



From digital **EXCLUSION** to digital **INCLUSION**

Contents

Foreword	3
About this report	4
About us	4
Easy to read	5
Stockholm County 2023 – the current situation	6
“Just log in” – about norms	6
Having access – about conditions	8
Affordability – about finances	8
Being able to use digital services – about accessibility	9
Digital exclusion – why?	11
One survey and seven interviews – about our material	11
Using the internet	12
E-ID	15
Region Stockholm’s digital services	16
Help from others	18
Digital inclusion – how?	20
Universal design is the first step	21
Daring to place demands for accessibility	21
The importance of excellent alternatives	21
Launch the country’s first regional DigidelCenter	22
Test environments	22
Offering support	23
Cooperation is the way forward	23
Conclusions	24
Sources	25
Thanks	27

Foreword

We are now in a new and exciting age: the digital age. A wealth of opportunities have opened up. Digitalisation simplifies everyday life for us as citizens, but it also brings the risk of digital exclusion.

Within Region Stockholm there are a number of useful apps and e-services, but they need to be made even better to include more people. This report points out shortcomings, but it also highlights opportunities to increase digital inclusion.

What if we could create digital inclusion instead?
In this report, we aim to showcase solutions that improve the lives of people with disabilities.

**Annika Hässler,
Chair,
The Greater Stockholm
Disability Rights
Federation**





About this report

In this report, we present a selection of unique material about how people with disabilities in Stockholm County experience digital society. It is not the internet itself that is the difficulty, but rather the many services and products that are not accessible. We also present solutions for how we can work together in Stockholm County to create digital inclusion.

References are marked within square brackets: []. A list of all sources used can be found at the end of the report.

About us

The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation is a cooperation body with no political or religious affiliations. We have 46 member organisations, together representing around 70,000 members. Our mission is to work on the basis of special interests to improve the situation for people with disabilities in Stockholm County.

Easy to read

Not everyone can
use the internet,
because it is not accessible.
Particularly older people
and people
with disabilities.

We believe that everyone
should be able to
use the internet.
We have therefore written
a report about these problems.
We propose different solutions.

We have asked
people
with disabilities.
Many of them think
that the internet is good.

But there are also
difficulties.
For example,
logging in and
remembering passwords.
The language can be difficult.
Or finding your way,
for example at 1177.se.

Our proposals

The region should ask
people
with disabilities.
Things should be accessible
from the start.
There should be help
if you need it.
The region should start
a DigidelCenter.
There, people can get help
or try things out.

Stockholm County 2023 – the current situation

In 2021, around one million Swedes were living in digital exclusion. These are people who rarely or never use the internet. Many people believe that this is a problem that will disappear as the population becomes more proficient at using digital services. However this is a misconception, as there will always be people who need help. Digital exclusion is highest among older people, those with lower education levels, and people with disabilities. [1]

In Stockholm County, it is estimated that 21 percent of the population has a disability. [2] There are various reasons why people with disabilities cannot, may not or do not want to use digital services and products. Within this group, digital exclusion is greatest among people with visual, intellectual, communication and/or cognitive disabilities. [3]

Technological developments are moving at a rapid pace. In 2022, for example, we sent 6.2 billion text messages in Sweden. [4] During the Covid-19 pandemic, the demand for digital services skyrocketed. [5] In just a few months, large parts of society switched to using more digital services more often. We started buying food and medications online, having meetings via Teams and Zoom, and meeting healthcare professionals via digital applications – apps.

The digital transition is here to stay. At the same time, this trend involves challenges. The gap between those who use digital services and those who don't is growing. [6] Many older people and people with disabilities worry about doing things wrong or being scammed online. These groups are increasingly targeted by online scammers. [7]

“Just log in” – about norms

Society has many norms. These are unwritten rules about how we are expected to act and behave. Today, there is a clear norm that everyone should be able to use digital services. More and more public services are provided via websites and apps. There is an expectation in society that citizens should be able to exercise their rights and obligations through various digital services.

People with disabilities are not a homogenous group. This means that different people have different conditions and needs when it comes to



using digital services. Some find that digital services make everyday life – and life in general – easier and better. At the same time, others within the group cannot, may not or do not want to use digital services.

