



**Local & Regional
Europe**

Digital services for all

Principles for a digital transition in European local and regional governments

CEMR position paper

January 2022

Key messages

1. Local and regional governments are at the forefront of the digital transition and represent a key player to facilitate the delivery of digital solutions for citizens, both as facilitators for local businesses and as providers of public services.
2. European initiatives to support digital transition should never come at the expense of local and regional governments and create unnecessary economic and administrative burdens.
3. It is essential to support the digitalisation of local and regional public administrations with appropriate funding opportunities, legislative measures, and policy tools: we need strategic thinking and coordination across Member States.

1. EU 2030 digital compass

- a) European societies are going through a period of profound societal, economic and technological change. These changes are reflected in the way our public administrations evolve.
- b) CEMR fully agrees with the four priorities highlighted by the European Commission in its recent communication “2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade”: *Digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals; Secure and performant sustainable digital infrastructures; Digital transformation of businesses; and last, but essential for us, Digitalisation of public services.*
- c) Local and regional governments (LRGs) strive to meet the growing demands and expectations of citizens and businesses as users of their services, while they must also remain attractive workplaces for qualified people.
- d) A high level of information security and respect for privacy are also increasingly important themes for building trust between LRGs, citizens and businesses.
- e) To achieve the goal of economic, social and territorial cohesion (Art. 174 TFEU), the EU should strive to ensure that citizens, companies and public administrations in every region and municipality have access to very high-capacity networks (i.e. fixed line and/or 5G/6G).
- f) Moreover, a review of the broadband state aid guidelines (2013/C 25/01) is urgently needed. The current thresholds do not reflect the expected future demand.

2. LRGs as service providers

- a) Several indicators, e.g. DESI (Digital Economy and Society Index), can be used to assess the level of digitization of a community, for example connectivity indicators, such as fixed and mobile broadband; the human capital and digital skills of the population; internet use; integration of digital technologies by private companies; or the provision of digital public services.
- b) These indicators represent important comparative learning tools that can support the inclusive development of LRGs less advanced in the digital transition.
- c) Local authorities, as users and providers of digital services, feel the need to make the necessary adjustments to the organization of their internal processes and their external communication in

order to prepare for new innovations, such as artificial intelligence, and put it to good use in the local environment.

- d) This can enable LRGs to identify local solutions to global challenges: providing better access and better use of information and communication technologies, fostering digital innovation and developing new skills are all crucial measures to help achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- e) Local authorities can create and support innovation laboratories, start-ups and incubators to stimulate economic growth and job creation.
- f) The questions these laboratories seek to answer are often complex but rarely unique, so collaboration with other regions of Europe is extremely needed to improve efficiency in the use of resources.

3. Smart cities

- a) The concept of smart cities offers enormous opportunities for a “triple gain” if it allows citizens to be more involved – the innovation must also be social: improving the quality of life of citizens; increasing the competitiveness of our economies; and paving the way for a sustainable low-carbon economy.
- b) When innovation occurs at the local or regional level, it helps create and maintain jobs and contributes to the economic development of the entire community. Therefore, smart city strategies must not focus solely on large cities but must also take into account the needs of smaller cities and municipalities.
- c) Often, these benefits extend even beyond community boundaries – in particular, by introducing technology-based services and improving the quality of citizens’ life in several areas, such as transport and mobility, energy, health care or education. It will require investment from the private sector even in more remote areas to also connect rural or suburban areas to broadband.

