United Nations University
Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance

Annual Report 2023

UNU
EGOV

Contents

1. Foreword by the Director

As we close the chapter on 2023, we reflect with pride on a year of remarkable growth and consolidation for UNU-EGOV. This year has been pivotal, marking significant strides in our mission to advance digital governance across the globe, particularly in the Global South.

At UNU-EGOV, **we recognise the uniqueness of each context**.

Each state, region, city, or community has distinct needs and aspirations. It is vital to tailor our efforts to the specific needs of each of them. Our focus is on harnessing technology and knowledge provided by our multidisciplinary and multicultural team to support sustainable development and strengthen governance systems, ensuring that every solution is as unique as the community it serves. That's why our work was rooted in a deep understanding of local contexts and driven by a commitment to developing bespoke contributions which are both practical and impactful. Our work in Cabo Verde, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Western Balkans, and other countries with which we collaborated over 2023 are excellent examples of that.

At UNU-EGOV, **we believe in the power of partnerships**.

By working jointly with local stakeholders and leveraging our expertise, as with the WADGov Forum, which we launched in 2023 in an event co-organised with UN ECA, ECOWAS and the Government of Gambia that gathered around 55 delegates from West African countries, we are committed to creating meaningful digital governance change and driving progress across the Global South.

By uniting efforts and reinforcing our collaboration with other UN system organisations, such as UNDESA, UNESCO, UNDP, ITU, UN-Habitat, UN ECA, and ESCAP, in 2023, we contributed to the production of relevant evidence for a better, global, and responsible use of digital technologies.

By gathering academics, policymakers, government officials, international organisations, and private sector institutions at our ICEGOV 2023 conference, we offered a multistakeholder international space to reflect, debate, and share, contributing to creating a more articulated, aligned, and impactful application of digital technologies.

At UNU-EGOV, **we are unwavering in our commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals**.

During 2023, our comprehensive research programme has explored digital transformation as a powerful tool for fostering sustainable development, empowering citizens, and creating robust and accountable institutions. The impact of our projects is evident in the enhanced public services, informed decision-making processes, and increased transparency and accountability within governments and institutions with which we collaborate.

While celebrating our achievements, we look forward with optimism to 2024, a milestone year for UNU-EGOV, as we will mark a decade of our existence with a broad range of events. At the same time, we are on the verge of establishing a new agreement with the Portuguese government, thus strengthening our capacity for impact and outreach.

I extend my immense thanks to our team, partners, and stakeholders for their untiring support and contribution to our success this year. Together, we will continue to work towards even more outstanding achievements and ensure that no one is left behind in the field of digital governance.

Delfina Soares
Director of UNU-EGOV

Vision

UNU-EGOV's vision is to cement its role as an international reference of excellence in digital governance by bringing together multidisciplinary and multicultural teams to exploit the potential of digital technology to address complex problems and emerging challenges.

Mission

The mission of UNU-EGOV is to support the United Nations system and its member states, in transforming the mechanisms of governance and building effective governance capabilities through the strategic application of digital technologies. As such, UNU-EGOV contributes to inclusive social and economic development, environmental sustainability, and peace and security.

UNU-EGOV aims to support the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda through an extensive research programme on digital transformation as a tool for promoting sustainable development, empowered citizenship, and strong and accountable institutions.

2. Our work

We conduct research, advisory, consultancy, and network and capacity-building activities on digital governance and the digital transformation of governments towards more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies.

We aim to understand government digital transformation and innovation for socio-economic development and inclusion. This outcome aligns with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our goal is to consolidate and exploit digital governance knowledge while also exploring new insights to advance global inclusion, development, sustainability, and security.

We investigate current and emerging digital technologies and digital governance opportunities and challenges to build resilient societies. This objective responds to the research demands and needs that have emerged from global situations starting in 2020, particularly the pandemic experience and the significant changes impacting societies and governments.

We are a distinctive combination of a think tank, a policy-driven research operating unit, and an integral part of the United Nations system.
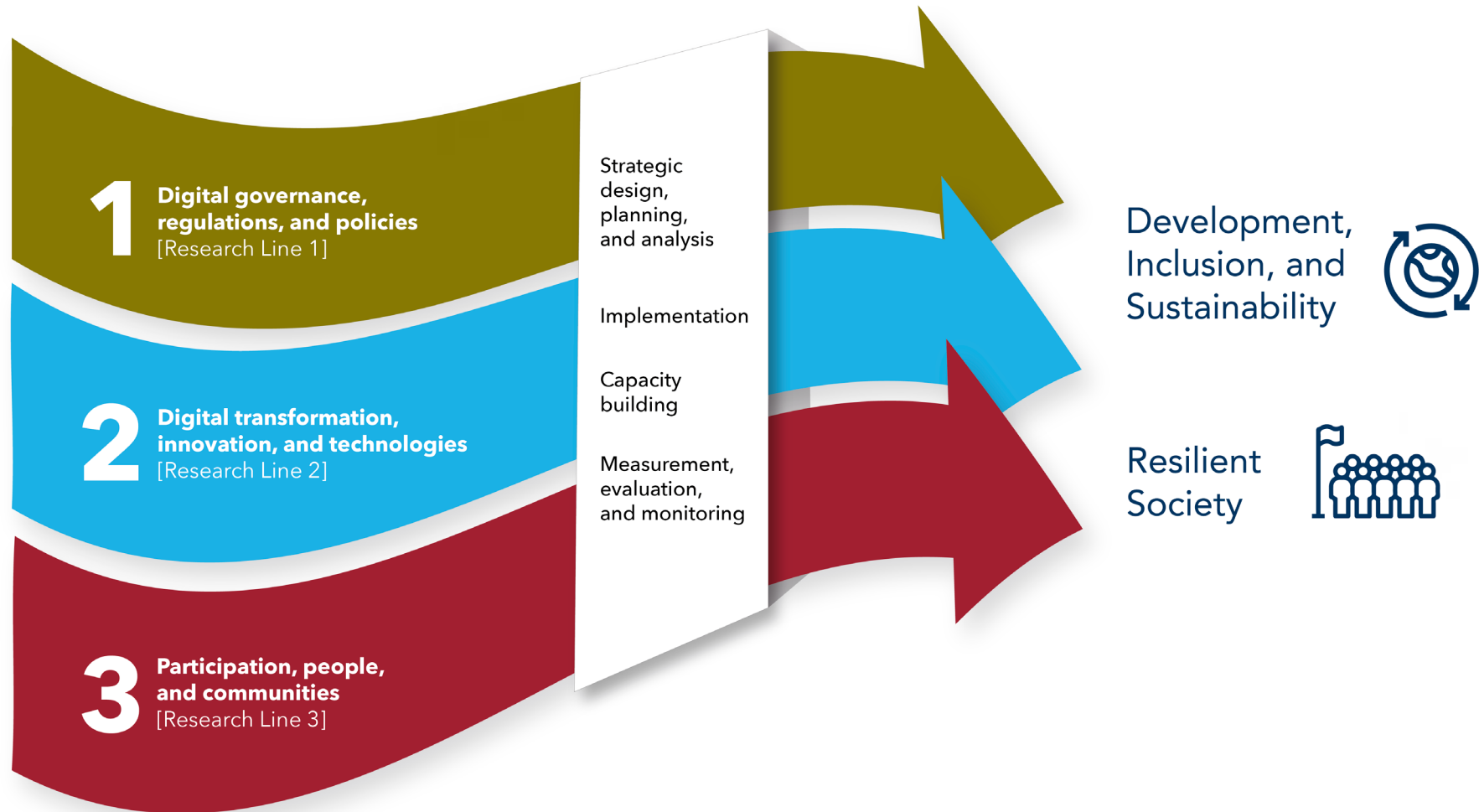
Our most valuable asset lies in our research team's interdisciplinary and multicultural nature, which gives each project a unique insight into the diversity and specificities of the challenges posed by the context.

