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|  | INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION  **TELECOMMUNICATION STANDARDIZATION SECTOR**  STUDY PERIOD 2022-2024 | | | | TSAG-TD441 |
| TSAG |
| Original: English |
| **Question(s):** | | | N/A | | Geneva, 22-26 January 2024 |
| **TD** | | | | | |
| **Source:** | | | TSB | | |
| **Title:** | | | TSB activities about Human Rights and Standards | | |
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1. **Introduction**

Embedding human rights in digital technologies is currently one of the United Nations' priorities. On February 24, 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, explained the importance of taking human rights into account in technical standards at a high-level meeting at the World Standards Cooperation (WSC). This was reported to the last TSAG meeting (TD213).

ITU Council discussed this subject as well in its July 2023 meeting[[1]](#footnote-1). In recent months, the United Nations General Assembly has updated two resolutions on human rights applied to digital technologies. Resolution (A/HRC/RES/53/29) "New and emerging digital technologies and human rights", updated on July 14, 2023, and resolution (A/HRC/54/L.12) "The right to privacy in the digital age", updated on October 6, 2023.

In addition, the "UN Secretary-General's Guidelines on Human Rights Due Diligence in the Use of Digital Technologies" are currently being drafted.

The ongoing digital revolution has shaped our world in unprecedented ways, fundamentally altering the way we communicate, work, and interact with information. In this ever-changing context, it is imperative to recognize the importance of embedding human rights in technical standardization design.

In the context of digital technologies, human rights include concepts such as the preservation of privacy, freedom of expression, access to information, data protection and non-discrimination. They are essential to preserving human dignity and ensuring that everyone can fully enjoy the opportunities offered by the digital world.

Thus, embedding human rights in technical standardization design is intrinsically linked to the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and to strengthening the inclusion of all in the digital economy.

1. **Current activities**

Several actions are underway. They are defined below:

* 1. **Raise awareness and understand the needs of ITU-T working groups**. Held open discussions with ITU-T study groups to understand their needs in terms of privacy, freedom of expression, access to information, data protection and non-discrimination. Discussions have been made with SG2, SG3, SG13 and SG15.
  2. **Study the state of embedding human rights at ITU.** This study will provide an overview of the work already carried out on human rights at ITU. Listing ITU's past and current work on this subject, summarizing and analyzing the work found in terms of its relevance to privacy, freedom of expression, access to information, data protection and non-discrimination, and improving the way human rights should be embedded in ITU’s actions.
  3. **Build ITU members' capacity through webinars.** The first webinar[[2]](#footnote-2) “The Interplay Between Human Rights and Technology” has been done on December 8th, 2023, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It was attended by more than 200 individuals.
  4. **Participate in the drafting of United Nations General Assembly resolutions on digital rights.** These discussions take place during the working sessions of the Human Rights Council.
  5. **Build a close relationship with OHCHR.** This relationship is key to working on the interplay between human rights and digital technologies. On December 11th, 2023, Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin moderated[[3]](#footnote-3) the round table “The Future of Human Rights and Digital Technologies” during the Human Rights 75 – High-level Event organized by OHCHR.
  6. **Participate in the UN Futures Lab Network and the Declaration on Future Generations** to consider embedding human rights in technologies.
  7. **Spotlight series on human-centric digital transformation.** The TSB has been collaborating with BDT to set up a series of webinar[[4]](#footnote-4) presenting human-centric cases for digital transformation.
  8. **Participating to panel discussions** such as:
     1. the side event “presentation of XR holocaust testimony "Tell me Inge"” during the Human Rights Council 54th session[[5]](#footnote-5),
     2. the panel discussion “Applying the UNGPs Lens to Managing Human Rights Risks from Generative AI”[[6]](#footnote-6) during the 12th United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights,
     3. and the panel discussion organized by the World Bank “AI for Humanity: AI based on Human Rights”[[7]](#footnote-7) during the UNCTAD eWeek.
  9. **Contacts have been established** with organizations such as the Internet Society, the Global Network Initiative, Meta, the World Bank or the Internet Engineering Task Force to discuss human rights in the context of digital technologies.

