

UN — Portugal Digital Fellowship

DIGITAL INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION



**UNU
EGOV**



**REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA**
NEGÓCIOS ESTRANGEIROS



CAMÕES
INSTITUTO
DA COOPERAÇÃO
E DA LÍNGUA
PORTUGAL
MINISTÉRIO DOS NEGÓCIOS ESTRANGEIROS



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2026

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1. INTRODUCTION



Digital transformation is the driving force of fast-evolving processes which are re-shaping societies, economies, and States.

Digital technologies can act as a cross-cutting accelerator of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, SDG 16 calls for effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels in the framework of peaceful and inclusive societies. Digital transformation of governance processes and procedures has a role to play in achieving such a goal. The use of digital technologies by Governments to improve their operation as well as ways to foster bidirectional interaction with citizens has been the subject of significant and steady progress in recent years. Its enormous potential for the progressive realisation of the SDGs is widely recognised, namely through the recent adoption of the United Nations Pact for the Future and its Global Digital Compact.

The last two decades witnessed major efforts of the public sector first to introduce and later to manage the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in their ecosystems. Although a number of lessons have been learned in relation to risk minimisation and outcome maximisation, digital transformation and digital governance require an extensive effort to build awareness, capacities, and competencies within the public sector.

Within its “2030 Development Cooperation Strategy”, Portugal recognises the importance of digital transformation to achieve the SDGs, in particular for developing countries. One of the strategy’s priority axes (axis 4A) is fostering prosperity, namely through digital transformation, in order to help advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the implementation of its SDGs.

This is why Portugal is again partnering with the United Nations University Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance (UNU-EGOV) who is in a suitable position to assist developing countries in their digital development, to organize the third edition of the UN-Portugal Digital Fellowship focused on digital innovation and transformation. This concept note offers an overview of the 2026 edition of the Fellowship, building on the previous two editions (November 2024 and May 2025), in line with both the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the priorities of the 2030 Portuguese Development Cooperation Strategy. This overview outlines the Fellowship’s structure, organisation and training outcomes, as well as substantive contents and learning methodology.

2. CONCEPT

A woman wearing a headscarf and glasses is standing and presenting to an audience. She is gesturing with her right hand. In the foreground, the backs of several audience members' heads are visible as they sit at desks with laptops. The scene is dimly lit, with a green tint overlaying the entire image. A large monitor is positioned behind the presenter, and a microphone is visible on the desk in front of her.

2.1 TARGET PARTICIPANTS

The envisaged participants of this Fellowship are high-level officials and diplomatic officials at the Permanent Mission's in New York, from developing countries.

Seminar cohorts will be dimensioned for up to 30 in-person participants.

2.2 LEARNING OUTCOMES

This Fellowship will articulate in a coherent way the following questions, addressed in the context of developing countries' specific challenges:

- How to develop, evaluate and monitor digital governance and associated public digital infrastructures/resources/policies to maximise the potential of digital solutions, improve management and deliver high-quality public services?
- How can digital transformation be conceptualised and implemented from an inclusive and citizen-centric perspective?
- What is the role of open data within innovative digital governance models?
- How to manage change and transformation in digital governance?
- How to build safe, secure, and resilient digital government services?

The reflections and discussions conducted around these questions will equip participants with knowledge and tools on the following elements:

- The relevance and impact of digital transformation for governments and sustainable development.
- The nuts and bolts of digital transformation and digital governance.
- The major opportunities, enablers, challenges and trends of digital transformation and digital governance.
- The new trends in the design and development of more inclusive and citizen-centred digital public services.
- The opportunities and risks of emerging technologies to digital governance.
- The central role of data, and open data, in promoting innovative digital governance models.
- The mechanisms to engage and empower citizens.
- The major legal and regulatory aspects impacting digital governance.
- The main assessment techniques, benchmarks, and indicators to assess and monitor digital governance development.
- The multi-nature challenges and existent mechanisms to manage change in digital governance.
- The different models and challenges for managing the digital transformation process in the public sector and the role and competencies of a Government Chief Information Officer (GCIO).

2.3 PROGRAMME

The five foundational questions laying down this Fellowship will be approached through 13 modules, structured into 5 parts, as presented below.

Modules 4 and 10 will be delivered by guest speakers from AI4PA (Module 4) and National Cybersecurity (Module 10), two nationally operating digital transformation entities in Portugal.

PART 1: Digital Transformation and Digital Governance: Rationale and Foundations

Module 1: Digital transformation and digital governance as a holistic tool to support the Sustainable Development Goals

Module 2: Digital governance foundations

PART 2: Digital Innovation and Transformation for Better Government

Module 3: Design and development of inclusive and citizen-centred digital public services

Module 4: The architecture of digital government in Portugal: identity, integration, and accessibility

Module 5: Harnessing emerging technologies in public services delivery

PART 3: Digital Innovation and Transformation for Better Governance

Module 6: Open data and data governance for better government

Module 7: CivicTech and e-participation: digital tools for citizen engagement

Module 8: Inclusion, human rights, and participation

PART 4: Towards Safer and Trustful Digital Innovation and Transformation

Module 9: Secure and resilient digital government services

Module 10: Cybersecurity and governance

Module 11: Legal and regulatory issues on security and privacy

PART 5: The Governance of Digital Innovation and Transformation

Module 12: Digital governance assessment

Module 13: Digital transformation: governance, innovation, and change management

2.4 TEACHING METHOD

A mixed method approach will be applied to link both theory and practice.

