

# The Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Inclusivity Measurement Programme

## Call for National Research Teams

### Background

The [Global Development Network \(GDN\)](http://www.gdn.int) is a public international organisation that supports high-quality, policy-oriented, social science research in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) to promote better lives. Founded in 1999, GDN is headquartered in New Delhi (India), with offices in Clermont-Ferrand (France) and Arlington (USA). Our work spans the Global South.

### DPI Inclusivity Measurement Programme

Digitalisation is increasingly seen as a key driver of social and economic transformation. Governments around the world are adopting digital technologies (digital identity systems, digital payment systems, etc.) to improve service delivery, expand financial inclusion, and support economic growth. These foundational systems are often grouped under the name Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI<sup>1</sup>), which enables governments and private actors to deliver services more efficiently and transparently.

However, digitalisation has outpaced research, and little evidence exists on its socioeconomic impact in the Global South, especially on vulnerable populations. Alongside global actors shaping the DPI agenda, it was therefore a natural step for GDN to help bridge this gap by mobilising locally-based research to generate evidence on how inclusive DPI systems are and to foster dialogue with policymakers on how they can systematically measure and anchor inclusion as a key dimension of DPI deployment.

This is where the DPI Inclusivity Measurement Programme, funded by Co-Develop and

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<sup>1</sup> Digital Public Infrastructure is a relatively new concept. What GDN means by DPI in this Call for Proposals can be defined using the World Bank latest definition as: "DPI is an approach to digitalization focused on creating "foundational, digital building blocks designed for the public benefit." By providing essential digital functions at society scale that can be reused across sectors, DPIs enable public and private service providers to build on these systems, innovate, and roll out new services more quickly and efficiently. Common systems built as DPIs include digital identity and electronic signatures, digital payments, and data sharing".

implemented by GDN (in tight collaboration with research teams and partners) steps in. Launched in February 2026, it is designed to help countries assess how inclusive their DPI systems are, and specifically, to understand who is being reached, who is being left behind and why exclusion persists.

It brings together research teams, funding partners and government stakeholders from across the Global South with the goal to scale up and institutionalise evidence on DPI inclusivity in as many countries as possible.

In an initial phase starting in 2026, GDN will source, design and guide inclusion measurement projects in 5 countries (the object of the present call), while working closely with governments and local partners to advocate towards translating evidence into improved DPI implementation.

## Object of the Call for National Research Teams

### Rationale

Despite the rapid growth of Digital Public Infrastructure across the Global South, there is still limited feedback on how these systems are implemented and how they actually work in practice, and their broader societal effects. DPI is often designed and scaled without enough evidence on who it reaches, who it excludes, and why. As a result, exclusion can be built into systems without being noticed.

Governments, civil society, and communities need reliable and comparable data to understand these gaps and push for improvements. This need was first identified by Co-Develop, which supported an initial pilot study led by Dalberg in Malawi and Mongolia.

Building on this work, GDN has launched the design of a global comparative survey that is rigorous, adaptable to different contexts, and useful for policy discussions. Through this Call, we are seeking to recruit 5 national research teams based in Low to Upper-Middle Countries according to the World Bank classification, according to their level of income.<sup>2</sup> They will partner with us and engage deeply with this methodological framework, adapt it to their country's DPI realities, implement it with methodological integrity, and feed their findings into public and policy spaces to open important debates with national stakeholders about what a more inclusive DPI would look like.

Through this programme, we aim to develop and use a structured toolkit to document the experience of excluded groups at scale, reveal patterns that no single stakeholder can see, and identify forms of inclusion and exclusion that are new, context-specific, or invisible to the systems that produce them.

Our toolkit comprises both :

1. A structured comparative quantitative survey, to enable learning across countries and time

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<sup>2</sup> See the list of countries falling under the category of Low to Upper-Middle countries according to World Bank classification according to their level of income:

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/world-bank-country-classifications-by-income-level-for-2024-2025>

2. A complementary participatory research phase in the form of deep dives will be designed by the NRTs selected in this call.

In addition, this project has a strong advocacy component, as teams will feed their findings on DPI inclusivity into national public and policy debates on DPI through outreach activities.