1. **Main findings and challenges**
   1. **Raising awareness in ITU-T study groups needs to be continued.** Key Takeaways are:
      1. Extend discussions beyond specific study groups to include other groups.
      2. Consider the implications of restricting access to information in the context of freedom of information.
      3. Be cautious and precise with terminology, its meaning and use in different contexts.
      4. Clarify and understand the relationship between secrecy of communication and privacy.
      5. Investigate views on creating a group (e.g., focus group) on this topic within ITU-T.
      6. Explore alternative multistakeholder environments.
   2. **A study concerning human rights considerations in ITU activities is underway.** We already know that ITU already works on human rights considerations such as providing universal access, improving digital accessibility or gender equality.
   3. **Building the capacity of ITU members concerning human rights considerations is a main concern.** ITU Member can have different understanding and priorities concerning human rights. Building capacity and talking openly about this subject could help finding a consensus to embed human rights in digital technologies.
   4. **The UN General Assembly leads important discussions concerning the interaction between human rights and digital technologies.** Technical standardization processes are discussed during meetings. TSB should keep participating actively in these discussions.
   5. **OHCHR is the leading UN entity on human rights.** TSB should keep working closely with them to have their support to translate human rights at the technical standardizations level.
   6. **The UN Futures Lab Network and the Declaration on Future Generations are UN common activities.** TSB brings its technical expertise to the discussions and underlines the importance of standardization processes.
   7. **TSB has participated in 3 webinars on human-centric digital transformation as moderator.** It was an opportunity to look at study cases under the lens of human rights and standardization processes.
   8. **TSB has been participating in several panel discussions to bring its technical expertise to current digital challenges.** Indeed, the understanding of the interaction between human rights and digital technologies is multidisciplinary and requests deep discussions between specialists.
   9. **Formal and informal discussions took place with organizations concerned by human rights and digital technologies.** Most of them are already working on embedding human rights in their activities. Collaboration can lead to a better understanding of human rights challenges in the face of digital technologies and come with adapted standardization processes.
2. **Recommendations**

Embedding human rights in technical standards is a complex task that requires thoughtful and comprehensive actions. Here are recommended actions to embed human rights in technical standards.

* 1. **Promote multistakeholder engagement.**

Encourage the active participation of a diverse range of stakeholders, including civil society, academia, industry, and government representatives, in the development of technical standards. Ensure that multiple perspectives are considered.

* 1. **Collaborate with OHCHR and other relevant entities.**

Strengthen partnerships with OHCHR and other relevant organizations working in the field of human rights. Foster collaboration to ensure alignment with human rights.

* 1. **Organize capacity-building programs.**

Conduct training programs and workshops to build the capacity of TSB staff and ITU members in understanding and integrating human rights into technical standards.

1. **Conclusion**

In summary, as digital technologies reshape our world, embedding human rights in technical standardization design becomes imperative. Recent UN resolutions and ongoing efforts highlight the commitment to aligning technological advancements with human rights.

TSB's current activities reflect proactive steps, including raising awareness, studying human rights integration, and collaborating with OHCHR. Main findings emphasize the need for continuous awareness, multistakeholder engagement, and careful language use.

Recommendations outline a roadmap, including promoting engagement, developing guidelines, collaborating with OHCHR, conducting impact assessments, and integrating human rights expertise.

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1. https://www.itu.int/md/S23-CL-C-0074/en [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.itu.int/cities/standards4dt/ep39-2/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/udhr/publishingimages/75udhr/HR75-High-level-event-agenda.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Pages/Events/2023/Spotlight%20Series%20on%20Human-Centric%20Digital%20Transformation/Spotlight-Series-on-Human-Centric-Digital-Transformation.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/events/tell-me-inge [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1g/k1gkgsk5as [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://dig.watch/event/unctad-eweek-2023/ai-for-humanity-ai-based-on-human-rights-worldbank [↑](#footnote-ref-7)