People First: Digital Transformation for Inclusive and Resilient Cities

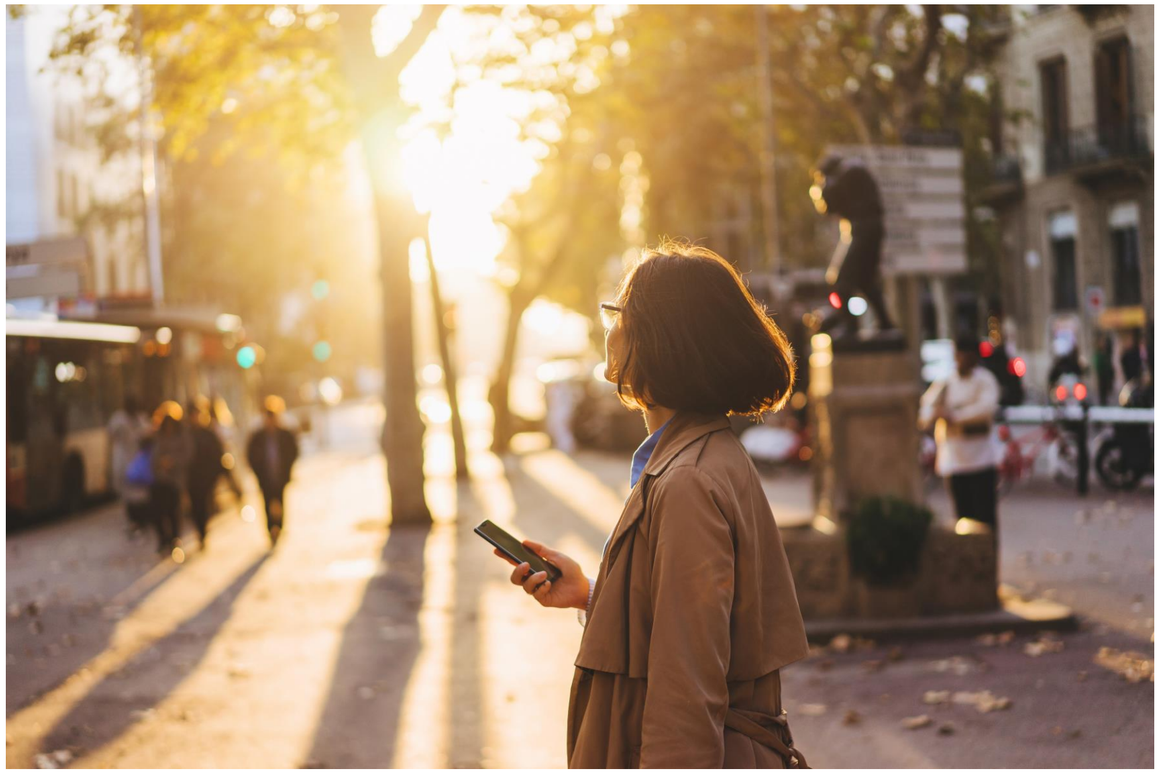
Presented by:
Okan Geray, Chair, U4SSC
05 November 2025

Cities are the heart of human innovation — and humanity itself

Technology alone doesn’t make a city smart.

It’s how we use it — to empower, include, and connect people — that defines progress.

Why People-Centred Digital Transformation?

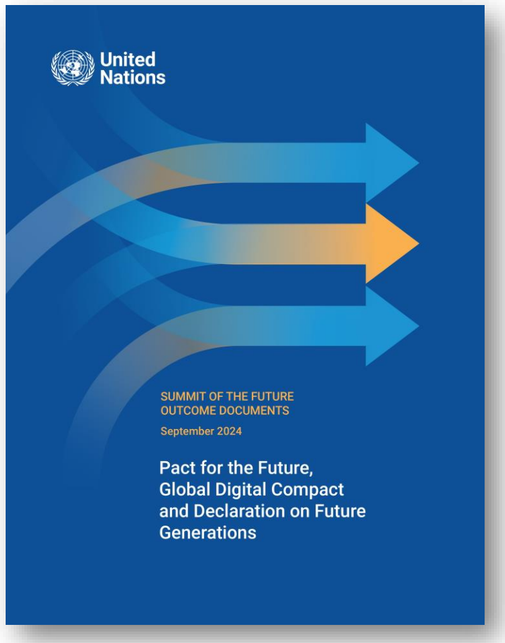


Cities thrive when digital tools:

