



Nordic Council
of Ministers

A SMALL STEP FOR DIGITALISATION, A GIANT LEAP FOR HUMANITY?



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NORDIC DIGIGOV LAB

The human being is at the heart of a Nordic cooperation project, Nordic DigiGov Lab, one of several initiatives supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The focus is on making it easier for citizens in the Nordic and Baltic countries to navigate through various life events with the help of digital public services.

The Nordic DigiGov Lab project is led by the Swedish Agency for Digital Government, Digg, and is carried out in collaboration with the Norwegian Digitalisation Agency, Digdir, and the Finnish Digitalisation and Population Data Agency, DVV. The project is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and will run for two years, from 2024 to 2026.^[1]

This is a somewhat edited and translated version of the third edition of Digg Reflekterar^[2], a publication series by the Swedish Agency for Digital Government, aimed at interested members of the general public.

1. <https://www.norden.org/en/node/92092> (accessed 2025-05-15).
2. [Ett litet steg för digitaliseringen, ett stort kliv för människan?](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

INTRODUCTION

The concept of human-centredness is frequently used within strategies and expectations in the field of digitalisation. But what does it really mean, and what does putting humans at the centre entail? We aim to highlight different perspectives of these questions and reflect on the various components of human-centredness.

What does it mean for the public sector to be human-centric? There are many expectations in this area from international organisations, as well as from Nordic and Baltic countries, where initiatives are underway clearly aimed at achieving a human-centric public sector.

In this report, we reflect on the concept from three different dimensions: governance, public services and innovation. We consider how these dimensions are interconnected and the challenges involved. What role does politics play in promoting human-centric governance? How can and should priorities be set from a human-centric perspective? What are the limits and possibilities for public administration to work in a human-centric way? Our aim is not to provide ready-made answers but to encourage questions and discussions – alongside decision-makers, practitioners, researchers, and others with an interest in the topic.

Happy reading!

HUMAN-CENTRIC – ONE WORD, MANY MEANINGS

Digg has previously described digitalisation as part of a complex phenomenon, where "human at the centre" is one of five areas contributing to the complexity of digital transformation.^[3] This is partly due to how the "human system", with dynamic collectives and thinking individuals with diverse needs and experiences, operates at various levels in societal systems and within different organisations.

Goals for digitalisation should, therefore, take into account that humans are at the centre, that digital technology is a tool for fulfilling different needs and solving challenges, and that it inevitably raises new questions about how and why we need to change, for example, operations and legislation.^[4]

A framework for a human-centric approach has been developed within the Nordic DigiGov Lab project.^[5] The framework is based on the European Union's European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade,^[6] the dimensions of "digital first" and "user-driven" according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Digital Government Index,^[7] and examples from research.

The first part of the framework addresses the foundation for a human-centric approach within the public sector. This approach is based on international and national human and civil rights, where people's needs and inherent value are at the centre. In practice, it can manifest by, for example, prioritising common life events in an individual's life. These life events occur in different contexts and at different times, which means that people's needs vary depending on life event.

Important starting points when thinking in terms of life events are to reason more broadly than from the perspective of a single actor or service and to be aware of how laws and regulations can vary in ways that unnecessarily increase the burden on individuals or businesses. It is also wise to consider how laws and regulations may be distributed across a variety of private and public actors. The ambition of a human-centric approach to service accessibility is that services can be offered

3. [Digg reflekterar, utgåva 1 Självmål i målstyrningen](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

4. [Digg reflekterar, utgåva 1 Självmål i målstyrningen](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

5. [Digi Gov Lab | Nordic cooperation](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

6. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023C0123\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023C0123(01)) (accessed 2025-05-15).

7. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-oecd-digital-government-policy-framework_f64fed2a-en.html (accessed 2025-02-05).

collectively and more precisely address the individual situation and the person's actual needs, with the goal of providing the best conditions to manage rights and responsibilities in the prevailing situation.

The second part of the framework addresses how the promotion of a human-centric public administration often requires horizontal governance from the central level. One aspect of this is the creation of a common infrastructure with public data at its core, where the administration as a whole can offer digital services that seamlessly extend across actors and sectors. This infrastructure enables a coherent and shared experience of public services for businesses and people. The Swedish administrative model requires increased coordination from the highest level in order to achieve the uniformity and efficiency needed to place humans at the centre.

The third part of the framework deals with how human-centric governance can be characterised. Researchers Christian Bason and Robert D. Austin have summarised and identified what characterises human-centric governance in public administration.^[8] Their conclusions are based on experiences and interviews with actors within public administration in Denmark, Finland, and the USA. According to the authors, human-centric governance can be characterised by the following aspects.

- **Reflective** User-centred, qualitative methods and empathy are considered important drivers for an organisation's ability to understand and create change.
- **Interactive** Understanding the need to create meaningful and purposeful interactions between citizens and public organisations can be achieved through various types of digital or practical tools.
- **Networking** Recognising the need to consciously think about and embrace how society is made up of a diversity of actors in order to create societal value.
- **Relational** Working with the understanding that public administration has broad and long-term commitments, requiring careful consideration of the values the organisation contributes to society.^[9]

8. Bason, Christian, Austin D., Robert, Design in the public sector: Toward a human centred model of public governance, 2022, Public Management Review, 24:11, 1727-1757.
9. Bason, Christian, Austin D., Robert, Design in the public sector: Toward a human centred model of public governance, 2022, Public Management Review, 24:11, 1727-1757.