By leveraging these strengths and collaborating closely with a global network of partners and stakeholders, we are able to deliver impactful results in the field of digital governance at local, national, regional, and global levels.

3. Our Core Research Programme

Governance, Technology, and People

Our Core Research Programme 2020-2024 focuses on three complementary and supplementary dimensions – Governance, Technology, and People.

1 **Digital governance, regulations, and policies**
[Research Line 1]

2 **Digital transformation, innovation, and technologies**
[Research Line 2]

3 **Participation, people, and communities**
[Research Line 3]

Strategic design, planning, and analysis

Implementation

Capacity building

Measurement, evaluation, and monitoring

Development, Inclusion, and Sustainability

Resilient Society

4. 2023 Highlights

PROJECT

Accelerating the Digital Transformation of the Public Sector of Qatar

UNU-EGOV initiated a new project with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of Qatar aimed at accelerating the digital transformation of Qatar's public sector. The project comprised the issue of relevant recommendations for the digital transformation process, the delivery of advisory services and the organisation of capacity development activities to better equip the government officials engaged in the transformation process.

PROJECT

Digital Maturity Index in Saudi Arabia

Under the long-term collaboration that UNU-EGOV has with the Digital Government Authority (DGA) in Saudi Arabia and in partnership with Kaizen (Arrowad International Group), UNU-EGOV initiated a new project. Based on the identification of international best practices and the evaluation of the existing methodologies employed by the DXMI, the project produced a set of recommendations to improve the focus, approach, and criteria used by the index, to ensure its relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability in the long term. By doing so, the project contributed to accelerating the digital transformation of government services, making them more responsive to citizens' needs and expectations, and thereby setting a benchmark for excellence in digital governance.

CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMME

Electronic Governance and Corruption Fighting

Framed by the MoU signed with the NIGSD in 2021, UNU-EGOV designed and delivered the third edition of a capacity-building Programme on *Electronic Governance and Corruption Fighting* targeting Egyptian government officials. The programme included five intensive teaching days, one cultural visit day, and one field visit day to Portuguese authorities acting in corruption fighting and digital governance. It was delivered at UNU-EGOV premises in Guimarães, Portugal, and attended by 27 government officials.

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Local Governments: An Exploratory Study on the Attitudes and Perceptions of Officials in a Municipal Government in the Philippines

Based on research conducted on emerging technologies, and specifically AI, a new article was published in the Journal of Public Affairs and Development. The publication investigated the perceived acceptance and adoption of AI in a local government and found the existence of moderate to high levels of positive attitude and behavioural intention toward the use of AI in government operations. The article contributed to the growing literature on governance, acceptance, and adoption of AI in governments.

STUDY

Local Online Service Index (LOSI) and Local E-Government Toolkit

UNU-EGOV and UNDESA jointly conducted the fourth edition of the Local Online Service Index (LOSI) study covering 193 cities worldwide. The study assessed the level of digital government development in cities and identified a set of recommendations to support digital government leaders' activity at the local level. The results will be included in the UN E-Government Survey flagship report to be published in September 2024. Additionally, UNU-EGOV and UNDESA jointly launched the Local E-Government Toolkit. This training toolkit was designed to dismantle many of the challenges associated with implementing and improving government capacities for inclusive and effective local e-government, fostering a more effective realisation of the various components of the LOSI and, in turn, contributing to the attainment of SDG 11, for Sustainable Cities and Communities.

EVENT

Digital Governance in the Northern Region of Portugal

From March to July of 2023, UNU-EGOV organised a cycle of debates and reflection on digital governance at the local level. The cycle targeted the 86 municipalities in the Northern region of Portugal. The sessions focused on the following themes: "Online Presence of Portuguese Municipalities: Current State and Recommendations for the North Region", "Digital Governance as a Catalyst for Trust and Transparency in the Local Administration", "Open Data and Data Science for Smart Cities and Regions", and "Harnessing Frontier Technologies for Better Governance: the North Region Context". The sessions were jointly organised with the University of Minho, the Association for the Promotion of the Development of the Information Society (APDSI), and Transparency International Portugal.

CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMME

Digital Transformation (GovTech) and e-Participation (CivicTech)

UNU-EGOV designed and delivered a capacity-building programme on Digital Transformation (GovTech) and e-Participation (CivicTech) to equip Saudi government officials to better face and act to achieve a number of ambitious targets set for the digital transformation of the country and its public sector and service delivery. Two editions of this programme were run at our premises in Guimarães, Portugal, in March and May, attended by a total of 46 officials from the Digital Government Authority of Saudi Arabia.

2023 Highlights

PUBLICATION

Joining the Open Government Partnership Initiative: An Empirical Analysis of Diffusion Effects

Published in Government Information Quarterly, this study analyses the effects of key diffusion variables on the expansion in the number of countries joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP) since its beginning in 2010. The findings indicate that the OGP diffusion takes place through regional proximity, common cultural and system of government traits, and membership in international organisations. While democratic countries are more likely to join, autocracies also join conditional on other countries from the same group joining. This suggests further research is needed to uncover the way countries with different regime traits design and implement transparency and open government policies under the banner of this multilateral initiative.

PARTNERSHIP

Kibabii University of Kenya

The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Kibabii University of Kenya marked a significant step forward in the collaboration to implement the Global Assessment of Responsible AI in Cities project. This initiative, funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and conducted in partnership with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), aims to advance responsible AI practices in urban settings.

PROJECT

ePART4GOV – An Integrated Project Framework for e-Participation and Governance Mechanisms

We started a new project to support the Digital Governance Authority of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in partnership with Kaizen (Arrowad International Group). The project aimed to integrate advanced e-participation tools and governance mechanisms to foster greater civic engagement, streamline governmental processes, and improve transparency and accountability within the digital landscape of Saudi Arabia.

PUBLICATION

Beyond Digital Access as a Human Right in Cities: Proposing an Integrated, Multi-dimensional Approach

UNU-EGOV and Digital Future Society (DFS) co-developed this whitepaper as a contribution to the work of the SDG 11 Global Council. The paper argues that while some cities are beginning to adopt people-centred and human rights-based approaches to digital access, these efforts must be complemented by a more comprehensive, systematic approach that prioritises the well-being, rights, and agency of individuals, communities, and the environment. This approach is crucial to ensuring that cities do not widen digital divides but rather foster inclusive and equitable digital access for all.

SCIENCE-POLICY BRIEF

Open Data and Emerging Technologies: Connecting SDG Performance and Digital Transformation

Submitted to a call from the United Nations Interagency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, with the aim to inform the Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum), this science-policy brief aims to clarify the critical links between adopting emerging technologies in digital transformation, open data, and data governance to strengthen the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This brief supports policymakers and public managers, particularly in the Global South, in the complex task of digital transformation and adoption of emerging technologies to better integrate open data and establish data governance to promote sustainability.

EVENT

Workshop on LOSI application in Palestine

Co-organised with the Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology of Palestine, this event gathered local government policymakers to discuss the results of LOSI application to cities in Palestine. The results show the level of digital development of Palestinian cities, highlight the main development gaps, challenges and opportunities faced, and advance a set of recommendations for future action.The workshop also offered an excellent opportunity for Palestinian city governments to engage in discussions and learn about the upcoming UN E-Government Survey 2024, with a particular focus on the Local Online Service Index (LOSI).
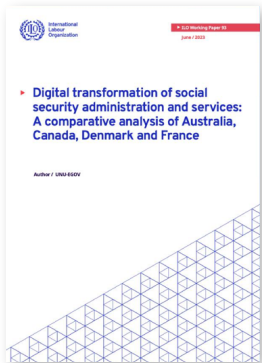
2023 Highlights

WORKING PAPER

Digital transformation of social security administration and services: A comparative analysis of Australia, Canada, Denmark and France

Developed for the International Labour Organization (ILO), this comparative study finds that the four countries have adopted different approaches to digital transformation, reflecting their unique political, economic, and social contexts. However, some common themes and trends emerge from the analysis. Based on this comparative analysis, a set of key lessons is presented.