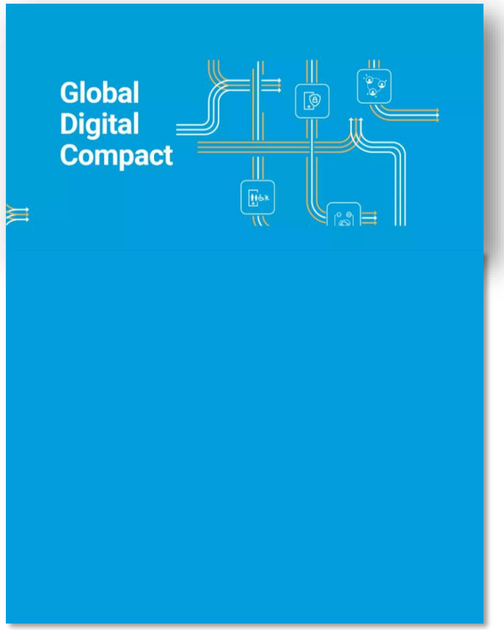
- Improve daily life
- Strengthen inclusion
- Boost resilience and sustainability

A people-centred approach ensures that innovation translates into dignity, opportunity, and well-being for all.

The Global Context

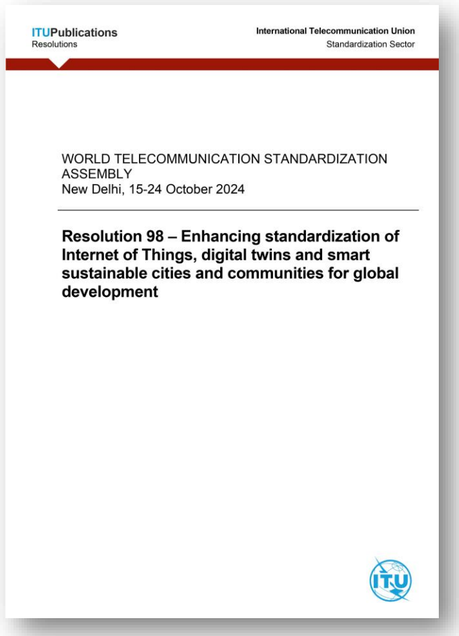


Pact for the Future



Global Digital Compact

New Urban Agenda



Resolution 98 (WTSA-24) on IoT, digital twins & smart sustainable cities

Inclusive, rights-based, and sustainable digital transformation

United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) Initiative

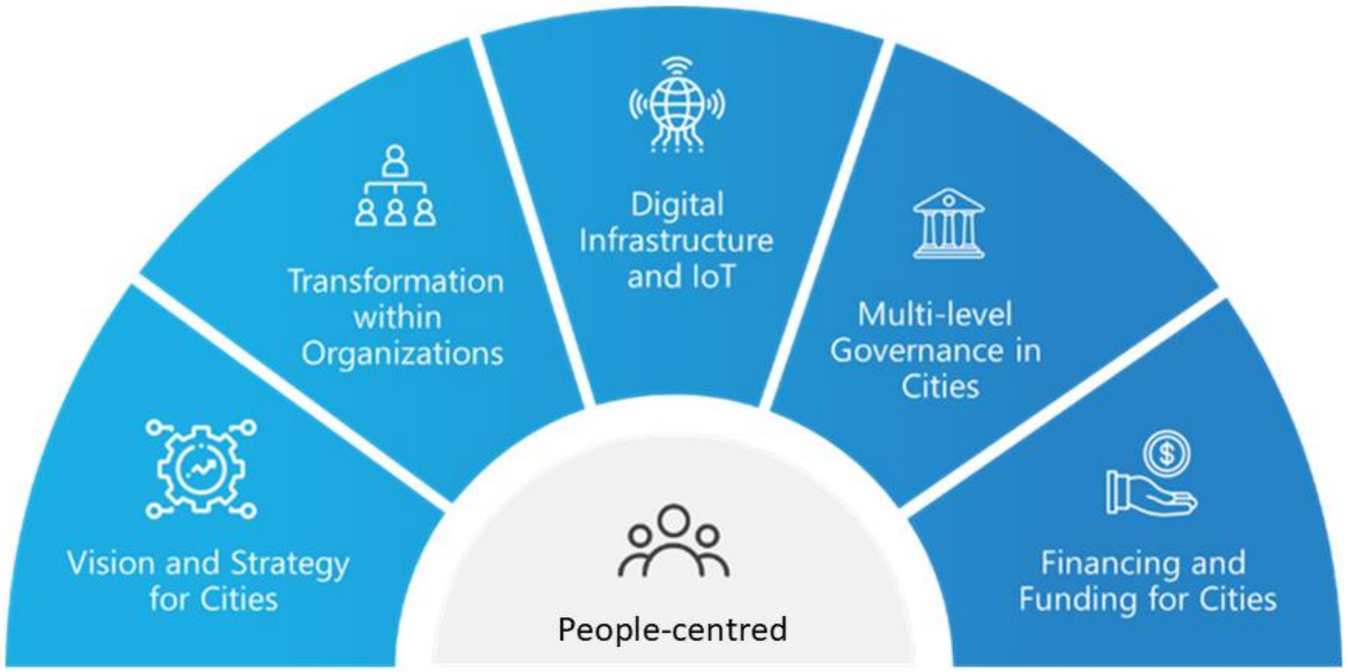
A UN platform, coordinated by ITU, UNECE and UN-Habitat and supported by 20 UN partners.

PACT FOR THE FUTURE

U4SSC Thematic Groups

- Artificial Intelligence in Cities
- Digital Public Infrastructure for Cities
- Digital transformation for people-centred cities
- City Platforms and Data Spaces
- Future Foresight for Cities
- Social-cultural Sustainability in People-centred City Governance
- Sustainable Digital Transformation in Buildings and Energy

