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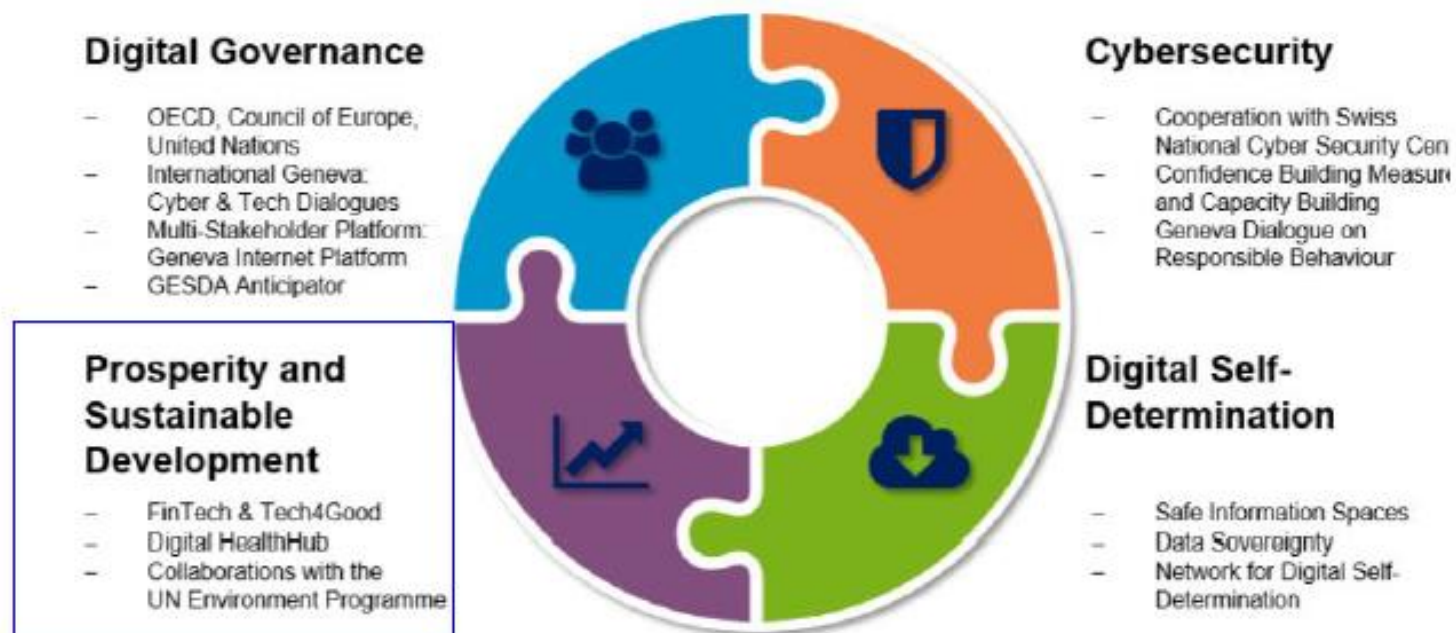
SDC's Approach to Digital Governance

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Digital Strategy FDFA (2021-24) /SDC



