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DANISH REGIONS

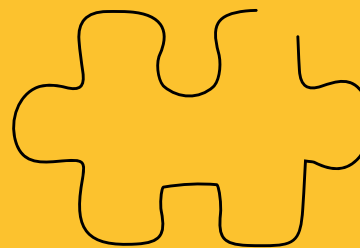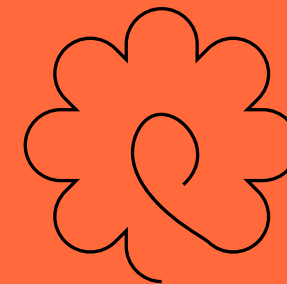Agency for Digital Government

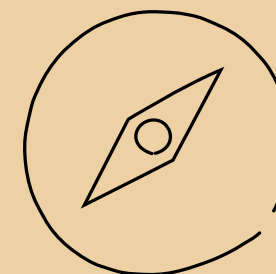# Principles for Digital Inclusion

Be Aware of the Consequences of Digitalisation
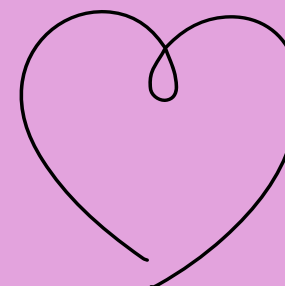
Design Solutions for All Citizens

Communicate so Everyone Understands

Assist Citizens with Their Digital Tasks

Help the Helpers

Provide Usable Alternatives

Joint Government Principles for Digital Inclusion

The Danish welfare state is among the most digital in the world, and with that comes responsibility.

Denmark is one of the most digitalised societies globally. Early on, central, regional and local government decided to take joint responsibility for an ambitious digital transformation in the public sector, and today, communication between citizens and authorities is primarily digital.

However, for some citizens, the increasing digitalisation poses a challenge. Approximately one-fifth of Danish adults experience some degree of difficulty in interacting digitally with public authorities. It is a democratic problem if the digital transformation becomes a barrier to participating in the welfare society.

As a society, we have a responsibility to harness the potentials of the digital development, contributing to improved welfare, growth and the green transition. It is our ambition that Denmark remains a digital forerunner. With that comes an obligation to create good conditions for citizens challenged by digitalisation.

There will always be those who find it difficult to be digitally self-reliant or who have special needs as digital users. Therefore, digital inclusion is an imperative, which we must continuously focus on when digitalising, and a key priority across the public sector.

We aim to be a forerunner in user-friendly and inclusive digitalisation, empowering individuals and adding value for all citizens.

With six principles for digital inclusion, the Agency for Digital Government, Local Government Denmark and Danish Regions collectively set the direction for public digitalisation with thought and consideration for all citizens.

Inclusive digitalisation begins in each project and within each organisation. This is how we digitalise responsibly and inclusively.

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Six Principles for Digital Inclusion

The joint government principles for digital inclusion aim to promote responsible and inclusive digitalisation. However, the principles only add value when they are reflected in decisions, projects and in the interaction between citizens and public authorities.

The principles are advisory and meant to assist authorities in their efforts towards inclusive digitalisation.

Making the Principles a Reality

The principles are relevant for anyone involved in public digitalisation or public service in areas where the interaction with citizens is digital.

As management or a decision-maker, you have a particular responsibility to ensure that citizen-oriented digitalisation considers all citizens. For this purpose, you can use the principles for digital inclusion as strategic landmarks and as a guide when balancing relevant considerations.

The principles can also help you support your employees in their work.

As an employee or specialist, you can use the principles in your work with citizen-oriented digitalisation, service design, citizen contact, or procurement of digital solutions. For example, the principles can form the basis for dialogue with suppliers of digital solutions.

In the section *Putting the Principle into Practice*, you will find specific advice on how to make each principle a reality. This is how we realise our ambition of an inclusive public sector.

Principperforinklusion.digst.dk, a Danish platform, provides specific tools, materials, cases and examples for each principle to support the work with inclusive digitalisation in a public organisation.

Be Aware of the Consequences of Digitalisation
Decisions about digitalisation should support the rights of all citizens and minimise risks of exclusion.