The U4SSC Framework



People-centred digital transformation framework

The Five Pillars

Vision and Strategy

a shared, people-first vision for transformation

Organizational Transformation

fostering skills, innovation, and inclusion in public institutions

Digital Infrastructure & IoT

ensuring universal access and human-centred design

Multi-level Governance

building trust through participation and transparency

Financing & Funding

enabling sustainable, equitable investment in digital transformation

Pillar 1: Vision and Strategy

- Engage citizens to define priorities
- Build inclusive, resilient digital communities
- Measure what matters — quality of life, not just connectivity

“A city’s digital vision should reflect its people’s dreams.”

Its key elements include:

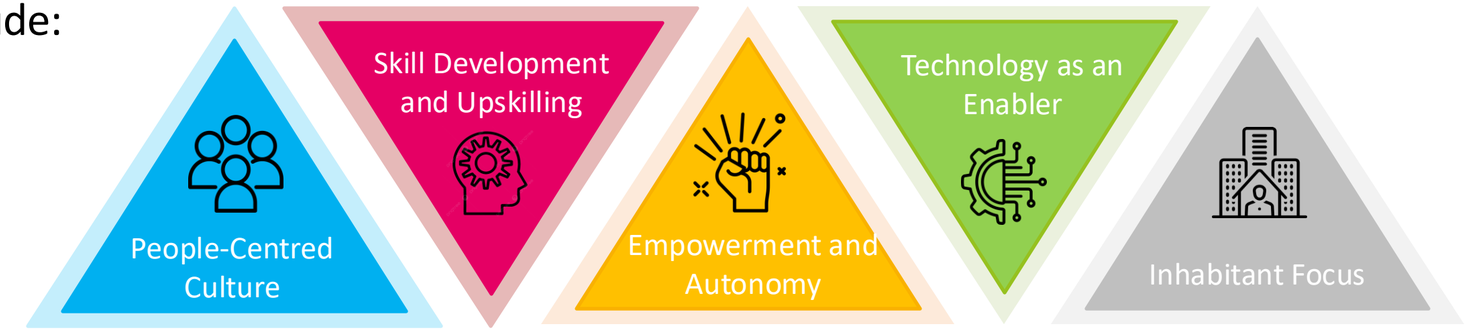
Pilar 2: Organizational Transformation

Foster **people-centred governance** and digital skills in public servants

Encourage **innovation**, **openness**, and **empathy**

Create a **feedback mechanism** to ensure every voice counts

Its key elements include:



