



**Transformation,  
digitisation &  
happiness:  
Public opinion on  
UAE government  
services**

2021



The Serco Institute is an international think tank working to help governments develop the next generation of public service solutions for citizens.

Throughout the Middle East we work collaboratively with government, the private sector, academia, and with citizens to develop the future of public service policy, design and implementation.

[info@sercoinstitute.com](mailto:info@sercoinstitute.com)



Serco launched ExperienceLab in the Middle East in 2020, and as a public services company that manages people, assets and data, ExperienceLab essentially acts as a wraparound of those three things to really focus on service excellence and the experience of the end user.

ExperienceLab helps clients to use the unique understanding of data and insights to design, evolve and adapt services to cater to the end user and deliver world class experiences.

[info@serco.ae](mailto:info@serco.ae)

The polling research was carried out online between 07.01.2021 - 15.01.2021 by CENSUSWIDE, an independent MRS accredited market research agency.

A series of 10 questions was asked to a sample of 506 people closely representative of age, gender and nationality in the UAE. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles

To provide some additional context to the polling, ExperienceLab conducted telephone interviews with a focus group of 10 people from the UAE.





The country is at the forefront of delivering an increasing number of services digitally, a move that is likely to be popular with residents according to our survey.



## Foreword

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a sharp and significant impact on government services in the UAE – from how they are accessed, to the pressure that they are under.

However, government services in the Middle East have been going through a process of transformation for some time.

International and local factors have been driving a change in how governments interact with their citizens and residents.

In this report, we look at what service-users think, how they want things to change and what governments can do to deliver futureproof services. Through expert polling and interviews across the United Arab Emirates, we have been able to create an informed and objective analysis of the sentiments of service users.

We explore how the expectations of residents are being met, with astonishingly impressive levels of satisfaction uncovered. The UAE is at the forefront of delivering an increasing number of services digitally, a move that is likely to be popular with residents according to our survey. Two other key priorities for residents are the unification and personalisation of services – in other words, making services available in one place, with more control and more attentiveness from those providing them.

Not only will delivering these priorities bring benefits for the service-user, but the Government could benefit too, through cost reductions and greater efficiency.

The central question facing the UAE is how does it maintain its high standards while undergoing a period of service transformation that could take them to the top of the government services international league tables?

Trust is fragile and service-users can quickly lose it if they have a bad experience. Ensuring it is retained as services evolve is difficult. However, with the UAE keenly focussed on ensuring the happiness of their residents, developing and delivering cutting edge government services going forward will require careful management of the transformation process.





The question facing the UAE is how does it maintain its high standards while undergoing a period of service transformation that could take them to the top of the government services international league tables?

## Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>
Context	11
Socio economic snapshot	12
Drivers for change	13
Measuring citizen satisfaction with public services – reasons to be cheerful?	14
<b>Key finding 1</b>	<b>15</b>
Expectations are high, happiness is high, the bar is set very high	
Nationality	17
Professional status & age	18
Trust & expectations	20
<b>Key finding 2</b>	<b>21</b>
The challenge: Digitalising, unifying, and personalising services	
Digitisation	23
Unification	26
Personalisation	28
<b>Key finding 3</b>	<b>31</b>
Change: Why and how it can be done	
The balance of risks – trust and transformation	33
Leave no service behind –	
Maintaining standards in services not transforming	34
<b>Conclusion &amp; recommendations</b>	<b>35</b>





Driven by international trends – including the Covid-19 pandemic – as well as local factors, government services in the UAE are going through a period of transformation.

## Executive summary

Our nation-wide survey found 90% of people described themselves as being “very happy” or “somewhat happy” with the UAE government services they have used in the past two years. This is a remarkably high figure, that is consistent across a range of demographics – including nationality, age and professional status.

However, driven by international trends – including the Covid-19 pandemic – as well as local factors, government services in the UAE are going through a period of transformation.

Survey data, alongside in-depth interviews, revealed that the UAE Government is on the right path, as it seeks to create greater access to government services through digital platforms.

This should also satisfy two other key calls from residents; to ensure government services are more unified (joined-up and accessible in one place), as well as more personalised.



Cost reduction, increased accessibility and greater efficiency, alongside a better experience for services users, could all be benefits of the current digitisation agenda.

However, we have identified a significant risk in the process of transformation. Service-users quickly lose trust in government services – and overall ‘happiness’ – if they have just one bad experience. It is crucial, therefore, that the process of transforming how government services are accessed and delivered is managed effectively.

Central to this will be ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how residents engage with services, managing the design and implementation of new service-platforms, as well as ensuring standards are retained in existing platforms.

To achieve this, we have identified seven key recommendations:

Continue on the path of service digitisation

Create the capacity for personalised and attentive service delivery

Upskilling and reskilling support staff

Unified services lead to happy users

Obtain the necessary expertise to manage service transformation

Securing standards in platforms that are not ‘transforming’

User-experience must drive service design

## Introduction

### Context

## What do citizens want when it comes to government services?

Through a nation-wide survey and series of focussed interviews, this ground-breaking report explores what residents of the UAE think when it comes to the government services they use and how they want to see them change.

Using the design and polling expertise of ExperienceLab and Censuswide, 506 UAE residents were surveyed, cutting across different Emirates, nationalities and professions. The macro-level data this produced was supplemented by a smaller number of interviews with residents across the country to explore their thinking on government services and how they could improve.

The past twelve months have been a turbulent time for governments and citizens globally, and the services public authorities provide have been under pressure like never before. The Covid-19 Pandemic has led to a rapid change in how people interact with government services. These transformations sit alongside the long-term drivers of change which are pushing UAE government services into a new phase of development and delivery.

As government services are reshaped, it is crucial that policy makers have an understanding of the current thinking and sentiments of those that use them. This research creates a baseline from which those designing public services can better understand and form the future. Furthermore, this paper outlines a series of distinct policy recommendations that will help ensure the UAE remains at the cutting edge of delivery, citizen satisfaction and innovation in public services.





## Socio economic snapshot



### GDP

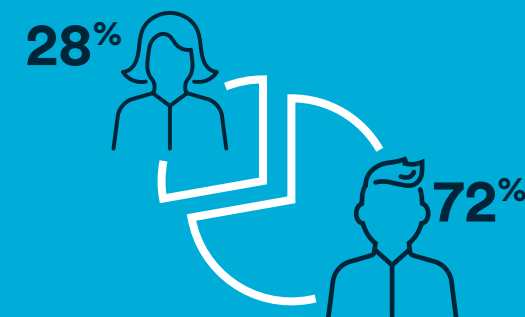
The UAE is a high-income country with the second largest economy in the region with a GDP of USD 402.8 billion [1].



