

# Annual Report 2019

Digital Future Society Think Tank

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# About Digital Future Society

Digital Future Society is a non-profit transnational initiative that engages policymakers, civic society organisations, academic experts and entrepreneurs from around the world to explore, experiment and explain how technologies can be designed, used and governed in ways that create the conditions for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Our aim is to help policymakers identify, understand and prioritise key challenges and opportunities now and in the next ten years in the areas of public innovation, digital trust and equitable growth.

Visit [digitalfuturesociety.com](https://digitalfuturesociety.com) to learn more

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### Published

February 2020

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# Foreword

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What started as an idea to understand and overcome the ethical and legal challenges of digital disruption has evolved into an impactful reality. Over the last twelve months, the Digital Future Society Think Tank has engaged with hundreds of experts from the public, private, academic, and third sectors with a shared objective of building sustainable, inclusive and equitable societies. We have successfully created a tangible space for reflection, engagement, and action that not only connects public and private spheres, but also links territories and organisations that rarely sit at the same table.

More than a unifying force, the Think Tank is also the pulsating engine of the Digital Future Society Programme. In a year, we have successfully created six working groups and partnered with two top international research organisations to produce eight reports on Digital Future Society's key thematic areas: Public Innovation, Digital Trust and Security, Citizen Empowerment and Inclusion, and Equitable Growth. We have advanced our research and advocacy efforts from the exploration of the challenges and opportunities of technological change to the proposition of action-oriented tools and initiatives for policymakers.

The journey is just beginning, and we are excited to move into 2020 with a honed direction and renewed ambitions. If 2019 was the year in which we laid the foundation of the Think Tank and set priorities, 2020 will be the year in which we engage our ecosystem and strengthen a "network of networks." We will continue to nurture relationships with leading experts and expand our network of core partner organisations, the Future Open Council, from 18 to 25 members. We will deepen our collective understanding of the most relevant digital policy issues while contributing to new discussions emerging globally.

As the Think Tank grows, evolves and matures, so too does the Digital Future Society Programme. As we incorporate new areas of work such as technology's role in the transition to climate neutrality, we will work closely with the Future Open Council and other partner organisations such as the World Economic Forum, Organisation for Economic Development, and United Nations, to strengthen our presence in international digital policy debates.

The first Annual Report of the Digital Future Society Think Tank offers an overview of what we do, how we work and what we have achieved so far, with a focus on insights gained from our reports. It also lays out the Think Tank's plan of action for 2020: creating a bigger impact together with our partners. Let the hard work continue to shape the Digital Future Society Think Tank vision into reality.

**Carina Lopes**  
**Head of Digital Future Society Think Tank**

# Introduction

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# About Digital Future Society

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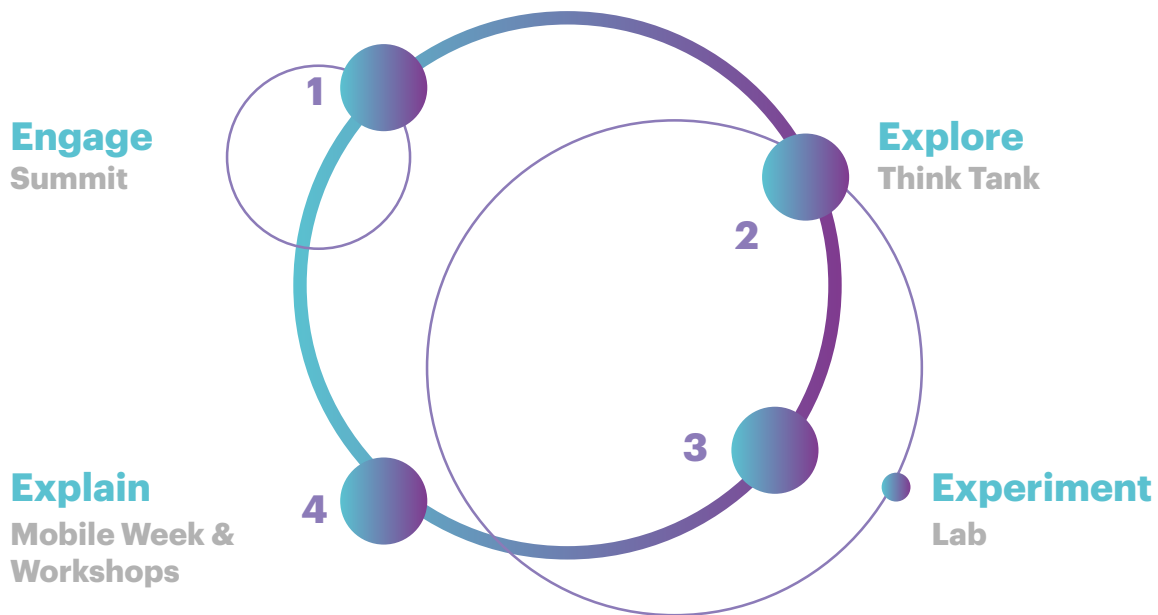
Digital Future Society is a transnational initiative of the **Spanish Secretary of State for Digital Advancement, Red.es** and **Mobile World Capital Barcelona** with an ambitious goal of understanding and addressing the legal and ethical challenges and opportunities of digital transformation.

