

Nordic DigiGov Lab

Human-Centric Innovation
for the next generation of
digital government



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Executive Summary

Nordic DigiGov Lab demonstrates how Nordic cooperation can accelerate digital transformation by combining human-centric governance, trustworthy artificial intelligence and public services delivered across borders for citizens in the Nordic region. The initiative has brought together digitalisation authorities, experts and practitioners from across the Nordic and Baltic region to explore how public services can be designed around people's needs, rather than administrative and institutional boundaries.

The project has produced four major innovation tracks: [AI-powered guidance for citizens during complex life events](#), a concept for cross-border information exchange related to death and inheritance, the [Nordic AI Trust Model](#) together with the Human-Centric Governance framework and the [Human-Centric Compass](#), these innovations all provide practical tools for future public sector transformation.

Designing Government Around People's Lives

The Nordic countries are internationally recognized for their high levels of trust, strong public institutions and advanced digitalization. Over the past decades, significant investments have been made in digital infrastructure, data sharing and online public services. As a result, citizens today can access many services digitally that previously required physical visits, paper forms or lengthy administrative processes.

Yet a fundamental challenge remains.

While public services have become increasingly digital, they are still often organized around the structures of government rather than the realities of people's lives. Citizens experiencing major life events – such as the birth of a child, starting a business, moving across borders or dealing with the death of a family member – must often navigate multiple organizations, regulations and digital services simultaneously.

Designing a coherent government system around people's lives, rather than offering disjoint services based on legal and organizational functions, is an important endeavour from a human-centric perspective.

Bridging this gap is one of the defining challenges for the next generation of digital government.

Beyond Digitalization

The next phase of public sector transformation is not primarily about introducing more technology. It is about creating public services that are coherent, inclusive and responsive to people's needs.

This requires a shift in perspective – from asking how organizations can digitize their existing processes, to asking how governments can organize themselves around citizens and life situations.

Such a shift affects not only service design but also governance, leadership, policy development and institutional collaboration.

This broader perspective is often described as Human-Centric Governance.

A Nordic exploration

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The initiative has involved policymakers, practitioners, researchers and innovation experts to investigate how governments can better understand citizens' needs and translate those insights into governance models, digital services and public sector innovation.

Through interviews with senior civil servants, workshops, practical experimentation and international knowledge exchange, the project developed a shared Nordic-Baltic understanding of human-centric governance and identified concrete methods for making it actionable in everyday public administration. Our exploration led us to conclude that a human-centric approach is based on international and national human and civil rights, and requires a horizontal governance approach from the central level providing common digital infrastructures. Other key aspects, based on research, is how a human-centric approach involves being reflective, interactive and relational.

Three dimensions of Human-Centric Governance

The project's work suggests that human-centric governance can be understood through three interconnected dimensions. These three dimensions are governance, public services and innovation. The dimensions involve different sets of opportunities and challenges, including the need for horizontal cooperation and governance among public authorities, enabling innovation through feedback and dialogue and reducing administrative burdens.

Understanding people's real needs

Public services should be designed around life situations rather than organisational responsibilities. This requires governments to develop a deeper understanding of citizens' experiences, expectations and challenges.

Creating conditions for collaboration

Human-centric services often require cooperation across organisational boundaries. Governance structures, incentives and leadership therefore need to support collaboration rather than reinforce silos.

Building trust through transparency and inclusion

Trust remains a cornerstone of Nordic societies. Human-centric governance depends on openness, accessibility, ethical use of technology and meaningful citizen participation.

Together, these dimensions provide a foundation for designing public services that are not only digital, but genuinely centred on the people they serve.

From governance to innovation

Human-Centric Governance served as the foundation for all activities within [Nordic DigiGov Lab](#). The project developed four innovation tracks that translate human-centric principles into practical solutions: [AI-powered citizen guidance](#), cross-border information exchange, the [Nordic AI Trust Model](#), and the [Human-Centric Compass](#).

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how governance principles can be transformed into concrete tools, services and methods that support more inclusive, trustworthy and citizen-centred public administration.

From Information Overload to Personal Guidance

When a family member dies, citizens often need to interact with multiple authorities, understand complex regulations and make important decisions while under emotional stress. To address this, we explore how artificial intelligence can provide guidance during these situations.

The solution was designed to support citizens by explaining processes, clarifying responsibilities and helping users navigate public services. User testing showed strong potential for improving accessibility, inclusion and trust. Rather than replacing public officials, the solution demonstrates how AI can complement existing services and provide support when citizens need it at most.