This report highlights how people with disabilities are both affected by and influence digital norms within society.

Having access – about conditions

In order to take part in digital society, various solutions are needed that many people take for granted. Stockholm County is a metropolitan region with approximately 2.4 million inhabitants. [8] In the central areas of the county, there is very good access to fixed and mobile internet. In rural areas and in the archipelago, broadband infrastructure is less good. There, about half of households have access to fast internet. [9] There are large differences in internet access, depending on where in the county people live or go.

Having access to technical equipment is another condition that many people take for granted. This involves having a computer, a tablet or a smart phone. Manufacturers of computers, tablets and mobile phones stop updating older models. At the same time, some apps require the equipment to have specific software or a specific operating system. As a result, people with older technology cannot use these apps.

Today, many authorities and other public actors require citizens to log in using various types of electronic identification, known as e-ID. Many of these are issued by banks and businesses. Sweden has been criticised for not having a national e-ID system. In autumn 2023, the Inquiry into secure and accessible digital identity (SOU 2023:61) presented a proposal that there should be national e-ID from 1 March 2026. [10]

Affordability – about finances

people with disabilities belong to the group or groups in society with the lowest levels of education and income. There is great variation within the group. Many are in employment, but some are supported by various benefits. Within the group of people with disabilities, the employment rate is 52%. This compares to an employment rate of 81% among the rest of the population. [11] As a result, not everyone can afford technology. For those who cannot afford technical equipment, many municipalities offer the possibility to use computers at libraries and other meeting places.

Today, there are many different ways to pay for goods and services. Paying by card has become the most common method. In many places, you can pay by Swish. During the past ten years, it has become increasingly difficult to pay with cash. [12] We can no longer use cash to pay for healthcare centre visits or public transport tickets in Stockholm. For those who cannot use a digital means of payment, participating in society is a challenge. Each year, the County Administrative Boards publishes a report on basic payment services. This report shows that fewer and fewer businesses nationwide are accepting cash. This does not meet citizens' need to be able to pay with cash. [13]

Being able to use digital services – about accessibility

To enable as many people as possible to use digital services, they must be accessible. This could involve having information read out loud, for example, having information available in easy-to-read Swedish, or a website being designed so that it is easy for users to navigate their way around and understand how to use it.

Legislation

The Swedish Act on Accessibility to Digital Public Services has been in force since 2019. It is based on a European standard – the Web Accessibility Directive – on internet and app accessibility. All public actors must comply with the act. This means that municipalities', regions' and public authorities' websites and apps must comply with the requirements. The act also states that there must be alternatives for those who cannot or do not want to use digital services. In June 2025, an updated version of the act will come into force, incorporating more and more elements of the Web Accessibility Directive into Swedish law.

Since 2015, a lack of accessibility has been included as grounds for discrimination in the Swedish Discrimination Act. The act does not mention accessibility in connection with websites, apps or similar. However, it does include examples of information and communication being accessible, such as access to different contact channels and citizens having access to personal service.



Digital exclusion – why?

In this section, we present facts about people with disabilities and how they are affected by digitalisation in Stockholm County.

