Expert Group Meeting, 29-31 March 2021
Guidelines

The Expert Working Group

The Expert Group Meetings (EGM) will be composed of three thematic sessions held over three days (see the enclosed agenda for the schedule breakdown). For continuity, experts are asked to commit to participating in all 3 sessions, as they are interconnected and will build on each other. In preparation for the sessions, participants will be asked to undertake a limited number of offline tasks (readings, preparation of presentations) individually and/or in teams. All sessions will be conducted in English, using the Zoom platform.

Each session will present the following key features:

• Pre-EGM preparation

• Brief introduction/icebreaker/presentations

• Interactivity – experts framing statements/pitches, polls, chat, and discussion.

• Breakout groups.

   To bring out insights and learnings in a different format each day, breakout groups will be organized, each with about 10 participants.

• Suggestions and Recommendations

Expert Dialogue 1: The Future of Digital Government

This is an introductory section to the expert group meeting and to the overall theme of digital government. In this futuristic session, experts are encouraged to think beyond today and try to visualize what kind of online public services are waiting for us in 5, 10, 20 years' time. What will be the key trends in e-government technologies, how public officials will interact with people, how will people conduct business with governments in the coming years and how digital government could bridge the digital divide and minimize social and economic inequalities and support the achievement of the 2030 agenda the impact of new technologies.

In connection, it is essential to acknowledge and address the impacts of COVID-19 on the future of digital governance. Despite being surrounded by immediate and critical impacts of the pandemic now, it is incumbent on us to consider how, with only ten years left to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Governments will need to work on strengthening the intersections of technology and sustainable development. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic can serve as a motivation to fulfill this promise. Indeed, policy makers should seize the COVID-19 crisis as a time to connect the unconnected, stress the resilience and responsiveness of different digital ecosystems and establish tailor-made digital government tools, strategies and collaborations for the future. Embracing e-government and harvesting the digital opportunities amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic holds the potential to support the long-term sustainable development of all United Nations Member States.

Pre-EGM preparation for Session 1

Experts are invited to provide inputs in advance of this session on these questions:

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<u>The Questionnaire should be fulfilled and returned to the organizers by 25 March 2021.</u>

<u>Expert Interview Questions:</u>

1. What are some important trends or functions/solutions/innovations that will impact and drive the future of digital government for sustainable development?
    Please identify the 4 most important trends and explain why.

    Trend #1 …………………………….
     Why …………………………………….

    Trend #2 …………………………….
     Why …………………………………….

    Trend #3 …………………………….
     Why …………………………………….

    Trend #4 …………………………….
     Why …………………………………….

2. What are some of the opportunities for digital government in 5, 10, 20 years' time?

    Opportunities in 5 years' time ……………………………………….

    Opportunities in 10 years' time ……………………………………….

    Opportunities in 20 years' time ……………………………………….

3. What are some of the challenges for digital government for the same time frame?

    Challenges in 5 years' time ……………………………………….

    Challenges in 10 years' time ……………………………………….

    Challenges in 20 years' time ……………………………………….

4. The COVID-19 pandemic has, in many ways, defined a new normal for our society – one that is more digital than ever before.

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> a. How has the pandemic changed the path or course of digital government transformation? ………………………………………………………………………………………….
> b. How can digital government agencies better respond and recalibrate to the new normal?……………………………………………………………………………………………………

Brief introduction/icebreaker/Presentations

To facilitate discussions and exchanges of views, invited resource persons will present a background paper/presentation to frame the discussion at the plenary.

Selected experts could also be invited during the plenary to make a short framing statement/pitch on specific topics to be further discussed in the breakout sessions.

Expert interview questions:

1- Are you interested in making an introductory framing statement that briefly captures what you see as the key issues in "the future of digital government"?   (3 minutes max)
YES   NO

2- If yes, what would be your focus?
(the subject should be in line with the topics in the first questionnaire)

Breakout sessions

The breakout working sessions will be tightly structured, with a clear focus on seeking advice and recommendations on the future of digital government. The organizers will moderate the discussion and a facilitator will collect and present the outcomes of the discussion during the plenary. The participants of each breakout session will be selected and assigned, randomly by Zoom algorithm.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The organizers will moderate the plenary discussion and each facilitator will present the outcomes of the discussion in the breakout working group, followed by open discussion.

Expert dialogue 2: UN E-Government Survey Methodology

The existing methodology of the E-Government Survey has provided a framework to track the digital transformation of the 193 UN Member States over the last two decades. While the core of the

methodology has remained unchanged over this time, some aspects of the assessment have changed in order to properly reflect changes in technology or society that affect the scope of digital government. In this regard, prior to each Survey edition, the UN reviews the methodology and strives to capture this fast-changing environment by introducing new questions, features and assessment methods as needed, to ensure that the Survey is accurate, insightful and relevant.