CONFERENCE PAPER

Decolonizing e-government benchmarking

Submitted and presented at the 24th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research (dg.o'23), this paper furthers the discussion on e-government benchmarking due to various models and measures. The results of research conducted in Brazil to identify the online presence of municipalities and contribute to measuring electronic government's progress at the local level, based on the Local Online Service Index methodology, are presented. Based on that experience, e-government benchmarking is discussed from a decolonisation perspective.

CONFERENCE PAPER

Problem Formulation and Use Case Identification of AI in Government: Results from the Literature Review

The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology has the potential to provide benefits to government and society but also can create biases and discrimination in communities. So far, the literature focuses on the technology level addressing performance efficiency and process improvement. The core question addressed in this paper is what factors should be considered when determining AI-related problems and establishing viable use cases. The paper was submitted and presented at the 24th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research (dg.o'23).
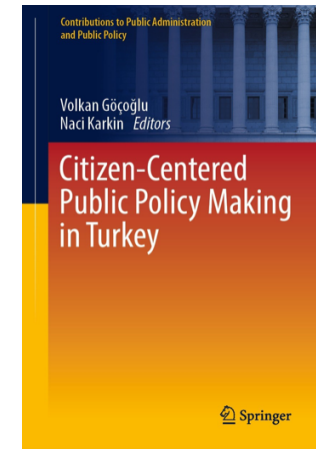
PARTNERSHIP

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) opened the way to initiate new and relevant collaborations between ECA and UNU-EGOV to harness digital technologies for the benefit of Africa's inclusive digital development and accelerate the adoption of the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020-2030.

BOOK

Citizen-Centered Public Policy Making in Turkey

This edited volume published by Springer contributes significantly to the public policy field by scrutinising the potential value direct citizen involvement can bring to governmental processes. Using Turkey as a case study, the book focuses on the core topics of public administration, the generation of public services, the design and implementation of public policies, citizens and networks, new business models, and local perspectives.

CONFERENCE PAPER

Citizen Participation Level in Smart Governance: A Literature Review

Submitted and presented at the Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS 2023), this literature review used and expanded Cardullo & Kitchin's (2018) "scaffold of smart citizen participation" to classify the participation level found in the smart governance literature. This review highlights the importance of using a common metric for measuring citizens' level of participation in smart governance.

2023 Highlights

CONFERENCE PAPER

Dynamic Capabilities and Digital Transformation in Public Sector: Evidence from Brazilian case study

The article analyses the mobilisation of dynamic capabilities focusing on operationalising technologies in public sector digital transformation strategies. The Brazilian Digital Transformation Strategy case study provides insights into how organisations can improve their capability to manage change, innovate, and create public value toward digital transformation. The paper was submitted and presented at the 22nd IFIP WG 8.5 Conference EGOV 2023 and published by Springer.

EVENT

WADGov Forum: West Africa Digital Governance Forum

Proposed by UNU-EGOV, the West Africa Digital Governance Forum (WADGov Forum) was launched in Banjul in co-organisation with UN ECA and the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy of the Government of Gambia. Fifty-five representatives from the West African countries and international and regional organisations attended the event. The Forum will act as a network with diverse and relevant regional stakeholders, aiming to develop digital governance practices.

EVENT

ICEGOV 2023

UNU-EGOV coordinated and organised the 16th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV) in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The conference returned to South America after the editions of 2009 (Colombia) and 2016 (Uruguay), focused on the theme "Digital Governance for Democratic, Equitable, and Inclusive Societies". The conference was attended by 269 participants from the academy, public sector, international organisations, NGOs, and private sector. The Minister of Management and Innovation of the Government of Brazil delivered the opening keynote.

PROJECT

Assessment and Recommendation for a National and Regional Digital Service Act

This project aims to evaluate the digital services market and existing regulatory frameworks across Western Asia to enhance online user safety and protection. By drawing comparisons with the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) and examining best practices, the project seeks to determine the viability and potential benefits of implementing a unified legislative approach similar to the DSA at the national or regional level.

EVENT

IGF 2023 Open Forum National Digital Transformation Strategies in Africa

This Open Forum was co-organised with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA) and focused on the latest developments, challenges and opportunities in Africa's digital transformation journey, featuring case study examples in the adoption of Digital Transformation Strategies and Roadmaps in selected African countries. The session took place during the Internet Governance Forum (IGF 2023) in Kyoto, Japan.

CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMME

Digital Governance for the Public Administration

After developing the Digital Governance National Strategy for Cabo Verde and its respective Action Plan, UNU-EGOV designed and delivered a capacity-building programme to 28 public officials in Cabo Verde. The programme revisited the concepts of digital transformation and governance, contextualised the National Strategy and its Action Plan and equipped teams with practices in project planning and management, digitalisation, reengineering and simplification of services, and participatory design and co-creation.

2023 Highlights

PARTNERSHIP
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

UNU-EGOV signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, through the WITS School of Governance. The MoU establishes a framework for cooperation in the area of digital governance and sets the co-organisation of the next ICEGOV (ICEGOV 2024) as a concrete joint activity of the two entities.

JOURNAL ARTICLE
Are electronic government innovations helpful to deter corruption? Evidence from across the world

Published in the journal Economics & Politics, this paper examines the impact of e-government on corruption using longitudinal data for more than 170 countries from 2002 to 2020. The empirical results suggest that e-government serves as a deterrent to corrupt activities, and e-participation reduces corrupt legislature activities, public sector theft, executive bribery, and corrupt exchanges. It is also suggested that the potential of e-government to deter corruption is higher in countries where corruption is moderate or high and economic development is lower.

CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP
Strengthening National Capacities for Spreading Digitalisation at Local Levels

Co-organised with UNDESA and ESCAP in Bangkok, Thailand, the workshop comprised six sessions aiming at strengthening national capacities for spreading digitisation at the local level, thereby advancing SDG 11 by providing knowledge and technical support, increasing knowledge of government officials both at national and local levels in utilising information communication technologies (ICT) and emerging technologies to deliver inclusive public services online, creating further synergies between national and local digital government development initiatives through a whole-of-government approach, and increasing awareness and showcasing the value of monitoring and evaluating local e-government initiatives.

CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMME
Digital Governance for the Judiciary

Framed by the MoU signed with the NIGSD in 2021, UNU-EGOV designed and delivered a capacity-building Programme on *Digital Governance for the Judiciary* to 27 Egyptian officials, mainly lawyers, judges, and prosecutors. This programme aimed to familiarise the participants with the concept of online courts, the new possibilities for justice they offer compared to traditional courts, and to understand the recent digital and AI adoption trends across justice systems and the benefits and risks of AI adoption in justice systems. The programme took place at UNU-EGOV premises in Guimarães, Portugal.

2023 Highlights

PARTNERSHIP
Fundação Getúlio Vargas

The establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Brazil, represented the formalisation of a process of collaboration that was already happening between the institutions. The formalisation through this MoU offers a more structured framework to extend the collaboration in the area of digital governance and digital transformation between the two institutions.

PROJECT
State-of-Affairs Report on Sustainable Development Goals for Qatar

This project aims to produce a report that assesses the current landscape of digital transformation initiatives in the context of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT)'s mandate, initiatives, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report will analyse the progress made by various sectors and regions in integrating digital technologies to achieve sustainable development objectives and offer valuable insights and recommendations to MCIT.