Digital Future Society connects experts, policymakers, civil society organisations and entrepreneurs from around the world to explore, experiment and explain how the design, use, and governance of technologies create the conditions for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Throughout the year, Digital Future Society transforms global reflection into local action and creates solutions that seek to respond to the most pressing challenges of technological disruption by examining issues like digital inclusion and closing data governance gaps.

The Digital Future Society Think Tank is the research and deliberative arm of Digital Future Society, whose aim is to foment a deeper understanding of digital technologies' impact on society through action-oriented research and dialogue.

## An action-oriented programme for the digital era



Transnational issues require the active **engagement** of public administrations, technology companies, civil society organisations and the global academic research community. Events such as the Digital Future Society **Summits** offer powerful platforms to connect experts, practitioners and policymakers that are actively working to shape current and future digital societies.

The Digital Future Society **Think Tank** conducts action-oriented research and dialogue around ethical, legal, and inclusion challenges with the aim of proposing relevant new principles, strategies, and solutions. Based in Barcelona, the Think Tank operates with a global vision and cross-sectoral approach to **exploring** the challenges and opportunities emerging from the design, use, and governance of digital technologies.

Solutions and policy recommendations resulting from the Think Tank's work are designed to empower policymakers to anticipate challenges and leverage opportunities of the digital age. The Digital Future Society **Lab** offers an environment to **experiment** with these outcomes by implementing local initiatives to prototype, pilot, and share lessons and best practices around the governance of digital technologies.

Finally, through a series of **workshops**, events, and panel discussions, the programme has **explained** the wider societal consequences and opportunities of technologies to citizens.

## Core themes

The work of the Digital Future Society Think Tank focuses on understanding how digital technologies and society evolve together through the exploration of four key themes that emerge at the nexus of digital technologies' design, usage and governance:

- **Public innovation**
- **Digital trust and security**
- **Citizen empowerment and inclusion**
- **Equitable growth**

### Public innovation

The rapid growth of the digital economy and disruptive digital platforms calls for governments to come up with creative policies that ensure technology works for the common good.

### Digital trust and security

Digital services must be based on relations of trust, security, and privacy. Public and private actors must agree and advance in defining responsible and transparent ways to design, deploy, and use digital technologies.

### Citizen empowerment and inclusion

Digital technologies must be inclusive enablers of citizen empowerment. This requires a new set of agreed metrics for digital inclusion and updated, systematic approaches to digital literacy in order to reinforce citizen participation and empowerment in public life.

### Equitable growth

Only by assuring that digital economies are more equitable by bridging digital divides from the bottom up and throughout the supply chain, including new forms of labour, can equitable growth happen locally and beyond borders. Moreover, the concept of planetary boundaries is often omitted from responsible tech discourse, signalling a need for deeper understanding of the environmental impact of the digital.