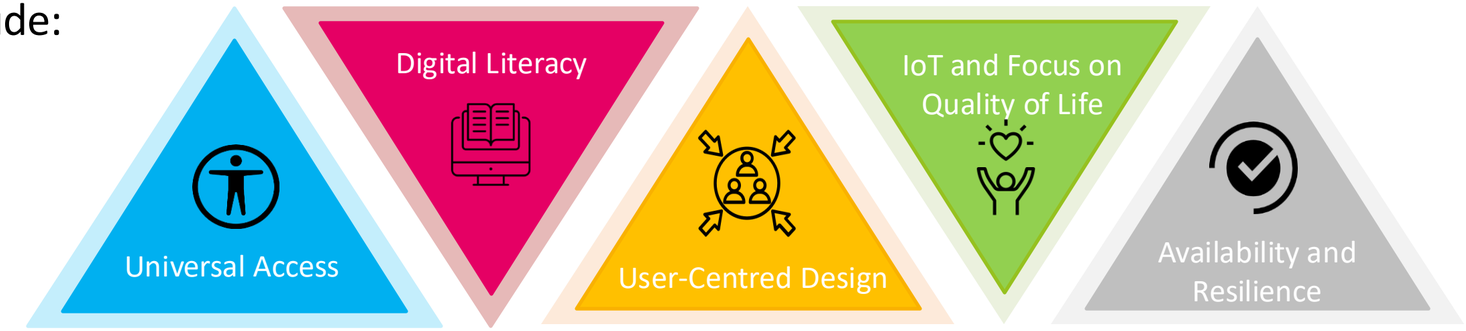
Pilar 3: Digital Infrastructure & IoT

Universal access — no one left offline

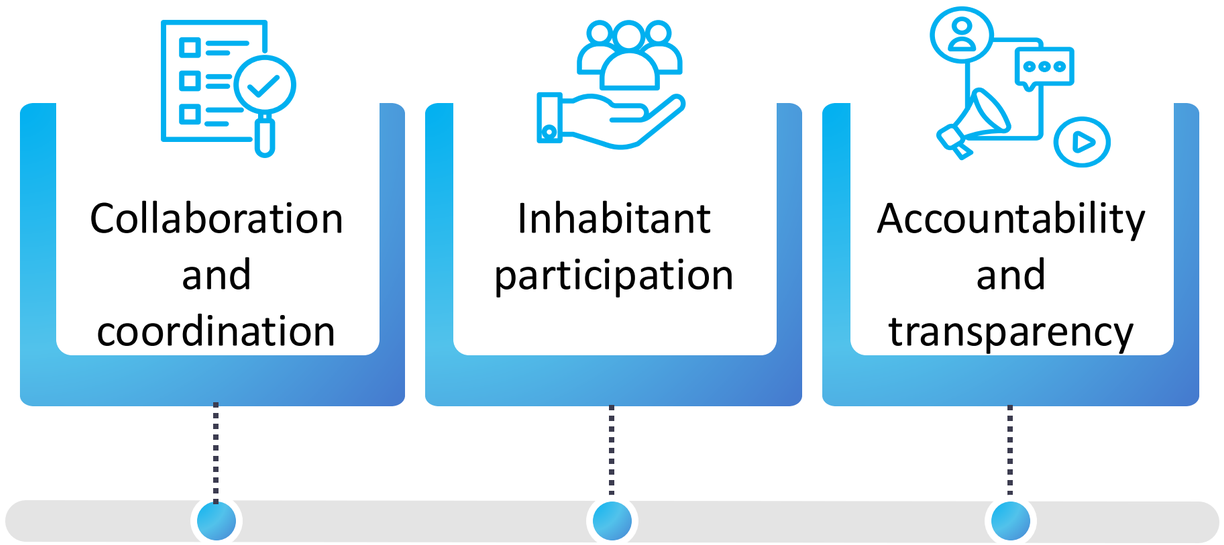
Digital literacy for all generations.