4. E-Government & skills

- a) CEMR supports e-government measures which strengthen local democracy through new forms of participation and information as well as flexibility, efficiency and accessibility of services to citizens.
- b) Local authorities often develop ICT solutions that could be useful to other LRGs, even in different countries. The coordination and effective dissemination of information is valuable to avoid “reinventing the wheel”: the creation and repetition of similar solutions and initiatives already existing at the local level should be avoided. This is where national associations or European networks have a key role to play, to facilitate this exchange of experience and expertise.
- c) EU legislative proposals in the field of e-government should strengthen the capacity of LRGs to provide digital services to citizens and enterprises in a decentralised manner.
- d) The digitalisation of local public administration can improve and simplify services to citizens and businesses and help reduce bureaucratic burdens and bring more interoperability, equality and coordination between public sectors, across levels and territories. It can also help to put in place greener and more transparent public administration procedures. However, it could also put a temporary pressure on local finances due to need for investment in new technology. The Recovery and Resilience Facility represents a great opportunity to invest in our territories.
- e) The transition to e-government requires investments and changes in procedures. LRGs need local public officials who have the knowledge and technical skills to adapt well to the digitisation of services.

- f) It is thus fundamental to pursue initiatives to integrate the necessary digital skills already at school age, both for teachers and for pupils, and to enable the participation of all citizens.
- g) This can be done in particular through specific EU initiatives to provide financial support and/or share best practices in the field of digitisation within local and regional authorities – for example through the new Digital Europe Program.

5. Striving for social inclusion

- a) The main objective of local and regional governments remains to consult and engage citizens and local businesses in order to identify their needs. This process helps best meet their diverse requirements, especially in our rapidly changing society, and how technology can allow LRGs delivering improved public services.
- b) To this end, CEMR supports the implementation of user-centred principles for the design and delivery of digital public services. The accessibility, security, availability and usability of services must be guaranteed so that they can be used by all in a non-discriminatory manner.
- c) The notion of "intersectionality" is therefore essential to understand how several factors of discrimination can add up and how tackling these obstacles contributes to the empowerment of the most disadvantaged citizens. Digital services must take into account the economic and social barriers that may prevent or hinder access to services by certain groups of citizens.
- d) CEMR deem the "digital first" an important principle that allows local and regional governments to prioritise digital contact with their citizens. As an alternative to the "digital only" option, the "digital first" principle always includes the possibility to establish other optional channels of communication, including physical or in-person contact, for and with citizens.

6. Once-only principle & online platforms

- a) In addition, it is essential for LRGs to limit the administrative burden on citizens and businesses, while ensuring higher civic engagement and the protection of personal data and privacy. The advantages of the "once-only principle" are obvious, but it is necessary to align all efforts in this regard with data protection rules. In this regard, CEMR members are concerned about some aspects of the recent proposal for a Data Governance Act.
- b) Another dimension of digital transition that is confronting the role of local and regional authorities is the fast development of shared economy-based platforms that offer services in taxi transport, home exchange, home rental, shared mobility, meal delivery, etc., with a considerable impact on local economy and societies.
- c) But municipalities can also set up their own platforms to provide services or collaborate with existing ones to implement their policy, for instance favouring those that respect more the rights of workers.
- d) The European Commission proposal for a Digital Services Act is thus very timely, but unfortunately it remains a reactive measure to regulate the existing market. Europe would need to develop alternative solutions, platforms that are fully conceived in the respect of European principles and rights, and platforms that guarantee transparent services based on trust and consent.

7. Interoperability

- a) Finally, the challenges of interoperability and cooperation between levels of government (vertically) and different sectors (horizontally) are one of the biggest obstacles to effective e-

government. Open and international standards play an important role in enabling fair competition and interoperability of services.

- b) For instance, CEMR recognizes the importance of the Single Digital Gateway initiative (Regulation 2018/1724/EU): it is essential that this portal takes into account the existing public portals at all administrative levels in order to avoid interoperability issues.
- c) Ensuring a transparent transfer of data between different systems in accordance with the once-only principle will greatly increase the quality and efficiency of the service.



ANNEX 1

Collection of good practice examples from CEMR national member organisations

Local Government Denmark (Denmark)

➤ [Digitization strategy of Local Government Denmark](#)

The strategy by [Local Government Denmark](#) (KL) "At the forefront of the welfare of the future" guides the work with digitization, data and new technology in the Danish municipalities and provides a strategic framework for, among other things, the joint municipal digitization program for 2021-2025 (see below) and KL's participation in the digitization cooperation across the public sector.