### Economy

Major industries in the UAE include aluminium production, boat building and repair, construction, fishing, hospitality and tourism, finance, textiles, and petroleum.

The country is also host to a fast-growing technology sector.



### Gender & age

Most migrant workers tend to be male, which has a marked effect on the country's gender balance where 72% are male and 28% female [2]. Of those aged between 0 and 14, the gender balance is more evenly split with 0.66 million being female and 0.69 million being male [2]. The median age in the UAE is 33.5, which is slightly higher than the global average, but is explained by the large preponderance of working age males between 25 and 54 [2].



### Nationalities

The country is a popular destination for international migrant workers who are attracted by the widespread job opportunities and generous tax rates. This popularity has seen a surge in the number of migrant workers to almost 8.6 million who, in addition to their dependents, represent some 88% of the population, with the largest migrant populations being from India and Pakistan. Emiratis make up around 11.48% of the population [2].

[1] United Nations - United Arab Emirates, "United Nations COVID-19 Socio-Economic Analysis for the United Arab Emirates," September 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/COVID19%20Response/UAE%20COVID%20Socio-Economic%20Analysis%20-%20September%2020%20final%20pdf.pdf>.

[2] UAE Population Statistics 2021 (Infographics) | GMI [Online]. Available: <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-population-statistics/>



## Drivers for change

The pace of change in the delivery of public services has accelerated across the world. Citizens expect more for less. Spurred on by technological change, a more interconnected global workforce, and private sector innovation, the way governments deliver services and how users interact with them is in flux.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has further hastened the pace of change in public service provision, particularly when it comes to digitisation. Around the world, social distancing measures have required governments to innovate when it comes to the services they deliver.

Alongside these global drivers, the UAE faces a specific set of factors which are impacting government services. After decades of impressive economic growth, the UAE's economy has faced some headwinds in recent years, largely due to external factors outside of government control. As a major OPEC oil producing nation, the ongoing depression in oil prices has reduced government revenue. This has been exacerbated by Covid-19, which has constrained travel and transport of all kinds and increased downward pressure on the oil price. Tourism, which accounts for 10% of GDP [3], has also taken a hit due to global travel restrictions.

However, the UAE possesses some strong macro tailwinds that should allow the country to overcome these challenges and continue to prosper. The Government has made impressive strides in upskilling and training the UAE's youth, nurturing a technologically savvy workforce ready for the 2020s and beyond. Further to this, the UAE continues to diversify its economy, reducing reliance on oil production.

The external challenges to the economy should not be trivialised. These may put pressure on government spending, extending to public service investment. However, the UAE has a major advantage to help mitigate this - as a relatively compact nation with a technologically literate population. This will allow UAE governments to continue their impressive strides in delivering digital government services, facilitating both better service provision and also less pressure on public finances.

[3] BNP Paribas, "United Arab Emirates: Towards a new crisis in Dubai?," 2nd Quarter 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://economic-research.bnpparibas.com/Views/DisplayPublication.aspx?type=document&IdPdf=38891>



## Measuring citizen satisfaction with public services – reasons to be cheerful?

Government services in the UAE are delivered at the Federal, Emirate, or Municipal level through various bodies and agencies. This means there is a diverse mixture of organisations providing services to citizens and residents. In turn, this means there is an equally diverse range of ‘touch-points’ where citizens interact with public services.

There is a clear intention to modernise, rationalise and centralise service delivery. This was demonstrated in the recent announcement that a new UAE Government structure had been agreed, including the closure of 50% of government service centres and their movement online within two years. Half of federal authorities are also set to be merged with other authorities or ministries [4].

A key question that needs to be answered as the government transforms how it delivers services is, are people happy with what is being provided to them?

Happiness has been a core focus of the UAE Federal Government for some years, and brought into focus by the *2016 National Charter for Happiness* and its associated initiatives. As such, the inter-play between the delivery of government services and citizen happiness is a well-developed concept in UAE public policy [5].

One of the most direct articulations of the link between happiness and public services is in the ongoing transformation of Customer Service Centres into Customer Happiness Centres. These Centres alongside other institutions delivering public services – including digital platforms – often ask users to rate their experience using a three-level ‘smiley-face’ system of positive, neutral and negative. This initiative is led by *Smart Dubai’s Happiness Portal* and its associated *Happiness Meter* and apps [6].

Gauging happiness levels is also in place at a federal level. The UAE Federal Government’s Happiness Meter is a feedback and assessment system that enables 100% of federal services in the UAE to collect and respond to real-time customer (citizens, residents, visitors) feedback interactions. It is enabling UAE government services to deliver on happiness goals quickly and efficiently [6A].

For this reason, this report examines and builds on the concept of ‘happiness’ as a way of measuring citizen satisfaction and expectation in relation to public services in the UAE.

[4] Emirates News Agency, “President approves new structure of UAE Government,” 2020 July 5. [Online]. Available: <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395302853277>

[5] United Arab Emirates Government, “Happiness,” 2020 December 13. [Online]. Available: <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/the-uae-government/government-of-future/happiness>

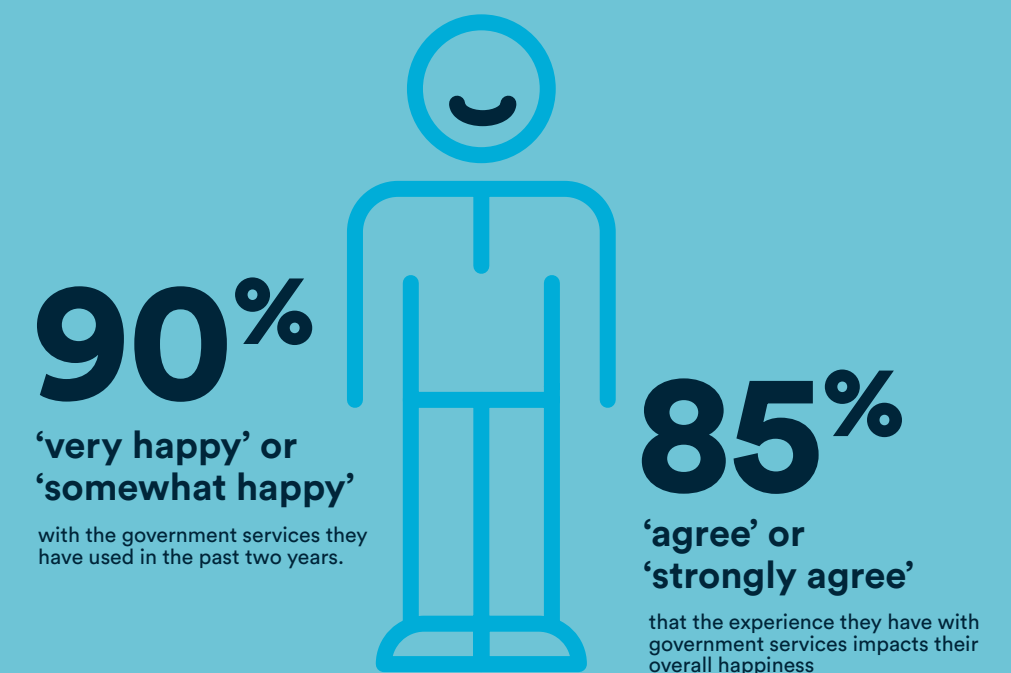
[6] Smart Dubai, “Happiness Portal,” 2016. [Online]. Available: <https://happinessportal.dubai.ae/en/Pages/default.aspx>