One survey and seven interviews – about our material

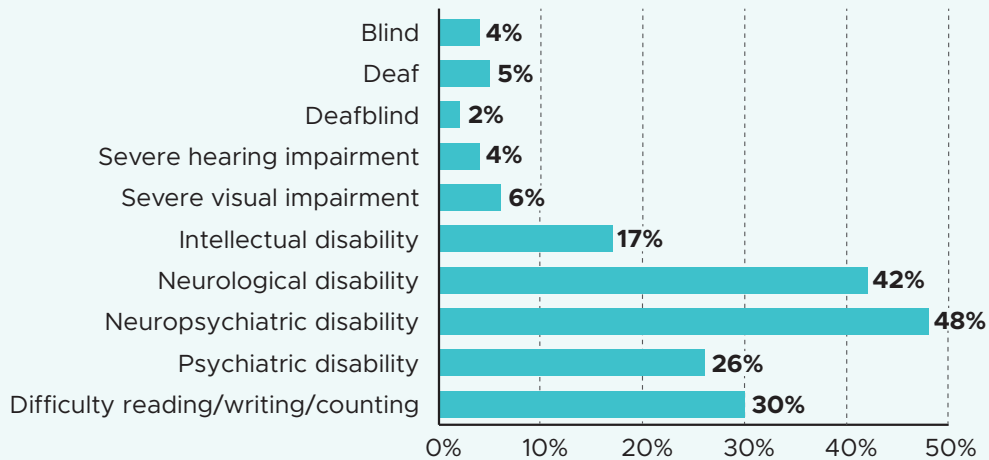
The statistical material is taken from the accessibility association Begripsam's "**Svenskarna med funktionsnedsättning och internet 2021**" ("Swedes with disabilities and the internet 2021") survey. The survey was completed by more than 2,000 people across the whole of Sweden. Of these, 304 stated that they live in Stockholm County. It is their answers that make up the statistical material used in this report. The survey included a control group of 280 people who do not have a disability and who live in Stockholm County. Begripsam's survey was aimed at people with disabilities, meaning that respondents were able to do so on their own terms. They could choose to respond digitally, on paper or by being interviewed.

Most of them reported having multiple disabilities or diagnoses. Based on their answers, Begripsam categorised the respondents into ten different categories of disability (see Diagram 1):

- blind
- deaf
- deafblind
- severe hearing impairment
- severe visual impairment
- intellectual disability
- neurological disability
- neuropsychiatric disability
- psychiatric disability
- difficulty reading/writing/counting

Diagram 1. The distribution between different diagnoses.

Expressed as percentages



The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation has also carried out seven in-depth interviews with people with various disabilities. These took place in June and July 2023. The aim of the interviews was to obtain deeper knowledge about the opportunities and challenges involved in using digital services.

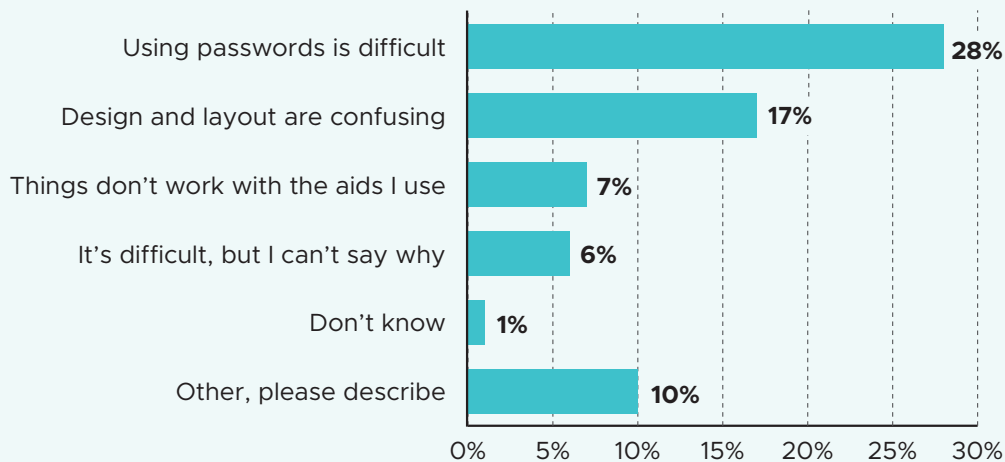
Using the internet

Of those who responded to the survey, 98% said that they use the internet. Of these, 65% said that they do not find it hard to use the internet. When respondents elaborated on what they found difficult, they mentioned different aspects. Some said that there is too much information, and that it is hard to sort out and assess whether information can be trusted. Others find it hard to manage passwords, and said that the language on the internet is too complicated. Some people find that on-screen contrast is often too poor, and that websites and apps are hard to navigate.

Two percent of respondents said that they do not use the internet. The reasons they gave included electromagnetic hypersensitivity and severe brain damage.

Diagram 2. What do you find hard to use on the internet?