PROJECT
Digital Government Assessment Programme

This project aims to conduct a comprehensive study of the relevant and available literature and present research findings that will assist the Digital Government Authority (DGA) in enhancing the online presence of key government entities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The project seeks to improve the usability and user-friendliness of digital service offerings, thereby contributing to the Vision 2030 initiative to transform the public sector to deliver world-class services online.

PROJECT
EGOV's repository platform

The repository platform launched by UNU-EGOV is a centralised hub of open and specialised knowledge to support multiple actors in tackling local challenges and digital transformation. The platform is designed to host multiple instances of repositories, each one focusing on specific themes. The two instances (two repositories) initially available are EGOV for Emergencies and Data for EGOV. The EGOV for Emergencies Repository provides content on innovations in digital governance for emergency response, and the Data for EGOV Repository provides resources on emerging technologies and data for public sector transformation.

JOURNAL ARTICLE
Digital Transformation, Governance and Coordination in Times of Crisis: An Analysis of Australia, Denmark and the Republic of Korea

The article's initial findings support past academic observations, emphasising that the successful digital transformation of the public sector largely depends on strategic focus, a strong governance model, and a high level of intergovernmental cooperation. The analysis, published in the "Digital Government: Research and Practice" journal, finds strong evidence that their existing governance and intergovernmental cooperation frameworks, in combination with their established service production and delivery ecosystems, have allowed the three countries to move towards real user-centric, integrated service production and delivery prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMME
Digital Transformation in Public Administration

Framed by the MoU signed with the NIGSD in 2021, UNU-EGOV designed and delivered a capacity-building programme on *Digital Transformation in Public Administration*. This programme addressed concepts and processes associated with strategic EGOV planning and analysis, topics related to the assessment and monitoring techniques for the EGOV domain, including the definition and use of suitable sets of indicators, and aspects related to citizens' inclusion in policy creation and decision-making. The programme took place at UNU-EGOV premises and was attended by 25 Egyptian public officials.

5. 2023 Figures

43 Publications

Journal articles	11
Book (ed)	1
Book Chapter	3
Conference Proceedings (ed)	1
Conference papers	22
Reports	2
Policy Briefs	1
Op-ed	2

61 Events attendance with active role*

Speaker	32
Discussant	15
Moderator	8
Presenter	6

36 Events organized

Large conference	1
Conference	4
Webinar	5
Seminar	8
Discussion panel	6
Workshop	12

Education and training

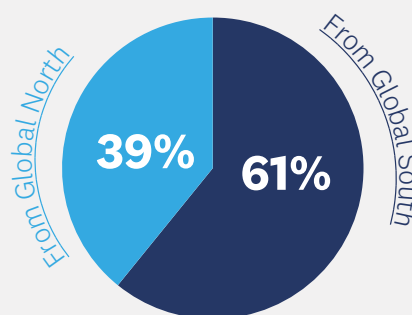| Courses coordinated and delivered to post-graduation programmes	Courses coordinated and delivered to post-graduation programmes	Invited lectures delivered to post-graduation programmes
9	**2**	**5**

190 government and public officials targeted

From developing countries	190
From developed countries	0
From Global South	190
From Global North	0

189 students targeted

From Global North — 39%
From Global South — 61%

■ From developing countries
■ From developed countries

Supervisions

13 PhD Co-supervisions

From developing countries	6
From developed countries	7

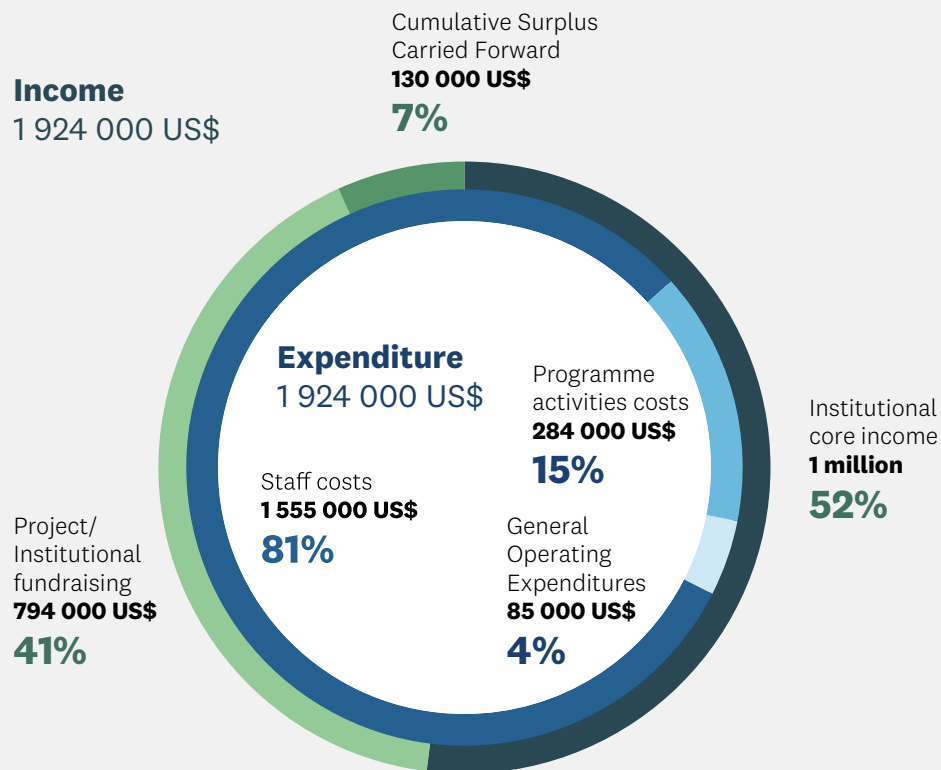### 13 Master Co-supervisions

From developing countries	2
From developed countries	11

*Speaker includes: keynote speaker; speaker.
Discussant includes: discussant; panellist; invited expert.
Moderator indludes: moderator; facilitator; co-facilitator.
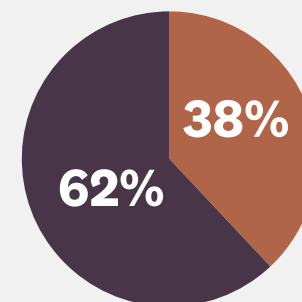
2023 Figures

Financials (in US$)

Income
1 924 000 US$

Cumulative Surplus Carried Forward
130 000 US$
7%

Expenditure
1 924 000 US$

Programme activities costs
284 000 US$
15%

Institutional core income
1 million
52%

Staff costs
1 555 000 US$
81%

General Operating Expenditures
85 000 US$
4%

Project/ Institutional fundraising
794 000 US$
41%

Human Resources

Personnel

Total of personnel	39
Total of nationalities	18

Male
51%

Female
49%

38%
62%
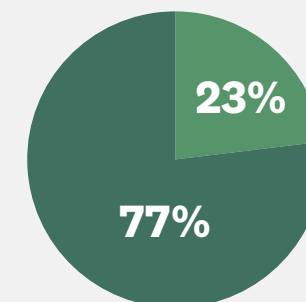
23%
77%

From developing countries
From developed countries

Global North
Global South

Institutional Partners

Other Partners/
Contributors
11%

Portuguese
government
institutions
13%

Reasearch
and academic
institutions
20%

International
and regional
organizations
7%

61
Institutional
Partners

Country level
institutions
(14 institutions
in 11 countries)
23%

Portuguese
academic/research
institutions
13%

UN System
Agencies
13%

6. Generating Knowledge and Providing Evidence

With a policy-driven digital governance focus, in 2023, UNU-EGOV further strengthened its cross-disciplinary research and advisory profile. Our efforts concentrated on generating new knowledge and producing evidence to assist policymakers in navigating the digital transformation of governments and society at large.