As key stakeholders within this initiative, selected teams will be able to engage with a wider community of researchers and actively contribute to the global conversation on how digital public infrastructure can advance inclusion and socio-economic development. This represents a unique opportunity to help bridge the gap between research on inclusion and policy-making in the specific field of DPI.

### Research Scope

Selected teams will focus on existing DPI systems that have been deployed for at least one year in their country, preferably (but not limited to) national IDs, digital payment and data exchange systems. National teams are expected to survey a *single* DPI system rolled out in their *own country*, unless they can demonstrate the feasibility of covering additional countries (as part of ongoing research, for example).

### Eligibility

#### Applicants

We welcome applications from research teams affiliated with and/or supported by an established research institute, university, or think tank in a Low- to Upper-Middle Income Country. This Call is also open for consortia of organisations that can apply jointly, as long as they present a single research team together.

The proposed teams can be composed of in-house researchers employed by the supporting institution, and/or affiliated researchers.

#### Geographical scope

This Call is open to teams based in all *Low- to Upper-Middle Income Countries* according to the World Bank classification, according to their level of income.

Tentatively, we will select 2 teams based in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1 based in Africa, 1 in MENA and 1 in Asia.

## Application Deadline

15 May 2026

## Application Language

English

## Research Project Language

Research projects can be implemented in the national language of the selected teams. However, reports must be produced in English, and at least one team member (preferably the Principal Investigator) should be able to interact in English as several workshops will take place in English during the programme. In case deliverables are written in a language other than English, the costs for the translation of all project-related materials (notably the datasets, surveys and reports) to English should be included in the applicants' proposed tentative budget.

## Duration

The research project should tentatively start no later than 2 September 2026, and last 6 to 8 months, depending on the different parameters proposed by the teams (size of the team, availability of data, selected DPI system, size of the sample).

## Type and Amount of Support

Financial support will be provided as a grant with a total maximum budget of US\$50,000. This budget should cover research as well as dissemination activities and translation when/if needed.

In addition to financial support, the selected teams will join GDN's community of researchers from the Global South, think tanks and research organisations, and build their professional networks.

GDN will feature their work in its communication network (GlobalDev Blog, social media, conferences, academic networks), providing them with enhanced visibility.

The DPI Inclusivity Measurement Programme is a global initiative that brings together a community of researchers, policy makers, DPI implementers and donors who will work with us to place inclusivity of DPI on the political agenda across the Global South.

If your organisation is not interested in or eligible for funding under this Call but has a strong national network and programmatic impact in the field of DPI, we encourage you to contact us and join our roster of partners on DPI Inclusivity. You will then be contacted for potential involvement and collaboration in future activities under the programme.

Please send us a brief e-mail stating your general interest and activities in the field of DPI at: [dpi@gdn.int](mailto:dpi@gdn.int)

### Information Session

Do you wish to apply?

Two information sessions for all prospective applicants will take place on 23 April 2026 at 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM CET.

Register in advance for this webinar:

[https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_Ymw0KH\\_a\\_Q36iXxVyjPkleA](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Ymw0KH_a_Q36iXxVyjPkleA)

### Reach us at

For any questions, write to [dpi@gdn.int](mailto:dpi@gdn.int).

## Description of the Research Programme

### Role of the National Research Teams

The selected teams will partner with GDN to generate evidence to high-quality standards, and feed it into national public and policy debates on DPI through outreach activities. As a result, the research project is structured into the two following components.

#### Research component

The research component centres around two main activities :

1. Carrying out a national survey that will feed into a global comparative study on DPI inclusivity. The survey tool is designed by GDN as a structured quantitative instrument; the selected national teams will play an active role in refining it and adapting it to the specificities of the countries and the nature of the selected DPI.
2. A deep dive, which is an additional and complementary research effort, teams can propose within the total budget. We do not prescribe the method - what we ask is that it goes beyond what the survey alone can capture: the lived experience of exclusion, the texture of non-use, and the local conditions that shape who is reached and who is not. The most valuable deep dives will be those that surprise us.

