

Why assistive technology matters for healthy ageing

John, from Zambia, is being fitted with a hearing aid. Globally, approximately one-third of people over 65 years of age are affected by disabling hearing loss. In low- and middle-income countries, only 3% of people who need hearing aids are able to access them.

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The World Health Organization defines healthy ageing as “the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age”. Assistive technology is an essential part of people’s healthy ageing pathway, and is central to a human rights approach, as many older people experience functional decline and need assistive devices such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, walking sticks, wheelchairs and accessible smartphone applications among other products. As a result of an accumulation of health risks across a lifespan of disease, injury, and chronic illness, the need for assistive technology increases for ageing populations. While a diverse range of assistive technology may be needed for people to maintain daily life and independence, and continue to do the things that matter to them, most older people in low- and middle-income countries are unable to access the assistive technology they need.



Among the over 60s,
nearly

70%

need assistive
technology.



In low-income
countries only

10%

of people have the
assistive technology
they need.



The number of
older persons
globally is projected
to reach nearly

**2.1
BILLION**

by 2050.



80%

of all older people
globally will be
living in developing
countries by 2050.

Why assistive technology matters for ageing populations

Access to assistive technology can enable older people to live healthier, more productive, and more dignified lives. Significant declines in physical and mental capacities and functional ability can limit older people's ability to care for themselves and to participate and contribute to society. Access to assistive technology, particularly in the context of accessible environments improves and facilitates ability, well-being, participation, and independence. This enables people to continue to engage in the activities that matter to them as they age.

Assistive technology enables everyone, as they age, to continue to contribute to families, communities and societies according to their wishes and values. Users of assistive technology are able to participate in family and community life, caregiving and volunteerism, and paid work for a longer span of years as improved health outcomes enable them to better cope with the challenges of ageing. In places with weaker social safety nets, this can protect older workers and ensure they maintain a source of income for as long as possible.

Among older people, women and persons with disabilities face the greatest challenges in accessing assistive technology. The combination of gender inequality and age-based discrimination disadvantage women to meet basic needs including accessing assistive products. Many persons with disabilities are among the poorest in society, especially in low-income countries, and cannot access assistive technology. As this group ages, their assistive technology needs will change and likely increase. To achieve equality, inclusion and the SDGs, older people must be meaningfully engaged in co-developing assistive technology. Age-friendly cities and community programmes can enable such contributions.



Inclusion is key to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and leave no one behind. There will not be full inclusion while people are unable to access assistive technology. Assistive technology cuts across all 17 SDGs and is particularly relevant to some.

Assistive Technology is an umbrella term for assistive products such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, prostheses, eyeglasses or digital devices, and their related systems and services.

ATscale is a cross-sector global partnership with a mission to improve people's lives through assistive technology. It catalyzes action to ensure that, by 2030, an additional 500 million people in low- and middle-income countries get the life-changing assistive technology they need.

Together, let's ensure older people get the assistive technology they need.