We executed a total of 43 projects. Of these, 24 were directly funded by our core budget. Additionally, 19 specific projects were carried out with external funding, 12 (63%) of which were in emerging economies.

Evidence-based policy advice and impact assessment

In 2023, we continued to conduct both exploratory and applied research. We strived to be practical, policy-oriented, and focused on addressing specific challenges governments and societies face in the digital age.

Exerting ourselves to make any recommendations actionable and evidence-based, we ensure they are always based on rigorous methods for comprehensive research and analysis. This includes studying the implementation and outcomes of initiatives which have applied digital technologies to transform the public sector.

In 2023, we continued providing evidence-based recommendations to both governments and international organisations.

In Cabo Verde, our research, stakeholder consultation, and assisted brainstorming enabled the Ministry of State and Public Administration Modernisation to define an Action Plan for the implementation of the 2021-2024 National Strategy for Digital Governance of Cabo Verde, which was jointly developed by UNU-EGOV and the Government of Cabo Verde in 2021.

In China, our collaborative knowledge support to improve China's institutional capacity towards universal social protection resulted in a series of country reports, a series of recommendations, and a final comparative ILO working paper on the digital transformation and data governance in Australia, Canada, Denmark, and France, which led to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security launching its new service transformation and data governance strategy for social security for China.

In Qatar, our assessment and policy recommendations were accompanied by capacity development, brainstorming, and ongoing advice to accelerate the digital transformation for public sector service production and delivery. Additionally, we conducted a study and produced a State-of-Affairs Report on Sustainable Development Goals that offered insights and recommendations on how the innovative use of technology and data can help monitor, measure and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

In Saudi Arabia, 2023 saw the completion of multiple new and ongoing projects, including the ongoing support to the Digital Government Authority on improving the online service portfolio across 24 different government entities and portals, the ePART4GOV project aimed at developing an integrated framework for e-participation and governance mechanisms, and also frameworks for digital maturity assessment or the mapping of national strategic initiatives and impact with the future Global Digital Compact.

The AI4PA Portugal project, launched in 2022, continued work on the efficient, effective, transparent, and ethical integration of AI for policy effectiveness and stakeholder training.

For GIZ, we finished a Comparative Study on the Digitalisation of Public Service Delivery in the Western Balkans (WB), the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Beyond. Based on a comparison of how two life events services are offered in selected countries against requirements and standards set by the EU Single Digital Gateway Regulation (SDGR), a set of policy recommendations to enhance digital transformation was issued.

Jointly with UN-Habitat and Kibabii University, we conducted a Global Assessment of Responsible Use of AI in Cities, aimed at thoroughly assessing the opportunities and constraints for local government to responsibly implement, use, and govern Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in cities. The project was funded by IDRC and produced robust recommendations for policymakers.

Rigorous cross-disciplinary research and knowledge creation

In 2023, we continued actively contributing to research on existing and emerging topics in a variety of ways. Our publication record improved with 43 reports, journal articles, conference papers, white papers, policy briefs, and op-eds being published. Beyond Digital Access as a Human Right in Cities: proposing an integrated multidimensional approach is one of the White papers published that intersects three relevant elements of our research: technology, human rights, and cities (government local level).

Through our strategic relationships with universities, such as the University of Minho in Portugal, the University of the Aegean in Greece, and the Fundação Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, 26 students, evenly between doctoral and master's degree levels, have been co-supervised in 2023, of which 31% were from developing countries. Ongoing or potential research and academic collaborations were also conducted or discussed with the Kibabii University in Kenya, the University of Laval in Canada, the Bocconi University in Italy, the Universidad de las Américas in Ecuador, and the University of Tokyo in Japan.

During the year, we actively contributed to 34 committees, boards, or councils of multiple institutions, projects, conferences, and PhD and MSc final examinations. The Working Group on Interoperability and the Working Group on Cloud Computing, both coordinated by the World Bank or the UNDESA E-Government Readiness Survey, are examples with global reach.

In 2023, we indirectly contributed to knowledge generation through the review of 120 different academic publications, with 64% being conference papers and 41% journal articles. This includes conferences such as the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS), Digital Government: Research and Practice (d.go), and EGOV-cedem-EPART, and journals such as Government Information Quarterly, Information Polity, Science and Public Policy, The Journal of Strategic Information Systems, The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries, Journal of Urban Technology.

The value delivered by our knowledge development and advice is illustrated by 58% of our 29 proposals in 2023 being selected for implementation and 55% of our external funding provided by government partners – facts we are particularly proud of.

7. Developing Digital Capacities and Competencies

UNU-EGOV's commitment to developing capacities and competencies is an essential part of our mandate to provide comprehensive training and knowledge transfer. By focusing on digital governance, we have provided public officials with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of digital transformation. In 2023, UNU-EGOV tailored several training programmes following government requests, developed through dialogue to address the specific realities and challenges faced by the respective organisation. Through those strategic collaborations and tailored training initiatives, UNU-EGOV has continued to foster a culture of excellence in public service, ensuring a sustainable digital transformation that aligns with global best practices and local needs.

Our capacity development initiatives in 2023 aimed to equip public administration professionals and government officials with the necessary skills and knowledge to drive digital transformation across a broad range of public services. This effort is key to fostering effective governance and service delivery in the digital age. Through a series of seminars, workshops, online interventions, and practical training sessions, participants gained hands-on experience and theoretical knowledge in key areas such as digital strategy, digital government assessment and monitoring, sustainable development, data governance, and emerging technologies.

Our team of experts conducted comprehensive assessments of the current digital landscape, identified areas for improvement, and designed customised capacity development programmes. These outputs have driven the governments we support towards achieving their aspirations of digital leadership, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity and sustainability in the digital transformation process.

Our training sessions underscore UNU-EGOV's unique role in bridging the gap between policy and practice, fostering a continuous learning and adaptation culture in public administrations worldwide. By focusing on capacity development, we ensure that government officials are well prepared to navigate the complexities of digital governance and drive impactful change.

Capacity-Building Programme on Digital Governance in Cabo Verde

The Capacity-Building Programme on Digital Governance in the Public Administration of Cabo Verde aimed to enhance the country's public sector with a structured training programme. The programme covered digital transformation and governance concepts, contextualised the Action Plan and National Digital Governance Strategy, and provided teams with project planning, digitalisation, and service simplification skills. UNU-EGOV experts organised modules on digital governance fundamentals, strategic instruments, project management, participatory design, and public service planning. Twenty-eight participants attended the programme delivered in Cidade da Praia, Cabo Verde.

Capacity-Building Programme for Public Sector Executives in Egypt

The Capacity-Building Programme for Public Sector Executives in Egypt has focused on developing strategic leadership and digital governance capabilities to enhance Egypt's public sector through tailored training. The programme focused on digital governance, corruption reduction, and judiciary reforms in collaboration with Egypt's National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (NIGSD). Key areas included strategic EGOV planning, AI in justice systems, and citizen inclusion in governance. The training combined lectures, cultural activities, and field visits to Portuguese government institutions. This programme took place in Guimarães, Portugal, and 79 officials from different government sectors in Egypt attended.