IoT serving human needs: clean air, mobility, energy efficiency

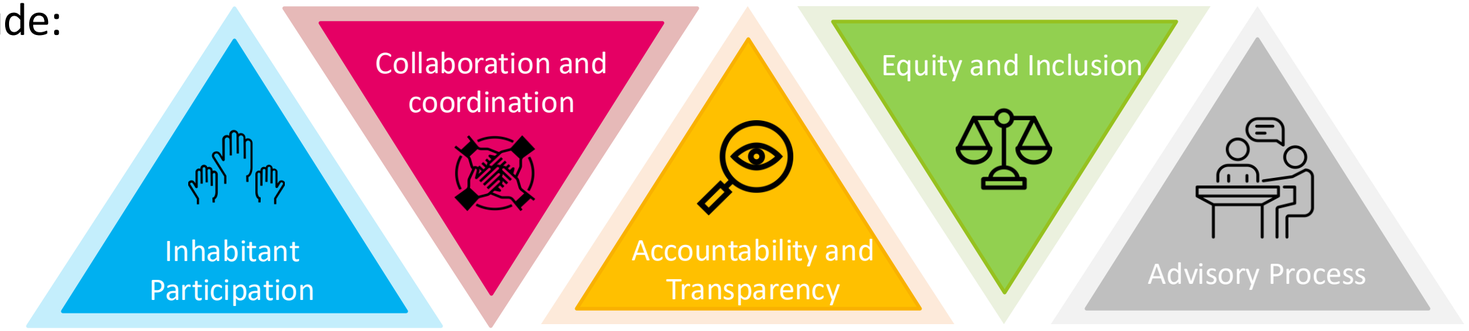
Its key elements include:



Pilar 4: Multi-level Governance



Its key elements include:



Pilar 5: Financing & Funding

Equitable investment guided by citizen priorities	Public-private partnerships	Innovative funding

Digital transformation must pay dividends in human progress.

Its key elements include:

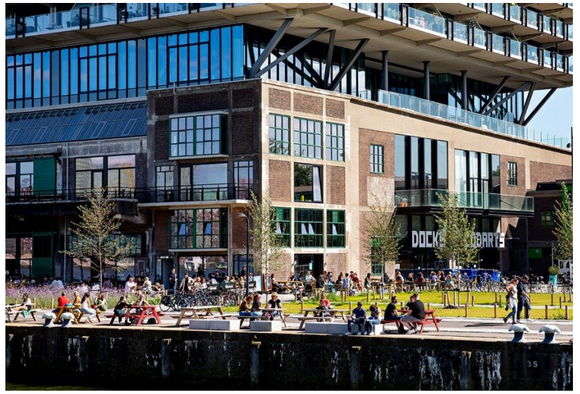
Measuring Programmes

U4SSC KPIs for Smart Sustainable Cities

Urban Monitoring Framework

Examples from U4SSC Partners

Dubai
Citizen engagement through AI-driven services



Rotterdam
Open data for resilience

Tampere
Digital twin for community planning

Quito
Participatory city labs for inclusive digital governance

Key Takeaways

Call to action for Mayors

Adopt a People-Centred Digital Roadmap aligned with the U4SSC Framework.

Invest in skills and partnerships to ensure local ownership.

Join the U4SSC network to share best practices and shape global standards.

Technology connects. Leadership transforms.

Together, let’s build inclusive, resilient, and connected cities for all.

Designing Smarter, Happier Cities: A Guide to Digital Wellbeing

Presented by:
Okan Geray, Chair, U4SSC
05 November 2025

Connected, Sustainable, Human: The Vision of U4SSC

What if our smart cities made us not just more connected — but also happier?

U4SSC's mission

"To promote the use of digital transformation and smart technologies to make cities more sustainable, resilient, inclusive, and people-centered."