Assist Citizens with Their Digital Tasks
Citizens should have easy access to help and guidance in their digital interaction with the public sector.

Design Solutions for All Citizens
Citizen-oriented digital solutions should be developed with diverse involvement of citizens, be based on citizens' needs and be usable for as many as possible.

Help the Helpers
It should be easy, secure and safe for helpers to assist digitally.
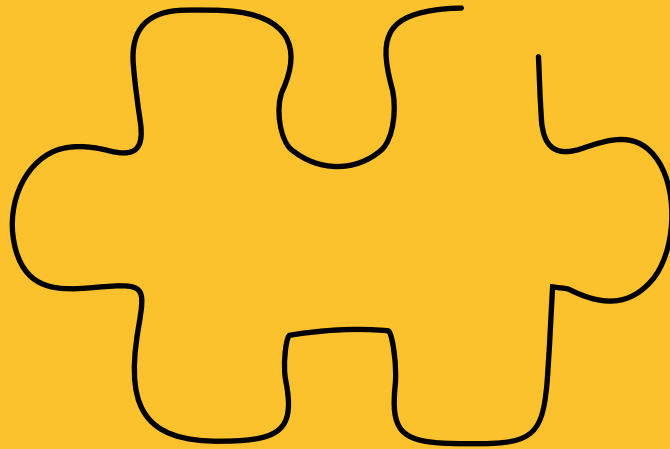
Communicate so Everyone Understands
Authorities should use easy-to-understand language and employ supporting tools and measures.

Provide Usable Alternatives
When citizens cannot be digital, alternative options should be available.

**Be Aware of the Consequences
of Digitalisation**

Be Aware of the Consequences of Digitalisation

Decisions about digitalisation should support the rights of all citizens and minimise risks of exclusion.

Citizen-oriented digitalisation can make many things easier and more efficient for citizens as well as authorities. However, digitalisation that does not consider the needs of all citizens risks excluding some citizens or making them dependent on help. Ultimately, this can challenge citizens' sense of security and trust in public digitalisation.

Thus, it is essential that decisions about digitalisation are made on a qualified basis. This requires that authorities continually and from an early stage assess the consequences of digitalisation efforts for citizens. Early involvement of citizens – especially those who may experience challenges – can be a crucial tool.

There may be many considerations to balance when digitalising. When relevant, responsible leadership and/or democratically elected decision-makers should be involved in finding the right balance between the relevant considerations. Ultimately, they carry the responsibility.

By being aware of how citizens are affected by digitalisation, we lay the foundation for making good and responsible decisions – and for implementing solutions that work for all citizens.

Putting the Principle into Practice

Be Aware of the Consequences of Digitalisation

- **Make the purpose of citizen-oriented digitalisation clear**

  Be thorough and specific about the problem your digitalisation project aims to solve. Clarity about the purpose provides the best basis for balancing relevant considerations. Pay attention to whether the purpose from the outset considers the inclusion of as many as possible.

- **involve leadership and/or democratically elected officials in decisions about digitalisation and highlight all relevant consequences in the decision basis**

  Economic consequences and benefits cannot stand alone in decisions about digitalisation. Inform decision-makers about relevant consequences and risks for citizens. This especially applies to those who may experience challenges with the planned solution.

- **Seek early insight into citizens' needs to avoid blind spots**

  Without sufficient insight into citizens' situations and needs, there is a risk of blind spots regarding the consequences of a planned solution for some citizens' access to public services.

Early involvement of citizens – especially those who may experience challenges – is a vital part of the answer. Involve citizens before settling on the solution.

Dialogue and collaboration with civil society organisations can strengthen your knowledge base. For example, organisations for the elderly and people with disabilities can often provide insight into citizen groups that may be challenged by digitalisation or have special user needs. There may also be valuable knowledge to gain from employees who have direct citizen contact.

- **Consider consequences for citizens – especially those who may experience challenges with digitalisation**

  What benefits and unwanted consequences can the planned solution have for citizens who are challenged by digitalisation? It may be relevant to analyse the consequences of the digitalisation project with a focus on citizens' legal rights and ability to be self-reliant. Apply the analysis actively in the decision-making process.