Guiding question: In setting the ground for the future of digital government, and understanding limitation of existing methodological frameworks, what are possible changes/refinement in (i) E-Government Development Index EGDI (with its sub-indicators, the Online Service Index (OSI), Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (TII), and Human Capital Index (HCI); and (ii) Local online services index LOSI (for municipalities and cities)?

Two presentations will frame the expert discussions, focusing on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the new realities of post-COVID digital world, vis-à-vis the analytical framework is employed by UN DESA to assess e-government development across the world. This will include overviews of the E-Government Survey's E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and Local Government Service Index (LOSI).

The experts will then engage in an open discussion on the key trends necessary to consider in reviewing the survey methodology.

Note: the structure of this session will provide Experts with essential foundational information on the Survey for the purpose of the discussions. For further information, experts can also refer to the methodology annex (from page 231) in the most recent edition of the Survey, available [here](#).

Breakout Group Discussions (day 2)

Prior to this session, the experts will be provided with relevant factsheets on various aspects of the Survey as background for the discussion. The participants will be divided into three breakout groups, assigned randomly by Zoom, and will address the following questions:

1. Is there a need to assess a **new set of e-services and features** to reflect the current/changing trends in digital government in addition to the existing 20 services covered in the OSQ?
2. Based on discussions of Day 1, **are there any key areas and features important to assess** that are currently not captured by the OSI and LOSI?
3. **Should both the OSI and LOSI** analytical framework **be organized around 4 areas: Technology, Content, Services, and Participation**?
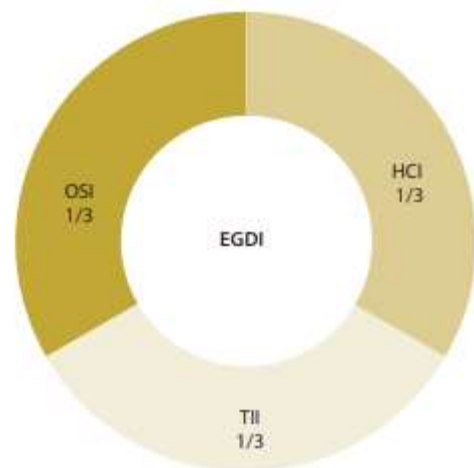
4. What are the **methodological implications** of assessing the new suggested features, areas and services? Are the new suggested features, areas and services assessable for all 193 UN Member States?
5. What are the **alternative ways of capturing the advancement of e-government development** at national and local levels?

After the breakout discussions, a facilitator from each group will present the summary of recommendations to the plenary, followed by an open discussion on the Survey methodology.

Expert dialogue 3: E-Government: Leaving no one behind and leaving no one offline

The accelerated pace of digital government transformation is a double-edge sword: it helps advance social inclusion but also risks further exacerbating inequalities and exclusion, as we witness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

How can governments ensure digital inclusion for all, and better address the needs, through digital transformation of: women and girls, people with disabilities, older people, the poor (those below the poverty line) and minorities (indigenous people, migrants, etc.)?

The UN E-Government Survey notes a positive correlation between digitalization and social inclusion. However, while e-government offers an opportunity for digital inclusion, it also risks a new digital divide, owing to insufficient access in low-income communities, either because of a lack of devices or of bandwidth and speed. Nevertheless, the greater ease with which information is gathered, stored, analyzed and disseminated, along with the decreasing cost and wider coverage of mobile-cellular and mobile broadband subscriptions have improved e-service delivery to vulnerable populations.

As observed in recent editions of the Survey, United Nations Member States are increasingly addressing the needs of marginalized groups through more targeted interventions and services provision. The 2020 UN E-Government Survey showed that there is a positive trend towards expanding the provision of online services designed for vulnerable populations, benefiting youth, women, persons with disabilities, older persons, immigrants and people living below the poverty line.