Problem-based learning will be chosen to facilitate learning through the experience of solving an open-ended problem found in support material.

An active learning approach, with discussion and practice as key constituents, will be adopted. Peer-to-peer and problem-based learning will be encouraged in all the modules of the Fellowship.

2.5 SCHEDULE AND COURSE STRUCTURE

Each iteration of the Fellowship will be scheduled over five working days and will consist of 25.5 effective teaching hours in total, excluding lunches and coffee breaks. Teaching will be scheduled Monday-Friday from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm.

All scheduled lunches and the Opening Dinner on the first day will be served at a restaurant within walking distance from the UNU-EGOV premises, and daily coffee breaks will be in UNU-EGOV premises. There will also be a Closing Lunch on the final day.

A social/cultural activity will be included, providing participants with an opportunity to engage in informal networking while experiencing Portugal's rich cultural heritage. There will be an arranged tour of [Paço dos Duques](#) on the Tuesday later afternoon / early evening, and a visit to the nearby [city of Braga](#) (via coach, journey time of approximately 30 minutes) on Thursday evening of the training week.

The daily structure is outlined below but may be adapted.

| DAY | TIME | |
|-----|---------------|---------------------|
| 1 | 09:30 – 10:30 | Opening and welcome |
| | 10:30 – 11:00 | Coffee break |
| | 11:00 – 13:00 | Lectures & teamwork |
| | 13:00 – 14:30 | Lunch |
| | 14:30 – 16:30 | Lectures & teamwork |
| | 18:30 – 20:30 | Opening Dinner |
| | | |
| 2 | 09:00 – 10:30 | Lectures & teamwork |
| | 10:30 – 11:00 | Coffee break |

| | | |
|----------|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| | 11:00 – 13:00 | Lectures & teamwork |
| | 13:00 – 14:30 | Lunch |
| | 14:30 – 16:30 | Lectures & teamwork |
| ... | ... | ... |
| | | |
| 5 | 09:00 – 10:30 | Lectures & teamwork |
| | 10:30 – 11:00 | Coffee break |
| | 11:00 – 13:00 | Lectures & teamwork |
| | 13:00 – 13:30 | Course wrap-up and programme closing |
| | 13:30 – 15:00 | Closing Lunch |

2.6 LOCATION

The Fellowship will take place at UNU-EGOV premises, located in the Campus de Couros, Rua Vila Flor 166, 4810-445 Guimarães, Portugal.

Map: <https://goo.gl/maps/1nX91MSvaqws8iKh8>

Note: The nearest international airport is in Porto – Porto Airport (OPO) – some 50 kilometres from Guimarães. Several transportation options such as bus, train, taxi or car are available to and-from the airport, which is placed just north of Portugal’s second largest city, Porto.

2.7 DATE AND TIMELINE FOR OPERATIONALISATION

The operationalisation of the Fellowship will be subject to the following timeline:

- December 8th 2025 – Announcement of the third iteration of the Fellowship
- February 2nd 2026 – Deadline for submission of applications
- mid-February 2026 – Selection and announcement of participants
- April 13th – April 17th 2026 – Third iteration of the Fellowship

2.8 CANDIDATES SELECTION PROCESS

To nominate a candidate to participate in the Fellowship, three documents are required and should be sent by email to digitalfellowship@mne.pt and egov-digitalfellowship@unu.edu:

- An official communication (i.e. Note Verbale) from the Member State, through the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York. The communication should, if applicable, list all nominations from that Member State (if more than one nomination is made, these should be ranked by order of priority).
- A nomination form must be submitted for each individual candidate.
- A copy of the passport (biometric data page) must be submitted for each individual candidate, and the passport should be valid for a minimum of **6 months** prior to the organization of the Fellowship.

More information on the submission of nominations procedure, including the necessary documents, can be found at <https://unu.edu/egov/un-portugal-digital-fellowship>. To ensure the quality of the training and proper participation, there is a limited number of participants. Only nominations with full documentation will be considered at the review and selection process led by the co-organizers.

2.9 SPONSORSHIP PACKAGE

Each selected participant will be provided with:

- Round trip economy class flights from the capital of the country of origin to Porto International Airport.
- Transportation from Porto International Airport to Guimarães.
- Hotel accommodation in Guimarães for the duration of the Fellowship.
- Breakfast, lunches, coffee breaks and an Opening Dinner during the Fellowship.

The organizers will not be providing:

- Internal travels in the country of origin, nor flights initially departing from and/or having as final destination any city other than the capital of the country of origin. Furthermore, the organizers will not cover hotel accommodations on the trip from the country of origin and Portugal.
- Daily subsistence allowances (DSA).
- Travel or personal insurance cover. Participants are encouraged to purchase those by their own means.