## Agenda 2030 alignment

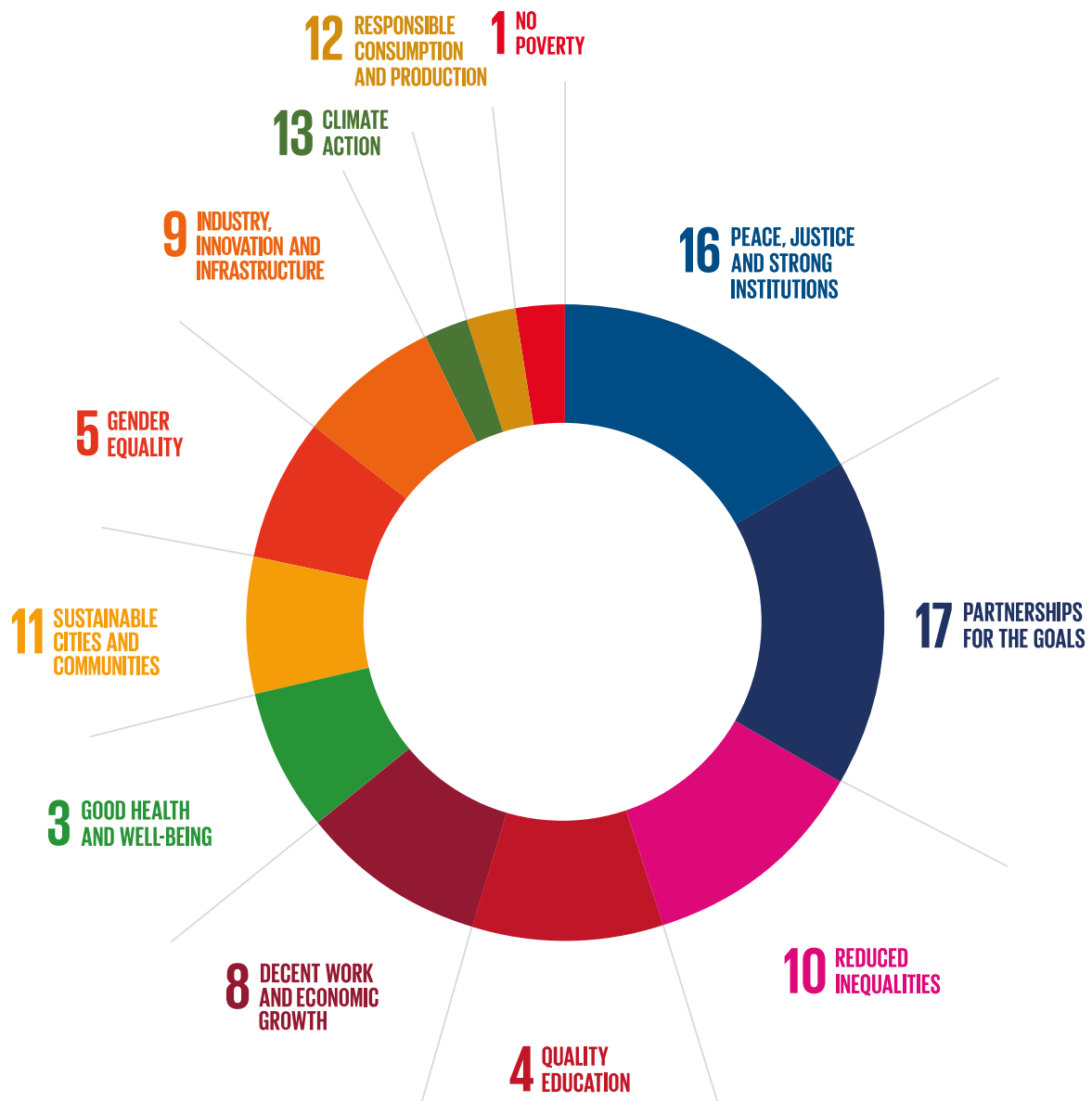
Conversations about a digital future society can be rendered meaningless if they are not positioned within the broader context of transnational issues. In order to define and guide the priorities of the Digital Future Society Think Tank, the trajectory our work has been aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined in the United Nations' Agenda 2030. By creating and strengthening partnerships between public, private, civil and academic actors based on the SDGs, the Think Tank not only sends a strong message to the wider Digital Future Society community, but also contributes to building a more inclusive and sustainable society.