Capacity-Building Programme on Digital Transformation (GovTech) and e-Participation (CivicTech) in Saudi Arabia

The Capacity-Building Programme on Digital Transformation (GovTech) and e-Participation (CivicTech) was designed to equip Saudi government officials to better face and act to achieve a number of ambitious targets set for the digital transformation of the country and its public sector and service delivery. The training had a broad scope covering an array of topics, including legal and regulatory issues, innovation in public services, emerging technologies for public services, digital trends and challenges of CivicTech and GovTech, citizen engagement and transparency, and civic tech solutions. Two editions of this programme were run at our premises in Guimarães, Portugal, and a total of 46 officials from the Digital Government Authority of Saudi Arabia attended.
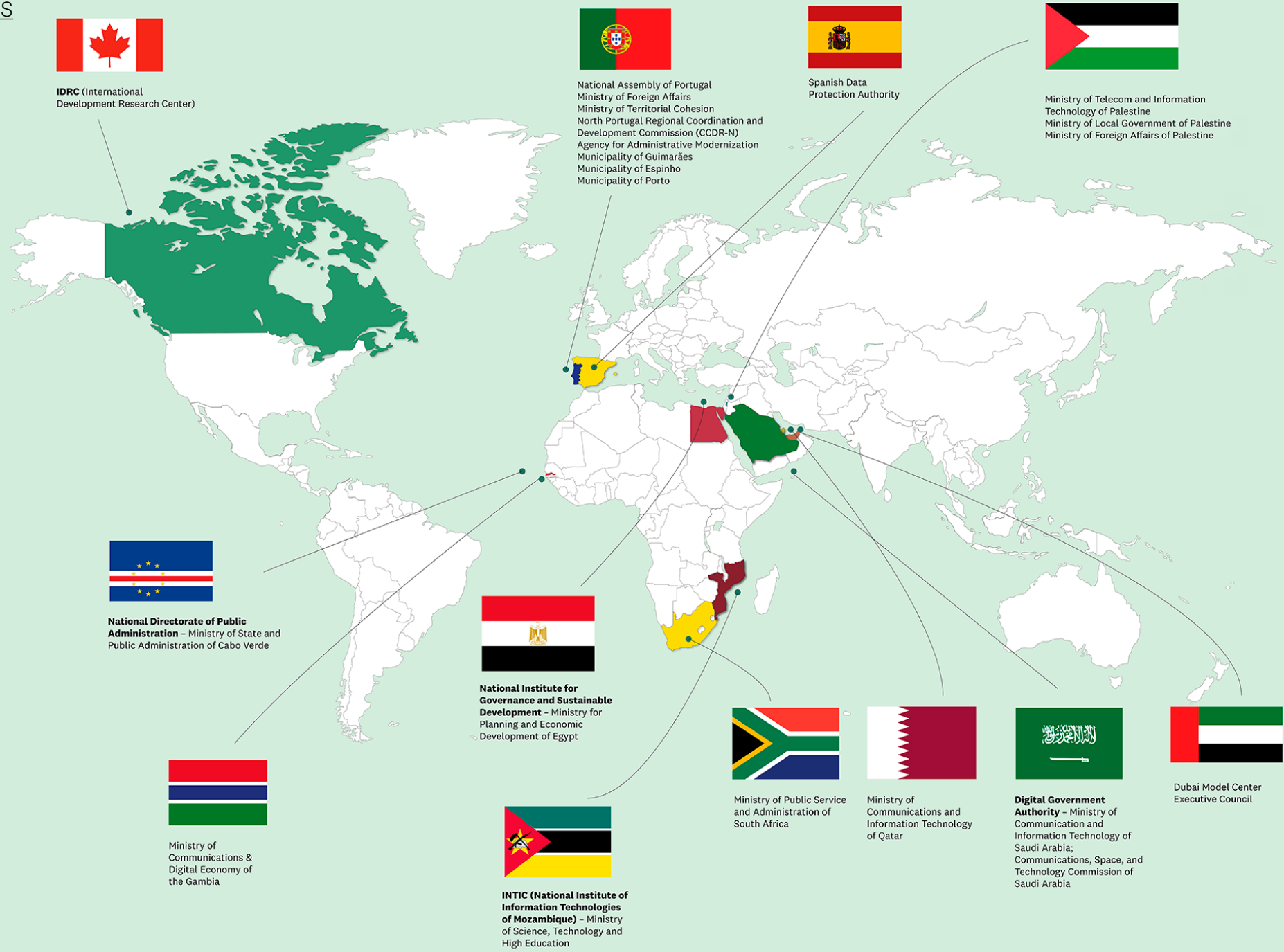
8. Partnering for Digital Sustainability

In 2023, UNU-EGOV continued its mission to foster digital governance by partnering with institutions both within and outside the UN System to promote digital sustainability. We established or reinforced relations with 61 partners, including UN System organisations, international/regional organisations, government organisations, non-government organisations, research and academic institutions, and the private sector.

These collaborations are crucial to enhance our capacity to conduct impactful research and projects and ensure our initiatives remain relevant. The expertise and resources brought by our partners significantly bolster our capacity to address complex global challenges and drive innovation in digital governance. Through these strengthened alliances, we continue to expand our influence and effectiveness, solidifying our position as a leading entity in digital governance.

GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

IDRC (International Development Research Center)

National Assembly of Portugal
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Territorial Cohesion
North Portugal Regional Coordination and Development Commission (CCDR-N)
Agency for Administrative Modernization
Municipality of Guimarães
Municipality of Espinho
Municipality of Porto

Spanish Data Protection Authority

Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology of Palestine
Ministry of Local Government of Palestine
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Palestine

National Directorate of Public Administration – Ministry of State and Public Administration of Cabo Verde

National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development – Ministry for Planning and Economic Development of Egypt

Ministry of Communications & Digital Economy of the Gambia

INTIC (National Institute of Information Technologies of Mozambique) – Ministry of Science, Technology and High Education

Ministry of Public Service and Administration of South Africa

Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of Qatar

Digital Government Authority – Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of Saudi Arabia; Communications, Space, and Technology Commission of Saudi Arabia

