

Human-Centred Justice in the Digital Era: Beyond Efficiency, Towards Dignity, Access and Human Agency

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Abstract

Digital technologies can make justice systems faster, easier to reach and more efficient. However, a more efficient system does not necessarily make justice fairer or more accessible. When technologies are introduced without sufficient attention to people's circumstances and needs, they may deepen existing inequalities, weaken meaningful human interaction, and leave individuals with less control over decisions that directly affect their lives.

Digitalization in justice includes a growing range of prison services, remote translation and interpretation, electronic case files, digital access to lawyers, AI applications, etc. Drawing on international policy frameworks and recent empirical research on human-centred justice, this study explores how justice becomes more digital without becoming less human.

The study argues that the success of digital justice cannot be judged by efficiency alone. A human-centred justice approach prioritizes serving people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, and institutions and services are designed accordingly. Hence, success is measured by the actual outcomes for people's lives. Specifically, digital initiatives must be evaluated in terms of whether people can genuinely access and use the system, whether they are treated fairly and with dignity, and whether meaningful human agency and control are preserved.

The four distinct dimensions of human-centred digital justice—accessibility, dignity, human agency, and fairness—help identify three recurrent risks: digital inequality, loss of human control, and depersonalization. Those risks may affect who can meaningfully access services, who retains final control over decisions, and who is seen and heard as a human being. The study concludes by proposing a practical framework for evaluating digital justice tools beyond formal provision and based on lived experience:

1. What justice needs does it address—and whose?
2. Who can access and who may be excluded?
3. Does it preserve dignity and meaningful human interaction?
4. Can people influence and challenge the process, and do humans retain final control?
5. Does it reduce existing inequalities—or reproduce them?