Expressed as percentages



Under the response option “Other, please describe”, several people stated that it is difficult when information is in English and when searches produce too many results. Some said that it is hard to get an overview, and to understand the logic or structure of the website or app. Others have difficulties with technical issues, such as internet connectivity or inaccessible design, or they find that the click area is too small.

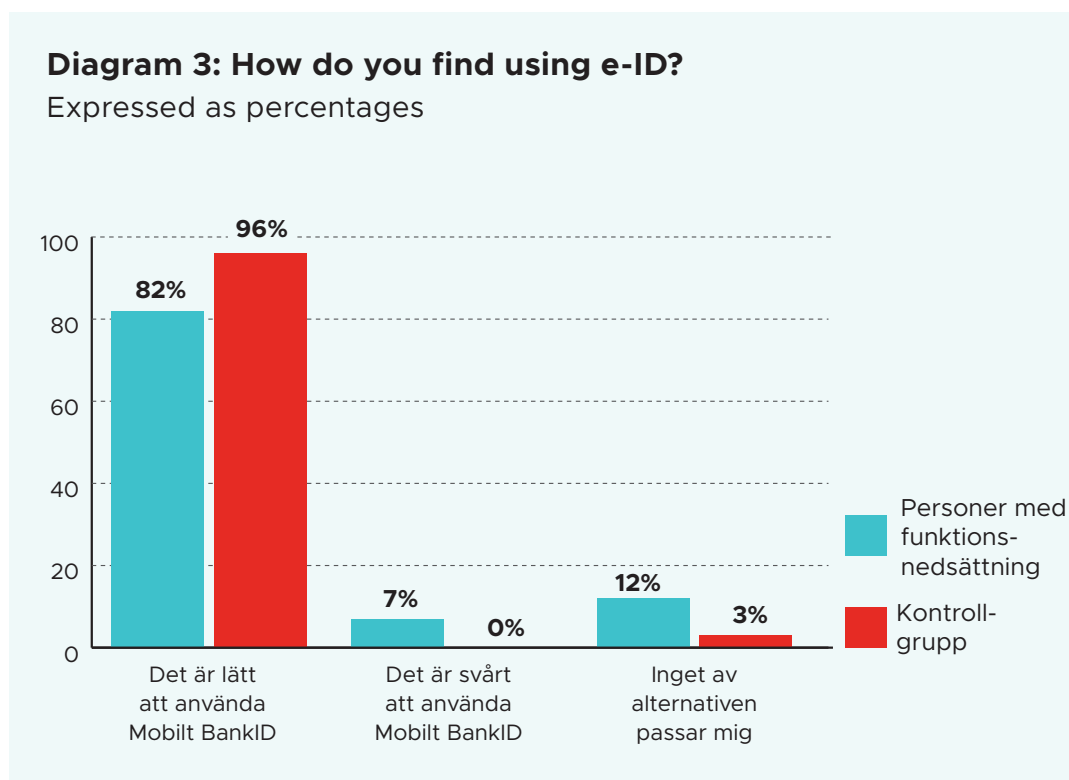
Most respondents said that they use the internet to pay bills, and to use email, Facebook and maps/directions. Some said that the internet has made their lives easier, for example by being able to do things in peace and quiet, not having to call authorities, or not having to fit in with opening hours.

Our analysis shows that both the survey respondents and the interviewees distinguished between what is entertainment and what is other business or public services on the internet. Many described using digital services for entertainment purposes as easier. This could involve streaming TV shows, using social media or shopping. The threshold is higher when it comes to contact with authorities. Several interviewees described how they have benefited a lot from digital services, particularly when they have experienced limited opportunities to move around in society for one reason or another.



E-ID

Users of many digital services need to be able to prove who they are. Today, different types of electronic identification – known as e-ID – are often used. In the survey, 82% stated that they use the BankID service. 96% of the control group have BankID. People with disabilities are slightly more likely to use e-ID services other than BankID. Another example of an e-ID system is Freja eID.



Many authorities and businesses use login alternatives with e-ID. The survey asked people what they find difficult about the internet. In the free text responses, 20 people said that they find passwords difficult. They also find logging in difficult when the user has to prove that they are not a robot. Since 2019, it has no longer been possible to log in to the 1177.se e-service using a password and text message. The assessment was that few people used this alternative, and that it was not secure enough. Different solutions are needed to enable as many people as possible to use digital services.