More concretely, National Research Teams will be responsible for:

- Adapting the survey to their national context
- Developing plans for one 'deep dive'
- Engaging with key national DPI stakeholders and administering the survey in-country in close collaboration with them
- Leveraging primary and secondary data to generate original analysis on DPI inclusivity at the national level
- Producing a national report on DPI inclusivity, presenting who is reached by DPI, who is left behind, and why
- Organising public dissemination workshop(s) to a broad audience that reflects the diversity of stakeholders involved in planning, deploying and using DPI (public authorities, DPI implementers, CSOs, media, etc.)
- Using their research to advocate for bringing inclusion measurement and, more broadly, the importance of researching the impact of DPI to the national policy agenda.

A more complete note on the comparative survey and deep dive is presented in the Annex.

#### Networking, dissemination and advocacy component

Selected teams will join a global network of DPI inclusion researchers to contribute to the evolution of the survey methodology through regularly:

- Participating in knowledge exchange with peers
- Contributing to global comparative analysis
- Potentially collaborating on regional or cross-country studies
- Collaborating on publishing research dissemination outputs (blogs, podcasts, etc.) on a need basis.
- Identifying entry points within the DPI national landscape to disseminate their findings, proposing adjustments to the existing system design whenever relevant.

#### **Scientific Guidance and Oversight**

A team of researchers and programme managers at GDN will guarantee global scientific coordination and network management, with the goal of:

- Establishing shared intellectual ownership of the tool(s) developed, and guaranteeing a stringent quality control mechanism to ensure the comparative nature of the global dataset
- Cultivating and expanding the network of partners and stakeholders supporting country-level implementation
- Facilitating horizontal learning and collaboration across countries
- Pursuing the widest possible uptake of results.

## Application Process

### Eligibility Criteria

Research teams must apply through an established research institute or centre registered in the relevant countries. We envisage multidisciplinary teams, with one clearly designated principal investigator acting as the focal point of the research team in its interaction with GDN and other partners.

The ideal research team brings experience in:

- Analysis of digital governance, digital transformation, ICT4D, institutional processes, or socio-economic systems
- Previous work on DPI, digitalisation or digital transformation is a strong asset
- Quantitative and qualitative research, including national stratified sampling, survey administration, and interviews
- Experience in disseminating research to diverse audiences and developing accessible data visualisations
- Experience in using research to advocate towards policy makers and donors
- While teams can conduct the research and report in the national language, at least one team member (preferably the PI) should be able to participate in workshops and meetings in English.

These criteria apply to the team as a whole, not to individual members. Experience should be demonstrated through projects, publications, or an institutional track record. Gender-balanced or female-led teams are very strongly encouraged to apply.

### Assets

While GDN welcomes applications from all teams, irrespective of the availability of their own funds to implement the survey, we will prioritise partners who can mobilise financial support and/or have a strong track record of linking research to advocacy at the national level, in a spirit of co-development and joint ownership of the initiative.

This will be assessed by the applicants' demonstrated ability to either:

- Secure co-funding of *part of the grant* from their home research institution or from other sources (donors, think tanks, national or regional initiatives)
- Mobilise, *in addition to this grant*, additional funding for follow-up activities (deepening the survey, updating it)

- Use the research findings to *advocate autonomously*, as part of their own activities, so as to convince DPI implementers to integrate the measurement of inclusion in their national DPI strategies/policies.

Teams that are already working actively on the impact of DPI and/or inclusion and can embed the survey in their own research programme are preferred, as this will likely foster the sustainability of the proposed survey tool. Teams connected with NGOs working with minority groups excluded from DPI are encouraged to apply.

### Selection Process

23 April 2026	Information session
15 May 2026	Deadline for the application
15-31 May	Requesting clarifications on the received proposals from applicants (if/when needed)
15 June 2026	Communication of a long list of up to 10 national teams
15-30 June 2026	Interviews with longlisted candidates
10 July 2026	Selection of the final five national research teams
July - August 2026	Finalisation of contractualisation aspects with selected organisations
2 September 2026	Kick-off

### Selection Criteria

The table below displays how applications will be evaluated.

