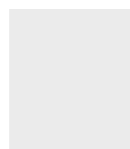


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## ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE International Telecommunication Union

ISSUE Stressing the Digitalisation of Government Services and Regulating Digital Identity Verification

SUBMITTED BY Lara Dudás, Chair of the International Telecommunication Union

APPROVED BY Vilmos Eiben, President of the General Assembly

## Introduction

The 21st century is marked by the unmatched advancement of a digital revolution that has affected practically every dimension of humankind, including politics. Governments around the world seek to shift from traditional bureaucratic structures to service-oriented systems to increase efficiency, enhance transparency and increase public reach. It is during this time of technology integration that the world has become a global village and the need for easy to access and comprehensive public services is on the rise.

The shift towards the inclusion of governmental tasks into the digital world is not seen as just an update of technologies but the rethinking of how the states interact with their citizens. Taxes can be filed digitally and voters can easily register and obtain a health record management system without necessarily having to go to mass gatherings of registration, making government business easier than ever before. Such changes however come with dire challenges such as the issue of the identity of the individual stakeholder. Appropriate legislation on the identity as a digital stakeholder is of essence so that protecting, accepting and honoring the confidentiality of an individual are fully exercised.

While it is true that digital identity systems can be the great equalizer and give equitable access to essential services and to oppressed groups, they must be designed in a manner that does not promote inequality. The phenomena of identity theft, data theft and cyber warfare however raise important concerns with respect to safeguarding sensitive information, as well as what the governments' responsibilities are in this regard. All these aspects are fundamentally intertwined with technological disruption, the protection of fundamental rights and global order making this issue one of the most important questions of the contemporary world.

## Definition of Key Terms

Digitalization - A process of converting hand-held and physical activities into an electronic form using the appropriate technologies for easier access in a more efficient way.

E-Government - The use of electronic means in service delivery between a government and its people, businesses and other interested parties.

Digital Identity - Electronic identifiers that allow the representation of a person or an organization in the Internet space including personal information such as a name or a date of birth, or biometrics.

Biometric Authentication - Techniques which utilize biological characteristics of a particular person, such as fingerprints, facial recognition and iris recognition for identification and verification purposes.

Identity Verification - The process which attempts to ascertain that a person's digital identity is the same as his or her biometric identity, using a variety of means which include but not limited biometrics and documentation.

Data Privacy - The right of individuals to control the collection, use, and sharing of their personal data.

Interoperability - The possibility that different digital systems, devices and networks are integrated to function as one.

Cybersecurity - Measures adopted to safeguard against intrusion, breach, attacks and transfer of information, networks, and systems without authority.

Digital Divide - The disparity between individuals or communities who can access new digital technologies or those that cannot, often determined by geography or economic standing.

Blockchain Technology - A technique that aggregates all transactions in a single entity and all transactions are uniquely verified and recorded, increasing safety and security, and privacy becoming increasingly used in identity management systems.

RegTech (Regulatory Technology) - Regulatory Technology is aimed specifically at assisting in compliance and monitoring processes, especially important for issues relating to the governance of digital identity.

- AI (Artificial Intelligence) - A sector in computing that is concerned in constructing devices that later on will be able to execute tasks that require the use of human intelligence such as reasoning and education.
- eIDAS (regarding electronic Identification, Authentication and Trust Services) - A regulation enacted by the EU, which allows and manages the safe electronic activities in any of its member countries.
- GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) - A regulation passed by the European Union which is meant to prevent any harm to the personal information and privacy of the citizens of the Union.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) - An international organization that is composed of the United Nations which seeks to improve world conditions through development, alleviation of poverty and sustainable development.
- NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) - Organizations that are in private hands and are without involvement of the government which aims to prevent social, environmental, and humanitarian issues.
- DTA (Digital Transformation Agency) - An Australian government department responsible for assisting other departments and agencies in relation to their digital transformation initiatives.
- LGPD (Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados, General Protection Law) - A data regulation policy in Brazil, which explains how a data subject's personal details may be collected, kept, and manipulated.
- IBM (International Business Machines) - An international company that specializes and distributes electronics, computer hardware, computer software and IT services.
- SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) - There are 17 goals which were initiated and established by the United Nations for the aim of tackling issues such as no poverty, inequality, climate change among others with a time span of sufficient time to the year 2030.