[6A] Government Experience [Online]. Available: <https://gx.ae/en/resource/download-attachment/197>



## Key finding 1

### Expectations are high, happiness is high, the bar is set very high



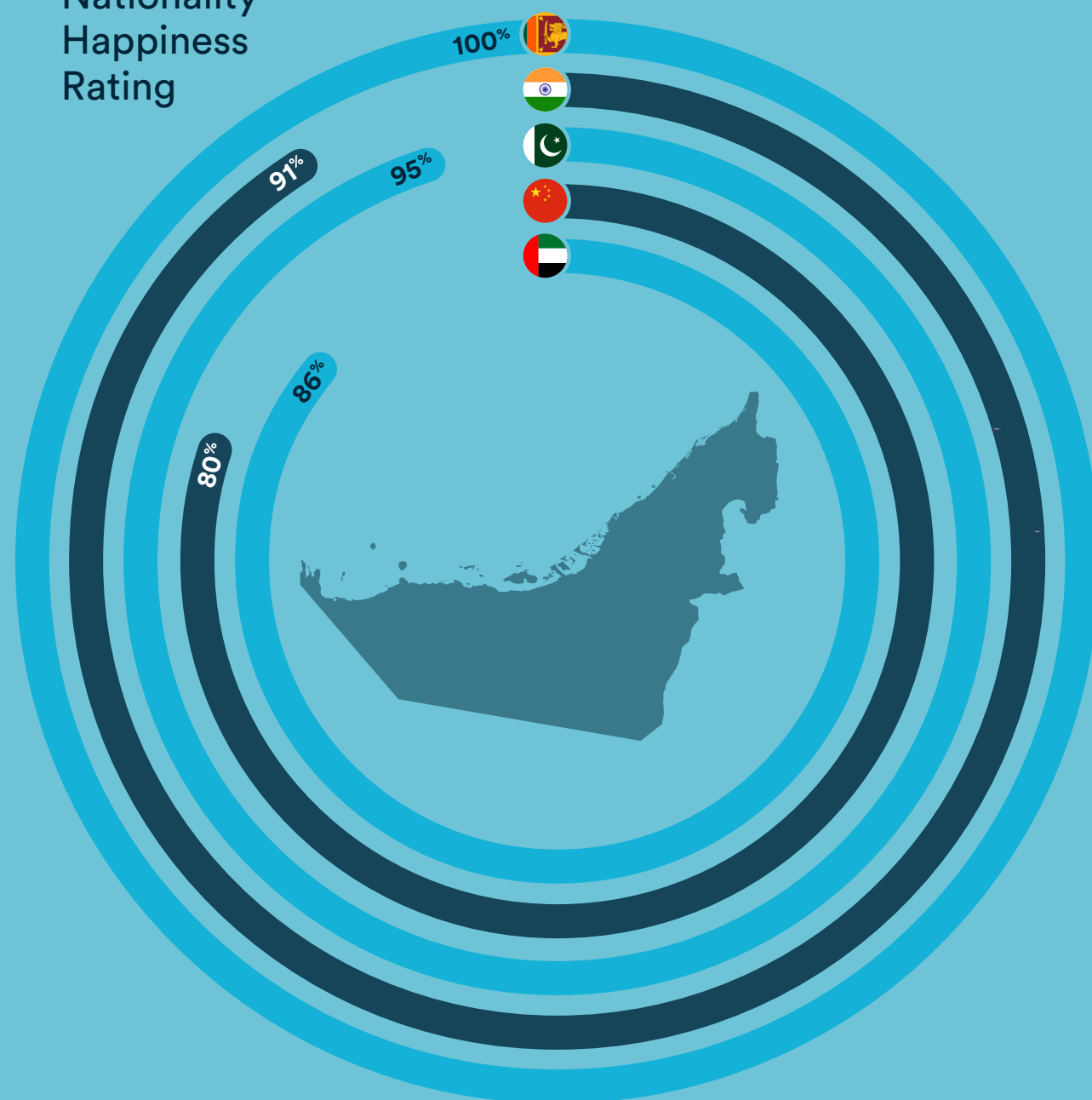
Remarkably our research revealed that **90% of people described themselves as being ‘very happy’ or ‘somewhat happy’** with the government services they have used in the past two years. This says much for the quality and consistency of government services in the UAE.

With services continuing to transform, this level of satisfaction gives federal and local administrations a strong foundation from which they can continue to develop their offering. It also means, however, that expectations are high. Residents will want services to remain at a certain standard even as they transform.

If services fail to keep pace with expectations the wider implications for residents’ overall happiness would be significant. This is confirmed by our survey, which found that 85% of citizens or residents ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that the experience they have with government services impacts their overall happiness.



## Nationality Happiness Rating



## Nationality

The 90% happiness figure is impressively consistent amongst different nationalities. The most satisfied are the Sri Lankan cohort, a small number of the sample, who reported a 100% happiness rating, whilst the Chinese cohort was the least satisfied with a happiness rating of 80%; but again, this group made-up a small number of the sample.

Of the larger cohorts, Indians reported a rating of 91% and Pakistanis 95%. Some might explain the high levels of happiness as being a product of government services in the UAE being more developed than those of respondents' home countries. This may have some influence on the results, yet **86% of Emiratis also reported they were happy with government services.**

This is significant because this cohort is likely to have the most extensive and longstanding experience of government services in the UAE.

The 506 survey respondents were divided amongst the following nationalities and representative of the UAE population: 157 Indians; 67 Emiratis; 65 Filipinos; 59 Pakistanis; 40 Egyptians; 7 Bangladeshis; 6 Sri Lankans; 5 Chinese; 5 European, 1 Nepalese; 1 Iranian; 78 'other' nationalities; 15 preferred not to reveal their nationality.