Do you generally feel capable of being digital in your contact with public authorities?

Yes **80%**   Partially **16%**   No **4%**

Answers among citizens aged 15-89 who have used a public digital solution.[1]

For example, it may have consequences for citizens exempt from Digital Post if they receive their physical letter too late — for instance, notification of surgery or a meeting with the public job centre. Consequently, short notice for a meeting may mean the citizen does not have time to arrange to have a helper present.

Principle 02

Design Solutions for All
Citizens

Design Solutions for All Citizens

Citizen-oriented digital solutions should be developed with diverse involvement of citizens, be based on citizens' needs and be usable for as many as possible.

We must ensure that digital services are accessible and user-friendly so that all citizens have access to public services and benefits.

Early and continual involvement of users is key to developing solutions that provide value for citizens and are usable for as many as possible. However, if you only involve those who resemble the majority, you will not benefit from insights from those who may be challenged by digitalisation.

Therefore, it is crucial for inclusive digital services that authorities prioritise diverse involvement of users in project plans and in ongoing operations.

Timely and genuine involvement takes time and requires resources but should be considered an investment in a solution that meets citizens' needs. Also, it minimises the need for later adjustments and can ultimately provide the best utilisation of public funds and resources.

The simpler and more user-friendly a solution is, the more people will be able to use it and benefit from it. Focusing on citizens' needs should be seen as investing in better and more citizen-centric digitalisation. Thus, as authorities, we should strive to procure and design solutions that are usable for as many people as reasonably possible.

Putting the Principle into Practice

Design Solutions for All Citizens

● **Involve users continually and genuinely – also citizens who find digitalisation challenging**

Continuous involvement of potential users is crucial for developing inclusive digital solutions. User testing is a valuable tool that can identify potentials and problems before IT development begins, during the project and when the solution is in operation. The most valuable insights often come from those who have special user needs.

For user involvement to make a positive difference, it must be genuine. Take input from citizens seriously and adjust your project accordingly as far as possible. For example, it may be useful to introduce a comply-or-explain approach to user input – also towards suppliers.

● **Design inclusive solutions that consider citizens' starting point**

When designing a digital solution, it is important to consider differences in citizens' abilities to be digitally self-reliant, which can include language difficulties, cognitive challenges, lack of understanding of the public sector, etc.

Furthermore, not all citizens have the necessary eID, credit card, or smartphone. Let your knowledge about citizens be reflected in design decisions for the digital solution.

Use common design conventions to guide citizens. A solution that is recognisable and resembles what citizens are used to on other platforms is more intuitive for them to use.

● **Design responsive solutions and think mobile-*first***

Nine out of ten Danes own a mobile phone, and many prefer to use it for most of their digital tasks. This does not least apply to citizens who are challenged by the digital development. Using responsive design is a web accessibility requirement, so that your solution adapts to different devices. It can be an advantage to apply the design approach mobile-first in an early stage to ensure, among other things that the solution adapts to mobile, tablet and computer.

● **Incorporate user-friendliness in security decisions**

In a digitalisation project, you will make decisions about security requirements for the user. Decisions that will ultimately influence the user experience.Assess the necessary security level and consider it in relation to your knowledge about the users, to take both perspectives into account and create a secure and user-friendly solution.

● **Strengthen the accessibility**

It is a legal requirement in the EU that websites and apps from the public sector must be accessible. Web accessibility is an ongoing effort that should be integrated across the organisation in both projects and operations. Include the requirements from the Web Accessibility Directive in supplier contracts, follow up with suppliers and conduct user testing continually.

● **Take advantage of technological opportunities to assist citizens with specific needs**

New technologies offer potentials to make your digital service more inclusive. Be aware of various technologies and discuss how you can and will use technology to assist citizens challenged by digitalisation.

Approximately 600,000 Danish adults use assistive tools or accessibility settings when navigating digitally.[2]

"We experience that many citizens try to communicate with the public sector digitally but are challenged by digital solutions that are not designed for them. They give up due to complex user interfaces and poor digital guidance, which is really unfortunate when they actually want to be digital." [3]

– Citizen Service Employee in Egedal Municipality

**Communicate so
everyone understands**

Communicate so everyone understands

Authorities should use easy-to-understand language and employ supporting tools and measures.