The central principles of the strategy are: to focus efforts on identifying and disseminating solutions that are technologically mature and that have the greatest potential for the municipalities; to support that all municipalities can be part of the technological development; to support that some municipalities can take the lead and gain experience that the other municipalities can benefit from and implement.

Technology and digital welfare solutions must to a greater extent be an integral part of the core tasks of the municipalities in order to develop welfare and strengthen quality, but also to deal with other challenges we face, among other things the extensive recruitment challenge.

➤ [The municipalities' digitization program](#)

The municipalities have a tradition of collaborating on the development of welfare-services with digitalisation. The collaboration is organised in digital strategies. In 2021, work on the municipalities' digitization program has begun. The program is the focal point for the municipalities' cooperation for the next five years. Six sub-programs have been established with a focus on various topics, e.g. data, digital inclusion, climate. Each program continuously initiates new initiatives where there is a demand. The purpose of making joint initiatives is to support the municipalities' local work with digital transformation. Steering groups have been established with participants from the municipalities who prioritize which projects are to be initiated.

➤ [The Knowledge Center of Local Government Denmark](#)

The Danish municipalities must find ways to handle the different challenges they face with welfare, finances and recruitment. One way is to use digital solutions and new technology and data as part of the answer. KL and KOMBIT's Videncenter aims at supporting the municipalities' digital transformation. Videncenteret gives access to knowledge, inspiration and action-oriented guides and tools developed by KL, KOMBIT and municipalities. The hope is that the municipalities can share knowledge, experiences and make useful partnerships.

➤ [KOMBIT](#)

KOMBIT is an IT / project organization with a foundation built on specialized skills such as system design, project management and IT tenders. These skills and knowledge help local authorities gain a competitive advantage when negotiating with IT vendors by ensuring increased value in both price and quality.

Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (Estonia)

The [Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities](#) is a co-operation partner in the development of event services for the state. Together with the state the Association participates in pilot projects and find solutions to involve local government services in event services.

- “Next generation digital government architecture”

This paper was published in February 2020 by the Estonian Government Chief Technology Officer, Kristo Vaher, on future event services and can be found on the CEMR [extranet](#).

The paper suggests that the next generation digital government architecture could be achieved by focusing on three key areas:

- Government services need to become reusable, proactive, and invisible, without requiring complexity awareness and multiple form filling within multiple administration sectors by the citizen. The paper proposes achieving this through domain driven design and business process modelling and related flow tools.
- The citizen communication layer with the government needs to transform from website-based services to seamless services in whatever environment the citizen finds themselves in. The paper proposes achieving this through using virtual assistants and related automated message rooms that can also be used for cross-border data sharing.
- Government needs to tackle existing monolithic legacy and build more re-usable technology stack for the next generation. The paper proposes multiple avenues for achieving this, primarily the concept of nation-wide scale event driven micro service architecture achieved through concept of distributed and X-Road enabled message rooms.

Last, but not least, it is also important to make a shift in how the government manages modern software projects in the public sector. The paper covers various aspects from lessons learned about agile development and becoming post-agile, to encouraging mind shift change from vertical project delivery planning to a horizontal approach, and the importance of impact in any system designed.

Association of German Cities (Germany)

- [“Strengthening the digital sovereignty of municipalities”](#)

In November 2020, the main committee of the [Association of German Cities](#) met and discussed on how using and linking extensive databases allows for a more effective management of mobility, social planning and crisis management issues. Data handling is also a question of municipal self-determination and independence in the digital space. The discussion is also available on the [extranet](#) of the CEMR.

- [GAIA X Hub Germany](#)

Gaia-X is a project initiated by Europe for Europe and beyond. Representatives from business, politics, and science from Europe and around the globe are working together, hand in hand, to create a federated and secure data infrastructure. Companies and citizens will collate and share data – in such a way that they keep control over them. They should decide what happens to their data, where it is stored, and always retain data sovereignty.