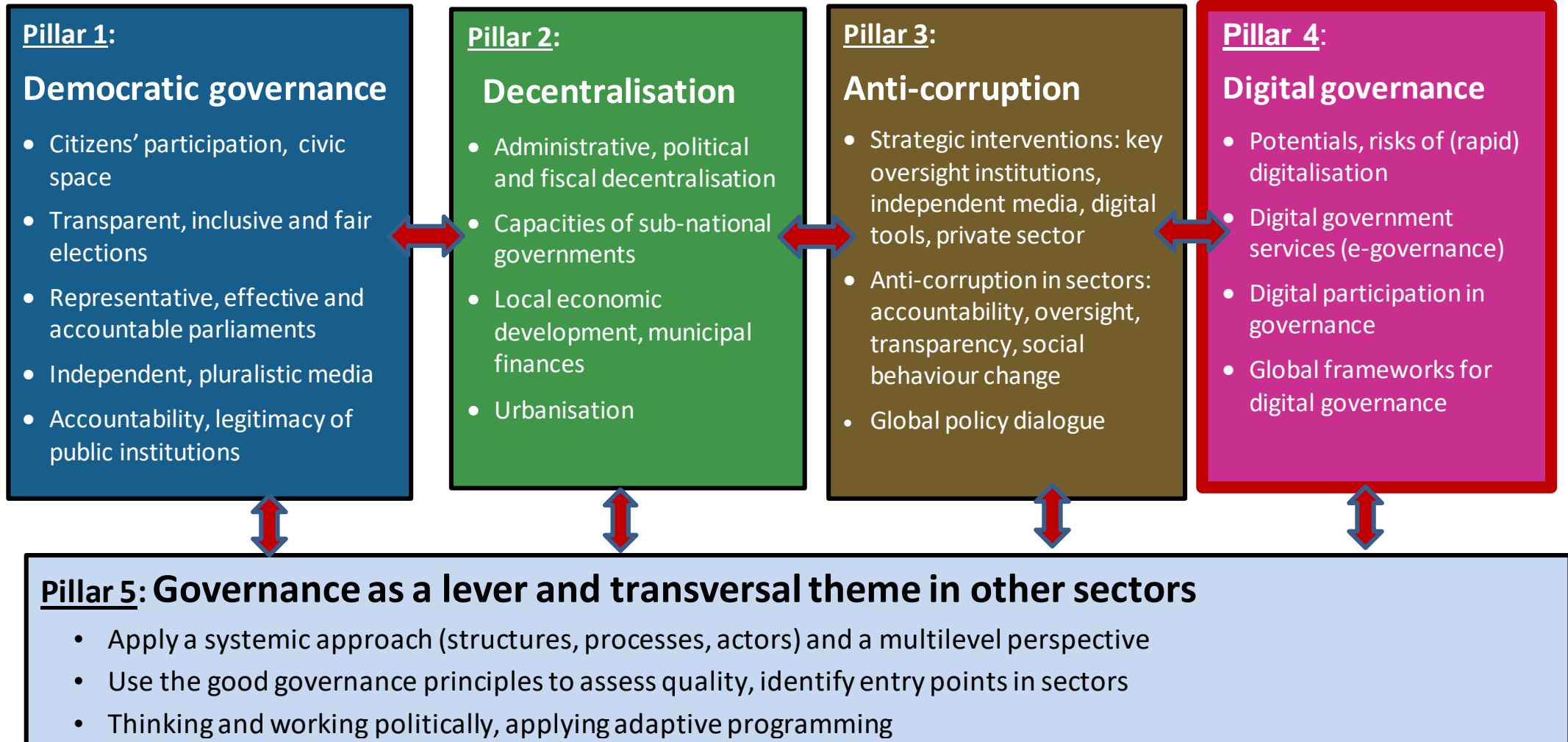
Strategic thematic priorities



SDC's Governance Priorities

Contributing to

- Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024 (Obj.4, sub-objective 10)
- Agenda 2030 (SDG 16)





Policy Note



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Key Issues in Digitalisation and Governance



1 Why is this topic relevant for development?

Digitalisation is perhaps the most important strategic challenge facing governance in the decade ahead. There are valuable opportunities that digitalisation provides to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 and 17, and particularly target 16.7 of 'inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels'. At the same time, there are new governance challenges raised by digital disruption, including the loss of privacy due to mass surveillance, closures of online civic space, and the shift of governance power away from citizens and domestic institutions to unaccountable internet corporations in foreign capitals. The most important insight is that digital technologies themselves are **neither good nor bad, nor are they ever**

1 This Policy Note is part of a series on digital governance and summarises the findings of a first report with the same title, *Key Issues in Digitalisation and Governance*. A second report titled *State Actors in Digitalisation and Governance* makes specific proposals about potential partners which are most aligned with Swiss strengths and strategic priorities. A third report, *Mapping of SDC's Projects in Digitalisation and Governance*, maps out existing SDC projects. A Practice Note, *Ways Forward, Assessment Tools and Possible Partners in Digitalisation and Governance*, introduces practical tools to help navigate SDC's support in this field.

neutral. Also, technology use tends to reflect the wider political and economic interests that are at play anyway.

2 Four different ways that 'digital' shapes governance

Digital in government
Application of digital technologies across government functions (e.g. automated salary payment).

Digital government services
Government-to-citizen information and services via government websites and portals (i.e. online licences).