## Professional status & age

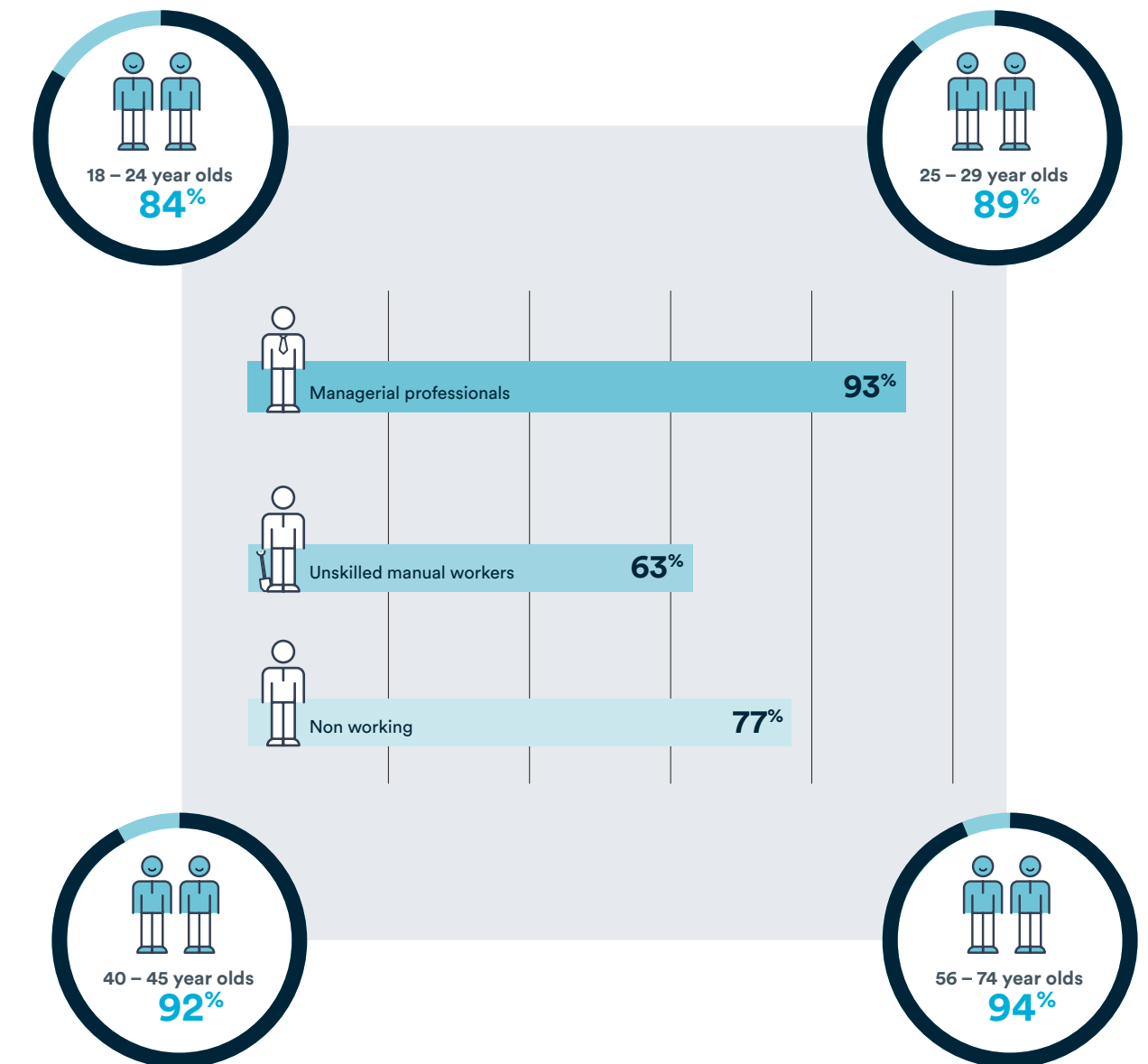
As with nationality, there is also a strong level of consistency according to professional status. **Intermediate managerial professionals reported the highest happiness rating of 93%, with semi and unskilled manual workers the lowest rating at 63%.**

This latter group appears to be something of an outlier, with the second lowest ranking coming from those not working, who responded with a rating of 77% happiness.

The lower levels of happiness amongst semi and unskilled manual workers could relate to the fact that this group consists largely of migrant workers who may face additional barriers to accessing services – such as language barriers.

Analysis of the data as it relates to different age groups shows that happiness with government services increases in-line with age. That said, all age cohorts responded with high levels of happiness: **84% of 18 – 24 year olds were happy, with 89% for 25 – 29 year olds, 92% for 40 – 45 year olds, and 94% for 56 – 74 year olds.**

One possible explanation for the slightly lower rating amongst the youngest age group could be their desire for more digitally orientated government services – a sentiment which is also reflected elsewhere in the survey (see section 2).





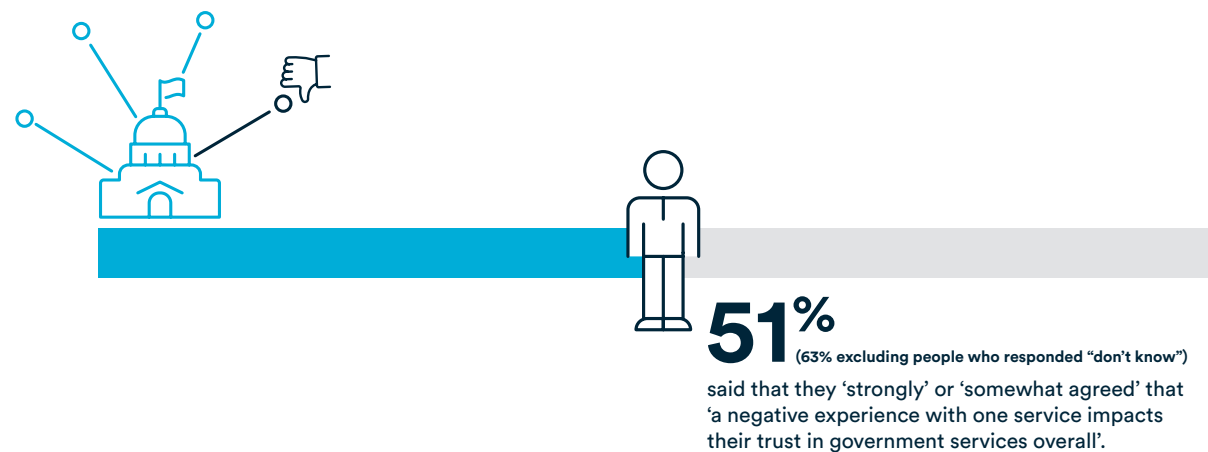


## Trust & expectations

As outlined, the survey data reveals a clear relationship between an individual's overall 'happiness' and the quality of delivery of government services. Another key finding from the data concerns the relationship between an individual's 'trust' in government services and the quality of delivery. **Over 51% (63% excluding people who responded "don't know") said that they 'strongly' or 'somewhat agreed' that 'a negative experience with one service impacts their trust in government services overall'.**

The fact a majority of those surveyed responded that their trust in government services drops after one sub-standard experience shows what is at stake with each interaction between citizen and government.