[Nordic DigiGov Lab](#) has developed an [AI-powered public service assistant designed to support citizens during life events such as death and inheritance](#). By interpreting both user input and legal frameworks, using Generative AI, the service provides personalized, reliable guidance and ensures access to the benefits and services people are entitled to.

Why It Matters

Dealing with loss is already difficult – navigating bureaucracy should not add to the burden. With AI-driven support, citizens can understand and apply for services such as funeral benefits or inheritance processes. At the same time, authorities gain a more efficient and inclusive way of delivering services.

How the Service Works

Imagine that you have just lost a loved one. Instead of navigating a maze of authorities and legal documents, you can simply describe your situation online in your own words.

The AI assistant, using Generative AI, will:

- Interpret your input and connect it with the relevant regulations and administrative rules.
- Verify your family's financial situation against the applicable laws.
- List the services and benefits you may be entitled to – for example, a *funeral allowance*.

This makes it easier for citizens to understand their rights and access support during difficult times.

The AI agent developed, is not only useable for "Death and inheritance" but can be utilized for all sorts of life situations and public services a citizen may be entitled to.

Other examples are if you have a seriously ill child, going through a divorce or become unemployed

When Public Services Cross Borders

Citizens increasingly live, work and maintain family relations across national borders. However, public administration remains largely organized within national systems.

[Nordic DigiGov Lab](#) explored how information exchange related to death and inheritance could be automated between Nordic and Baltic countries. The work produced a shared business case, user stories and a technical specification demonstrating how public authorities could collaborate more effectively across borders.

The work illustrates how digital cooperation can reduce administrative burdens while strengthening citizens' rights in an increasingly interconnected region.

The workstream focused on developing and testing a Proof of Concept (PoC) for the automatic exchange of death information between Nordic countries. The purpose was to demonstrate how cross-border data sharing can reduce administrative burden for citizens and authorities and enable more human-centric public services.

Main activities included mapping legal and technical prerequisites, designing a minimum viable data exchange model, and conducting a bilateral technical test between Finland and Iceland.

Key results include a first version of PoC architecture document, improved understanding of interoperability barriers, and concrete recommendations for scaling Nordic data exchange. The workstream demonstrates how proactive and automated services can support life events (such as death) in a way that reduces friction for citizens and authorities alike, directly contributing to human-centric governance.

The workstream aimed to design and test a cross-border solution for the automatic exchange of death information, a critical life event with multiple administrative consequences across countries.

The work was structured as a Proof of Concept, focusing on a limited but realistic use case: enabling one Nordic country to notify another about a citizen's death in a secure, structured, and automated way. In current situations, bereaved relatives must navigate complex, fragmented administrative processes between countries. The Pan-Nordic User Story developed in this workstream demonstrates this complexity and highlights the need for automated, cross-border data exchange to reduce burden in a vulnerable life situation.

The implementation combined:

- First approach to legal analysis (data protection, national legislation)
- Technical design (data model, interfaces, interoperability principles)
- Practical testing (Finland–Iceland pilot)
- Pan-Nordic User Story

The workstream directly contributes to Nordic DigiGov Lab's goals of:

- Enabling cross-border digital services
- Promoting interoperability
- Advancing human-centric, life-event-based governance

Visual communications of the User Story highlighting the complexity of cross-border administrative processes for bereaved relatives and identifying key pain points and opportunities for automation.

Building Trust in Public Sector AI

Trust is one of the Nordic region's most valuable assets. Over decades, public institutions have built strong public confidence through reliable services, transparency and a commitment to citizens' welfare. This trust has been a key enabler of digital government and the widespread adoption of digital public services.

However, trust should never be taken for granted. It takes years to build but can be lost in moments. As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integrated into public administration, preserving and strengthening trust is essential. Errors, bias or a lack of transparency can quickly undermine public confidence, making trust a critical consideration in the development and use of AI-enabled public services.

The [Nordic AI Trust Model](#) is developed to help and support public organizations when developing services with AI in order for them to keep or even increase the level of trust. Basically, the trust model help organizations to self-assess the service or solution developed in perspectives of each trust component and in line with the demands of the AI act. The model is based on components important to gain trust such as competence, responsibility and accountability and transparency.

With that also explainability and ethical considerations are included in the assessment of an AI implementation. When a self-assessment is done in the trust model; comes also an analysis made by an AI assistant built into the service. The analyses enable the user to take the necessary actions to provide responsible AI services.