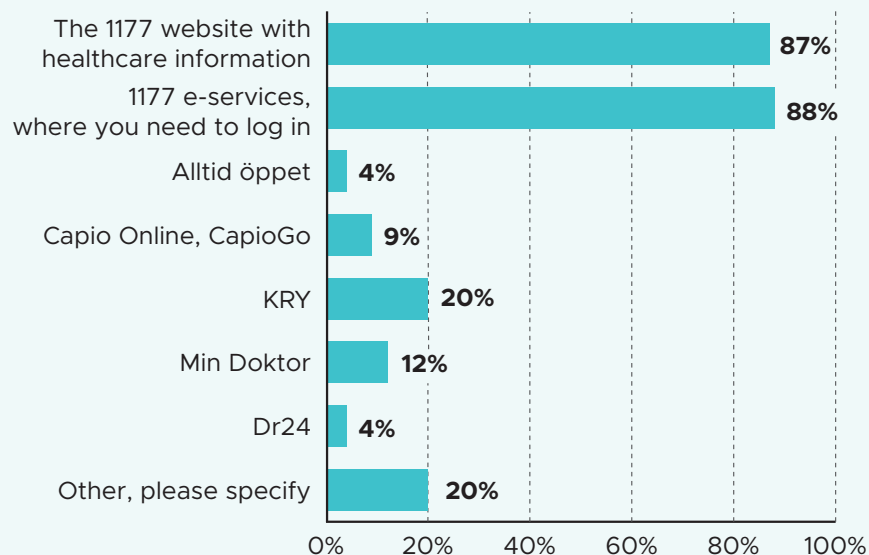
Region Stockholm's digital services

Digital e-services within healthcare

Among the main group and the control group in the survey, as well as among the interviewees, it appears that many people use digital health services. The most commonly used digital services are 1177's e-services. These are available both as an app and as a login page via the internet on a computer. In the survey, respondents described being able to log in to 1177, but that the service uses difficult language. The second most common digital e-service is Kry, which is used by 20%. Next comes Min Doktor, which 12% use. Of those who responded to the survey, 4% use Region Stockholm's Alltid Öppet app.

Diagram 4. Which of these e-health services have you used?