Digital participation in governance
Spaces designed to enable citizen-to-government and interactive spaces for citizens to monitor progress, hold those in power accountable, and actively participate.

Governance in a digital world
Monopolies shape the lives of citizens and the private sector with no governance mechanisms to regulate, tax or hold them accountable.

Mapping of SDC's Projects in Digitalisation and Governance

March 2022



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March 2022



Main Actors in Digitalisation and Governance

March 2022



Practice Note



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Ways Forward, Assessment Tools and Possible Partners in Digitalisation and Governance



Four stages of digitalisation and governance¹

Digitalisation is significantly affecting all sectors of development cooperation. Key aspects of social, economic and political life are migrating to online spaces, and so rely on digital devices and connectivity. Use of mobile and internet technologies has enabled a variety of positive digital dividends for development in education, healthcare and livelihoods. It has also, however, resulted in 'digital divides' that negatively affect the most marginalised.

1 This Practice Note is part of a series on digital governance. The first report, *Key Issues in Digitalisation and Governance*, highlights the key opportunities and challenges arising from digitalisation and a Policy Note with the same title summarises its findings. A second report titled *Main Actors in Digitalisation and Governance* makes specific proposals about potential partners which are most aligned with Swiss strengths and strategic priorities. A third report, *Mapping of SDC's Projects in Digitalisation and Governance*, maps out existing SDC projects. A Practice Note, *Ways Forward, Assessment Tools and Possible Partners in Digitalisation and Governance*, introduces practical tools to help navigate SDC's support in this field.

SDC frames its work on digitalisation and governance within a typology of four stages (see Box 1), which are explained in more detail in a separate short Policy Note.

These four stages overlap significantly, meaning a particular initiative may contain elements of one or more stages. Nonetheless, the four stages are recognisable to digital governance professionals and have analytical value in furthering our understanding of ongoing change. In the first stage, the focus is on increasing the productivity of civil servants by digitalising mundane departmental processes and functions. The second stage centres on building government websites and portals that enable citizens to access government services at their convenience, without needing to travel to government offices or queue to see officials. In the third stage, digital tools and online spaces are used to improve government engagement with citizens, creating inclusive, participatory opportunities for citizens to play a meaningful role in the



Four ways that 'digital' shapes governance

Box 1. Stages of digitalisation and governance



1 **Digital in government:** The digitalisation of internal government functions, including the adoption of computers, productivity software, and automation of payroll for police and government staff.



2 **Digital government services:** The digitalisation of government services to citizens. Previously called e-government, this includes government websites and open government data portals, and incorporates myriad digital government services, such as online licences, procurement and tax returns.



3 **Digital participation in governance:** The digitalisation of participatory governance initiatives, including online consultations, petitions and inclusive decision-making. Previously called e-governance or e-participation, this includes online participatory budgeting and other civic tech projects.



4 **Governance in a digital world:** The task of governance in an increasingly digitalised world where foreign monopolies have privatised the platforms on which social, economic, and political life takes place. How do we support digital citizenship while avoiding a descent into forms of digital authoritarianism characterised by surveillance and disinformation?



Digital governance = a balancing act

- Unaccountable internet giants
- Internet shutdowns
- Fake news, targeted Disinformation
- Citizen manipulation
- Violence against women online
- Biased algorithms
- Digital inequalities