The Trust Model is possible to use any time in an AI service lifecycle; before deployment, after deployment and as a declaration of the organization as an AI service-organization.

The Nordic Trust Model is open for anyone to use. It has undergone tests within the project and the Beta version is available in several languages.

The work demonstrates that trustworthy AI is not only a technical issue but also a governance challenge requiring leadership, transparency and citizen engagement. The plan is to develop the Nordic Trust Model with a register where each public organization with an AI service that has used the Trust Model may register. That may increase the transparency as well as it offers a possible safety check that people really are using a public digital service. The Trust Model will also be a tool to use in line with given duties for AI regulatory sandboxes and the agencies appointed as National contact points.

From Principles to Human Centric Compass

Based on the knowledge and work compiled in our report [*A Small Step for Digitalisation, a Giant Leap for Humanity?*](#) The project identified eight principles that may guide leaders in creating the conditions necessary for human-centric transformation:

1. Put human needs at the centre
2. Communicate clearly
3. Give people a seamless experience
4. Ask once and re-use
5. Be efficient and predictable
6. Ensure inclusiveness – leave no one behind
7. Think ahead and work proactively
8. Safeguard privacy and transparency

These principles are operationalized in one of the outcomes of the project, the [Human-Centric Compass](#), an AI-supported self-assessment tool for leaders and organisations.

The Compass combines governance methodology, structured reflection, Nordic-Baltic examples and AI-supported dialogue. Rather than providing clear cut answers, the Compass is designed to encourage learning, reflection and motivation for organisational development. The architecture is designed to be open, reusable and adaptable across different national contexts.

The Compass demonstrates how AI can support governance development in addition to service delivery.

Learning Together

Knowledge sharing has been a cornerstone of [Nordic DigiGov Lab](#). Through webinars, workshops and the Human-Centric Governance Network, public authorities have exchanged experiences, methods and practical examples.

The network has strengthened collaboration between countries and created a platform for continued learning. Participants have highlighted the value of dialogue-based approaches, where practical experiences are shared openly and adapted to different contexts. This collaborative approach has proven to be one of the project's most valuable outcomes.

The value of this collaborative approach has also been recognised internationally. Nordic DigiGov Lab was recently awarded a Good Practice Certificate by the European Public Sector Award (EPSA). In its assessment, EPSA highlighted the project's quality and its "significant contribution to development and innovation in the public sector". The recognition reflects the strength of cross-border collaboration and the close commitment of the digitalisation authorities in Sweden, Finland and Norway throughout the project.

A New Nordic Capability

[Nordic DigiGov Lab](#) has evolved beyond a time-limited project. The participating digitalisation authorities have agreed to continue and strengthen their cooperation beyond the original project period.

As part of the project, annual Director General meetings have been established and have so far been hosted in Stockholm and Finland. The Director Generals of the digitalisation authorities in Finland, Sweden and Norway have jointly decided to continue their collaboration after the project ends and to establish a permanent Nordic cooperation structure. Denmark and Iceland have also been invited to participate in this long-term collaboration.

This decision reflects the value of the relationships, methods and innovations created through the initiative. It establishes the foundation for a lasting Nordic capability focused on human-centric digital transformation, trustworthy AI and cross-border public service development.

The project demonstrates how Nordic collaboration can create sustainable impact, strengthen public sector innovation and contribute to a more integrated Nordic region.

Key Lessons for Future Digital Government

A human-centric approach should be embedded in governance, as it helps address key societal challenges and build trust through competence, accountability, and transparency – essential foundations for AI adoption. The [Nordic DigiGov Lab](#) demonstrated that cross-border collaboration, continuous knowledge sharing, and engagement at all organizational levels create lasting value and strengthen digital transformation. Sustained pan-Nordic cooperation will require silo-breaking teams, shared collaboration tools, and a common platform, while maintaining the use of Scandinavian languages as a practical enabler of collaboration.

Sources and Further Reading

The Nordic DigiGov Lab: [Nordic DigiGov Lab | Digg](#)

Human-Centric Governance Reflection Paper: [A small step for digitalisation, a giant leap for humanity? Reflections on human-centredness in the public sector](#)

Nordic AI Trust Model: [The Trust Model - Sweden's Data Portal](#)

Human-Centric Compass: [The Human-Centric Compass](#)

Min Vei Designing Government Around People's Lives: [minvei](#)

About this publication

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