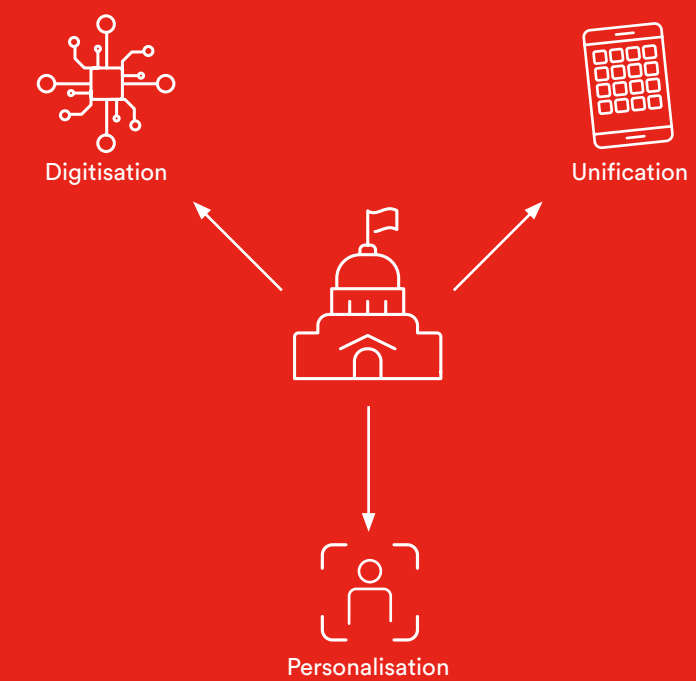
Given the already high level of expectations, government service reforms will need to be managed with great care as they transition to new models to ensure that citizens don't lose faith in the services in the interim. This is especially relevant when it comes to extending digital access. If those who prefer accessing services through traditional channels feel that digital access does not offer the same level of quality, these groups in particular may lose trust in government services.



## Key finding 2

### The challenge: Digitalising, unifying, and personalising services

The drivers for change, as well as public opinion identified by the survey, indicate that there are three key challenges facing public services in the UAE:



This section of the report looks at these issues and the underlying factors that are creating these challenges.



The UAE's existing digital public service capacity and its citizens' desire to see more of it is clearly visible in the survey data.



## Digitisation

The UAE is amongst the countries at the cutting edge of taking services online, however, the pace of change is accelerating internationally, and public appetite for it is continuing to grow.

With 120 city services offered from over 30 government and private sector providers, Dubai's *DubaiNow* app is a world-leading example of the digitisation of government services [7]. Confirmation that further digitisation is underway across the UAE also came with the recent announcement that a nation-wide single portal and application is being developed, through which residents will reportedly be able to access all the services offered by federal entities [8].

These efforts align with attempts by governments around the world to digitise the services they offer to citizens. Germany, for example, has through their Online Access Act (Onlinezugangsgesetz) committed to all public services being accessible via digital channels by the end of 2022 [9]. In Estonia, 99% of public services are already available online [10].

The UAE's existing digital public service capacity and its citizens' desire to see more of it is clearly visible in the survey data. **88% of respondents indicated that they were comfortable using digital services; this rises to 90% when asked about digital services in general (for example, those provided by private companies).**

[7] DubaiNow App, "DubaiNow App Homepage," [Online]. Available: <https://dubainow.dubai.ae/Pages/default.aspx>

[8] Khaleej Times, "UAE to launch one app for all services," 8 December 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/technology/uae-to-launch-one-app-for-all-services/>

[9] The Federal Government of Germany: Ministry of the Interior, "The Implementation of the Online Access Act," [Online]. Available: [https://www.onlinezugangsgesetz.de/Webs/OZG/EN/ozg/ozg-node.html;jsessionid=16040DBDAEE1F18C416CB65039304D74\\_2\\_cid364](https://www.onlinezugangsgesetz.de/Webs/OZG/EN/ozg/ozg-node.html;jsessionid=16040DBDAEE1F18C416CB65039304D74_2_cid364)

[10] e-Estonia, "e-Governance," [Online]. Available: <https://e-estonia.com/solutions/e-governance/>



Those who were ‘very happy’ or ‘somewhat happy’ with government services in general also indicated a high-level of preference or comfort in accessing them digitally. **75% of people who said they were ‘very happy’ with government services said that they accessed them digitally wherever possible.** This indicates two potential relationships – firstly, that those who use online public services are very happy with the service they receive; secondly, the more people who use digital-platforms instead of other means of accessing services may get better outcomes and be ‘happier’ with government services overall.

What is more, social distancing measures brought on by Covid-19 have fast-tracked the digitisation of government services. Not only have many services already moved online, citizens are generally likely to be more accepting, comfortable and keen for services to be accessible via digital platforms. **74% of UAE respondents indicated that they were more likely to use digital government services as a result of Covid-19.**

Having said that, interviews with citizens uncovered that although they had a preference for online government services, issues with AI and a feeling that some portals are ‘outdated’ were frustrating.

**This is backed up by survey data which showed that 37% of residents found government services complicated.** The small number of people who said they were ‘very unhappy’ with government services consistently described services as more ‘outdated’ than ‘modern’.



**I am not so happy, it is either outdated, or it is a lengthy process, or you get an error at the end.**

Interviewee comment

This dissatisfaction is likely to be in part the result of citizens comparing digital government services with private sector equivalents. Governments therefore need not only to keep pace with the digitisation of government services globally, but also with the private sector’s digitisation agenda – from taxi and food ordering apps, to retail and smart home systems.

Alongside meeting demand and increasing customer satisfaction, governments and citizens could also see a range of further benefits through the digitisation of services, including:



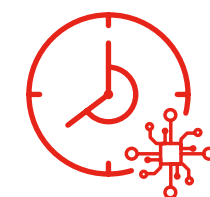
### Cost

Huge cost reductions can be made through the digitisation of government services. However, if executed poorly, financial costs, alongside customer satisfaction can be hugely impacted (discussed further in section 3).



### Accessibility

Online services are available to citizens 24/7, regardless of geography or large-scale physical infrastructure. Digital services also allow easier access to services in a range of languages. Considering the diversity of the UAE, this should also be considered a significant benefit. Of course, individuals need to have a device that allows them to use digital services, however, 97% of UAE citizen’s have access to a smartphone at work or home [11].



### Efficiency

Significant efficiency and productivity gains can be made by the digitisation of services. Estonia estimates the reduced bureaucracy has saved 844 years of working time [12]. The efficiency and productivity gains made by digitisation are likely to be further enhanced by continuing advancements in automation and AI.