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A human-centric approach within the public sector is based on international and national human and civil rights.

The concept of human-centric also plays a central role in the field of digitalisation. There are several examples from international intergovernmental organisations such as the EU and OECD. The concept is applied to everything from the design of public services and AI-based solutions to the issue of how rights and obligations are managed in a digital society.^[10]

The meaning of the term human-centric has evolved over time, and some aspects of the framework are not new. The following quote from computer pioneer and researcher Michael Dertouzos in an interview with Computer Sweden from 2001 is telling of how human-centric is used in relation to digital technology:

Human-centered computing is about making computers meet our needs. It's about making machines easier to use and ensuring they become part of our natural environment, just like breathing.^[11]

If we then add the word "design" to human-centred, it turns out that the term can be traced back to the late 1950s. It is believed to have emerged at the intersection of various disciplines such as art, anthropology, and engineering at Stanford University.^[12] Even then, it was recognised that one way to solve problems and develop products and processes, was to "start with the human". That is, the premise for problem-solving is to understand needs and human experiences by involving the intended target audience in the creation of a product, service, or work method.

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The concept of human-centredness plays a central role in the field of digitalization.

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10. See [OECD Legal Instruments](#), 2024, [Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI | Shaping Europe's digital future](#) and [Ett samhälle i förändring - underlag till regeringens strategiska prioriteringar](#) (accessed 2025-01-31).
 11. Michael Dertouzos (1936-2001), Professor in the department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Director of the MIT Laboratory for Computer Science (LCS) from 1974 to 2001, in an interview by Computer Sweden published on March 2 2001 in connection with the publication of his book *The Unfinished Revolution*.
 12. [Human-centered design - Wikipedia](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

HUMAN-CENTRIC AI

Returning to the present day at Stanford University, a collaborative project is underway between researchers and public actors on human-centric AI.^[13] The initiative's acronym HAI summarises their view on human-centredness. They are primarily interested in issues that arise in society as AI spreads across various areas that affect people (Human Impact). Secondly, they argue that AI technologies should enhance human capabilities – rather than replace them (Augmented Human Capabilities). Thirdly, they believe that AI should be developed to improve or understand various human domains such as human behaviour, emotions, language, and more (Intelligence).^[14]

Another current example is how human-centredness is applied in the EU's ethical guidelines for trustworthy AI. Here, the focus is on how AI systems should promote and be based on, among other things, fundamental human rights. The starting point is the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade.^[15]

According to the EU, AI solutions should be human-centric, meaning they must promote freedom and welfare for people, and therefore be based on a "commitment to use them in the service of humanity and for the common good".^[16]

According to the EU, a human-centric approach means that when using AI for surveillance or when disseminating, developing, and using AI, "human values are central." These values include: Respect for fundamental rights, where humans have a "unique and inalienable moral status"; and Consideration for the environment and other beings that are part of the "human ecosystem", in order to promote sustainability for future generations.^[17]

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AI technologies should enhance human capabilities – rather than replace them.

13. Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, [Home | Stanford HAI](#) (accessed 2025-02-18).
14. Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, [Home | Stanford HAI](#) (accessed 2025-02-18) and [About | Stanford HAI](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).
15. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023C0123\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023C0123(01)) (accessed 2025-05-15).
16. [Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI | Shaping Europe's digital future](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).
17. [Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI | Shaping Europe's digital future](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

A HUMAN-CENTRIC DIGITALISATION POLICY?

Digital inclusion, together with social factors such as education, location, gender, and income strongly affect people's ability and willingness to engage with public digital services. As society becomes increasingly digitalised, this has consequences for trust, democracy, and people's well-being, which we must understand and develop in a variety of ways.

There are fundamental questions to consider regarding access, distribution, and allocation of the data generated by individuals' actions and behaviours in the digital world. Questions can be raised concerning everything from who gets access to an individual's own data, to the access of relatives to the same data (in the event of death, for example), and what interests society and commercial forces might have in this same data.

Examples of human-centredness can be found in many places around the world, not least in the Nordic and Baltic regions. The digitalisation agencies in Sweden, Norway, and Finland have explored how human-centric governance works in practice within the framework of the Nordic DigiGov Lab project. Below are several examples of human-centric approaches identified within the project, based on, among other things, interviews with representatives from various countries.

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGIES

Denmark's national digitalisation strategy^[18] includes, as one of nine visions, the creation of coherent public services for people and businesses. These services should be user-friendly, consistent, and cohesive, regardless of where citizens interact with the public administration.

A concrete example is the web portal borger.dk, which deals with a variety of life events. The individual answers questions about their situation and then receives suggestions on how they should proceed step by step to fulfil their obligations and claim their rights.

Estonia has two strategies where human-centric governance is a key component: the national AI strategy^[19] and Estonia's Digital Agenda 2030^[20]. The AI strategy clearly outlines how AI-based systems should be grounded in human-centric principles.

18. [National Strategy for Digitalisation - together in the digital development](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

19. [980182_4434a890f1e64c66b1190b0bd2665dc2.pdf](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

20. [Digiühiskonna arengukava_ENG.pdf](#) Estonia's Digital Agenda 2030 (accessed 2025-05-12).

The Digital Agenda specifies how human-centric digital government is one of four major "leaps" it aims to promote (in addition to AI-powered government, green digital government, and a switch to life and business event based and proactive services).

Norway released their latest digital strategy, "The Digital Norway of the Future"^[21], in the autumn of 2024, where they continue their focus on creating coherent services for seven different life events.

EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC SERVICE PORTALS

Lithuania has an "e-Government gateway" where services and queries are grouped from a life event perspective.^[22] The portal is described by the European Commission as a "State Information Resource Interoperability Platform" (SIRIP), where public actors can create and offer user-friendly digital services for residents, businesses, and employees within public administration.^[23]

Iceland offers public services through its digital portal island.is.^[24] Services are grouped both by life events such as retirement, moving home, or having children, and by "service areas" such as consumer protection, education, or for business owners.

EXAMPLES OF ORGANISATIONAL COLLABORATION AND THE LAW

Norway has a cross-departmental working group with representatives from all ministries to horizontally coordinate the country's efforts for coherent services.^[25]

Estonia uses the term "Estonian legal space" to identify and bring together laws and regulations that support digitalisation. One activity here is the development of human-centric digital administration using legal frameworks to promote reliable digital services.

Estonia has made it possible for citizens to track how public administration uses their data through what is known as its "data tracker".^[26]

21. [The Digital Norway of the Future – National Digitalisation Strategy 2024–2030](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

22. <https://www.epaslaugos.lt/portal/> (accessed 2025-05-15).

23. [SIRIP: State Information Resource Interoperability Platform | Interoperable Europe Portal](#) (2025-05-15).

24. [Island.is](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

25. [Arbeidet med de sju livshendelsene | Digidir](#) (accessed 2025-02-04).

26. [Data tracker | RIA](#) (accessed 2025-02-05).

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Lithuania has an “e-Government gateway” where services and queries are grouped from a life event perspective.

EXAMPLES OF FUNDING

Finland has developed and implemented a programme to promote life event-based digitalisation.^[27] The programme is run by the Finnish Ministry of Finance and has dedicated funding to support the preparation of life event-based digitalisation for individuals and businesses.

27. [Programme to promote life event based digitalisation - Valtiovarainministeriö](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

THREE DIMENSIONS OF A HUMAN-CENTRIC PUBLIC SECTOR

We note that while a human-centric approach can mean many different things, it has some key core meanings that can be applied to various areas. To summarise the concept, we take a closer look at and deepen a model developed within the collaborative project Nordic DigiGov Lab. The model has three dimensions, Human-centric governance, Human-centric public services and Innovation.

Based on the framework for defining a human-centric approach presented earlier, Figure 1 presents three dimensions of human-centredness.^[28] Each of the dimensions does not necessarily depend on the others and can be developed independently and at various levels within public administration. The model summarises a selection of the opportunities and methods that typically emerge regarding human-centredness.

28. Figures 1 to 4 were developed in cooperation with Marie Berntsen at the Norwegian Digitaliseringsdirektoratet (DigDir) within the Nordic DigiGov Lab project.