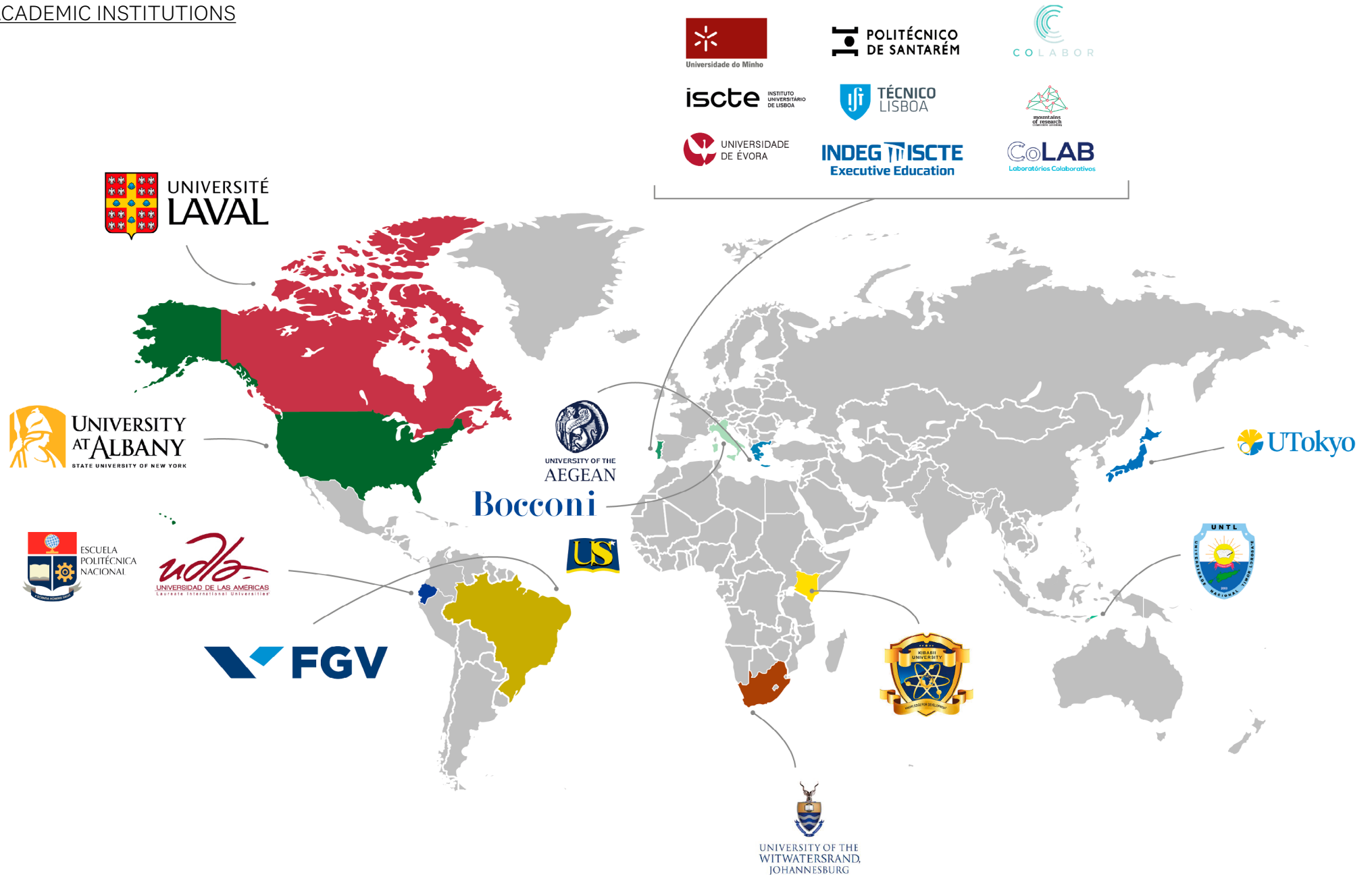Dubai Model Center Executive Council

UN SYSTEM ORGANISATIONS

United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

ESCAP — Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

UNESCO — United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ITU

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

UNDP

UNRIC

UN HABITAT FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

INTERNATIONAL/REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Digital Cooperation Organization

WORLD BANK

OECD

issa

OTHER PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

TRANSPARÊNCIA INTERNACIONAL — Transparency International Portugal

cetic.br

giz — Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

مجلة الرواد — Arrowad Group

SmartCity® BUSINESS AMERICA

Aets

Stantec

The year 2023 was marked by two major events: the launch of the [West Africa Digital Governance Forum](#) in Gambia and the 17th edition of the International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance ([ICEGOV 2023](#)) in Brazil.

Additionally, 36 other events were organised or co-organised with partners, including five webinars, eight seminars and 12 workshops, reflecting its commitment to addressing challenges related to digital governance. Several seminars were held, such as those on [Artificial Intelligence](#), [Digital Transformation](#), and [Smart Cities](#). These sessions provided participants with valuable insights and practical knowledge, fostering a community of practice dedicated to improving digital governance.

Our team members also participated in more than 60 international conferences or initiatives, significantly expanding its global mark and presence. One notable example from the [World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2023](#) was the contribution to the workshop "Multistakeholder Partnership to Empower Digital Literacy Initiatives". Furthermore, UNU-EGOV secured nine externally funded projects, receiving support from several governments and international organisations.

In 2023, UNU-EGOV was invited to be a key collaborator of the UNESCO Information for All (IFAP) Programme, reinforcing the existent collaboration between the institutions, and to join the World Bank Working Group on Cloud Computing, in addition to the membership that UNU-EGOV has regarding the World Bank Working Group on Interoperability.

It is still worth highlighting both the network of collaborations and partnerships with UN system organisations, such as UNDESA, UNESCO, UNDP, ITU, UN-Habitat, UN ECA, and ESCAP, and the multiple Universities, research centres and think tanks with which UNU-EGOV partnered and connected to develop joint research, projects, training programmes, events, publications on digital governance and digital transformation topics.

UNU-EGOV's efforts in securing externally funded projects have been vital in supporting its mission, influence, and network. In line with its strategic action to bid for competitive tenders from various organisations, UNU-EGOV has effectively disseminated its intention to contribute to digital governance development globally. These funded projects have enabled the execution of initiatives addressing critical issues such as digital inclusion, smart city development, and the utilisation of big data for public service improvement.

Through these multifaceted contributions and partnerships, UNU-EGOV continues to lead the way in promoting digital sustainability. Its work not only enhances the capacity of public institutions to leverage digital technologies towards better public services but also empowers citizens and communities to participate actively in the digital transformation process. Looking ahead, UNU-EGOV remains dedicated to fostering innovation and collaboration to achieve sustainable digital governance worldwide.

Externally Funded Projects

UNU-EGOV's portfolio of externally funded projects significantly expanded in 2023, with nine new initiatives supported by governments and international organisations. These projects span a range of critical areas, including e-participation, digital assessment and Sustainable Development Goals. One key project, funded by the European Commission, focuses on analysing e-governance legal frameworks. Another project, supported by GIZ, aims to study country models for the international transfer of digital government experiences and solutions. Other projects have been mentioned in different parts of this report. These initiatives contribute to expanding UNU-EGOV's research capabilities and driving tangible improvements in digital governance across various countries, sectors of intervention, and digital networks.

16th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV 2023)

The 16th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV 2023), held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, from September 26 to 29, was organised by UNU-EGOV and Smart City Business America under the theme "Digital Governance for Democratic, Equitable, and Inclusive Societies". Over four days, the conference featured 269 participants from 28 countries, including 150+ speakers across ten tracks. Highlights included five keynote lectures, three high-level panels, 18 paper sessions, two workshops, and six roundtable sessions. Key topics addressed ranged from digital inclusion and AI governance to agile regulation of the digital transformation. ICEGOV 2023 continued its tradition of fostering collaboration between academia, the private sector, government, and civil society, deepening innovative digital governance solutions exchanges.

Local Online Service Index (LOSI) Network

In 2023, we saw the expansion of the Local Online Service Index (LOSI) Network. The LOSI Network is a concept jointly introduced and coordinated by UNU-EGOV and UNDESA in collaboration on the assessment of digital government development at the local government level. After the first wave of the LOSI assessment framework application in Brazil, Jordan and Palestine in 2022 (the three initial members of the LOSI network), in 2023, we enlarged the network by coordinating new LOSI applications in Greece, Uzbekistan and India. Other countries are already expressing their interest in applying LOSI and joining the network.

A similar concept is the Health Online Service Provision Index (HOSPI) Network. As part of the HOSPI Network, we collaborated with our colleagues at UNU-IIGH and local health authorities in Malaysia to apply the methodology first tested in Portugal to evaluate hospital portals in relation to attractiveness, efficiency, and patient responsiveness. Greece and Ecuador have also already applied HOSPI.