Why Digital Wellbeing matters

Digital wellbeing = ensuring technology enhances rather than diminishes quality of life

It strengthens social connections and community resilience: digital tools empower human relationships and collective thriving

It ensures technology enhances quality of life, helping people benefit from digital innovation without suffering its downsides

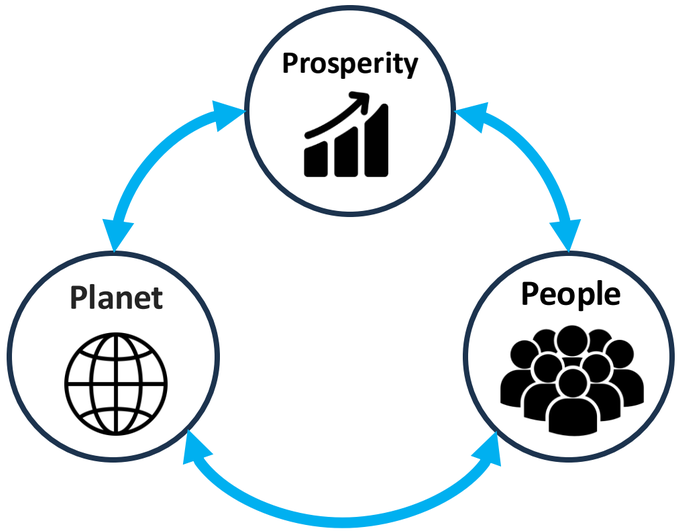
It supports sustainable and people-centred urban development, making digital transformation serve citizens' needs

It promotes inclusion and equity, ensuring everybody can access, use, and benefit from digital technologies safely and meaningfully

The Link to Sustainability

Digital wellbeing's approach

- Tightly linked to SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing
- Following **U4SSC holistic approach**, it **links economic, environmental and social sustainability**



What Is Digital Wellbeing?

- It is **how digital interactions affect our mental, physical, and emotional health**
- It is **a key component of people-centred digital transformation,** ensuring technology enhances quality of life
- **Aligned with SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing),** promoting healthy lives in increasingly digital societies
- It has a subjective nature, **as different people experience digital tools differently**

Example:

Social media can have…

Positive connotations

Connection
Awareness
Self-awareness

Negative connotations

Anxiety
Stress
Self-fixation

The Digital Wellbeing Framework

Three Core Dimensions

Perception of Digital Influences

It captures how an individual's interactions with digital tools impact engagement and overall wellbeing

Technology can either promote positive habits or create negative ones

Perception of Environment

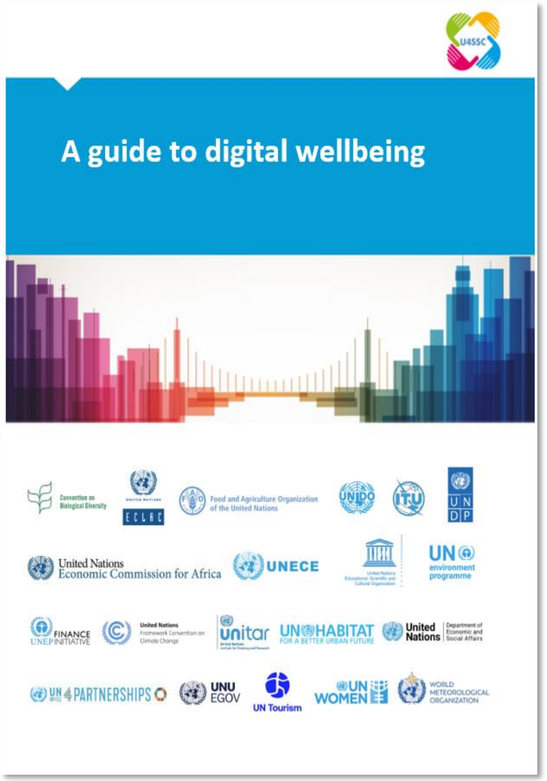
Refers to how cities shape digital experiences

It includes factors like the quality of the digital infrastructure, cultural norms around technology use and socio-economic conditions