Expressed as percentages

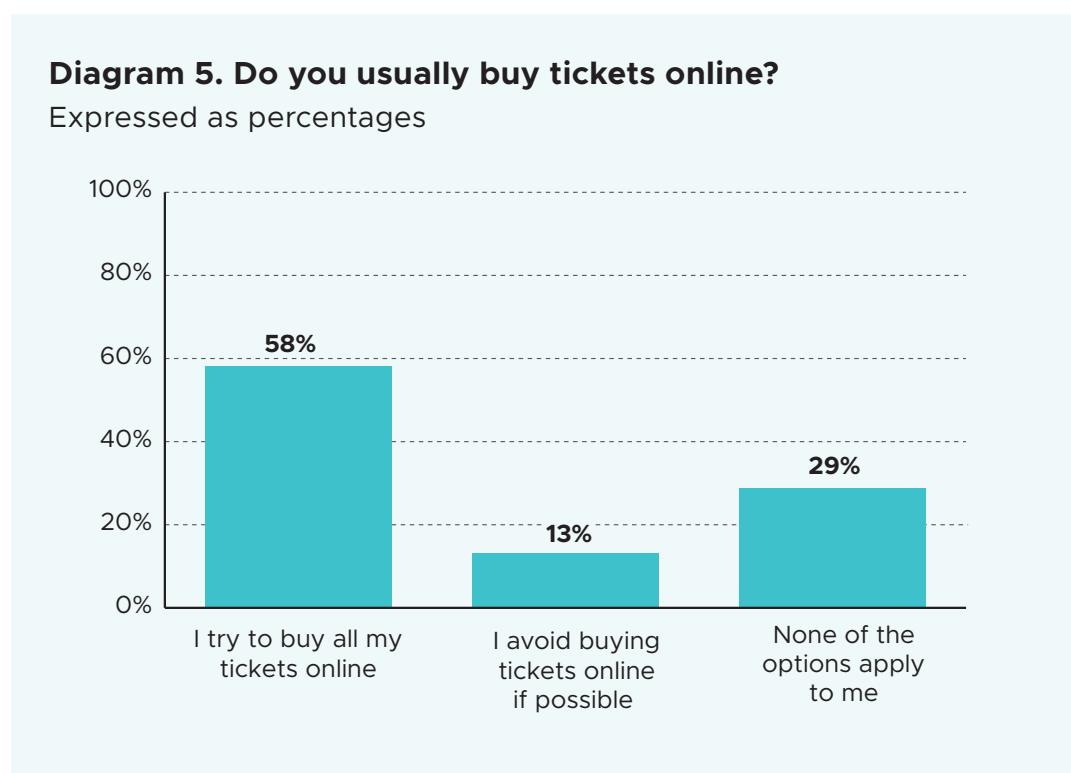


In the survey, 54% of respondents said that they feel completely or partly confident about digital care encounters. In the free text responses, one common answer was that digital healthcare appointments are good as a way to avoid traveling and for simple tasks such as renewing prescriptions. On the other hand, when an examination is needed, people want to meet healthcare professionals in person. However, many people referred to cumbersome technology and uncertainty about how personal data is handled as two reasons why they prefer face-to-face meetings.

One interviewee described how they can now participate in coordination meetings with healthcare. This was previously unthinkable due to their disabilities. They described how the biggest problem is that all care providers have their own care apps, and that it takes a lot of time and energy to learn how to use them. They also said that it is difficult to get an overview, and that there are many apps.

Travel apps

The survey did not include any questions about services used within public transport. However, it did have one question about whether people usually buy tickets online. 58% said that they usually buy tickets online. Among the control group, 83% said they regularly buy tickets online.



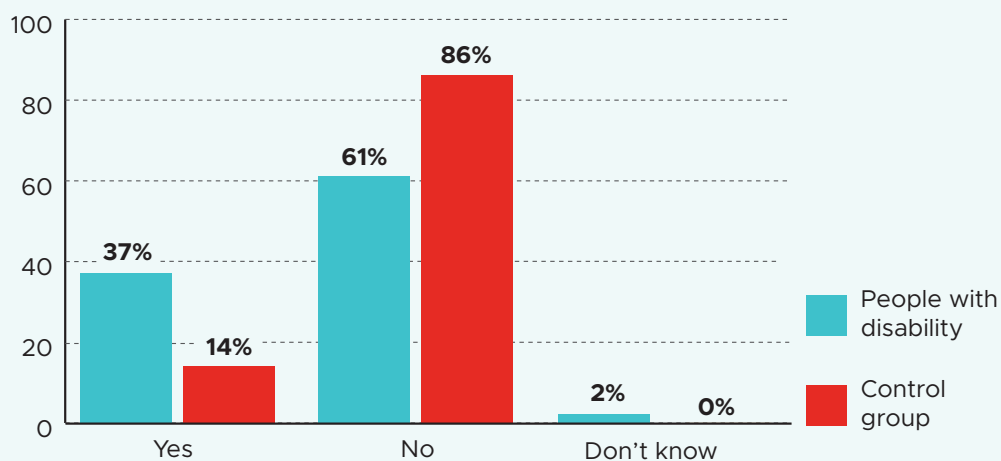
One interviewee said that they regularly use Region Stockholm's mobility services app. They said that it mostly works well and is easy to use, but that it is hard to use the app when something goes wrong, for example when it freezes or needs to be updated. In these cases, they need to ask for help.

Help from others

In the survey, 37% said they need to ask others for help compared to 14% in the control group. This can include help with banking, contact with authorities and healthcare, and help with the actual technology. When asked who they turn to for help, the respondents said they ask relatives or family members. They also ask conservators, housing support and friends for help.

Diagram 6. Do you usually ask others for help when doing things online?

Expressed as percentages



In contrast to the survey respondents, more than half of the interviewees said they need help. One interviewee described needing help with almost everything, while others only need help occasionally. They then turn to relatives and family members in the first instance.