## General Overview

In analysing the complexity of the digitalization of governance, it is useful to look at its historical evolution. The turn of the 20th century saw the first wave of e-governance projects as a result of the spread of the internet. Some tasks revolved around establishing online tax and public records filing systems. Approaches and outcomes pioneered in Canada and the United States showed how with the help of new technologies it was possible to reduce the amount of bureaucracy.

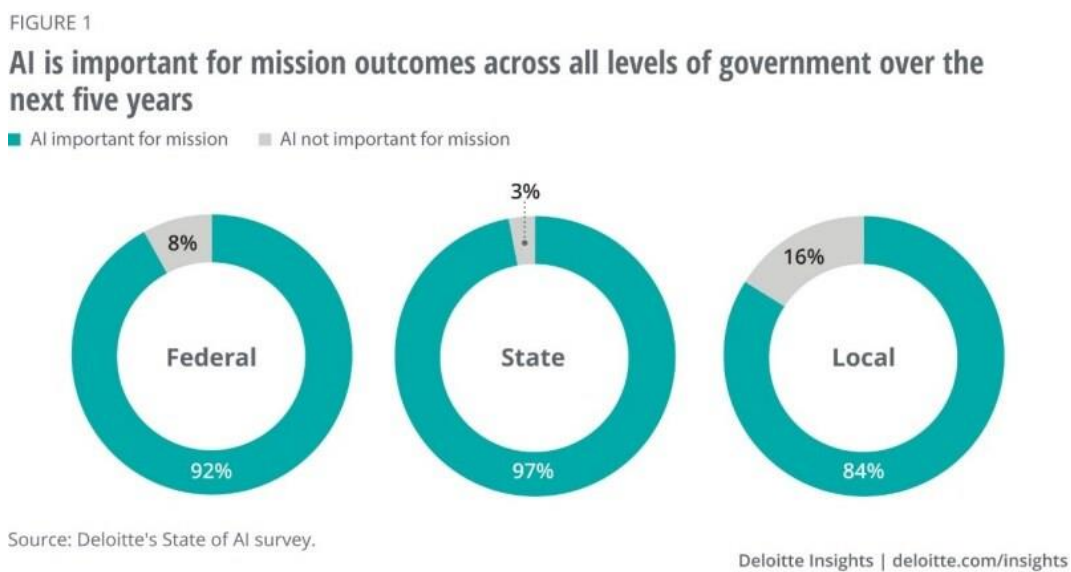
However, as digital technologies developed, the countries started introducing more complex and comprehensive solutions. Countries such as Estonia proved to be among the leaders in this area with its X-Road platform which allowed various government agencies to be linked together forming a unified digital infrastructure through which the citizens interacted with them. This model opened opportunities for other countries to emulate the use of information and communication technologies in governance, which is the digitization of governance systems and processes.

The development of digital systems has not been without its problems as nations across the world have sought to implement their own innovative solutions. Most nations have as of now adopted advanced technologies like AI, Blockchain and biometrics into their systems. For instance, the Aadhaar system which is India's biometric mandate and the largest around the world, is a good suitable example of how digital identities can be utilized to great effect across populations in dispensation of public services. However, the reliance on these technologies is not the same across all regions and some are still trying to establish their basic requirements.

All of these innovations are however accompanied with a ton of hurdles. Government privacy is one risking factor as billions of personal data employed in identity verifications are collected. The internet also brings threats of cybersecurity breaches through malicious hacking so the dependence on digital devices has some risks to it. Additionally, the injustice regarding the resources available digitally aggravates the situation further with the low earning population being unable to avail essential solutions as they remain neglected by most providers.