The digital development has increased the degree of written communication between citizens and the public sector, which is problematic when one in six has weak reading skills. Others have cognitive difficulties and may struggle to focus or gain an overview of large amounts of information.

Citizens' need for easy-to-understand communication can be difficult to balance with indisputable requirements on especially legal matters. However, genuine legal security requires that citizens can find the information they seek and, most importantly, understand it so they can act upon it.

The digital transformation offers new options to communicate in inclusive and targeted ways. For example, the same content can be conveyed with different levels of detail on the same website. Video and graphics can support comprehension, and in some cases, new technologies, such as speech technology, can reduce the need for text. These are potentials that we, as authorities, should utilise.

As authorities, we should communicate in an easily accessible language and utilise digital opportunities to ensure that as many as possible understand our communication. This enhances citizens' sense of assurance in their contact with the public sector and it can reduce the need for support and assistance, providing value for everyone.

Putting the Principle into Practice

Communicate so everyone understands

- **Write to *someone* rather than about something**

  It is essential to write with the recipient in mind and to be aware of your target groups. Be specific about what this means in practice and share experiences of implementing it. Focus on citizens' actual needs for information and leave out information that is not necessary in the context. Help recipients understand your message and enable them to take action.

  Write concisely and precisely, and make the content clear and easy to understand. Keep the readability score low and focus on the most important themes so citizens can understand and act upon them more easily. This is particularly important as citizens increasingly read information on mobile devices and small screens.

- **Consider the benefits of short summaries, language versioning, etc.**

  Sometimes, short summaries and similar that highlight the most important aspects for the reader can be useful. For example, a particularly easy-to-read version may be beneficial when communicating about complex or legal content.

- **Support written communication with visual means**

  Digital communication provides better opportunities to actively support written content with visual tools, such as videos and illustrations. This can help people with, for example, reading or learning difficulties to understand the information that is relevant to them.

- **User-test your communication**

  It can be beneficial to user-test communication materials, letters, etc., to test how citizens – including those who find written communication difficult – understand them.

Approximately one in six Danish adults have weak reading skills.[4]

An impact assessment conducted by Norwegian municipalities indicates that NOK 1 invested in clear language provides a return on investment for the authority of NOK 1.30 to 4 – in addition to better user experiences, among other things, for citizens.[5]

Technical terms and long texts can disconnect citizens. For example, terms used about party representation in the public sector can be difficult to navigate, and the terms are not always used in a similar manner. Consequently, an individual acting as a proxy mistakenly registered herself as the giver of the power of attorney because she misunderstood the meaning of the terms.
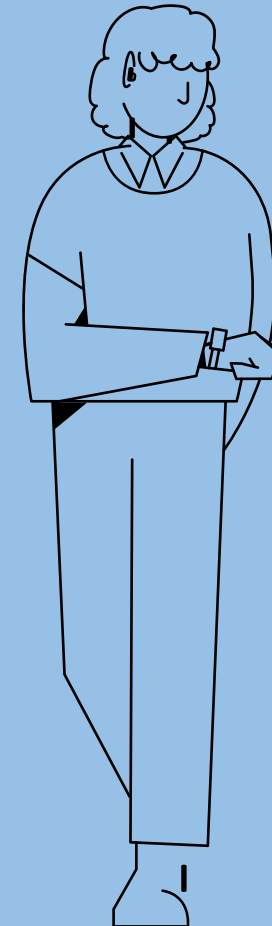
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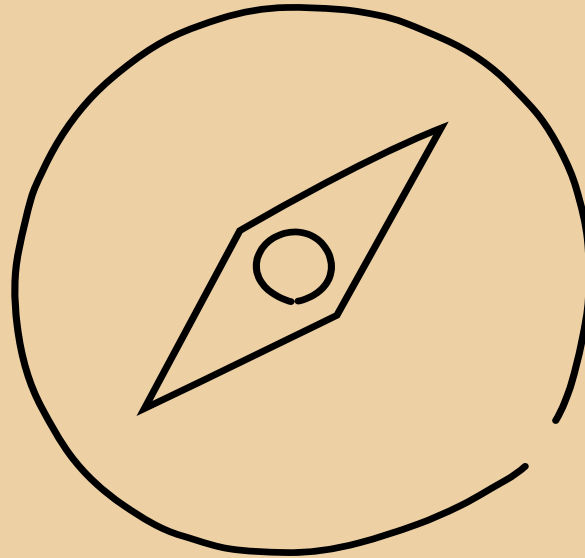
Assist citizens with their digital tasks

Assist citizens with their digital tasks

Citizens should have easy access to help and guidance in their digital interaction with the public sector.