Still, about half of the world's population remains offline, which increases the risk that vulnerable groups without Internet access will fall further behind in the rapidly progressing digital society. Thus, technology can both aid and impede the overarching goal of leaving no one behind. Even for those with access, the question still remains, as to what extent there is meaningful access, sufficiency in targeted services for the vulnerable groups, and quality of these e-services.
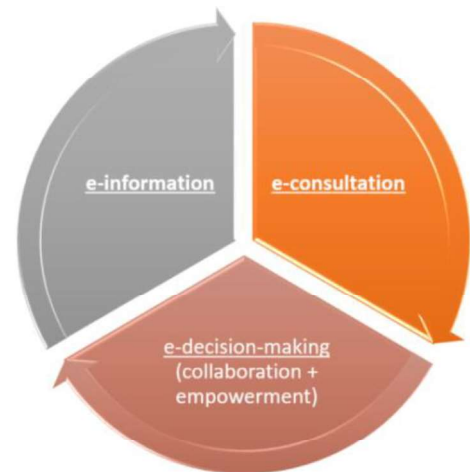
About E-Participation and the E-Participation Index (EPI)

Participation is a key dimension of governance and is one of the pillars of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of national participatory processes, particularly in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 16.7, which calls for ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

In the E-Government Survey, e-participation is defined as "the process of engaging people through ICTs [Information and Communication Technologies] in policy and decision-making in order to make public administration participatory, inclusive, collaborative and deliberative for intrinsic and instrumental ends" (United Nations, 2014, p. 61). This definition emphasizes the importance of e-participation for sustainable development, and the collaboration between governmental and non-governmental actors. Modes of public engagement can be categorized as three broad approaches: (i) to inform; (ii) to consult; (iii) to engage in some degree of decision-making, that encompasses collaboration or empowerment. The choice of mode, rules of engagement and process design vary with context and intent. In the long run, the aim of engaging the public is not only to resolve immediate issues at hand (what are the best solutions?), but also to build capacity for the future (how to do this in a way that would help society achieve better results over time).

As defined by the Survey, the e-participation index (EPI) is assessed in the following three dimensions:

(i) **E-information**: the provision of information (whereby the government provides information to people that is considered enabling to participation)
(ii) **E-Consultation** (whereby the government consults individuals on policy or on service delivery at different stages of the process and possibly provides feedback to them),
(iii) **E-decision-making*** (whereby the government involves people in decision-making; through two sub-dimensions: (a) **e-collaboration** (that include co-creation and co-production) and (b) **e-empowerment** (such as in participatory budgeting).

*It is important to note that the e-decision-making dimension here does not include any form of political discourse, and therefore do not include participation and engagement in political parties' platforms, electoral platforms; nor does it include e-voting, m-voting, etc.

About Open Government and the Open Government Data Index (OGDI)

Since 2014, the Survey has documented open government development trends, specifically related to open government data (OGD). There are innumerable benefits associated with the release of open government data. Trends in OGD performance are reflected in **the Open Government Development Index (OGDI) -- a pilot assessment** that was initiated in 2018 and repeated in 2020. The OGDI is derived as a supplementary index to the Online Service Index (OSI). It extends this dimension of the Survey by focusing

on the use of open government data (OGD). The OGDI identifies three key dimensions in its current framework, which are: (i) policy and institutional framework (as foundation); (ii) platform (existence of OGD portal and associated features); (iii) data availability in various sectors such as health, education, employment, social security, environment and justice) and data applications (such as through organizing open data hackathons).

Expert Interview Questions for Session III*:
Note: Experts are invited to provide inputs in advance of the expert group meeting

1. Close to half of the world's population remains offline and will not be able any digital services provided by governments. How can governments accelerate the **bridging of all forms of digital divides, including meaningful access to e-services**?

2. What are the **opportunities and risks of a "digital-by-default" or "digital-first" strategy/approach**, wherein services are primarily offered online, isolating those who do not have online access, or do not know how to access or use them, or do not trust online services?

3. **Making a government website or mobile app inclusive and accessible** means making sure it can be used by as many people as possible, including (i) older people; (ii) those with impaired vision; deafness or impaired hearing; (iii) cognitive impairments or learning disabilities. What are some norms and standards that the UN could advocate?

4. How can the UN E-Government Survey **better evaluate the targeted provision of e-services to specific vulnerable groups**? Please specify especially for (i) women; (ii) persons below the poverty line; and (iii) the minorities.

5. E-Government services are increasingly pervasive, along with an emphasis on usage, usability and usefulness of services. How can governments step up in **building digital capacity of users** in utilizing online services, especially for the vulnerable groups (e.g. older people)? What can governments do to **build digital trust** of their services?

6. What are the opportunities and risks to enhancing social and digital inclusion through e-government and **emerging technologies such as AI, robotics**, etc. and innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships? Please illustrate with specific government cases.

7. How can the **UN E-Government Survey better assess e-participation and open government data?**

Dry-run Zoom meeting

"Dry-run" technical tests will be held on 22 and 25 March to test Zoom connections and provide a short briefing on the meeting logistics. The dry-run meetings are expected to take 20-30 minutes.