The SDGs provide the ideal framework to contextualise the actions and impact of the Digital Future Society Think Tank. As we seek to ensure the design, use, and governance of digital technologies becomes more responsible and trustworthy, increased trust in public and private organisations contributes to peace, justice and strong institutions. In the digital age, solutions to improve digital literacy and empower citizens become indispensable to reduced inequalities, bridging digital divides and ensuring decent work and economic growth.

**“The right of access to a digital society, essential for social inclusion, has already been recognised as a universal human right by the United Nations.”**

Nadia Calviño  
Vice-President and Minister for Economic Affairs  
and Digital Transformation  
Government of Spain

## Digital Future Society and the Sustainable Development Goals



The infographic shows which SDGs are more strongly impacted by the work of the Digital Future Society Think Tank.

# 2019 at a glance

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In 2019, the work of the Digital Future Society Think Tank explored how governments and technologists can shape more inclusive, transparent and equitable futures. With a mission of understanding the different ways digital disruption impacts society, some of the specific technologies examined in detail include automated decision-making systems, distributed ledger technologies, GovTech, and digital labour platforms.

**8 publications**



**6 working groups**



**100+ experts  
from 20 countries**



During 2019, the Think Tank forged partnerships with key research organisations and invited renowned experts to participate in 3-day working group meetings in Barcelona.

Additional research to define the direction and scope of work was undertaken prior to and following each working group.

This work was transformed into eight reports published by the Think Tank throughout 2019.

## Future Open Council

The core of the Digital Future Society Think Tank is formed by a select group of partner organisations called the **Future Open Council**. Its role is two-fold: to provide an internationally balanced roster of expertise from the public, private, third and academic sectors that broadens our contextual lens beyond Western Europe, challenges our assumptions and checks our blind spots.

Each member organisation assigns experts to participate in the production of the Think Tank's reports and to take an active role in Digital Future Society activities and events. The Future Open Council brings distinct experiences in reflecting on and implementing solutions and projects related to the key Digital Future Society Think Tank themes.

In 2019, the Future Open Council was expanded to include **18 organisations** with wide-ranging geographical, transdisciplinary and cross-sectoral representation. The Future Open Council is essential in ensuring that the impact of the Digital Future Society Think Tank is truly global.

**Future Open Council 2019**



# Key achievements

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Through 2019, Digital Future Society engaged with over 100 international experts from public, private, civic society and academic organisations to produce **eight reports** on topics ranging from data governance to the future of work.

The following section highlights key insights from each report.

## Public innovation

### Where emerging tech meets government

Increasingly, governments are experimenting with emerging digital technologies in hopes of reducing costs and improving the efficiency and transparency of public services. The first publication of the Digital Future Society Think Tank examined how public sector organisations can strike the right balance between leveraging the benefits that emerging technologies such as **automated decision-making systems (ADMS)** and **distributed ledger technologies (DLT)** have to offer while ensuring that potential risks are adequately addressed.

Looking into four possible scenarios for 2030, a group of experts from five organisations with expertise in artificial intelligence and blockchain technology came up with a set of recommendations around three areas of work for governments developing and deploying emerging technologies:

- Focus on **oversight** and key regulatory actions.
- Invest in **internal capacity** building.
- Create mechanisms for **citizen redress and support**.

### Working group member organisations





## Leveraging GovTech for citizen participation

Local and national administrations are developing digital participation initiatives in attempts to be more open and place citizens at the centre of public policy. For this, they are increasingly partnering with startups and small and medium enterprises that provide technology products and services: an ecosystem known as GovTech. The challenges and opportunities of these ecosystems have been identified by a group of experts from nine organisations, who proposed recommendations around four areas of action:

- **Stimulate the GovTech ecosystem** by setting up dedicated GovTech programmes and quality standards as well as establishing citizen-centric GovTech accelerators.
- **Build capacity** with public administrations by, for example, making recruitment processes more flexible to attract tech, digital and citizen participation professionals to the public sector.
- Create a **national participatory GovTech strategy** that includes guidelines and toolkits for government managers and that promotes the use of open standards for technology and content.
- Encourage citizen participation and foster **communities of practice**.

