

Session 352

Tuesday 7 July 2026

I.T.U. – leaving no one behind.... I need a Telephone to connect to yoU

🕒 10:00–10:45 (UTC+02:00)

📍 Physical (on-site) and Virtual (remote) participation

📍 Room T103, ITU Tower Building

⚙️ Interactive Session

Session Chair: Dr Sarah Jane Fox

Guests:

(1) **Professor Alfredo Ronchi**

(2) **Dr. Pavan Duggal**

SESSION OVERVIEW

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It was explained that,

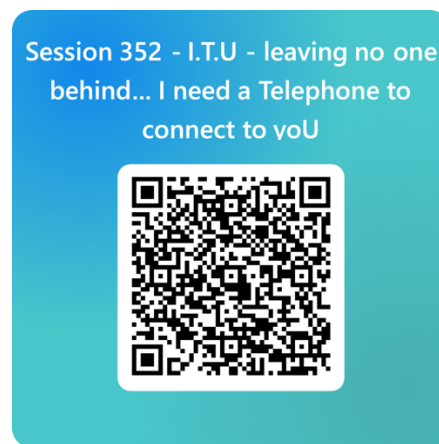
- (a) This session relates to some of Dr Fox's research from the last 2-years and does have some linkage and synergy to the open space session from last year: **Putting the "I" back into AI** – which discussed ensuring the 'individual,' not just the human, discussed the '*you and me*' having an equitable voice and fair opportunity, regardless of culture and other differences - age, race, colour, disability, sex and sexuality.

This session predominately started in consideration to the (i) older generation before (ii) looking at human rights and protections for this new technology world, more broadly, that is - where A.I. will grow and digital/connected services expand.

Discussions within this session, therefore, looked to:

- 1) Heighten societal variables and therefore different issues/needs
- 2) Gain critical insight and thoughts from the wider audience,
- 3) Propose solutions and/or,
- 4) Look at research opportunities to tackle related aspects and ensure..... '*no one get left behind....*'

The accompanying questionnaire, with a QR codes was identified, and all persons were asked to complete it and promote it.



The session started with a little framing

Generational names / labels:

- The Greatest Generation; the Silent Generation: 1926-1945;
- The Baby Boomers: 1946-1964 and
- Generation X.... 1965 and the 1980.

This means that the Silent Generation are certainly pensioners today.....

The baby boomers are also, or, are nearing becoming 'potentially' part of the retired sector or are at least regarded as the older group!

Certainly, the later baby boomers and early Gen Xers were growing up in the 1980's: which was a decade that was significant in terms of alerting us to the plight of ensuring our future was sustainable. It saw the publication of the Brundtland Report, relating to 'Our Common Future;' – which actually set the foundation for the MDG's and then the UNSDG's.

And, from a cultural perspective, 1985 also marked the film 'Back to the Future,' which considered the power of technology in terms of the ability to change the human destiny, this being facilitated through an advanced electric car. This inevitably means ensuring that technology advancements equally embrace diversity and remain an advantage and not disadvantage.

It was identified that in 2020 at WSIS – the Medici Framework, so Alfredo Ronchi had an excellent session entitled:

ICT's and Older Persons: Responsible use of the cyberspace: tips and hints for Seniors. And, actually, there was actually quite a lot of discussions, that year, relating to older persons and both the use of technology as aids but also the need to protect and educate alongside empowering older people to use technologies.

Covid-19 actually alerted the world to the fact that the rapid advancement of digitalization, which was at an unprecedented pace, digitally disadvantaged ‘older adults’ many of whom were “*locked out of essential and life-saving services.*”^[1]

Discussions related to the fact that, aside from technology, under the current international human rights framework, it has been remarked that there is a significant protection gap for older people. And that, globally, *older people* continue to suffer a wide range of human rights violations on a daily basis. This includes age-based discrimination and other exclusions across social, economic, and political dimensions, where ‘*their*’ voices are not heard and ‘*they*’ are not catered for. This can include denial of access to care and support services, inadequate social security and even physical and mental mistreatment and as we said if they can access it – due to the advancement of e-services many are finding it difficult to achieve. For instances to access their bank services online – these are the generations, that were used to walking into high street branches or even not originally having banking services. Doctor’s appointments have also gone online – hence society is becoming digital by default.

In 2024, after years of advocacy, a dedicated UN Working Group on Ageing acknowledged that more needs to be done to tackle the inequalities and violations faced by the older generation. This included highlighting the need for a new, dedicated UN provision – in the form of an ‘*international human rights treaty on older people.*’

Dr Fox explained that her research considered how ‘old age’ is defined or classed as: *which really translated to there being no standardisation.*

The secondly, consideration and discussion was given to each generation and the technology, risks and rights, associated to each generation – as part of this the telephone was used by way of comparison technology. This was also based on a U.S. – U.K. comparison too.

So, for instance: the telephone was when it first started being manufactured was a luxury items for the rich and then it was a shared service. Over time we have seen the development of the phone, that has journeyed from the street corner into our personal pockets. Gone are the operators and the party lines – with many households now dispensing with their home (landline phone).

The digital phone – like the mobile phone has also been transformed from an analogue service to a digital system. This really starting in the Baby Boomer/Gen X era: and both generations (certainly the younger Boomers) are said to have been this transitioning generation. Yet for the older Boomers and the Silent generation there have been some difficulties in terms of wanting to use a mobile phone and the level of technology they either want/need or can even use.

While in the UK there will be a fully complete digital switch over of the land phone to a digital (internet system) by the start of 2027 – which had caused discussions and

¹ [DigiAge](https://digiage.io): Equality for the Older (UKRI funded project) - <https://digiage.io>

debate and certainly amongst the like of care providers and groups speaking on behalf of the other generation. This will see the switching off the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) and Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN). By January 2027, all existing services will need to be fully migrated to IP platforms (internet protocol).

So, whilst digital systems are highly reliable, internet outages or disruptions can occur – which means the loss of the phone – so advocated is a battery back-up, or having a backup internet solutions, such as mobile networks or secondary broadband connections. Of, course this increases costs and adds often to the complexity – for older users.

It was explained that the questionnaire was posing questions relating to

- (i) The older generation: do they need increased rights and if so what type of rights and protections?
- (ii) And/or does society need better human rights and protections for this new technology age? And what is the reasoning behind this.....

The findings from the questionnaire will be used in, and aid to guide further research.

Please now see the related outcome document for findings and recommendations from the session.