A citizen's tasks are rarely inherently digital, but their interaction with the public sector often is. This has made it more difficult for some citizens to be self-reliant, but the right help and guidance can be crucial for many.

It is important that we, as authorities, guide citizens. Both so they can use the specific digital solution and have an overview of what to do.

It is not always easy to find the right help – especially if one is already digitally insecure. This may cause some to give up in advance and instead seek personal assistance at, for example, the citizen service centre. It is important that authorities clearly guide citizens to support when they need help in the digital process.

Good guidance and easy access to support creates better user experiences and helps more citizens to serve themselves. It is efficient use of public funds when citizens, who, with a little help, can be digital, are so. Most importantly, it provides the best conditions for a good encounter with the digital public sector.

Putting the Principle into Practice

Assist citizens with their digital tasks

● **Guide about the task, not just the specific digital solution**

To prevent citizens from becoming insecure or getting stuck in the middle of a task, it is a good idea to provide guidance throughout the solution. Good guidance helps the uncertain citizen. For example, consider using illustrative visualisations and videos.

In your guidance, be aware that a citizen's task itself may require guidance. This could, for example, include what should be done before using the digital solution, how far the citizen is in the process and what the next step is.

Employees with direct citizen contact often have valuable knowledge about where in the process citizens seek help because they become unsure or get stuck.

● **Make it clear to the citizen where help is available**

Be attentive to supporting citizens' use of digital solutions with good support options. Citizens' needs vary, and phone support, chatbots, side-by-side assistance, etc., can be relevant options for different citizens.

Simply indicating clearly where help is available can strengthen the sense of assurance in the digital solution for some citizens. Be clear and explicit about help and support options for your solutions.

● **Utilise relevant support situations to build confidence and skills in the citizen**

A safe introduction can make a big difference for the individual. When a citizen shows up to seek help with a digital solution, it may be relevant to use the support situation to show the citizen how to use the digital solution themselves. For instance, it may be beneficial to prepare employees for this situation and to make instructional resources available.

Four out of five citizens who use public digital solutions prefer to manage their tasks with the public sector digitally.[6]

Citizen Service 2GO in the City of Aarhus regularly visits the municipality's settlements and shelters to assist citizens with tasks, such as getting a national eID. This is a helping hand for citizens who need assistance but do not always pursue it themselves. The intention is to meet citizens where they are so that more get the opportunity to interact digitally with the public sector - a help for digital self-help.
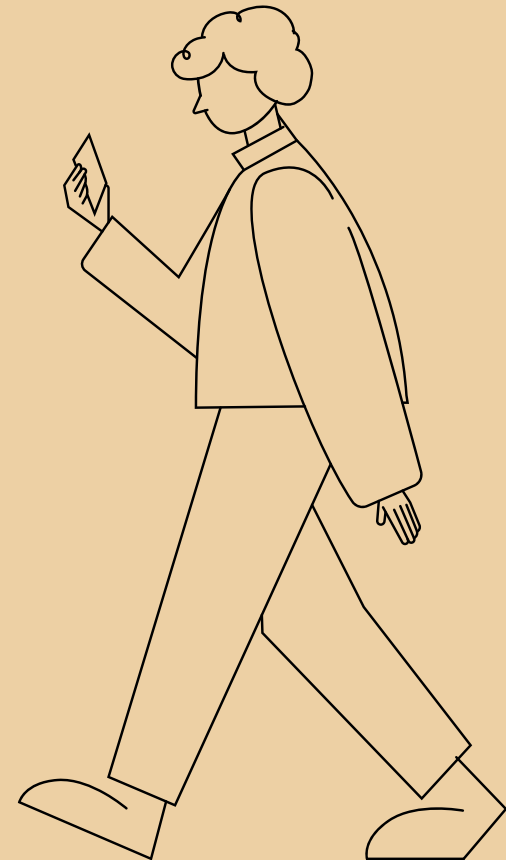
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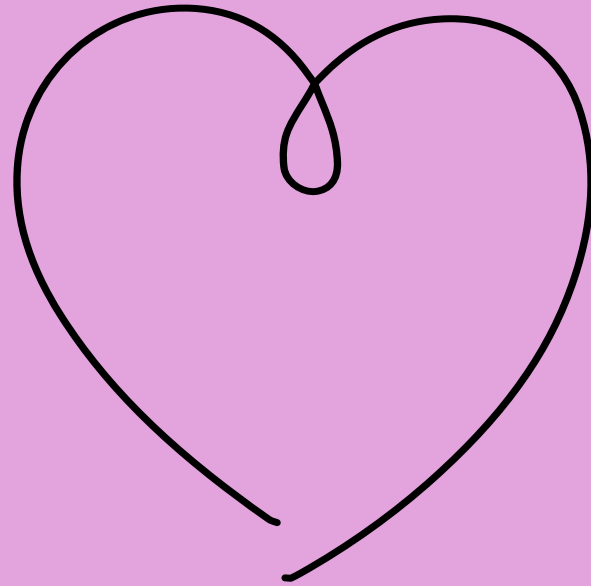
Help the Helpers