Through LOSI and HOSPI networks, UNU-EGOV established partnerships with multiple Universities in different countries, opening up avenues to further joint research in digital governance and publishing relevant contributions to policymakers and government officials operating in the field.
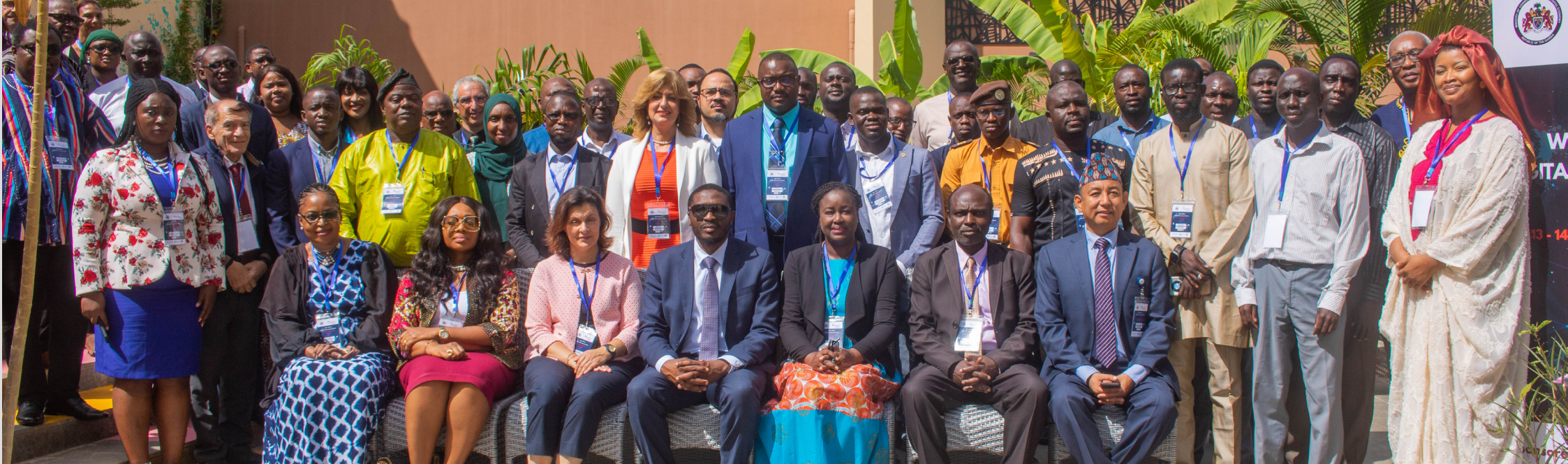
9. Strengthening Connections with the Global South

In alignment with what is enshrined in the UNU Charter, during 2023, UNU-EGOV remained committed to growing vigorous communities of academics, researchers, and practitioners and strengthening national and institutional capacities in the Global South. The launch of the WADGov Forum, the MoU signed with UN ECA to collaborate to promote digital governance in Africa, the collaboration with the University of Santiago in Cabo Verde to establish a master degree on Digital Transformation, the organisation of ICEGOV 2023 in Brazil, the capacity-building Programmes designed and delivered to Egyptian officials, and the advisory and technical assistance projects executed in countries like, for example, Cabo Verde, are evidence of this commitment and action.

> *The West Africa Digital Governance Forum (WADGOV) is launched as an open platform to articulate efforts among West Africa countries in the region in order to develop digital governance policies, strategies, mechanisms, and initiatives, contributing to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, namely more inclusive and participated societies, citizen empowerment, and transparent, accountable and trustworthy public institutions.*

This is the initial paragraph of the Banjul Declaration, approved in the final session of a broader initiative proposed by UNU-EGOV and launched in The Gambia on 13-14 September 2023.

Designing and organising the WADGov Forum with various countries and regional organisations in Western Africa was a central project of UNU-EGOV in 2023 as part of its strategy to consolidate partnerships for digital governance in the Global South, particularly in Africa. For two days, in a joint organisation with UN ECA and the Government of The Gambia, around 55 delegates sought to foster synergies and identify challenges to promote the design and assessment of regional and national strategies for digital governance and citizen empowerment. Needless to say, most of these countries face critical challenges at both the strategic level (e.g., weak planning and institutional articulation, lack of suitable monitoring mechanisms) and the technical one (e.g., weak infrastructure, insufficient funding).

Therefore, the Forum aimed at a shared response, articulating digital governance development initiatives at different levels and voicing this cause in the international arena.

The underlying concept proved relevant and able to be replicated in other regions. Similar initiatives are thus planned for 2024 in the Southern and Eastern regions of Africa and Central Asia.

However, UNU-EGOV's focus on the Global South and its active support of its dynamics goes further and is itself multidimensional.

For example, throughout 2023, we worked jointly with other Portuguese Universities and high-level education institutions – the University of Minho,

the University of Évora, and the Polytechnic Institute of Santarém – in the design of a master's degree in Digital Transformation to be offered by the University of Santiago of Cabo Verde.

We signed an MoU with UN ECA that established a general framework of cooperation on issues at the intersection of digital governance, data-driven policymaking, development of digital financial services (DFS) and the acceleration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across African countries.

We continued a direct collaboration with Cabo Verde in consolidating the Action Plan associated with the National Strategy for Digital Governance, which we developed earlier, and in training staff

from the country's Public Administration to monitor its implementation. At UNU-EGOV, we highly value this type of intervention, which allows countries to mobilise their own human resources to design and operationalise going-digital strategies through consolidated sets of public policies.

Finally, we are aware of the multi-directional nature of these processes. Technology, governance, and digital transformation are words whose history is excessively marked by other latitudes. Making them a source of emancipation and sustainable development entails the need for having them rewritten in light of the diversity of practices in the Global South, the richness of its cultures and the enormous societal challenges it faces. Such is part of our daily work at UNU-EGOV.

10. Closing Words by the Deputy Director

For UNU-EGOV, 2023 was a year of maturation. A larger and more diverse team. A consolidated portfolio of projects and an expanded range of training programmes. Innovative research results. And, mainly, an increasing international recognition as a relevant and reliable partner.

A decade afterwards, we revisit the conceptual note that proposed the creation of this Unit to UNU in July 2013 and recognise in it what still drives our path today:

> *[To] carry out policy-relevant research; translate research findings into relevant policy instruments; build capacity in localizing and applying such instruments (...); build and maintain international research and policy networks to share lessons learnt, foster mutual learning, and bridge research and policy worlds; and disseminate the outcomes of its activities to create impact.*

T. Janowski, 2013

However, as UNU-EGOV approaches its tenth anniversary, new challenges emerge.

Our work crosses multiple strands and very diverse contexts. It builds bridges, launches networks. The first challenge is precisely that: how can such networks be made more impactful and effective, catalysts for development and emancipation, especially in the Global South?

The second focuses on research. There is a need to look for new problems that challenge the core of our mission in a world crossed by multiple conflicts, a dramatic climate crisis, an escalation to rearmament, and enormous difficulties in making progress on the sustainable development agenda.

The third calls for a more systematic evaluation of the impact of our projects. What added value do they bring? What difference do they make? What mark do they leave?

As a University, we are aware that not only solutions matter but also, and foremost, the rigorous formulation of the relevant questions. The road ahead. The guiding dream. In the words of a great Portuguese poet,

> *Through the dream, we go,*
> *Moved and mute.*
> *Do we arrive? Do we not?*
> *Fruitful or not*
> *Through the dream, we go.*
>
> *Enough is the faith in all we have*
> *Enough, the hope in what*
> *We might never have.*
> *Enough, the soul that we spare*
> *With equal joy*
> *To the unknown*
> *And to the ordinary*
>
> *Do we arrive? Do we not?*
> *We leave. We go. We are.*
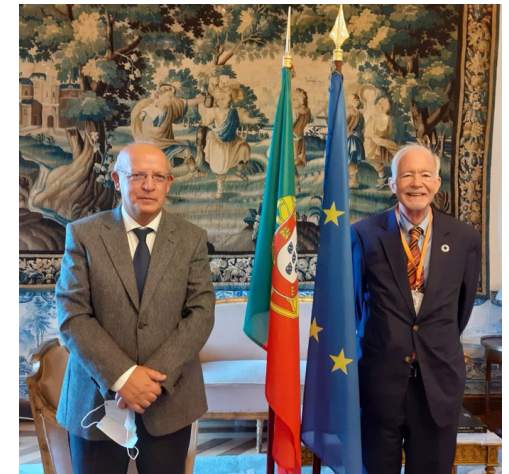
Sebastião da Gama,
1924-1952

Luís Soares Barbosa
Deputy Director, UNU-EGOV

11. Thank you

As we close another year of results and impact, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone at UNU-EGOV for their unwavering dedication and hard work. Your commitment and effort have been instrumental in achieving our goals.

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to all our partners for their invaluable collaboration and support throughout this journey.

Together, we have accomplished something truly remarkable. Thank you all for your exceptional contributions!