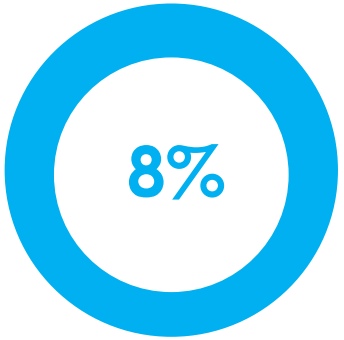
The Digital Divide

Age disparities in AI adoption

AI use declines sharply with age:

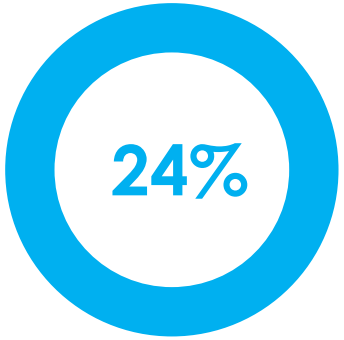


of adults aged 30–44 use AI

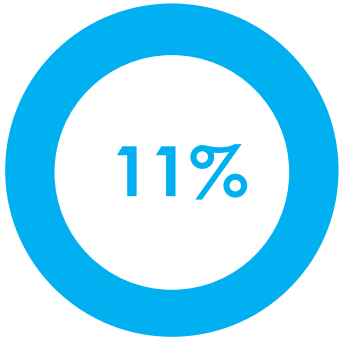


of people aged 60+ report using AI

Daily workplace AI use:



of people aged 29 to 44



of people aged 61 to 79



All data from ITU, Artificial intelligence and ageing: Inclusive pathways for older persons in a digital world

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Intersectionality

Geographic and Regional Disparities

Geographical differences

- Developed regions are adopting AI almost twice as fast

Regional differences in AI familiarity

- 41% of respondents in the Middle East, Africa and India (MEAI) reported being quite or very familiar with AI, compared with only 12% in North America

Urban–rural divide

- Cities such as Shenzhen have advanced AI infrastructure, while some rural western provinces still face basic connectivity gaps

Why it matters

- rural and remote areas often have older populations and weaker connectivity

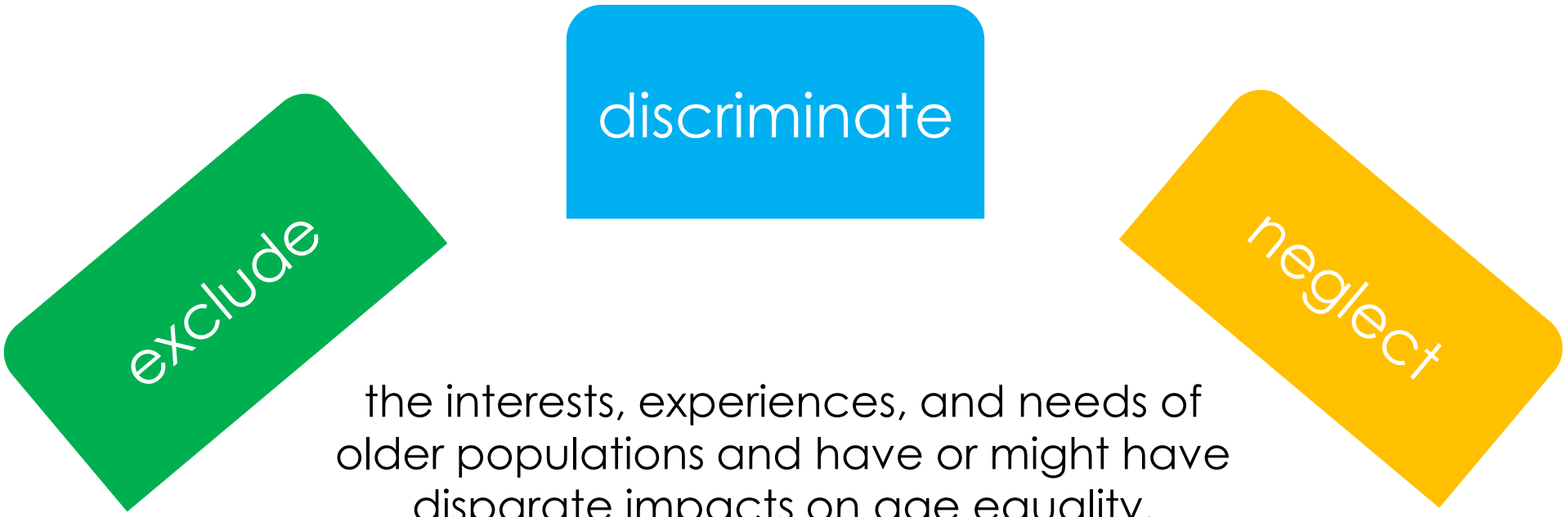


All data from ITU, Artificial intelligence and ageing: Inclusive pathways for older persons in a digital world, Understanding older generations` adoption of AI

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AI Ageism

AI ageism can be defined as practices and ideologies operating within the field of AI which



the interests, experiences, and needs of older populations and have or might have disparate impacts on age equality.