Help the Helpers

It should be easy, secure and safe for helpers to assist digitally.

Many who are challenged by digital technology seek support from helpers such as family, an IT volunteer, or an employee at a residential care home or similar. This is positive because it provides them with access to the benefits of digital services.

However, the assistance situation can be vulnerable. There may be situations where the citizen discloses their passwords or where the helper gains access to private information that is unnecessary for the given purpose.

Therefore, it is important that we, as authorities, take responsibility for creating clear frameworks for digital help. That especially involves providing good options for digital party representation, allowing a helper to act on behalf of the citizen.

This requires thorough consideration of use scenarios for both the person needing help and the helper. With good assistance options, more citizens can complete their digital tasks safely and securely.

Putting the Principle into Practice

Help the Helpers

- **Consider the needs of both the citizen and the helper in situations involving digital assistance**

  Safe and sufficient help requires good options for digital assistance. Among other things, include citizens' needs for party representation in your solutions and ensure that the citizen, with this assistance, can complete their task.

  Consider the entire assistance process as a user journey for both the helper and the citizen. Ensure that the process is intuitive for the helper and that the helper has the necessary user rights to complete the task.

- **Make it clear to the helpers how they can assist**

  Navigating the various options for party representation can be challenging. Therefore, provide an overview of the options for digital assistance and aim to make the options recognisable and intuitively usable across platforms.

It cannot be expected that helpers know how they can assist digitally. Therefore, it is important to inform helpers about what they can assist with in the specific task and how they can provide digital help.

Be aware that helpers may not necessarily have a strong starting point for assisting digitally. This also applies to employees who, alongside their core tasks, assist citizens with digital tasks. Supporting employees with relevant instructional resources or education efforts may be beneficial.

"We received a letter about a heating grant – there was a link in the paper letter. I thought that as a relative, I could go in and report the heating consumption, but the solution could not handle that. Apparently, being a relative only means that I can call and talk to them about her case." [7]

– Relative to a citizen exempt from Digital Post

Approximately one in five Danish adults have had the need for help with digital contact with the public sector in the past year.