Perception of the Individual

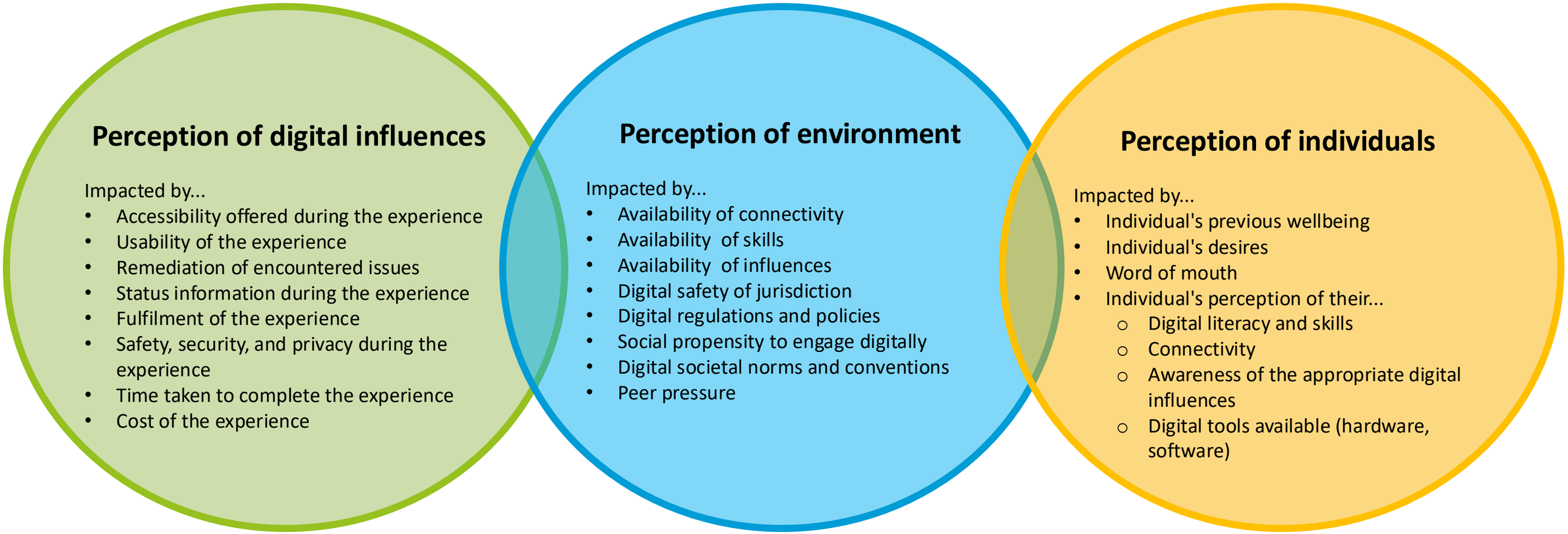
Encompasses how self-awareness and emotions influence digital life

It refers to how a person's identity and internal experiences influence their interactions with digital technologies



The three core dimensions

Roots and perceptions



Global Examples

Success Stories from Around the World

1

China

AI + Community

Digital transformation of areas with aging populations and diverse service needs

2

United States

Franklin County Digital Equity Coalition and Smart Columbus

Initiatives that aim to bridge the digital divide and ensure that all residents have access to essential digital resources

3

India

End Now Foundation

ENF designs and delivers educational programmes that teach digital and media literacy across India

4

United Kingdom

The Cybersmile Foundation

Non-profit organization that helps individuals and communities experience the benefits of digital connectivity while feeling safe, secure and respected

Global Examples

Success Stories from Around the World

Australia

Centre for Digital Wellbeing
Policy research and design centre focusing on technology's impact on overall health and wellbeing, safety and social cohesion

5

Singapore

Digital for Life
Movement that aims to galvanise the community in Singapore to help citizens of all ages embrace and learn digital to enrich their lives

6

UAE

Council for Digital Wellbeing
Aims to ensure the digital wellbeing of citizens, maintain a balance between digital and real life and raise awareness

7

Saudi Arabia (ITHRA)