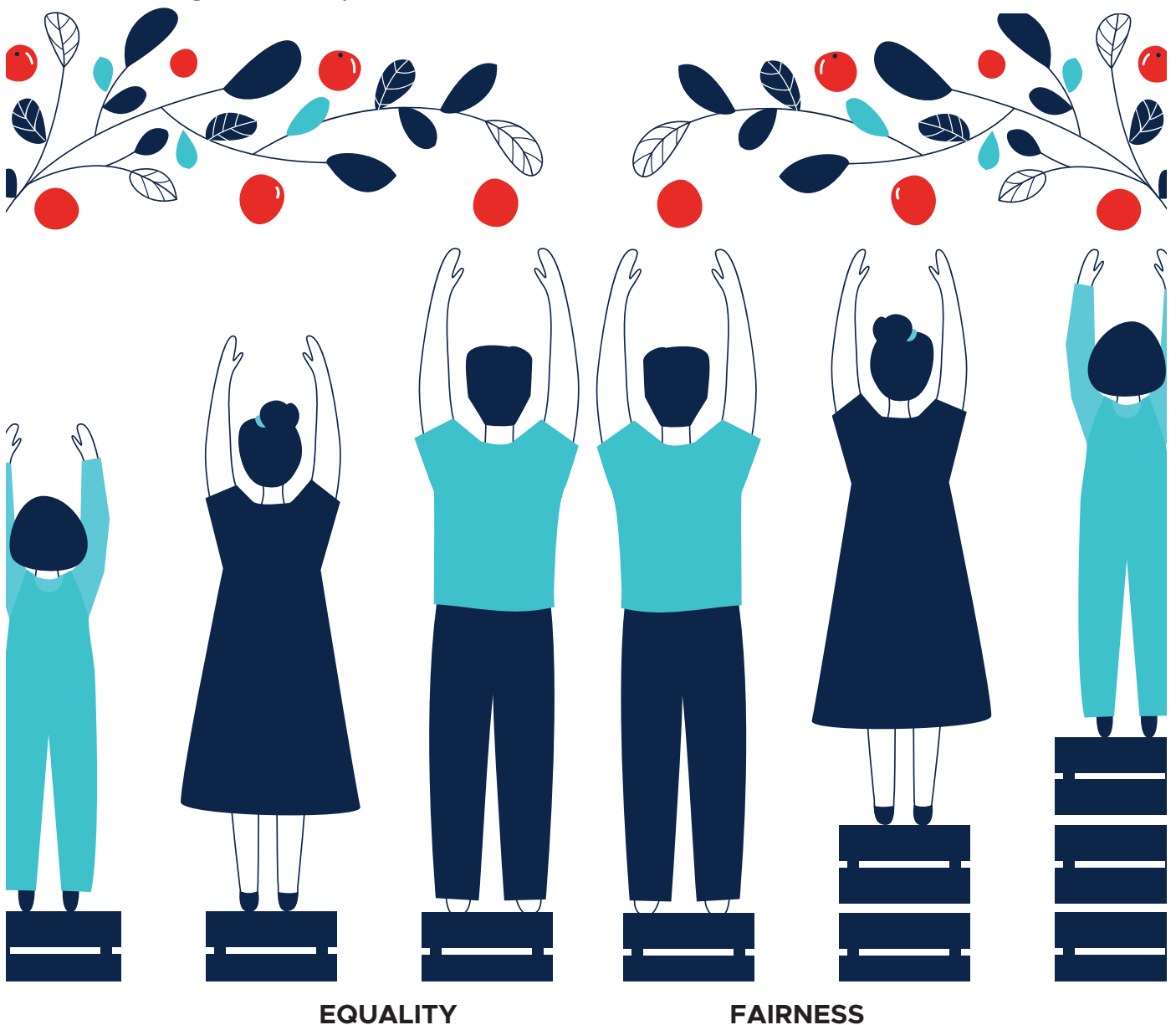
When asked how they would like things to be, most said that they would like to be self-sufficient. Inaccessibility and uncertainty are two common reasons why people ask others for help.



Digital inclusion – how?