Furthermore, with the spread of COVID-19 specific protocols across countries highlighted the significance of robust and comprehensive national ID systems and how the world can benefit in great lengths from them through technology and required resources. However, hurried AI Technology adoption and implementation led to regulatory control weakness across regions and has fuelled global calls for newer structures and better coordination across regions. The ability

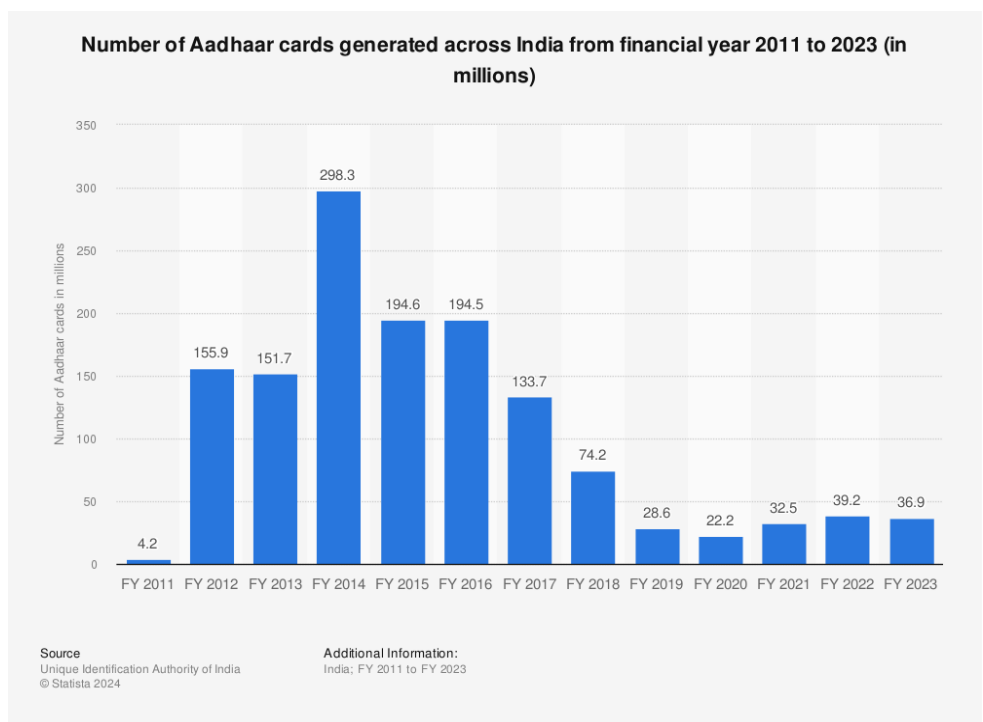
to govern such inclusion remains an uphill challenge. Using technology for inclusion, governance and not exclusion remains the goal across the community.



## Major Parties Involved

**Estonia:** Estonia is at the forefront of e-governance. The country’s X-Road platform helps to exchange data across private and public sectors securely. Citizens can do online taxes and voting, serving as an example to a smaller nation like Rwanda, which is aiming to further strengthen its digital governance.

**India:** With Aadhaar, the world’s largest biometric-based digital identity program, every one of the more than one billion people in the large country is provided with a distinctive ID which helps many to get services. Populous countries, such as Nigeria, will benefit from the lessons learnt from Aadhaar, including balancing scale while still ensuring privacy.



**Haiti:** As a result of inadequate infrastructure and a lack of resources, Haiti has considerable difficulties in integrating into the digital systems. At the same time, interest in improving governance through technology and electronic solutions for better delivery of services is observed in the country. With assistance from global non-governmental organizations, like in the case of M-Pesa in Kenya, mobile-based technologies may be used in Haiti to improve the accessibility of financial services and the availability of public services.

**Chad:** Chad is still developing the digital side of their infrastructure, but they are looking for ways to better their governance through digital measures. One of the areas they are looking to improve is to learn from how successful Rwanda has been and see how they can develop from it.

**European Union (EU):** In the case of the EU, eIDAS regulation enables secure electronic identification across borders while GDPR determines the data protection measures for users. Such frameworks aid regions like Latin America, where countries such as Argentina are developing their capabilities on digital identity and data protection systems.

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):** The UNDP actively promotes digital governance in poorer countries through its Digital Strategy 2022, which promotes the provision of services and improves service transparency. For example, in Sierra Leone and other countries, digitization is becoming a means to grant people legal identity and access to public services.