Digital Dividends

- Innovation
- Efficiency
- Inclusivity (of some)
- Corruption prevention





Practical approaches to digital governance

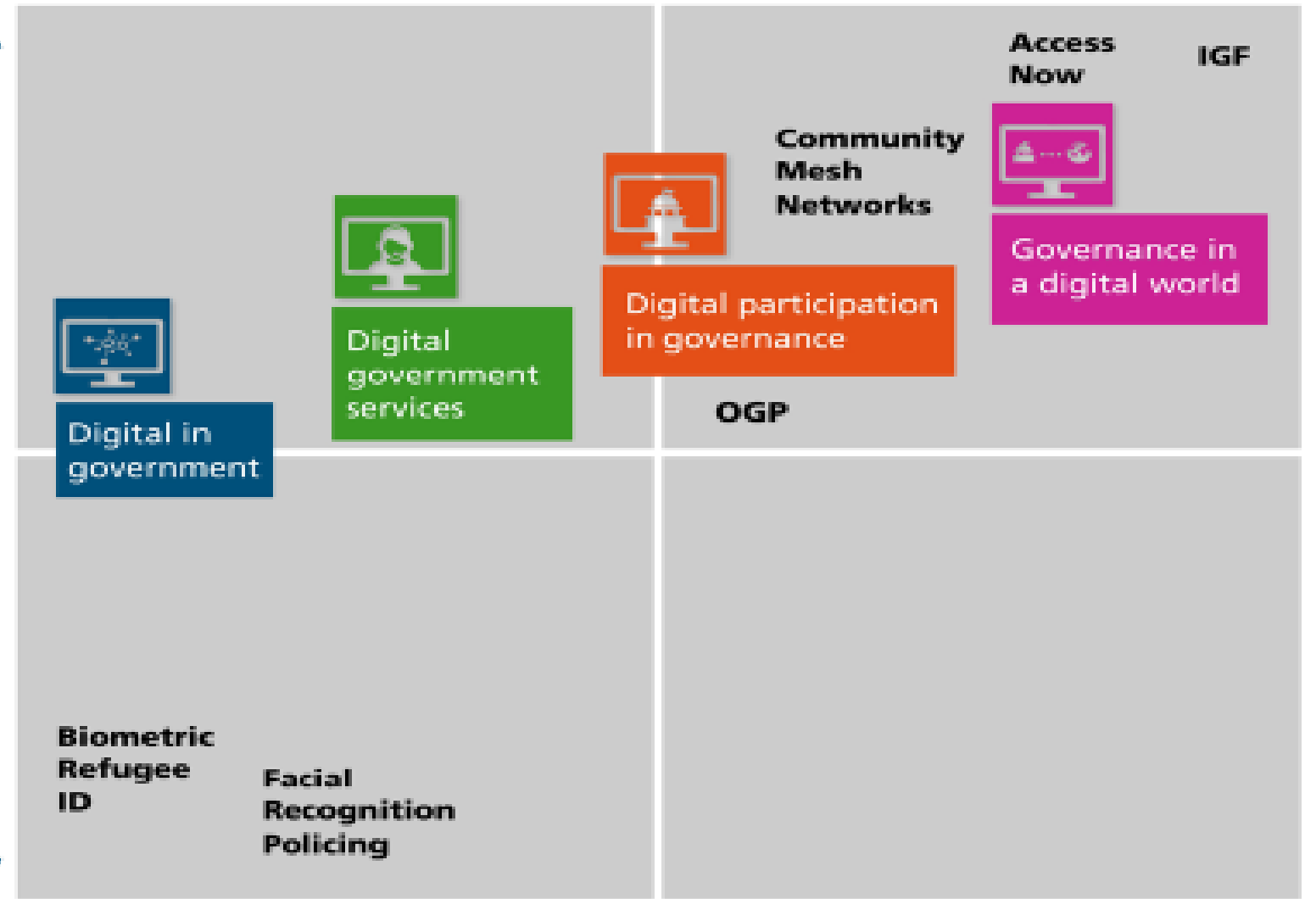




*How to
promote
inclusive and
participative
digital
governance?*

Free
Open
Decentralised

Unfree
Closed
Centralised



Technocentric
Dehumanising
Artificial intelligence
Automated Algorithmic

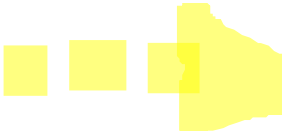
Human-centred
Humanising
Participatory
Dialogic



Table 1. Capacity and intent template

Regime	Examples of engagement with government	Examples of engagement with civil society
Authoritarian government Political intent: Centralisation, utilising mass surveillance and internet shutdowns Capacity: Low	Digital in government Assistance to digitalise meteorology services Digital government services Assistance to provide government information online	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fund inclusion in Internet Governance Forum (IGF)• Fund Access Now's #KeepItOn campaign or similar initiatives (as the FDFA's Peace and Human Rights Division does)• Provide workshops in strategic litigation for civil society partners
Democratic government Political intent: Reproduction of status quo, leading to mass surveillance and disinformation Capacity: Medium	Digital government services Assistance to digitalise open government data and join Open Governance Partnership (OGP) Digital participation in governance Assistance to create online space for inclusive governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fund initiatives such as African School for Internet Governance and/or help build similar schools elsewhere• Promote open data, open access, open source, open government, open development• Support public awareness campaigns about digital rights, surveillance, misinformation
Progressive government Political intent: Reform of internet governance and decentralisation of infrastructure/services. No illegitimate surveillance Capacity: Medium	Digital government services Assistance to create open government portal Digital participation in governance Assistance to facilitate participatory online budgeting Governance in a digital world Assistance to break up digital monopolies, tax digital transactions and prohibit online hate speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support decentralised community (connectivity) networks (e.g. health), non-surveillance media, anonymity tools• Advance digital rights and legal measures against surveillance; introduce legal tools to target misinformation