### Working group member organisations



## Digital trust and security

### Towards better data governance for all

While undoubtedly serving as an asset, data also poses ethical risks. The first working group of experts on digital trust and security met in February 2019 to kick off Digital Future Society's exploration of the challenges and opportunities faced by data-driven societies.

Data ethics is the study and evaluation of moral problems related to data collection, algorithms and the practices of data professionals. This report maps the landscape of data ethics and presents four relevant case studies illustrating the ways in which policymakers can better weigh the complexities of data governance.

To move from policy debates to action towards better data governance, public and private organisations should:

- Lead by example by implementing **Privacy by Design**, going open source by default and experimenting with emerging data governance models such as data trusts.
- Push for accountability and regulatory **reform** that involves concrete actions beyond commitment to ensure ethical data collection and governance.
- Take an inclusive and transparent approach to data governance that goes **beyond consent** and transparency fallacies.

### Working group member organisations



## Business models based on privacy, trust, and transparency

As data-driven technology companies corner the market and draw massive profits from the data economy, there is growing concern on behalf of policymakers on how to level the playing field to ensure healthy competition, especially when it comes to SMEs.

The emergence of new business models that prioritise privacy and transparency over profit can potentially improve citizens' trust in public and private organisations. Yet these companies face several critical challenges that inhibit their potential. Before policymakers can nurture this nascent segment of responsible digital firms, they must be able to identify them.

An analysis of the cases of four successful business models, DuckDuckGo, Nextcloud, ProtonMail and Matomo Analytics serves as the basis for three actionable initiatives designed to enable policymakers to support business models based on privacy:

- Introduce a **certification** system for businesses that comply with principles of privacy, trust and transparency.
- Foster market penetration of business models for privacy, trust, and transparency through favourable **public procurement** conditions.
- Create a global network of **incubators** that support and incentivise the creation of privacy-first businesses.

### Working group member organisations



## Citizen empowerment and inclusion

### Measuring the margins: A global framework for digital inclusion

For this report, the Digital Future Society Think Tank and the United Nations University Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance worked together to develop a comprehensive framework for policymakers to measure and monitor digital inclusion more effectively. International organisations, governments, statistical agencies and policymakers at all levels of government can obtain a more accurate understanding of digital inclusion by regularly assessing four dimensions of data at national, regional and local levels:

- **Access** to ICTs and quality of that access.
- Traditional and digital **skills** such as critical thinking, literacy, and entrepreneurship.
- **Use** of technology, digital services, content production, civic engagement activities, as well as places of access to measure value creation.
- A **supportive environment** particularly in terms of affordability, legally valid identification, financial inclusion, trust and security.



**UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY**

**UNU-EGOV**

**Operating Unit on Policy-Driven  
Electronic Governance**

## Four dimensions to measure digital inclusion



Comparative coverage of six digital inclusion indexes by indicator dimension, showing focus and overlaps.

Image source: Digital Future Society and UNU-EGOV.

## Dealing with disinformation: Strategies for digital citizen empowerment

In the interest of promoting citizen empowerment in the age of disinformation, the Digital Future Society Think Tank and the Institute for Technology and Society of Rio de Janeiro worked together on a global analysis of existing initiatives aimed at helping citizens become more critical consumers of information.

Examples of case studies analysed in this report include the creation of **fact-checking** agencies or collaborative projects to verify news such as Newtral (Spain), and **media literacy** initiatives, as in the cases of Media Monitoring Africa and Chicas Poderosas (Colombia). The report also looks at the development of **tech-based tools** like that of CoFacts in Taiwan, as well as **public policies** and international partnerships, such as those developed in the European Union.

By looking at the common challenges and success factors of these initiatives, the report lays out three sets of recommendations designed for policymakers and other stakeholders fighting disinformation:

- First, tackling the issue effectively cannot be a one-person job nor a silver-bullet approach to solutions.
- Secondly, it is important to think in long-term spans, since disinformation is a constant phenomenon and does not only strike during election periods, even though its effects may be felt more acutely during these periods.
- Finally, since information goes through a three-stage process from production to dissemination to consumption, solutions must be developed holistically, addressing all three fronts.