Association of Local Authorities in Iceland (Iceland)

The [Icelandic Association of Local Authorities](#) (Samband íslenskra sveitarfélaga) has since October 2019 been working on a digital agenda for the Icelandic municipalities. It has established digital cooperation structures between them and a digital team with three experts is currently working within the Association to assist with the digital transformation of Icelandic municipalities. The first common digital solution for municipalities is being implemented. It will enable people to apply for social financial aid digitally. Emphasis is being put on close cooperation with the state to utilise the digital infrastructure it has established and to promote the creation of an integrated digital public sector.

The Association created [website](#) for the municipalities, which offers digital toolbox and other services. A video presentation about the digital work of the Association is available [here](#).

Association of Netherlands Municipalities & Association of Provinces of the Netherlands (Netherlands)

➤ [Intergovernmental Data Strategy](#)

The COVID-19 crisis has once again shown how crucial data is for policy and society. From a multi-level government point of view, there was therefore a great need for the next, even more ambitious step when it comes to data. This prompted an acceleration and intensification of the data policy, and the drawing up of an Intergovernmental Data Strategy. This strategy has been drawn up by the various departments on national level, implementing organisations and umbrella organizations of co-governments, such as the [Association of Dutch Provinces](#) (Interprovincial Overleg, IPO) and the [Association of Netherlands Municipalities](#) (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, VNG). Responsible data use for societal issues is central in this data strategy. The data strategy argues for more control over responsible data sharing and the development of a number of data system functions available to all levels of government in the Netherlands.

➤ [Position paper digital identity \(2018\)](#)

In this position paper, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) defends the project a Digital Identity, meaning digitalising government's services and make them accessible to the public. In this way, needs, questions and preferences of the inhabitants would be met more easily. In order to better support its own service provision and meet the needs of society, the introduction a secure, reliable digital identity is urgent. Society is changing, and so is the relationship between government, businesses and residents. This position paper thus explains why the VNG is advocating for a digital ID, to keep the contact between people and facilitate exchanges.

➤ [Position paper White paper Artificial Intelligence \(2020\)](#)

In this position paper, VNG provides a summary of Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy priorities, with further explanations of the priorities and recommendations. However, VNG supports the fact that AI should be developed under certain standards, to avoid misuse of data and protect citizens. Municipalities should be more involved in the development of policies and legislation resulting from the Commission White Paper. The Commission should develop an unambiguous procurement framework and legal conditions aimed at the procurement of AI by governments.

Two additional position papers by VNG are available on the CEMR [extranet](#):

- The first one regarding the Digital Services Act (DSA), in which the VNG replies to the Commission's public consultation on the DSA to bring into focus a number of developments

regarding digital services and their impact on municipalities. As mentioned, the VNG, as representative of all 355 Dutch municipalities, primarily chooses the perspective of public interest and values to see what additional rules are needed for the regulation of platforms.

- The second one establishing 'Principles for a digital society' to give Dutch municipalities a common framework and shared ambitions for tackling dilemmas relating to digitalisation and public values. With these principles, the Dutch municipalities have a single common basis for implementing responsible data use in public space.

Other material produced by VNG on these issues:

- o Letters and Declarations
 - [Declaration Smart Society \(2019\)](#)
 - [Letter to Netherlands municipalities implementation of Single Digital Gateway \(2021\)](#)
 - [Principles for a digital society \(2020\)](#)
- o Reports
 - [Report on \(digital\) inclusion \(2020\)](#)
 - [Trend report Digital society 2020 \(2020\)](#)
 - [Directive open data and re-use of public sector information: impact analysis \(2020\)](#)
 - [GovTech in the Netherlands: building a leading GovTech nation \(2021\)](#)
 - [Trend report Digital society 2022 \(2021\)](#)
- o Webinars
 - [Webinars on Web Accessibility \(2021\)](#)
 - [Webinars Single Digital Gateway \(2021\)](#)

Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (Norway)

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities wrote several strategy documents available online.