How to promote digital governance in different (regime) contexts?

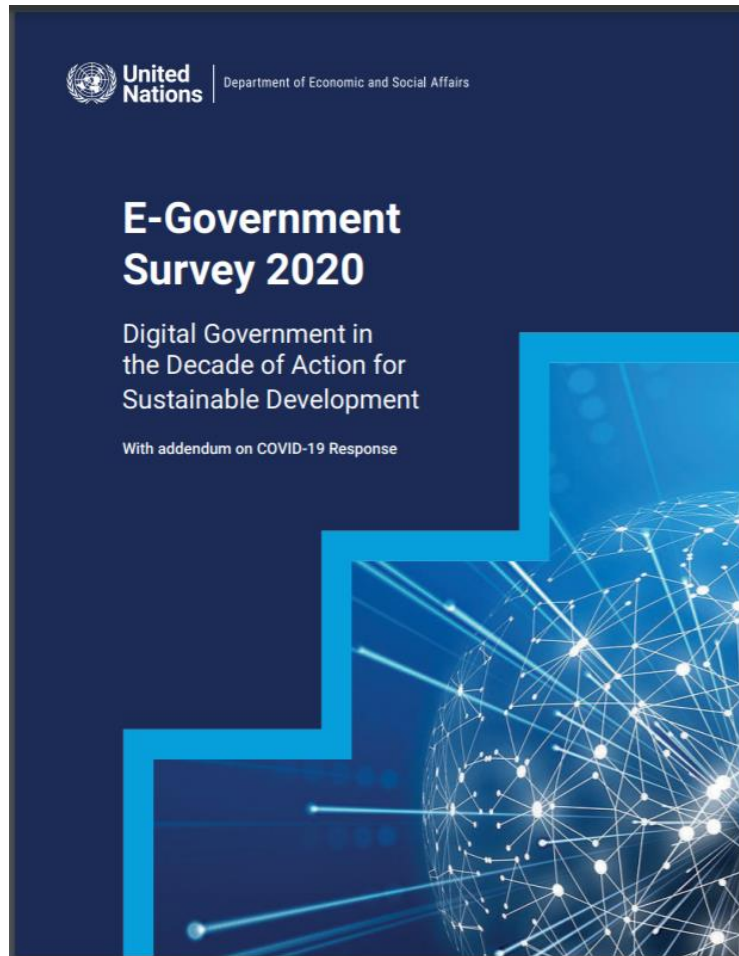




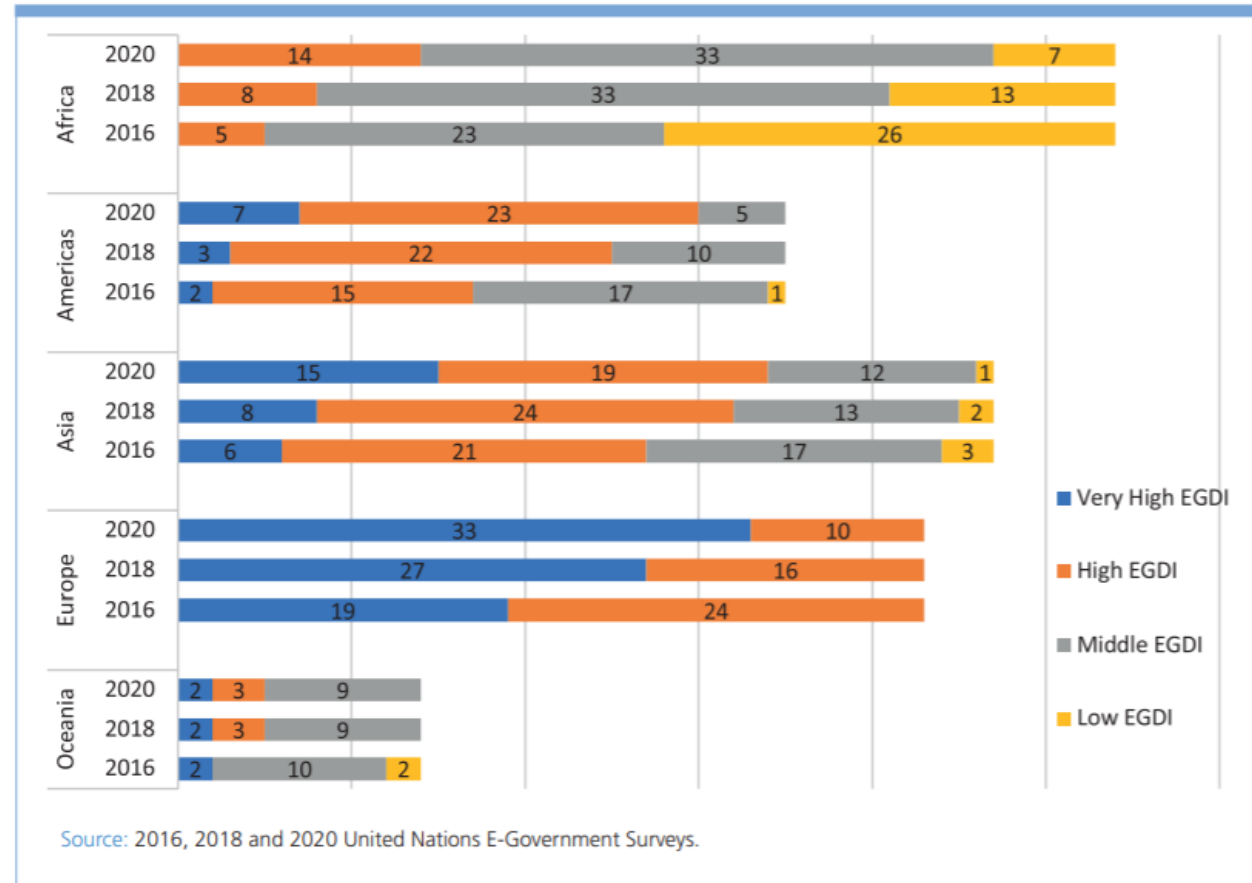
Ten Questions for Digital Governance Triage

1. **Political Economy:** Whose / which interests will be amplified?
2. **Human Rights:** Which rights will be affected?
3. **Participation:** who participates in the initiative? Will it enhance inclusion?
4. **Free and open internet:** How does it contribute to free and open internet?
5. **Decentralisation:** Is power centralized or decentralized by the program?
6. **Corruption:** Is corruption tackled at all levels?
7. **Technical feasibility:** Is the proposal technically feasible?
8. **Political feasibility:** Is the proposal politically feasible?
9. **Opportunities and challenges:** Does the proposal respond to opportunities (inclusion, efficiency gains etc.) and challenges arising from digitalization?
10. **Governance as transversal theme:** How can the proposal contribute / strengthen governance in other sectors?

Unequal Distribution of Digital Government Services between Countries



Regional distribution of countries by EGDI level, 2016, 2018 and 2020





Mapping – findings

1. **Digital in government:** still a very active area of work, foundational to work in the following stages as it provides infrastructure, builds skills and catalyses a culture/approach upon which the other categories can build.
2. **Digital government services:** remains a growing sector, all countries now have government websites, albeit with very different levels of functionality and sophistication.
3. **Digital participation in government:** Often, initiatives operating in this category are limited to pilot funding, preventing them from scaling up learning and impact. SDC's work with EGAP in Ukraine and DEMOS in Kosovo provides useful lessons and templates that can be adopted or modified in other countries.
4. **Digital governance:** perhaps the most troubling and strategically important area of future work. Existing governance mechanisms have proven inadequate in holding foreign corporations accountable or ending the 'pandemic' of digital surveillance, digital disinformation and internet shutdowns. These risks will likely trickle down to the three previous stages.