



WORKSHOP 2

Digital Government for Inclusive Service Delivery

Concept Note

Organiser: Digital Government Branch (DGB) / Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) / United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

Introduction

The 2025 United Nations Public Service Forum will take place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan from 23 to 25 June 2025, under the theme "Five Years to 2030: Accelerating Public Service Delivery for a Sustainable Future". The Forum is co-organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) through its Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) and the Government of Uzbekistan.

The Forum will be comprised of a series of workshops where various elements related to the overall theme will be explored in more detail. Workshop 2 organized by Digital Government Branch (DGB) will explore the importance of inclusive service delivery for digital government.

Objective

This hands-on workshop aims to support participating countries in identifying innovative approaches to digital service delivery that increase the outreach to and inclusiveness of the most vulnerable population groups, such as those living in poverty, women and girls, older persons, persons with disabilities, youth, migrants, and refugees.

The workshop aims at equipping the representatives from public institutions at all levels with tools to effectively address digital inequalities and digital inclusion with innovative solutions and forward-looking strategies to close the divides.

Focus

The principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB) is central to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a foundational element of good governance. As digital technologies increasingly shape access services, rights, and societal participation, digital inclusion becomes crucial for equitable public services delivery. Without intentional efforts, vulnerable groups—such as those living in poverty, women and girls, older persons, persons with disabilities, youth, migrants, and refugees—risk further marginalization as more services move online.

In today's hybrid digital society, lacking digital access can lead to exclusion, either through intentional policies or the unintended consequences of uniform digital strategies. Digital divides now represent a new form of inequality, where access to online information and services determines one's ability to benefit from public services. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this divide, as those without digital access were unable to access critical services, education, and economic opportunities during lockdowns. As public services increasingly rely on digital platforms, a meaningful engagement with digital platforms requires digital illiteracy among all population groups, as well as improved access to and unaffordability of the internet.

E-government has the potential to streamline service delivery, reduce costs, and improve transparency. However, governments must recognize that digital transformation is not inherently inclusive and must proactively identify and address gaps that leave certain groups behind. If digital solutions are designed without considering the needs and circumstances of marginalized populations, they can inadvertently reinforce barriers to access. For example, poorly designed digital ID systems or high service costs can exclude those who need services most¹. An integrated approach that addresses barriers related to access, affordability, and ability (the 3As) and relies on the use of data, user-centered design, and targeted delivery of services can ensure that digital public services are truly inclusive. By prioritizing digital inclusion, public administrations can improve equitably of service delivery supporting sustainable development and strengthening social cohesion in an increasingly hybrid digital society.

The workshops will discuss these topics and highlight examples from around the world leveraging on innovation and frontier technologies like AI in addressing digital divides and improving digital inclusion.

Structure

This workshop will be composed of an opening session, four in-depth thematic sessions, and a closing session. The opening session will welcome participants and introduce the focus and objective of the workshop. The rapporteur will present key conclusions and recommendations at the closing of each thematic session. The closing session will consist of key conclusions as well as a discussion among participants to identify key messages that will be presented in the plenary at the UN Public Service Forum.

Session 1 – Designing Services for Everyone: How Innovation and Technology Improve Digital Inclusion