All data Stypinska, J. AI ageism: a critical roadmap for studying age discrimination and exclusion in digitalized societies. AI & Soc 38, 665–677 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-022-01553-5

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AI Ageism

Age bias in algorithms and digital datasets	Stereotypes, prejudices, and ageist ideologies in the tech industry	Ageism in discourses about AI	Algorithmic discrimination–automatic decision-making	Marginalization and exclusion of older persons as users
Technical Level	Individual Level	Discourse Level	Group Level	User Level
Age-restricted training datasets lead to flawed facial recognition, inaccurate sentiment scoring, and biased models.	Youth-centric tech teams embed personal assumptions and ageist stereotypes directly into product design.	AI fairness discussions focus heavily on race, gender, and disability while completely omitting age.	Automated systems unfairly target older demographics through biased recruitment ads, resume screening, and credit scoring.	Poor interface design and assumptions of frailty treat older adults as passive recipients rather than active users.

All data Stypinska, J. AI ageism: a critical roadmap for studying age discrimination and exclusion in digitalized societies. AI & Soc 38, 665–677 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-022-01553-5

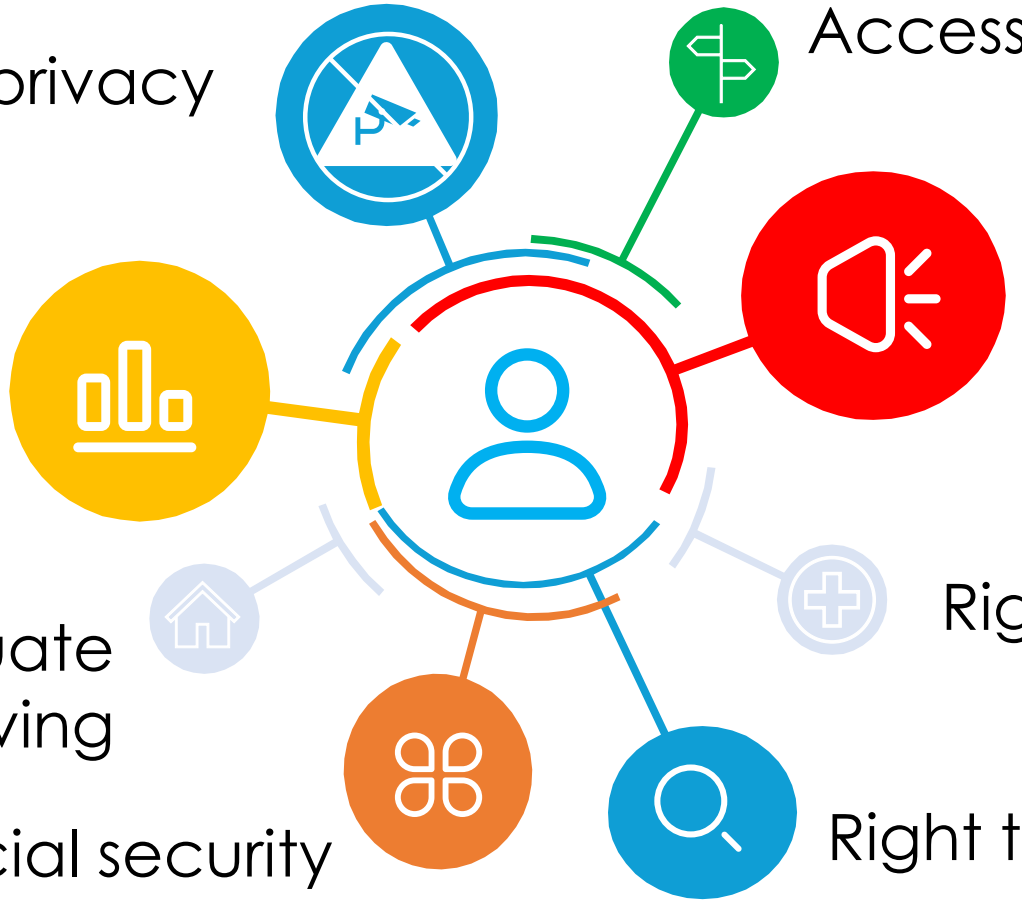
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Applying Human Rights Standards to AI

Area	Specific Risk & Operational Impact	Normative Anchor
Equality and non-discrimination	Algorithmic ageism, intersectional harm, and biased automated service denial	A/HRC/60/45, paras. 39–42; A/HRC/36/48, para. 94
Right to Privacy & Data Protection	Data collection, intrusive surveillance, and unmonitored procurement	A/HRC/60/45, para. 49; A/HRC/43/29, para. 24
Autonomy & Legal Capacity	Digital paternalism, loss of agency, and forced technology adoption.	A/HRC/43/29, paras. 23
Accessibility and digital inclusion	Severe demographic, linguistic, and rural access barriers to essential services.	A/HRC/60/45, paras. 46–48
HRDD & Effective Remedy	Unchecked corporate AI deployment without safety testing or pathways to appeal unfair decisions	A/HRC/59/53, paras. 5, 42, 65
Participation and informed consent	Exclusion of older adults from tech co-design and opaque, non-consensual data processing.	A/HRC/36/48, paras. 96–97

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Human-Rights Consequences



Right to privacy

Access to justice

Right to participate in public life

Equality and Non-discrimination

Right to an adequate standard of living

Right to health

Right to social security

Right to information



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Vision for Human Rights and emerging digital technologies



All data from Mapping report: human rights and new and emerging digital technologies (A/HRC/56/45)

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