[11] Deloitte, “Deloitte Global Mobile Consumer Survey, Middle East Edition 2019: Mobile consumption in a post-growth world,” November 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/xe/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/GMCS-whitepaper.pdf>

[12] e-Estonia, “e-Governance,” [Online]. Available: <https://e-estonia.com/solutions/e-governance/>



## Unification

Going hand-in-hand with digitisation is the unification of government services – giving citizens access to as many services as possible through a single platform.

In open-ended survey questions, the most common response when asked if they had “one wish how would they change government services?”, respondents said it was for all government services to be available online in one application or platform.

With the UAE set to create a single app for all federal government services (as outlined above), the process of unification is clearly in train.

This will sit alongside the *UAE Pass* digital identity system which has been rolled-out across the country – replacing the *DubaiID* and *SmartPass* systems at the end of 2020 – and creates a unified login credential for all online government transactions across the country, including the payment of utility bills and filing residence visa application.

This is likely to address some of the criticisms identified during interviews with UAE residents who, for example, expressed frustration with the need for the repeated input of information to access different government services.



Every Government entity requires a registration channel and the specification of user and pass was different between all. They don't have a unified user and pass and I have to remember all my credentials.

Interviewee comment



The Canadian Identification system is linked with everything in the country, even the credit card... I wish we would have that here in the UAE.

Interviewee comment



Why can't my license card be digital? Same for Nol? Today, my phone does everything for me and I don't want to carry a wallet, like instead of carrying my credit card I have ApplePay.

Interviewee comment

The UAE is, again, towards the forefront of the global race to unify access to government services. However, other nations have made big strides in this area, including South Korea which has a national portal that allows access to over 300 government services [13]. The private sector is also accelerating attempts to create a single services eco-system through which customers access products and information.

One interviewee summarised this sentiment by saying that government services should follow the trend set by mobile phone companies in the creation of apps like ApplePay, which they claim is making the need for them to carry a wallet obsolete. As with the digitisation process, keeping step with international trends in unifying government services will also require administrations to maintain standards aligned to the private sector.

Currently UAE residents primarily access government services through Customer Happiness Centres, kiosks, call centres or digital platforms. This diversity of platforms was recognised by survey respondents, with **85% 'strongly' or 'somewhat agreeing' with the statement that there was a 'variety of channels' through which they can contact the government.**

This 'range' of access points is likely to be seen as a benefit. However, with the majority - 54% (excluding people who showed no preference) - of respondents also indicating that they will choose a digital route where available, there is likely significant excess expenditure by federal and local governments on the maintenance and development of physical channels (Customer Happiness Centres and kiosks) which are seen as less preferential by those seeking to access the service.

Alternative access points to digital platforms will of course continue to be required for people who cannot make use of online services. This should not preclude the unification of services that may be accessed through in-person platforms. The continued drive to bring services together in other non-digital platforms, such as in Customer Happiness Centres, will also likely lead to better outcomes for service-users, as well as a reduction in back-office costs for government.

[13] M. Daub, A. Domeyer, A. Lamaa and F. Renz, "Digital public services: How to achieve fast transformation at scale," McKinsey & Company, July 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/Digital%20public%20services%20How%20to%20achieve%20fast%20transformation%20at%20scale/Digital-public-services-How-to-achieve-fast-transformation-at-scale-vF>.

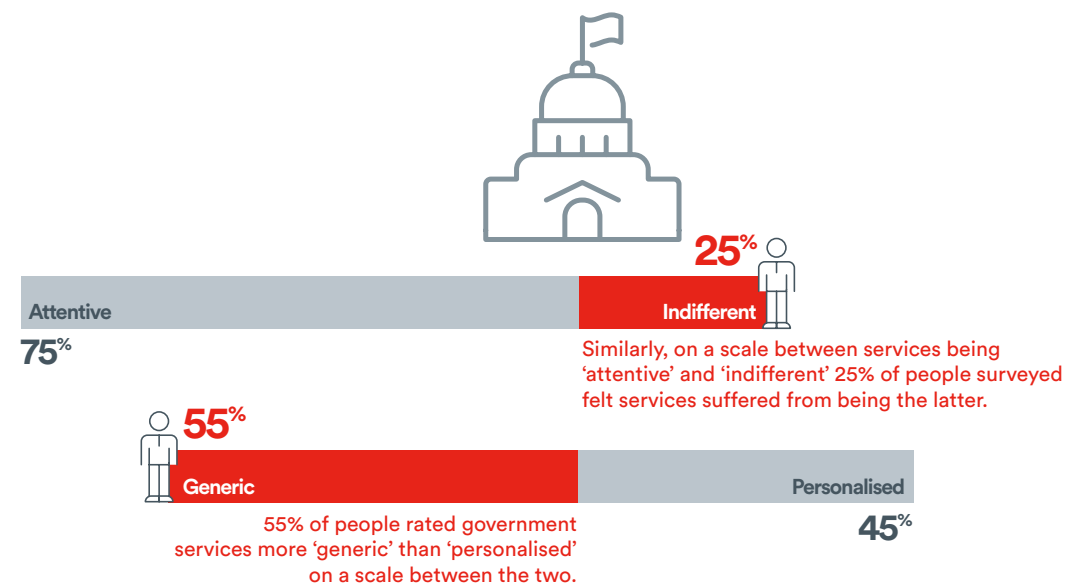




## Personalisation

Within the parameters set out by the survey, the greatest reason for dissatisfaction related to services being perceived as 'generic' and not sufficiently 'personalised'. 55% of people rated government services more 'generic' than 'personalised' on a scale between the two.

Similarly, on a scale between services being 'attentive' and 'indifferent' 25% of people surveyed felt services suffered from being the latter.



Digging deeper into these issues through interviews, people noted that the level of service was dependent on the "mood swings" of the individuals delivering the service. One interviewee went as far to say that "once you have to pick up the phone, it's a negative experience".



**My happiness depends on a person when [the service] is not digitized. People are unstable, [I have to deal with their] mood swings.**

Interviewee comment



**Once you have to pick up the phone, it's [already] a negative experience.**

Interviewee comment

Obviously, the statistics show these are outliers when compared to the average experience of service-users, but they demonstrate the potential issues faced by this small cohort of people who do have a negative interaction with a government service provider.

Some of these issues may be rectified by the movement of services on to digital platforms. If developed using user-centred design methods, digital services will allow greater control and flexibility, as well as faster and more efficient interactions with government for citizens. Effectively, the digitisation and unification of government services will allow for greater control for the individual, in turn leading to greater personalisation of the services. The service-user will be able to tailor how, when and why they access services to their own personal needs, rather than relying on the process, opening times or aptitudes of in-person channels.