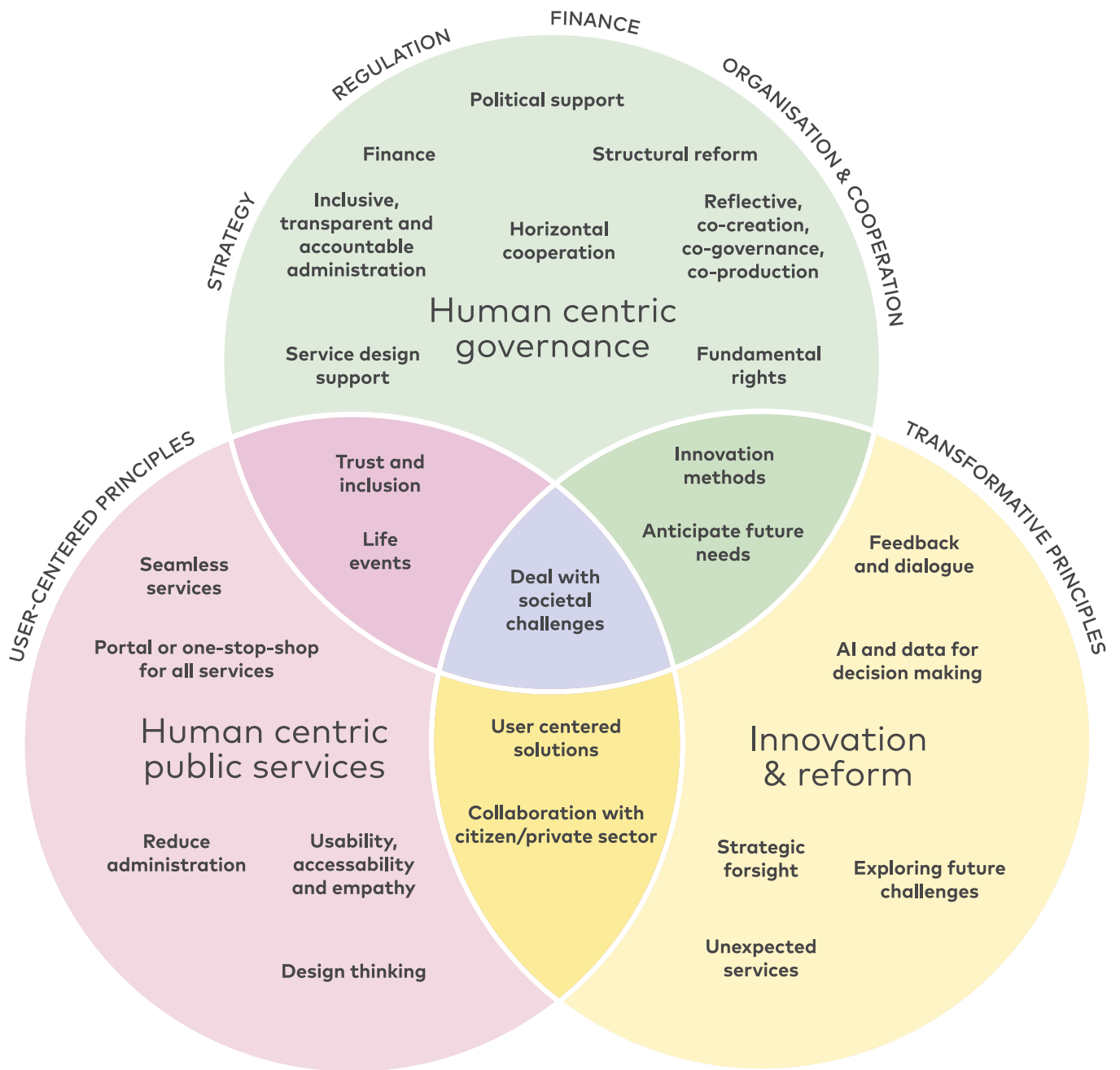


Figure 1 Three dimensions of human-centredness, developed in the Nordic DigiGov Lab project.

DIMENSION I – HUMAN-CENTRIC GOVERNANCE

The governance dimension is inspired by the OECD's "The E-Leaders Handbook on the Governance of Digital Government" .^[29] It includes strategy, organisation and collaboration, funding, and regulation.

In Figure 2, we deal with a broad range of aspects. Political support, for example, is clearly reflected in certain digitalisation strategies and funding initiatives aimed at achieving human-centredness. Norway's latest strategy explicitly expresses a human-centric ambition in the preface and is signed by both the Prime Minister and the Minister for Digitalisation and Public Administration.

In Denmark, the preface to the strategy with its collective commitments, is signed by the government.^[30] In Finland there are funding initiatives specifically aimed at promoting life event-based services. These are directly tied to commitments made by the Prime Minister and the government.^[31]

Within the Nordic DigiGov Lab project, the importance of integrating general administrative reforms with a human-centric approach and digitalisation is clear. Regarding fundamental rights and principles, it is important that these are clearly articulated as reasons for human-centric governance. For example, the Swedish National Financial Management Authority (ESV) points out that the foundation for needs-driven development in the public sector can be justified from the perspective of the Swedish form of government.^[32]

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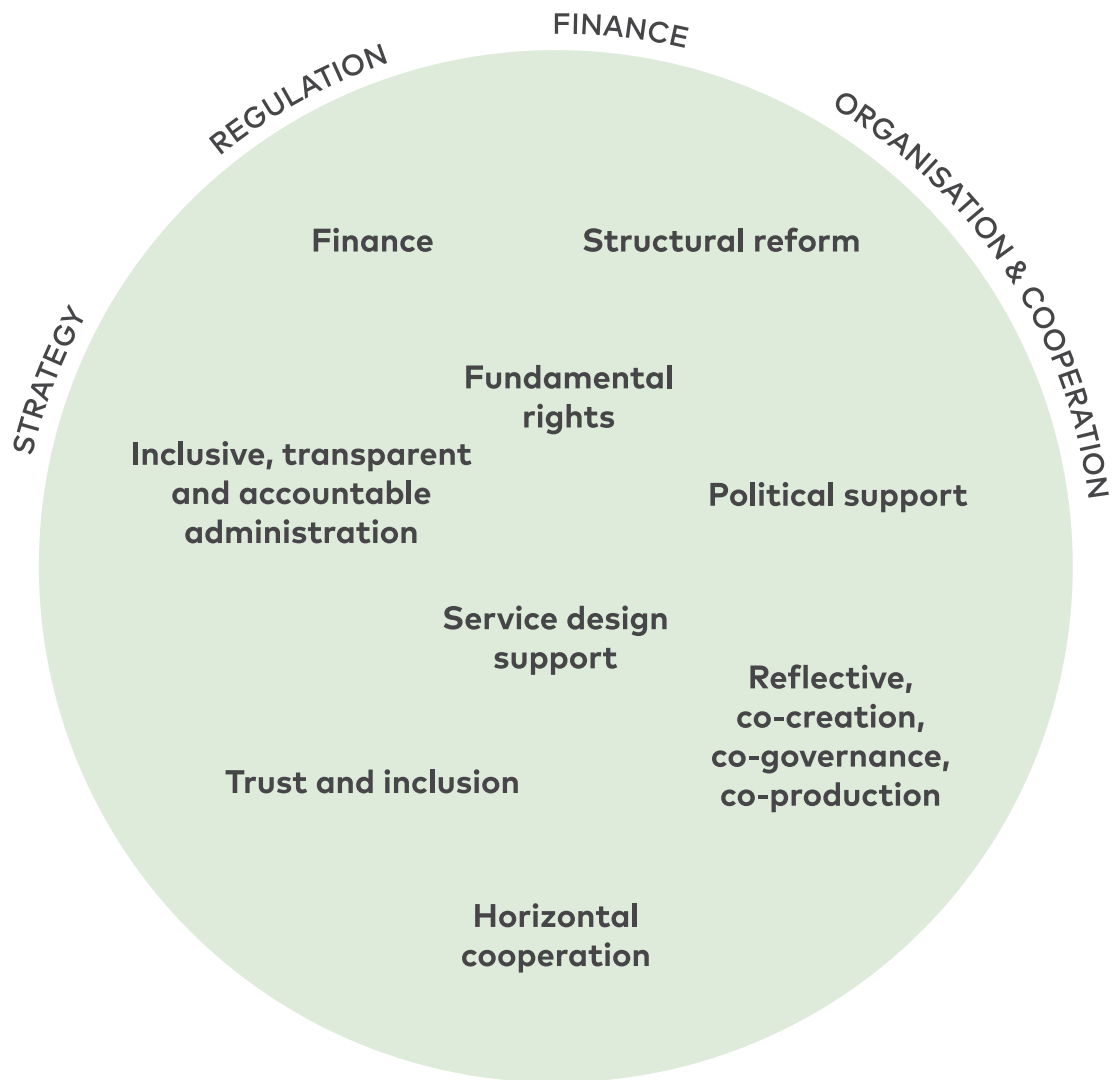
29. <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-e-leaders-handbook-on-the-governance-of-digital-government/ac7f2531-en.html> (accessed 2025-02-06).