**Tech Companies:** Recently, we have been witnessing multinational corporations such as IBM and Microsoft emerge as leaders in the market for digital identity technologies. During the innovation in their products, they focus on the privacy encapsulated by the technologies that still retains the physical form. These improvements are great for Sub-Saharan Africa which has millions without any formal identification.

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Access Now and Privacy International are NGOs that aim to create a digital world that is safe and censorship free especially for Uganda in which issues around the use of a national ID have raised concerns about data privacy and ostracism.

## Timeline of Events

**1997** - Estonia introduces X-Road, a digital governance platform.

**2001** - Denmark launches NemID, a digital identity system.

**2009** - India rolls out Aadhaar, a biometric identity system.

**2014** - EU launches eIDAS, enabling cross-border exchange of digital identities.

**2016** - GDPR enforces data protection laws in the EU.

**2018** - Australia opens a “transformation” agency to oversee e-governance.

**2020** - Due to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, government services in various countries started to become digitized.

**2022** - UNDP has its first Digital Strategy on governance processes.

**2023** - The World Bank reiterates the impact of digital identity in accomplishing the SDGs.

**2024** - ITU establishes its principles on the verification of digital ID.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### DATA PROTECTION FRAMEWORKS

The EU’s GDPR, or Brazil’s LGPD are basic examples of these frameworks, which are designed to protect the privacy of personal information by regulating consent and data processing. The enforcement of GDPR has led to substantial changes across the world, and LGPD embraced these principles for Brazil. These initiatives have, in principle, enhanced confidence in the use of digital services, but for several smaller institutions the compliance remains a problem.

### OPEN-SOURCE INITIATIVES

The Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) advocates for open-source digital identity systems, for example, MOSIP, which has been adopted in the Philippines and Morocco on official government websites. These endeavours lower expenses and encourage inventiveness, but they also encounter obstacles such as the need for financial support and widespread use.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

Through ID4D and other projects, the World Bank assists developing nations with building their digital infrastructure including countries like Bangladesh and Uganda. Limitations in technology capacity and financing continue to exist despite the improvement in the quality and quantities of services and increased access to financial services among lower income populations.

## RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

This includes the work done by the MIT Media Lab in cooperation with companies such as Microsoft, which have made strides in developing secure identity solutions including blockchain and biometrics. Yet, deploying these solutions in resource-constrained regions is still a major challenge.

## Possible Solutions and Approaches

### GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS

Global policies for identity management such as biometric systems, provide greater interoperability and trust in digital systems. These policies promote access to international services such as banking and medical facilities. According to some however, these policies might not be suitable for certain countries with no infrastructure development which can lead to these countries being left out. Regions and countries need to achieve a compromise between global and local.

### DECENTRALIZED SYSTEMS

Identity systems using blockchain technology are decentralized and ensure transparency in the management of data, making it harder for practices such as corruption and identity theft to occur. Programs such as Sovrin Network allows users to own their data. On the other hand, there remain obstacles to universal access of the technology, due to its high cost, the need for technical expertise in operating it, and it is also not easily available in poorer countries.

### INCLUSION PROGRAMS

Inclusion programs help disadvantaged students gain access to the internet, to the much-needed devices, as well as education on how to use them, this is a great way to give them a chance to look for jobs and continue their education. In improving digital literacy, programs such

as Google's Digital Skills for Africa campaigns have helped. Such programs however need to ensure that no individual is left out due to their cultural beliefs or language.

## LEGAL CONTROL

Legal frameworks like the general data protection registry and the LGPD ensure data privacy and accountability which helps maintain a digital identity. These legal provisions create confidence in people but are not easily implementable in places that are underdeveloped. Critics argue that promotion of innovation might be hindered by strict regulations and that a neutral approach is better suited.

## PUBLIC-PRIVATE STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

Cooperatives of the government and the business serve to achieve public goals of access to the population by using the innovations of the private sector. India's Aadhaar project showcases how such partnerships allow tackling the problem of large-scale digital identity in an efficient manner. On the other hand, issues in data usage and protection definitely require caution to be able to preserve public confidence.

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