- [Digital strategy for public sector in Norway 2019-2025](#)

"One digital public sector. Digital strategy for the public sector 2019-2025" was published in 2019 by Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation. It defines the common goals and focus areas for digitalisation activities towards 2025, and supports digital transformation throughout the entire public sector. The strategy's main measures focus on user-centric service development and more efficient and coordinated utilisation of common IT solutions by developing a common ecosystem for digital collaboration in the public sector.

- [Fiks-platform](#)

Through this platform KS provides a number of digital services to their members, a platform where digital joint solutions that municipalities and county municipalities can use can be found. The platform will contribute to a coordinated digital service development in the municipal sector. With the Fiks-platform, municipalities and county municipalities can digitise their services faster, increase the quality of the services and digitize for lower costs than if everyone were to develop services separately.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities & Local Government Association (UK)

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) has put in place several services for people, which can be accessed from the various websites at hand. The third one, Improvement Service, is COSLA's arms-length agency that supports 32 municipalities in design and deliver better public services. This includes Digital Services which includes a number of key digital collaborative Scotland-wide municipal services. The last one, Connecting Scotland, is a collaboration between Scottish Government, Local Government and the Third Sector, with the Scottish coordinating NGO platform Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) as lead delivery partner, developed in response to the pandemic. It provides data, training, support and devices, so that the most vulnerable and digitally excluded people can access services and support and connect with friends and family.

➤ [Digital Strategy for Scotland](#)

In May 2021, a "Digital Strategy for Scotland" was updated. It aims to create digital public services around the needs of the user and to make public services more efficient, to support our digital technologies industries and to focus our education systems on expanding its digital skills where the Citizen must be at the heart of digital transformation. The Digital Strategy has three key themes: People and Place, A Strong Digital Economy and Digital Government and Service. COSLA and its subsidiaries the Digital Office and the Improvement Service have been working with the Scottish Government in updating this Strategy.

➤ [Digital Office for Scottish Local Government](#)

Working in partnership with Scotland's local authorities, the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government is helping to drive digital transformation across the country – delivering a digital first approach that enables councils to provide better services to their citizens. This digital portal provides information on the work of The Digital Office, their programmes and initiatives, access to useful resources and the latest news.

➤ [Improvement Service](#)

The Improvement Service (IS) is the 'go-to' organisation for local government improvement in Scotland. They providing a range of transformational change, performance and improvement support, data and intelligence services and digital public services. They ensure that all the work delivered is firmly focused on achieving their vision and purpose, and on adding value for local authorities, for the Local Government family and for broader group of diverse stakeholders.

➤ [Connecting Scotland](#)

Connecting Scotland is a Scottish Government initiative being managed by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.

➤ [Digital Transformation in Scottish Local Government](#)

Presentation on the "Digital transformation in Scottish Local Government" by Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive East Renfrewshire Council and Chair of the Local Government Digital Transformation Board.

The UK [Crown Commercial Service](#) (CCS) published the "[Digital transformation guide: technology procurement for local government](#)" to help local governments navigate their way through a comprehensive range of technology-centred commercial solutions in order to outline and deliver their own local transformation plans. The digital transformation guide for local government is built around the

Central Digital and Data Office's [technology code of practice](#). The guide is also endorsed by the [Local Digital Collaboration Unit](#), part of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. More information on the guide is available on this [web page](#). CSS also created this [online form](#) to provide help or support to access the commercial solutions mentioned in the guide or advice from category experts.

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Local & Regional Europe
since 1951**

About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional authorities in Europe. Its members are over 60 national associations of municipalities and regions from 41 European countries. Together these associations represent some 100 000 local and regional authorities.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of local and regional authorities and to provide a platform for exchange between its member associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

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