Criteria	Description
Clarity	Overall clarity of the proposal
Relevance	Country and DPI system selection: maturity, comparative value, cross-strata variation
Experience	Team track record in similar research projects, experience to adapt and roll out similar surveys, relevant certifications to conduct research on human subjects, access to surveyors or on-demand survey teams,

	and access to ethics review committees
Complementarity	Complementarity of all team members in terms of expertise, background, methodologies used, etc.
Outreach	Ability to advocate using research findings based on examples of previous work and a network of teams/organisations
Co-funding	Priority will be given to teams whose supporting research institutions can co-fund (themselves or via other programmes or donors) part of the budget for the research project
Feasibility	Alignment between the scope of the research, the team, the budget and the timeline proposed
Balance	Gender balanced team

## Application Documents

All applications must be uploaded to our website:

[https://app.gdn.int/grantee\\_portal/auth](https://app.gdn.int/grantee_portal/auth)

All documents listed below must be carefully filled in and submitted as part of this application. Please make sure you use the templates provided on our application website.

1. Letter of support from the head of the applying institute – including an indication of co-funding or funding for follow-up activities (see Template A - Declaration)
2. Application dossier (see Template B - Application dossier)
3. Tentative budget (see Template C - Tentative Budget)

## Webinar - Information Session

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The team will present the programme, respond to all questions and clarify any aspect of the call.

## Annex - A Note on the Research Toolkit

### *Global Comparative Survey and Deep Dives*

The DPI Inclusivity Measurement Programme rests on the premise that understanding who is excluded from a DPI-based society, and why, requires both breadth and depth. Breadth to make findings comparable across countries, credible to governments and the international policy community; depth to capture what numbers alone cannot reach.

The research tool has two components designed to work together: a global comparative survey and a society-level deep dive.

1. The global comparative survey is a structured quantitative instrument built around a conceptual framework that connects the conditions people bring to a DPI system with the outcomes that system produces for them. It does not treat adoption of DPI as the end of the story. The survey is designed to map, for a nationally representative and deliberately sampled group of marginalised respondents, the full arc from structural position in society to lived outcomes in terms of inclusion and exclusion i.e. which groups face barriers at the point of access; which face barriers to enrollment even when access exists; which enroll but do not and can not engage meaningfully; and which engage but do not experience the participation, belonging, and rights that genuine inclusion requires. A core set of questions will remain constant across all five countries to enable cross-country comparison and to build towards composite indicators that can be tracked over time. National Research Teams that join the programme will be invited to adapt questions that are country-specific across the different survey modules to reflect the particular DPI system under study, local social strata, and relevant intermediaries and access points in their country. What we expect to learn from the survey is, above all, a structured account of where in the chain exclusion concentrates and for whom, so that it is comparable enough to other countries' data and specific enough to be actionable at the national level. We believe this evidence is key to boosting debates on the design of DPI to benefit all.
2. The deep dive is an additional and complementary research effort we propose to the teams. It constitutes the decentralised half of the tool and is designed to surface what the survey structurally cannot. Quantitative measurement is poorly

suited to capturing the texture of lived exclusion: the fear or shame that accompanies a failed enrollment, the sense that a system was not designed with the last-mile beneficiary in mind, the informal workarounds that communities build because formal channels have failed them. It is also poorly suited to examining the supply side of exclusion: whether the design choices embedded in a DPI system, i.e. its identity requirements, its interface assumptions, its agent network, its regulatory framework, were made with marginalised groups in consideration, and if so, what happened to those considerations during implementation. National Research Teams are best placed to identify what form of inquiry will be most illuminating in their context. These deep dives could take the form of a deliberative focus group exploring whether non-users feel the system was designed for people like them or narrative interviews tracing how a single interaction with DPI changed someone's relationship with formal institutions or key informant interviews with the architects or frontline managers of the system regarding their assumptions about users or an observation of a real enrollment or service moment to document the gap between designed and actual experience. Each of these can serve as what we think of as a litmus test for the inclusivity of a DPI system, and each requires local knowledge, trust, and contextual judgment. Deep dive proposals will be assessed for funding based on methodological soundness and relevance to the programme's core questions, but we expect the most valuable insights to come precisely from approaches we have not anticipated. Teams should treat the deep dive as part of the research where their expertise, relationships, and contextual understanding are the primary assets. Once commenced, the programme will include training sessions on the survey and work sessions on the deep dives across countries, early in the implementation for harmonising as well as cross-team learning.

Together, the survey and the deep dive are designed to produce findings that are rigorous enough to benchmark and compare across countries, and grounded enough to spark debate based on real experiences.