Over half of them have received help from a family member or friends. [8]
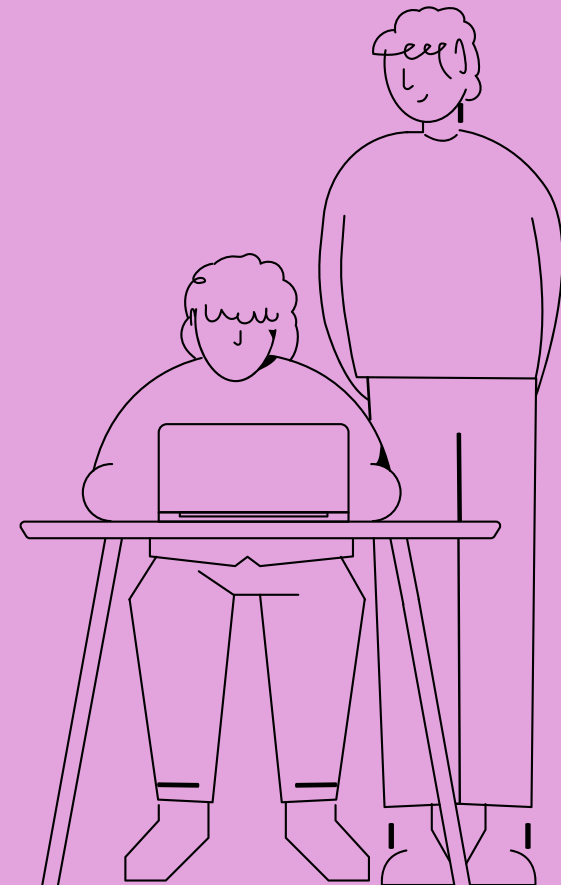
Principle 06

Provide Usable Alternatives

Provide Usable Alternatives

When citizens cannot be digital, alternatives should be available.

It is crucial that citizens who cannot be digital continue to have access to public services in a dignified way. There will always be citizens who cannot use digital solutions - they should not be disadvantaged or involuntarily made dependent on help from others.

But how do we ensure adequate alternatives to digital solutions when administration and user journeys are digitalised? And which alternative service can and should be offered if a service is, in fact, made possible by digital tools? These questions can be challenging but are nonetheless important to address.

As a public sector, we should ensure that usable alternatives to digital solutions exist, and that citizens in need of an alternative know where to find it.

New technologies offer new opportunities. The proper alternative is not necessarily analogue. For example, artificial intelligence can enable new forms of assistance or support citizens in their information search and self-service.

Clear and usable alternatives can provide a better opportunity to be self-reliant for those who cannot use digital solutions and help ensure they have a safe encounter with the public.

Putting the Principle into Practice

Provide Usable Alternatives

- **Ensure appropriate alternatives to the digital**

Legislation requiring citizens to contact the public digitally, for example, using digital self-service solutions, should always include the possibility of exceptions for those who need it.

In some cases, a digital solution is not mandatory by law but is in practice the only option to receive the given service. In these cases, the authority should, when meaningful, offer alternative access to the same or a similar service for citizens who cannot use the digital solution.

- **Think through the alternative user journey**

Sometimes, citizens who cannot be digital may find the alternative options to digital solutions inadequate or difficult. Help and guidance for the citizen's tasks, for example, in understanding the content of a form, are just as important outside the digital platforms. Therefore, think through the alternative user scenario.

Civil society organisations and employees with direct citizen contact can contribute with valuable knowledge about where challenges arise in the alternative user journey.

- **Make alternatives easy to find**

Citizens should have the opportunity to manage their tasks themselves, even if they are not digital, do not have an eID, or do not have a national identification number. Make sure it is clear where the citizen can go for an alternative, for instance, on your website or in connection with the self-service solution.

- **Support citizens' tasks and needs with usable alternatives**

Citizens' situations and needs are different, and the alternatives to digital contact should be usable for the individual. The good alternative is not necessarily a printed form. For example, personal or outreach citizen services, case handling over the telephone, video meetings, etc., can assist citizens in various ways. For instance, a telephone voicebot can support non-digital citizens in their information search, contribute to their understanding of their case process, etc.

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In Roskilde Municipality, among others, citizens can use speech technology to get help over the telephone from the voicebot Kiri, which can answer questions and, for example, book an appointment for the citizen in citizen services.

"They [the employees] are actually often quite frustrated about guiding citizens who are not digital because it is so troublesome and difficult for these citizens, and their relatives. Their professionalism and pride mean that they would rather complete the task for the citizen instead. They do not feel they provide good service in these situations."[9]

– Manager of citizen service in a municipality

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        Government and Local Government Denmark

Danish readers can find more information about the principles
and inspiration for working with digital inclusion at

principperforinklusion.digst.dk

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