- Assistance in obtaining travel visas, including travel/accommodation expenses to another city for visa arrangements. Once selected, participants should make their own arrangements to obtain the aforementioned visa for their visit to Portugal, as necessary and as soon as possible. Information on visa requirements can be found on the following webpage, namely under “who needs a visa” and “where should you lodge a visa application” on the right-hand side menu: <https://vistos.mne.gov.pt/en/short-stay-visas-schengen/general-information/who-needs-a-visa>.

The organizers shall also not be held liable for any claims, damages, losses, or expenses arising from or in connection with the services provided. By deciding to apply to the Fellowship and upon selection, participants acknowledge that the organizers bear no responsibility for the actions, omissions, or any other occurrences involving participants. Any claims, liabilities, damages, costs, or expenses related to the services involving the participants will be without implication of liability to the organizers.

2.10 TESTIMONIES

The UN-Portugal Digital Fellowship serves as a catalyst for advancing digital governance by equipping public sector professionals with the knowledge and tools to drive transformation in their respective countries. The testimonies in this section, from the previous two editions, highlight the programme’s impact beyond individual capacity building, demonstrating how the insights gained are shaping institutional strategies and fostering cross-sector collaboration. These reflections underscore the programme’s role in strengthening public administration frameworks and advancing sustainable digital development on a global scale.

My greatest learning has been the importance of putting the citizen at the center of all initiatives. Understanding that technology should be a tool to improve quality of life and facilitate access to public services is essential. Additionally, I have learned about the need to promote a culture of collaboration and adaptation within institutions, as well as the relevance of transparency and accountability in the transformation process. (2024 Edition)

The most important takeaway from the training on digital innovation and transformation is the gained insights from EU countries' experiences and the SDG regarding digital transformation, particularly emphasizing the significance of Open Government Data. (2024 Edition)

The diversity of participants and global perspectives have enriched my learning experience by offering a variety of approaches and solutions to common challenges. Each participant brings their own culture, experiences, and knowledge, allowing me to see problems from different angles and consider

alternatives that I might not have thought of otherwise. Additionally, the exchange of ideas and best practices among countries has fostered a collaborative learning environment where we can all grow and benefit from the collective experience. (2024 Edition)

The explanation was exceptional given that these technical concepts can be challenging to explain which demonstrates great expertise. The interactions with all of the lecturers were also fantastic, exchanging ideas with brilliant professional was truly a unique experience, which I am both very grateful and fortunate to have experienced. (2024 Edition)

My biggest takeaway from the training is learning how to effectively implement digital transformation in my office and country by drawing on the real-world experiences shared during the program. I gained valuable insights from the way the Portuguese government has successfully led its digital transformation initiatives, particularly in public service delivery, transparency, and citizen engagement. (2025 Edition)

My biggest takeaway from the UN–Portugal Digital Fellowship is that digital transformation is not just about technology — it's about people, governance, and strategy. The training taught me that successful digital innovation requires inclusive design, strong institutional frameworks, cybersecurity awareness, and change management. (2025 Edition)

The diversity of participants and global perspectives was one of the most enriching aspects of the UN–Portugal Digital Fellowship. Engaging with professionals from different countries, backgrounds, and government systems allowed me to understand how digital challenges and solutions vary across contexts — from large, digitally advanced nations to small island developing states like mine. (2025 Edition)

3. UNU-EGOV PROFILE



3. UNU-EGOV PROFILE

UNU-EGOV is a think tank dedicated to Electronic Governance (e-Governance), located in Guimarães, Portugal. As part of the United Nations University (UNU), UNU-EGOV is a core centre of research, advisory services and training. As an international reference of excellence in this area, UNU-EGOV brings together multidisciplinary and multicultural teams around complex problems and emerging challenges, with a focus on the 2030 Agenda, namely SDG 16.

The UNU is headquartered in Tokyo and is composed of several Institutes and Programmes located in 12 countries (<https://unu.edu>). It was established in 1972 by decision of the UN General Assembly to contribute, through collaborative research and education, dissemination, and advisory services, to efforts to address the issues of concern to the United Nations, including sustainable development.

UNU-EGOV was established in May 2014 by decision of the United Nations University Council (<https://unu.edu/about/unu-council>), which serves as the governing body of UNU. As per Article I of the UNU-EGOV Statute, the Operating Unit has the legal status necessary for the realisation of its purposes and activities and has the capacity to enter into agreements and contracts.

The mission of UNU-EGOV is to support the United Nations system and Member States of the United Nations in transforming the mechanisms of governance and building effective governance capabilities through strategic applications of information and communication technologies to *inter alia* contribute to inclusive social and economic development.

UNU-EGOV has extensive experience in digital transformation processes, at the level of design, implementation, and evaluation, in diverse contexts including in developing countries. UNU-EGOV experts have a high level of knowledge and extensive experience in collaborating with governments in the development of policies, strategies, and plans for e-Governance and in measuring and monitoring the progress of e-Governance development. UNU-EGOV experts specialized in the fields of information systems, public administration, change management, human resource management, legal, IT strategic planning and management, and project management.

More information on the submission of nominations procedure, including the necessary documents:



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