Technology and innovation can significantly improve public service delivery for everyone by making services more accessible, efficient, and inclusive. For example, digital identity management systems, like Madagascar’s PRODIGY project, help citizens without formal identification access essential services such as education, healthcare, and voting, using a combination of online platforms, SMS, call centers, and in-person support to reach even those with limited digital access². Inclusive design principles further enhance public service delivery by addressing barriers related to digital literacy, accessibility, and affordability. In Kenya, the use of USSD technology allows people with basic mobile phones and limited literacy to access financial and government services without the need for internet connectivity or smartphones, setting a global example for inclusive digital solutions³. Additionally, digital transformation enables more personalized and data-driven public services, increases engagement between citizens and government, and supports sustainability efforts by streamlining resource allocation and reducing operational costs⁴. By combining digital innovation with intentional, user-centered approaches, governments and organizations can ensure that public services truly serve everyone, especially the most marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Despite remarkable advances in technology and the rapid expansion of internet connectivity, over 2.6 billion people worldwide remain offline, facing barriers such as affordability, lack of digital skills, and insufficient infrastructure.⁵ These challenges are not confined to the developing world; even in digitally advanced societies, rigid systems and exclusionary design can leave millions unable to access essential services, deepening social and economic divides⁶. This session explores the critical role of technology in addressing complex issues with innovation and fresh approach in public services delivery. It highlights how thoughtful design and cross-sector collaboration can unlock opportunities, drive social progress, and ensure that no one is left behind.

Session 2: Data and Delivery: Which Services to Digitalize Next?

This session explores how governments can strategically prioritize the digitalization of public services by leveraging data-driven insights and global best practices using the Digital Government Model Framework introduced by the UN E-Government Survey 2024⁷, ensuring that digitalization efforts align with national development goals and maximize benefits for all citizens. Drawing on the Survey findings, the session examines how leading countries like Denmark, Finland, and Singapore have used advanced data analytics and open data systems to identify high-impact areas for digital transformation, resulting in seamless, citizen-centric platforms for services such as healthcare, tax, and social welfare. Participants will examine also case study from Austria on the government’s model approach in prioritizing which public services to digitalize next and how can AI tools assist in analyzing the data from other countries and contexts to support digitalization efforts. The session will highlight also the examples from Denmark’s “NemID” digital identification system and the expansion of city portals assessed through the Local Online Services Index (LOSI), to understand how data can guide the selection of services for digitalization and address persistent disparities between national and local e-government performance.

Session 3 – Case Studies from the Countries

This session will present examples and good practices on digital inclusion from around the world focussing on how public institutions can create inclusive and predictive services relying

on frontier technologies. Cases will specifically focus on countries in special situations (CSSs).

Guiding questions:

1. *What innovative approaches did the government use to expand the outreach of digital public services to the most vulnerable population groups?*
2. *What strategies were adopted by your country government in enhancing digital literacy skills and improving accessibility and affordability of internet and digital services for all?*
3. *How can governments integrate AI and other frontier technologies to enhance digital inclusion?*

Session 4 - Panel Discussion with Experts: Can Countries Close the Divides in Digital Inclusion?

The session "Can Countries Close the Divides in Digital Inclusion?" addresses one of the most pressing challenges highlighted in the 2024 UN E-Government Survey: the persistent global digital divide. While the world has seen remarkable progress—with the global average of the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) improving substantially and the proportion of the population lagging in digital government development dropping from 45% in 2022 to 22.4% in 2024—significant gaps remain, especially in regions such as Africa, least developed countries, and small island developing states⁸. These disparities are compounded by limited infrastructure, low internet penetration, and insufficient investment, leaving approximately 1.73 billion people worldwide still excluded from the benefits of digital government. To close these divides, the UN E-Government Survey emphasizes the need for international collaboration, targeted investment in broadband infrastructure, and robust digital literacy initiatives.

The panel discussion with experts will focus on strategies and policy recommendations for the UN Member States in bridging the digital divides and highlighting examples where such strategies worked. Attention will be given specifically to the rapidly changing landscape of AI technology application in service delivery.

This workshop will conclude with key messages and recommendations from all the sessions of the workshop. The workshop rapporteur will lead a discussion, among participants, to identify key messages that will feed into the Forum's Rapporteur's Report on the last day of the UNPS Forum.

Organisational Details

- This workshop is organised by the Digital Government Branch (DGB) of the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)/UN DESA.
- Participants are expected to come from central and local government officials, policymakers, public government experts, public sector institutions, practitioners, civil society, academics, and media.
- The workshop will be conducted in English.
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