Of course, there will continue to be a need for in-person channels, however, if the digital route is selected by a greater proportion of users, there will be less pressure on (and potentially proportionally more resources available to) these channels. In-turn, this could lead to a more personalised, more attentive experience for the smaller number of users that choose to access services in-person.







The pace of change internationally - and in the private sector - in comparable services means that if you are standing still, you are going backwards.



## Key finding 3

### Change: Why and how it can be done

#### In a changing world, standing still means going backwards

Although interviewees identified a small number of areas where refinements could improve customer experience, the survey data shows that people are generally happy with government services. It would, however, be a mistake to interpret this as a justification to make only minor amendments to existing service provision.

The pace of change internationally - and in the private sector - in comparable services means that if you are standing still, you are going backwards.

Citizens and residents will interact with the services of other countries and companies, comparing them and contrasting them with those of the UAE. If this comparison becomes unfavourable, the impressive statistics on 'happiness' uncovered by this survey are likely to quickly diminish.

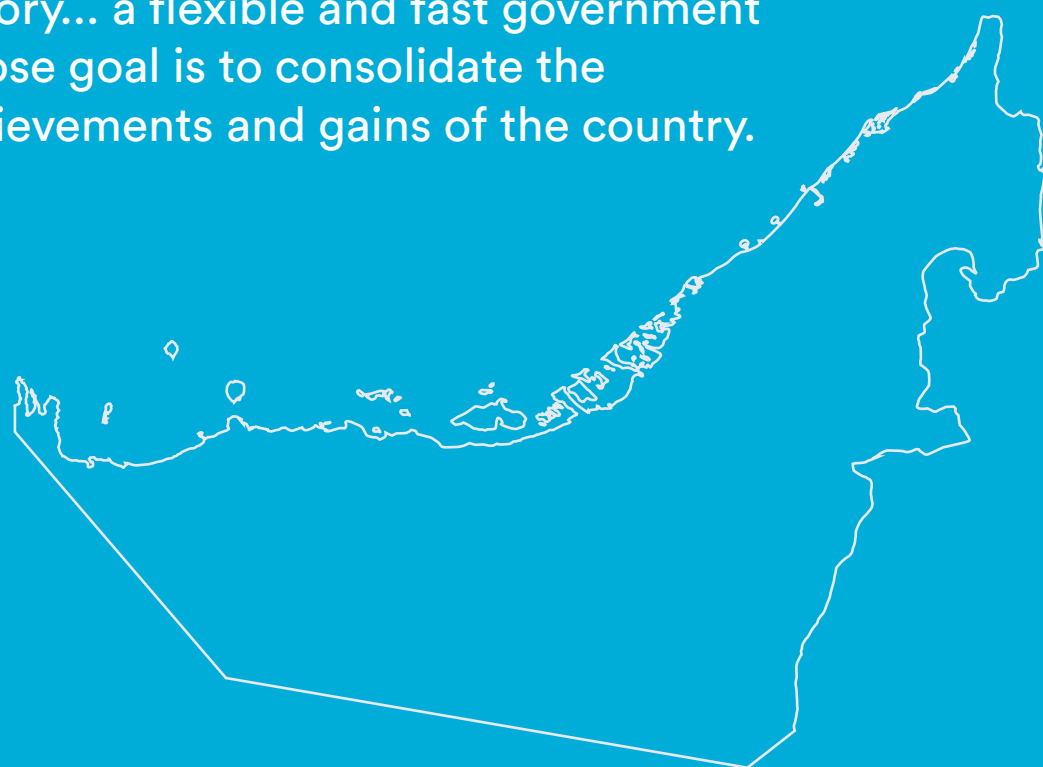


That said, it is clear from the various initiatives already underway, and recent statements by senior UAE Government figures that there is no intention to ‘stand still’ when it comes to the evolution of government services. This was recently articulated by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, who recently stated:



Our goal of structural changes today is a government that is faster in decision-making, more up to date with changes and better in seizing opportunities and in dealing with the new stage in our history... a flexible and fast government whose goal is to consolidate the achievements and gains of the country.

[14]



[14] Gulf Business, “Sheikh Mohammed announces new government structure with merged ministries,” 5 July 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://gulfbusiness.com/sheikh-mohammed-announces-new-government-structure-with-merged-ministries/>



## The balance of risks – trust and transformation

The process of transforming government services itself carries significant risk, and it is crucial that this is managed effectively. There is a long-list of international examples of failed government transformation projects, which have cost treasuries billions. From a failure to understand the needs of the consumer, to a lack of internal expertise, a range of factors can scupper the best of intended government projects. **The Royal Academy of Engineering and the British Computer Society found that 84% of public-sector projects resulted in failure of some sort.** A New Zealand government study judged 38% of government projects a success, while 59% involved problems and 3% were a complete failure [15].

The implications of poorly handled service transformation go well beyond the financial. As we know from the survey data, a significant portion of service-users are likely to lose trust in government services in general if they have one poor experience. The survey data also shows that peoples’ experience of government services has a significant impact on their overall happiness. This means that the general happiness of those who use government services could be severely impacted by an issue in a single transformation project.

There is also a wider impact on the potential platforms a service-user might choose going forward if they face an issue – for example, if a newly digitised government service is found to be difficult or inefficient by a service-user, they will be more likely to access this service via a different, more expensive platform (perhaps a Customer Happiness Centre). This not only minimizes any gains in terms of cost reduction or increased efficiency, it could also serve to undermine wider trust in the transformation of other government services.

It is crucial, therefore, that governments ensure that the process of designing and transitioning to more digitised, unified and personalised services is done effectively, without negatively impacting user experience and consequently trust in government services overall.

To do this governments will require the expertise, insight and skills of partners to assist in the design and implementation of re-imagined services. This should start at the foundations of customer insight and user experience, and run all the way through to training and management of the back-office support services that will maintain and deliver the government service.

[15] PricewaterhouseCoopers International (PwC), “Are public projects doomed to failure from the start?,” 2017. [Online]. Available: [https://www.pwc.ch/en/publications/2017/pmi\\_are-public-projects-doomed-to-failure\\_en\\_2017\\_web.pdf](https://www.pwc.ch/en/publications/2017/pmi_are-public-projects-doomed-to-failure_en_2017_web.pdf)





## Leave no service behind – Maintaining standards in services not transforming

It should also be noted that the transformation of services – and their movement to new platforms – should not mean that those which will be continued to be delivered through their existing means can be forgotten.

As already outlined, the movement of services to digital platforms should create some capacity for other physical-platforms (such as Customer Happiness Centres). This in turn should lead to further improved customer service outcomes.

However, the continued training of staff and effective management of these platforms is key, as the same ‘trust’ issue which could affect poorly implemented transformed services could materialise amongst those people who use these physical-platforms if standards begin to deteriorate.