30. [National Strategy for Digitalisation - together in the digital development](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

31. [Programme to promote life event based digitalisation - Valtiovarainministeriö](#) (accessed 2025-02-06).

32. [Från behovsdriven utveckling till nyttorealisering – en översikt - ESV Forum](#) (accessed 2025-02-06).

Governance dimension



KEY STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

Get politics on board first?

Start with the big flows – how, who, when, quantity and quality.

Get things done first, think later? Think slow, then act fast?

Cooperation and culture, funding meaningful goals.

How do we make the services nobody asked for?

How to find long-term financing based on holistic needs?

Figure 2 Dimension I: Human-centric governance, developed in the Nordic DigiGov Lab project.

Governance can also take the form of principles, guidelines, and standards for the design and delivery of public digital services, something that is currently lacking in Sweden. This leads to different public actors working in various ways, which, as pointed out by the Swedish National Audit Office, results in inefficiency. This, in turn, impacts the accessibility of public digital services.^[33]

Governing towards human-centredness can pose many challenges. Administrative systems are generally hierarchical and vertical, making it difficult to create seamless and holistic experiences of public services. Therefore, a certain degree of collaboration and horizontal governance from the central level is required. As mentioned earlier, Norway has initiated such an organisational model at the central level to promote life event-based services.

Other challenges may relate to the ability to prioritise efforts from a human-centric perspective. On the one hand, there may be a desire to prioritise areas where a high proportion of people come into contact with the public sector, thus justifying human-centric efforts from a quantitative perspective, where "demand is highest." On the other hand, there may be strong qualitative benefits in areas where the volume is not as large, but where efforts should be prioritised based on acting relationally and reflectively. This could involve reducing digital exclusion, or promoting equal access to digital services regardless of whereabouts in the country people are located.

From a human-centric perspective, it may also be important to act on the understanding that the answers are not predetermined but need to be explored and understood with empathy and sensitivity. This requires the ability to work with an open mind and a respectful yet assertive approach, and with various qualitative methods. A prerequisite is to allow for more actors to participate in the governance, but also the ability to work iteratively and develop solutions over time.

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In Sweden, needs-driven development within the public sector can be justified based on the Swedish form of government.

33. [Digital services for individuals – major development opportunities for government agencies | Riksrevisionen](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

DIMENSION II – HUMAN-CENTRIC PUBLIC SERVICES

In the next dimension, as seen in Figure 3, we are inspired by the OECD's principles for human-centric public services, their Digital Government Index, as well as the EU's Interoperability Framework (EIF), which includes principles around user-centredness and inclusion.^[34]

