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## Summary

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# Digital services for individuals – major development opportunities for government agencies

## Summary

The Riksdag's goal is for Sweden to be the best globally at harnessing the opportunities presented by digitalisation. The goal covers the meeting between government administration and citizens, which is increasingly taking place digitally. The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has examined whether the central government's efforts to develop the digital services of agencies aimed at private individuals have been sufficiently effective. The audit is limited to digital services that aim to report or apply for something, and which thus result in a case at the agency.

The Swedish NAO's overall conclusion is that the central government's efforts to develop the digital services of agencies have not been sufficiently effective. The quality of the examined services is acceptable, but there is substantial room for improvement in several respects. There are also shortcomings in the agencies' way of developing usable and available digital services. However, the main obstacles are at the systemic level, and their removal requires measures by the Government.

## **Central government services for private individuals are not fully digitalised**

The agencies we have examined have digitalised most services aimed at private individuals. However, there are services that are used by many for which there is not yet a digital alternative. The Swedish NAO therefore considers that the degree

of digitalisation can be increased further. However, most agencies included in the audit lack an overview of the extent of the service offering aimed at private individuals that is digitalised.

### **Usability and availability of digital services can be improved**

The digital services examined by the Swedish NAO are of acceptable quality, but can in all cases be developed in terms of usability and availability. However, there is a substantial difference in the extent of usability and availability of agencies' various services. The services also differ considerably in how developed they are in terms of their number of functions. There are a number of tangible deficiencies. For example, terms are often technical and difficult to understand, applications cannot always be paused, there is often no possibility of interaction between users and the agency, and feedback can rarely be submitted directly in the service. The agencies are also far from the ambition that the user should only have to submit a piece of information once.

### **Agencies need to proceed more on the basis of user needs and take greater account of benefits and costs**

The assessment of the Swedish NAO is that the agencies do not work sufficiently to include users when developing digital services. In our opinion, an intensified effort in this area would generate a significant improvement in the usability and availability of the services. There are also numerous examples of inter-agency cooperation not yet being in place that could improve the quality of digital services. There is thus much that the agencies could improve within the bounds of their present conditions.

Digitalisation of services generates both costs and benefits, but can be profitable and pay for itself within a few years in the form of reduced manual processing. However, agencies' use of cost-benefit analyses is limited and, insofar as they are used, only the agencies' savings are examined and not those of users. There is therefore a risk of agencies taking the wrong actions or doing too little.

### **The Government should have a longer-term approach in its governance of Digg**

The Agency for Digital Government (Digg) was established in 2018, with the task of coordinating and supporting public administration-wide digitalisation, thus enhancing efficiency in these efforts. The Swedish NAO considers that, so far, the Government has excessively governed Digg through short-term, albeit comprehensive, remits and should steer the agency more through instructions.

It is clear that Digg may come to play an important role as agencies work in different ways with digital services aimed at private individuals. So far, Digg has assumed the role of a cautious guide of sorts, and there are few signs that its work has had any appreciable impact among the agencies. Digg also lacks tools to influence the agencies. At the same time, Digg's work is in the early stages and it is therefore difficult to assess efforts so far.

Digg allocates relatively little resources to work concerning digital availability, and has expressed its wish to rid itself of its supervisory remit. Digg also works far too little with promoting digital availability.

Several government inquiries have highlighted that existing regulations impede or prevent fulfilling the ambitious goals of digitalisation policy. Nevertheless, the Government has taken few initiatives to eliminate these obstacles. In the audit, more examples of obstacles have emerged than described in previous inquiries, and the problems are found in general legislation and in operation-specific legislation. The Government needs to remove these legal barriers more actively if the ambitious goals are to be attained.

## **Recommendations**

The Swedish National Audit Office makes the following recommendations to the Government:

- Intensify efforts to remove, as far as possible, the legal barriers to the development of digital services. This includes reviewing both general legislation and legislation specific to certain operational areas.
- Clarify the role that the Agency for Digital Government is to have and ensure that governance is in line with this role. Also, clarify the Government's expectations of the Agency for Digital Government's work with supervising and promoting digital availability.
- Govern the Agency for Digital Government primarily through instructions, and less through government commissions in appropriation directions and separate reviews. This is to enable laying down conditions for the Agency for Digital Government to establish and work more with its core operations.
- Consider giving the Agency for Digital Government the right to prescribe regulations within the framework of work relating to the public administration-wide digital infrastructure (Ena), with a view to enhancing the uniformity of agencies' digitalisation efforts.

The Swedish National Audit Office makes the following recommendations to the agencies that provide digital services aimed at private individuals:

- Ensure that users are involved in the development of digital services. For example, users should be able to provide feedback directly in the service, and the services should be tested thoroughly and continuously on different user groups, not least those with special needs.
- Use cost-benefit analyses when testing and developing digital services. This applies in particular to testing services that are still non digital, as part of continued digitalisation.
- Ensure that the digital services can be used by individuals with protected personal data.