In other words, if standards fall in Customer Happiness Centres due to a de-prioritisation triggered by a greater focus on digitised services, those people who continue to use them could lose trust due to a bad experience, which, as we know, has an impact on their feelings towards government services and happiness more generally.

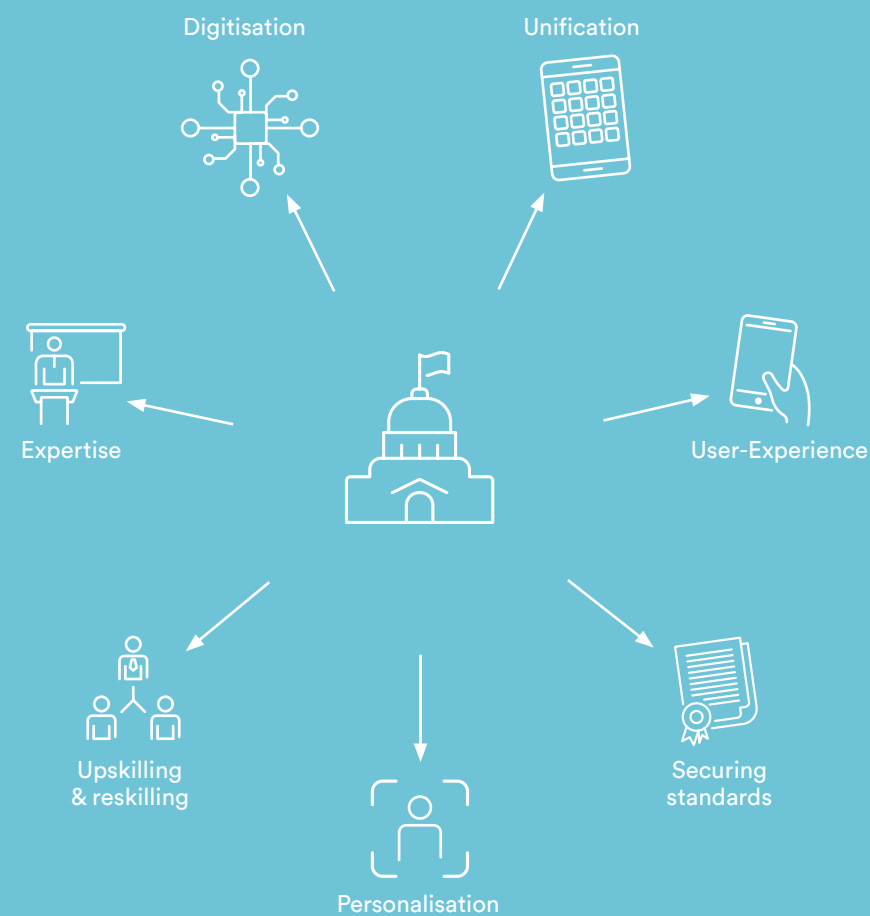
## Conclusion & recommendations

This research shows that high-expectations are being met with high-standards when it comes to the delivery of government services in the UAE. However, services are continuing to evolve and transform in line with global trends and user demand.

The central question facing the UAE is how does it maintain its high-standards throughout a period of service transformation?







Through our extensive, data-led research, we have identified seven key policy recommendations:



**Key policy recommendation 1**

**Continue on the path of service digitisation**

Those delivering and using government services will benefit from the continued move towards creating better digital access. Significant cost, accessibility and efficiency gains, alongside an appetite amongst UAE residents to see further digitisation are clear motivations for governments to continue on the current trajectory to enhance their digital offering.

The UAE federal and local governments will need to incorporate the latest innovations in technology – for example, AI and automation – so that services maintain (or outpace) comparable government and private sector platforms, with which service-users will interact.

This is particularly true in the UAE due to the highly mobile nature of its population, who are likely to interact and compare a range of different international government and private sector digital services.



**Key policy recommendation 2**

**Unified services lead to happy users**

Alongside digitisation, access to government services should become as unified as possible.

This, again, is already in-train, however there is clearly an appetite amongst UAE residents for as many services as possible to be available through a single platform.

This should also mean that services should be as ‘joined-up’ as possible – meaning that there is no need to re-enter information nor to transfer between different platforms to access services. This should be true in relation to services accessed digitally, as well as other platforms, such as call centres.



### Key policy recommendation 3

#### Create the capacity for personalised and attentive service delivery

Although the survey and interviews found that people were generally ‘happy’ with government services, one of the more commonly cited criticisms was that they were ‘generic’ with those delivering the service lacking in ‘attentiveness’.

The digitisation of services should help with this issue. However, it is recommended that further examination takes place of how services where residents interact with government services staff could be more personalised and attentive. This could lead to a refinement of the training procedures, scripts and processes used by government services staff.



### Key policy recommendation 4

#### Obtain the necessary expertise to manage service transformation

Crucial to all of the changes taking place in UAE government service is the effective management of transformation. This research clearly identifies that a single bad interaction with a government service can have a significant impact on an individual’s attitudes towards government services in general and their overall happiness.

Poor execution of service transformation will not only lead to significant financial costs, but undermine the primary aim of project – to deliver a better experience for residents.

It is therefore crucial that UAE governments ensure that they make use of international experiences and expertise, drawing on the private sector and other external stakeholders to ensure the process of transitioning to new ways of accessing government services is managed effectively.



### Key policy recommendation 5

#### User-experience must drive service design

The people that are going to be using services will give the best insights when it comes to how they should be designed. Policy makers should consult service-users to understand how and what access they want to government services.

Testing user experience and understanding the insights before rolling out new services or platforms will ensure that issues can be identified, and refinements made before they are used by the population at-large. Not only will this lead to better outcomes in terms of customer happiness, but reduce costs in the long-term as fewer large-scale re-designs will be necessary.



### Key policy recommendation 6

#### Upskilling and reskilling support staff

Although the digitisation and unification of services is likely going to reduce the need for some in-person services, there will still be a need for a significant back-office function to support these platforms. It is crucial that there are effective processes and training in place for these staff from the outset.

A well-designed digital platform for government services will not function effectively if the support staff behind it are not given the appropriate skills to manage it.



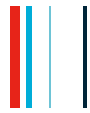
### Key policy recommendation 7

#### Securing standards in platforms that are not ‘transforming’

Although a significant transformation of government services is already underway, it is crucial to recognise that some people will continue to access them through existing platforms – for example, call centres and Customer Happiness Centres. Standards must be retained, therefore, across all platforms.

Facilities should continue to be developed across all government services, alongside providing staff with the necessary skills development and training opportunities.









[sercoinstitute.com](https://sercoinstitute.com)

[serco.com/me](https://serco.com/me)