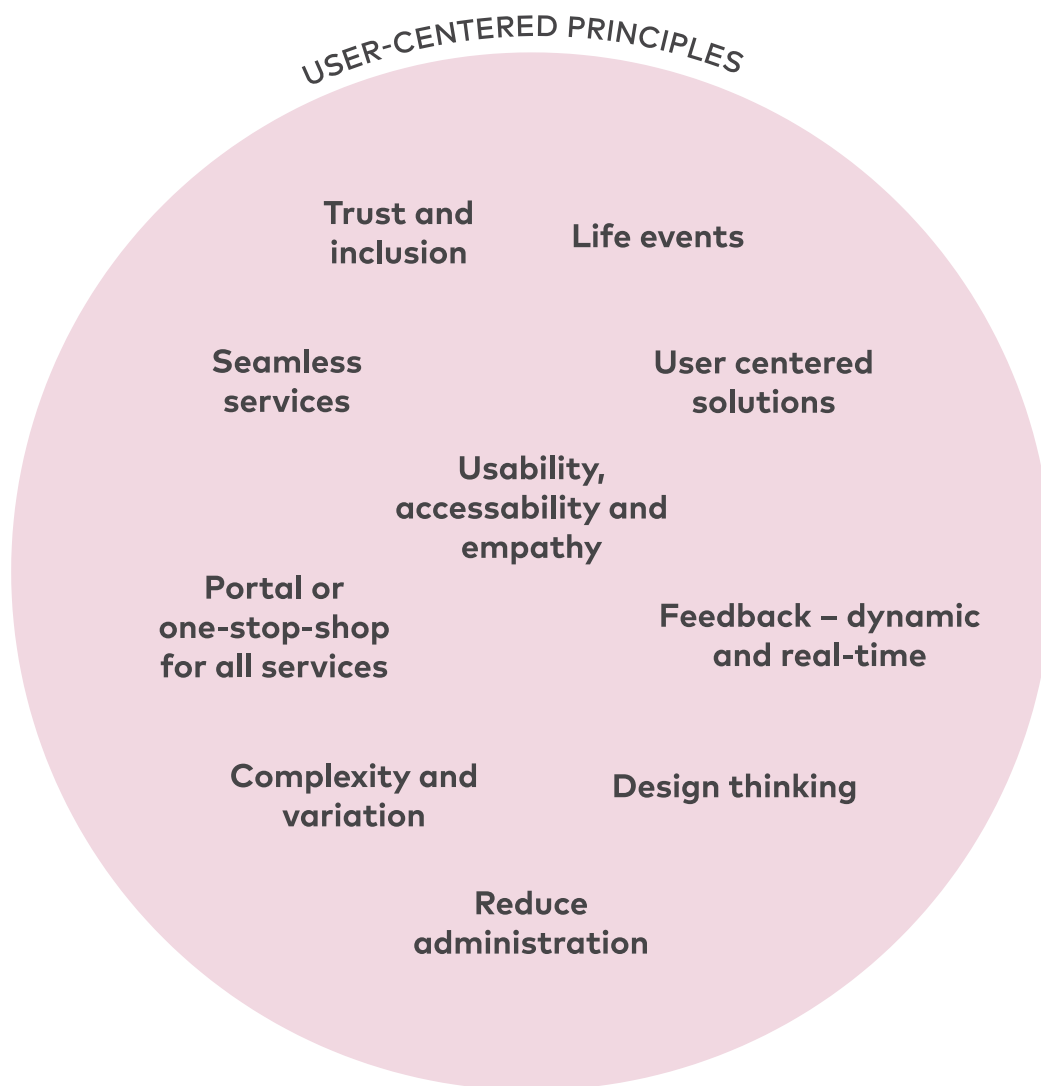
In the autumn of 2024, the OECD published a recommendation for human-centric public services.^[35] This recommendation highlights, among other things, that services should inspire trust and be based on the perspectives, needs, experiences, and expectations of individuals and groups. This also means that services should be grounded in fundamental values, where the protection of privacy and security is maintained, alongside upholding freedom, equality, rule of law, and justice. The recommendation calls for the public administration's ability to capture, understand, and incorporate citizens' needs and opinions in its daily work. Ultimately, this concerns the very design of the services and how the development of public administration is driven forward in collaboration with citizens.

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The recommendation calls for the administration's ability to capture, understand, and incorporate citizens' needs and opinions in its daily work.

34. [The European Interoperability Framework in detail | Interoperable Europe Portal](#) (accessed 2025-02-06).
35. [OECD Legal Instruments](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

Human-centric public services dimension



KEY STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

How to create user-journeys across the system of different public administration actors?

How to define and prioritise life-events?

How to measure peoples' needs — quantity and quality, empathy, transactions.

How to handle complex as well as complicated life situations (variations in predictability)?

How do we initiate and develop cross-border services?

Understanding the relational character of services?

Figure 3 Dimension II: Human-centred public services, developed in the Nordic DigiGov Lab project.

As with the previous dimension, here too we encounter a range of aspects to consider. The "design thinking" approach for creating services involves focusing on the user perspective through structured methods, in collaboration with various actors, infrastructure, and digital technologies^[36], with the explicit goal of creating a service based on people's needs, which is relevant to the target groups and those in need of the service.

The previously mentioned researcher Christian Bason writes in his dissertation about how design thinking has been adopted in the public sector and has become a "global movement".^[37] In simple terms, this involves developing and transforming the public sector, especially through increased public participation, aiming to create societal change through public policy and services.

The dimension of human-centric services can, therefore, focus on how services should be developed in close collaboration with people and businesses to capture their experiences and needs. The ability to co-create has also been highlighted as an important tool not only for developing new services but also for addressing and handling new societal challenges, as shown in an extensive study of public administration in European cities.^[38]

Another area shown in Figure 3 is "reducing the administrative burden" for individuals in their interactions with public administration. This ambition is a classic within Swedish public administration. For example, the Swedish Bureaucracy Inquiry expressed as early as 1979:^[39]

Through cooperation between authorities in data collection, the public's need to provide information could, in certain cases, be simplified. Some data collections should be designed so that future use of data by other authorities is facilitated. [...] The individual's role could change to checking and approving data.

This is an early example of the desire to ease the burden on individuals from having to submit information – often the same information – to multiple public actors who have not managed to coordinate with each other, thereby aiming to focus on what is essential. The goal is to first confirm what is correct and accurate, in order to efficiently and clearly access obligations and rights, rather than creating more administration and bureaucracy.

36. [Från behovsdriven utveckling till nyttorealisering – en översikt - ESV Forum](#) (accessed 2025-02-06).

37. Bason, Christian, Leading Public Design How Managers Engage with Design to Transform Public Governance, 2017, Copenhagen Business School [PhD]. PhD series No. 21.2017, [Christian_Bason.pdf](#) (accessed 2025-02-03).

38. [Public-Innovation-building-capacity-in-Europes-city-governments.pdf](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

39. <https://lagen.nu/sou/1979:31> (accessed 2025-05-15).

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The individual's role could change to checking and approving data.

This is about ensuring that people and businesses only need to provide certain standard information once (“the once-only principle”). After that, the data should be shared between relevant authorities, so that it does not need to be provided again for each new case or contact with an authority. This saves time and resources and ensures that the data used is of high quality and retrieved directly from the source.