## Equitable growth

### Bridging digital divides: A framework for digital cooperation

In a global context of digital transformation, digital divides can be found in every country. Despite having connectivity, considerable segments of populations, even in rich nations, are left behind as access to ICTs and digital literacy fail to advance at the same speed.

The work of the Digital Future Society Think Tank on digital divides focused on two aspects: providing an updated multi-stakeholder framework for digital cooperation and proposing a roadmap to apply the framework when attempting to bridge digital divides.

In addition to ensuring a balanced approach to digital cooperation with relevant stakeholders from the **public** sector, **private** sector, **civil society**, and **research communities**, policymakers should take the following steps into account:

- Prepare for digital cooperation by engaging with relevant **local** stakeholders.
- Launch a digital cooperation initiative that builds **coherence** between planning and implementation.
- Sustain a digital cooperation by **consolidating** the newly created ecosystem.

### Working group member organisations



## The future of work in the digital era: The rise of labour platforms

Digital labour platforms are transforming the workplace, the workforce, and the nature of work itself. These changes amount to considerable opportunities, alongside significant challenges. In general, platform work offers workers access to income and flexible working arrangements. In informal economies or sectors, platforms offer an entry point to formal labour markets, both local and global. For businesses, digital platforms open new economic opportunities and the possibility to digitise services. For policymakers, the rise of platform work brings concerns around the imbalance of power between platforms and workers and the erosion of workers' collective bargaining power. This working group came up with five initiatives to help policymakers improve digital labour platform governance:

- **Amplify the atypical worker's voice:** An initiative to provide legal status to third-party entities authorised to represent platform workers in negotiations and collective agreements vis a vis the digital platform and the government.
- **Data works!** An initiative that involves publishing, updating, and sharing platform datasets with an oversight role given to the government.
- **Platform cooperative accelerator:** Aimed at re-balancing power between platform and workers, this initiative proposes a publicly-funded accelerator to cultivate platform cooperatives.
- **Worker status questionnaire:** An initiative to tackle the lack of information and ambiguity regarding the rights of workers and the responsibilities platform have towards them. Better informed workers will be able to make conscious choices at the start of their employment relationship with the digital platform.
- **Easy taxes for platform workers:** An initiative intended to test easy mechanisms for digital platforms and to facilitate worker compliance with tax codes and social security contributions.

### Working group member organisations





# Looking ahead

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## The Think Tank in 2020

In preparation for the Digital Future Society Global Summit, we will continue to explore pressing digital policy issue areas including the future of work, digital inclusion, and data governance. In light of the global climate emergency, we also plan to initiate a new line of work.

Our efforts in 2020 will be carried out together with our Future Open Council partners and growing community of collaborating experts, with a focus on expanding our “network of networks” in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

### Future of work

The evolution of technologies like the internet, APIs and algorithms are changing business models, labour relations and the way we organise work. In 2020 the Think Tank will zoom in on the rise of digital labour platforms in South Asia and Latin America. We will examine how platform work is changing workers’ professional identities and helping professionalise informal jobs in India. Moving to Latin America, we will explore how algorithmic management affects platform workers there. To complement this regionally-focused work, we will compile a global snapshot and critical analysis of initiatives led by platform workers to support each other and collectively organise.

### Digital divides

When looking into public innovation and digital inclusion throughout 2019, one element stood out: digital exclusion starts with the design of digital public services. This year we will build on this theme and produce two new reports. One will be a response to Philip Alston’s report on “Extreme poverty and digital welfare” published recently by the United Nations. Our second report will present best practices on public service design from a digital inclusion perspective, drawing on the “Measuring the margins” report produced in 2019.

### **Data governance**

By continuing our work that directly addresses data governance and with a strengthened focus on opportunities for SMEs, the report on this theme will focus on the EU regulation on platform-to-business relations adopted in July 2019. The report will explore how SMEs can take ownership of data in the digital platforms that they use.

### **Tech and the climate emergency**

This new and timely line of work will be launched with the publication of two reports. One will look at the climate cost and ecological footprint of emerging tech and AI. The second report will track advances in the field of computational sustainability, with the objective of offering a deeper understanding of how AI can be a powerful tool in driving sustainability, for example, by reducing emissions and helping society adapt to a changing climate.



**Digital  
Future Society**