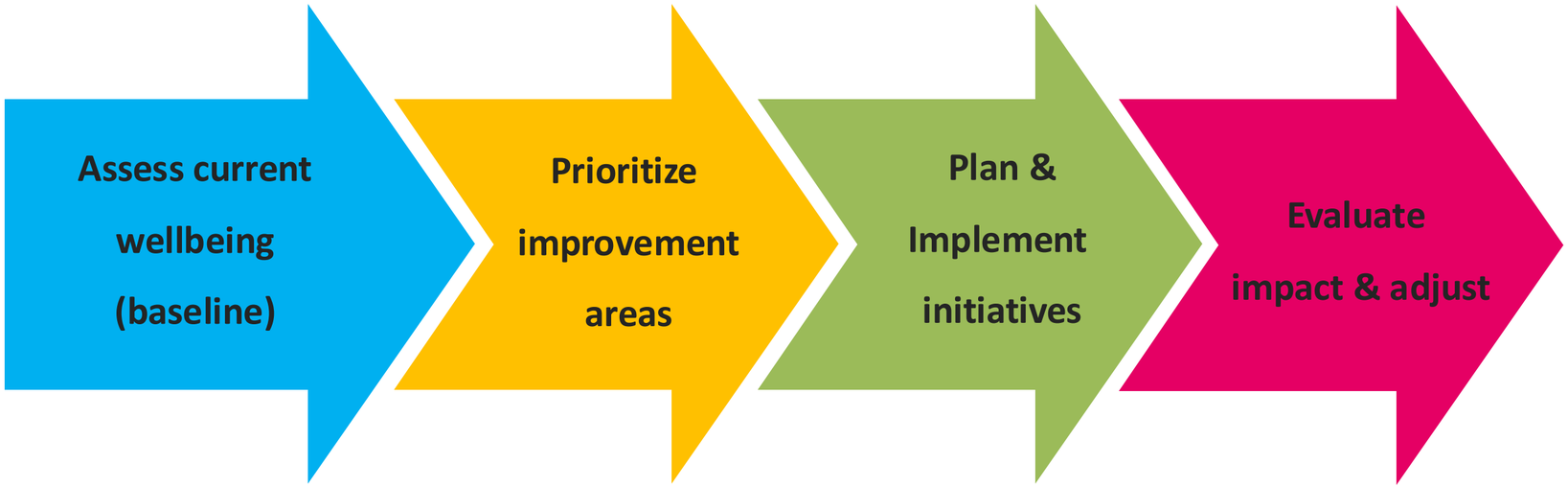
Global Sync Summit
Initiative that aims to raise awareness through translating research- based understanding of the amplification of technology on our lives

8

Case Studies

How Cities Can Act

4-Step Methodology



This methodology aims to enable cities to enhance digital wellbeing through an iterative approach

Policy Levers & Innovations

Actionable ideas from the report

Establish a Chief Digital Wellbeing Officer (CDWO) role: Designate a dedicated leadership position within city government to oversee and coordinate all digital wellbeing initiatives. This ensures that digital wellbeing is not an afterthought but a central tenet of city planning

Integrate digital wellbeing impact assessments: Require pertinent digital technology city projects to undergo an assessment to explicitly analyse the potential effects on people's wellbeing (e.g., mental health, privacy, digital equity)

Develop a "People-Centred Focus" Charter: Create a public charter that outlines the city's commitment to using technology to enhance, not detract from, people's wellbeing. This charter would serve as a guiding document for all public sector digital technology projects

Incentivize private sector collaboration: Develop a framework to incentivize the participation and engagement of private companies that actively contribute to digital wellbeing. This could financial incentives or official recognitions and certifications for companies that meet a set of standards

The Road Ahead

Conclusion

- Digital tools should enhance mental and social wellbeing rather than contribute to stress and isolation
- A truly people-centred approach acknowledges the diverse ways individuals interact with technology and calls for policies that support all residents
- A structured Digital Wellbeing Framework serves as a valuable guide for understanding and improving digital wellbeing at individual and societal levels
- *“Digital wellbeing is not a luxury — it’s a foundation for sustainable, inclusive, and human-centred smart cities”*
- Integration of digital wellbeing is mandatory in the education sector, workplaces, and urban planning

“Let’s make our digital cities truly well — for everyone.”

For more information, please contact:

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Thank you!