To return to the concept of relational, we can ask how this might manifest in practice in public services. Here, several potentially conflicting interests must meet and be managed. The administration's need for transparency and rule of law are core values that the public sector must uphold to protect a democratic society.

These values can conflict with the needs of a specific target group or commercial interests that may not desire transparency or openness. Similarly, excessive collaboration with a particular target group or need may risk creating unfair priority over other groups. Another example of a challenge concerns how and whether services are followed up after implementation to ensure relevance, quality, and efficiency in relation to needs and original goals. Here too, qualitative and quantitative measures may need to interact when decisions are made about future development or discontinuation.

Seamless and holistic services, in turn, require that various public – and private – actors collaborate to achieve practical results. This can become a difficult balancing act when public actors are not monitored or funded based on the collective benefit.

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The administration's need for transparency and rule of law are core values that must be maintained to protect a democratic society.

DIMENSION III – INNOVATION AND REFORM

The innovation dimension is illustrated in Figure 4 and focuses on the ability to think entirely anew, both for new and existing problems. Unlike improvements, or entirely new services based on traditional logic, digital transformation fundamentally changes how public administration works across various areas: in its internal processes, in how new legislation is developed, and in how it interacts with people and businesses.^[40]

There are at least four different types of innovation areas for public administration. These can involve changing internal work processes, creating new services or products, governing in new ways, or enabling other and new ways of viewing old problems through the use of new opportunities.^[41] The Norwegian researcher Heather Broomfield argues that when it comes to creating truly "transformed" services, it is about managing, analysing, and understanding large amounts of data, where public administration can implement services based on understanding probabilities, predicting needs, being proactive, and supporting citizens.^[42]

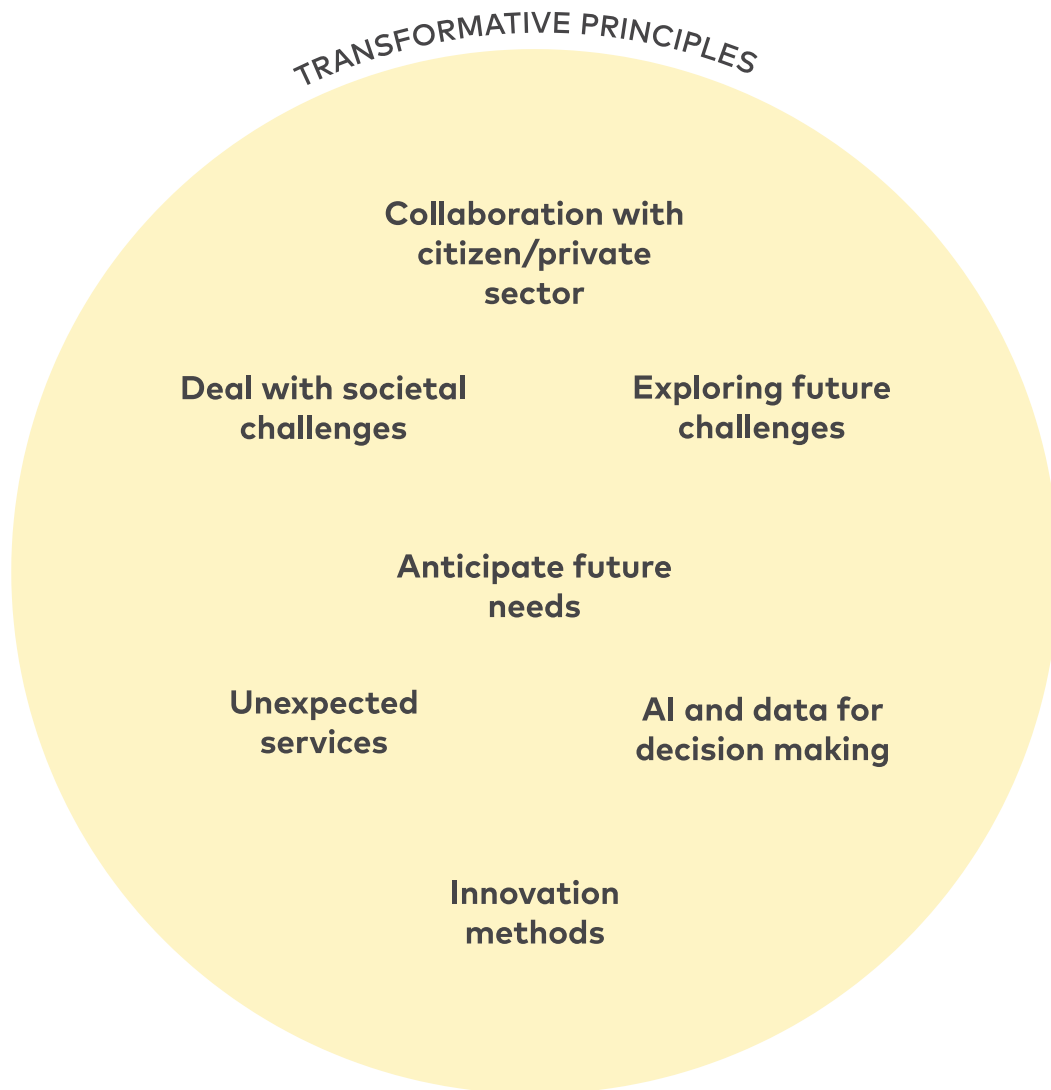
The innovation dimension has many touchpoints with the other two dimensions in that it, in certain respects, requires active governance and open conditions to succeed. It also needs to address, to a great extent, the identified problems and ambitions within the service dimension, such as reducing administrative burdens or increasing trust and inclusion. There are several potential "methods" to capture new trends in the environment, but also to understand and predict societal challenges and needs. In line with Broomfield's reasoning, the ability to use data analysis – with the support of technologies such as AI – can help us identify areas that can be reformed or where innovation can bring significant benefits.

40. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0740624X18304131> (accessed 2025-05-15).

41. [Public-Innovation-building-capacity-in-Europes-city-governments.pdf](#) (accessed 2025-05-15).

42. [Toward a Common Understanding of a Data-Driven Public Sector - A Conceptual Framework by Heather Broomfield :: SSRN](#) (besökt 2025-02-06).

Transformative solutions dimension



KEY STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

How do we enable cognitive leaps in creating new types of public services?

What role can digital technology play in enabling new types of services?

How do we balance key values of public administration and the need for stability with the need for innovative reform?

How do we make the services nobody asked for?

How do we create space for innovation in a highly regulated sector?

Figure 4 Dimension III: Innovation, developed in the Nordic DigiGov Lab project.

Descriptive analysis provides answers to questions such as “What has happened?” both over time (historically/timeline) and in the present (current overview). A descriptive analysis may involve grouping and reporting key metrics related to specific areas or years, and can also contribute answers to questions about why something has happened.

Predictive analysis answers questions such as “What will happen?” and can be based on earlier analysis questions such as “Why has something happened?” Various methods or algorithms can support the analysis of relationships between different variables to explain specific outcomes, patterns, and/or clusters in a dataset. This can, in turn, be used to formulate expectations for future events or assess risks based on different scenarios.

Prescriptive analysis is about answering questions such as “What should happen?” This type of analysis can be based on norms within areas such as information security, efficiency, law, or ethics. Using these norms, a dataset is analysed to generate alternatives, rankings, or proposals for different courses of action.

Appropriate data management can provide direct feedback on how an organisation conducts its work. Automated feedback loops can give real-time information on how digital services are performing, and subsequent analyses can help identify the need for business development. Other inputs for the need to change operations may come from external environment monitoring with strategic foresight.

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The ability to use data analysis can help us identify areas that can be reformed or where innovation can bring significant benefits.

As in the other two dimensions, we face challenges here as well, such as the need to constructively balance public core values and principles with the need to reform and do things in new ways to meet new types of societal challenges while maintaining democracy, accountability, and transparency.

The starting point for innovation or transformation should be tactical and strategic reasoning to understand where and when people need physical interaction and support, or when citizen involvement is not required at all, such as through automated approaches. An example could be that certain types of rights are granted automatically without an application being made. Here, various tools and

spaces may need to be created to allow new ways of thinking to emerge. This could be achieved through regulatory sandboxes or by creating a culture that is open to new ideas in collaboration with people and businesses.

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An example could be that certain types of rights are granted automatically without an application being made.

HUMAN BEINGS AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR – FINAL THOUGHTS

In light of the rapidly accelerating development of digitalisation itself, as well as the rise of generative AI, human-centredness has gained renewed relevance and widespread attention. This is evident not only in leading intergovernmental organisations but also in academic research. When adopting a human-centric perspective, we are confronted with significant questions facing society. Ultimately, it concerns how we need to safeguard and ensure that individuals have the right conditions to exercise their rights and responsibilities in a digital world. Or, how we should adapt and develop digital public administration based on our varying interests and social circumstances.

In this context, key issues emerge, particularly regarding the importance of digital inclusion and whose perspectives should determine how digitalisation is shaped. Several important questions arise concerning access to, and the dissemination of, people's data, particularly in relation to different life events, and how data can and should be managed in the future. Finally, this also includes broader issues concerning digital competence, both in terms of professional skills and general knowledge, as well as the ability to navigate and act within a digital society.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

During the course of the work, the following thoughts and questions have arisen that we believe need further discussion, based on how the concept of human-centredness has been presented in this report:

How can a human-centric approach be justified from a political perspective? To what extent should public opinion and expressed needs influence work within the three dimensions of human-centredness?

Is it more important to immediately implement practical solutions for users, or should we first consider and explore potential solutions? One alternative is to "think slowly – and then act fast." How and when should we balance these different approaches?

How can we achieve the greatest possible benefit? Where in the process should human-centric initiatives be prioritised? Should we start with a cost-benefit analysis that primarily considers the number of transactions to achieve maximum savings and efficiency? Or should we identify needs and priorities based on other values, such as empathy? Should we begin where poverty and exclusion are most pronounced, or where strong but perhaps unspoken needs exist? Should we work with emotions and ideas as a basis for prioritisation?

Many aspects of human-centredness require an active, participatory, and practical approach from public administration. What kind of culture of collaboration and attitude is needed from decision-makers and public officials to initiate and work with human-centredness?

How can – or should – public administration build capacity and be given the means to create services we do not yet know we need? Should the public sector even engage in such innovation work at all? Is there a risk of trying to personalise too much? Isn't the most important thing what we aim to achieve for society, democracy, people, and businesses, rather than innovation or transformation in itself? How can we achieve this while society, industry, technology, and people's needs and desires change rapidly?

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Whose perspective should decide how digitalisation is shaped?

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

A SMALL STEP FOR DIGITALISATION, A GIANT LEAP FOR HUMANITY?

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