In this part of the report, we present our proposals for how we can work together to reduce digital exclusion and create more digital inclusion.

As members of society, we have both rights and responsibilities. As digitalisation increases, we are expected to use more and more digital services to access public services. People with disabilities face different opportunities and challenges. The survey and the interviews revealed that for many people, it is not the internet itself that is difficult. Public authorities therefore need to have digital services that work so everyone can participate on equal terms. Equality involves doing things differently to meet all different needs.



Universal design is the first step

Universal design is a method for creating accessible, user-friendly products, services and environments. It is based on the idea that as many people as possible should be able to use a product or a service from the start, without any special adaptations. This applies to both physical and digital products, as well as services and environments. [14]

When public actors develop digital services or products, universal design should be the obvious starting point. Using universal design increases the chances of getting things right from the start and creating a more inclusive service or product. To do this, it is necessary to find out about the conditions for different groups in society. Launch or invite participants to a focus group with people from the group or groups that you know the least about.



The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation proposes that universal design should be incorporated into all procurements of digital services and products in Region Stockholm.

Dare to place demands on accessibility

To enable as many people as possible to use digital services and products, they must be accessible. Region Stockholm and other public actors need to become better at including demands for accessibility in procurements. Several accessibility standards and directives feature minimum requirements that a service or product should meet. Why not look at things from the opposite perspective? Dare to place tougher demands so more people can use digital services and products.



The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation proposes that Region Stockholm should impose the highest possible demands for accessibility in procurements and specifications.

The importance of excellent alternatives

Digital services and products that are universally designed, accessible and user-friendly can be used by many people. However, there will always be people who cannot use digital services for various reasons. For these people, there should be excellent alternatives to digital services. The Swedish Act on Accessibility to Digital Public Services states that there must be alternatives to digital services. For example,

this could involve citizens getting help from authorities by phone or by letter, or by having forms and social information sent to their home address. There needs to be a combined service within the region that can provide support and guidance for citizens.



The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation proposes that Region Stockholm should introduce a combined service that people who cannot use digital services can turn to.

Launch the country's first regional DigidelCenter

Twenty-eight of Sweden's municipalities currently have what are known as DigidelCenters. These were first started in 2013, as a project to increase citizens' digital participation. A DigidelCenter is a meeting place where people can access technology and get guidance. There is currently no DigidelCenter in Stockholm County. Since 2023, Sweden's 21 regions have been tasked with coordinating regional development in connection with sustainability and digital inclusion. [15] The interviews revealed a need to be able to ask people other than relatives for help or to manage things themselves. A regional DigidelCenter could perform this role, and could contribute towards greater digital inclusion.



The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation proposes that Region Stockholm should introduce the country's first regional DigidelCenter.

Test environments

As discussed above, people with disabilities have different circumstances when it comes to using digital services. This means that different types of solutions are needed to meet their needs. The interviews revealed that many people would like to try out digital services or products without them being 'live'. A number of interviewees described a fear of things going wrong, and that they would feel safe trying out digital services or products in an environment where the risks of making mistakes are low. This would allow more people to take part in the digital society, and would empower individuals. It should also be possible to hold training sessions for both staff and citizens in these test environments.



The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation proposes that Region Stockholm establishes test environments for its e-services.

Offering support

Everyone absorbs information in different ways. Some prefer to talk to a person, while others prefer to watch a video or read step-by-step instructions. To enable as many people as possible to use digital services and products, the associated support services need to be reviewed. For example, when using 1177.se, it is currently possible to get support by phone or by filling in a form. This allows the user to choose how they want to be helped.



The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation proposes that Region Stockholm should inventory and expand the range of support offered to citizens.

Cooperation is the way forward

In order to include more people and create greater digital inclusion, there is a need to share knowledge and experiences with target groups that risk being excluded. Region Stockholm has a cooperation agreement with the disability rights movement. This states that the parties should cooperate on issues affecting people with disabilities. Getting things right from the start contributes towards better solutions that can be used by as many people as possible. It strengthens citizens' integrity and independence, and helps more people to participate on equal terms.

Digitalisation is a fact, and will continue to develop. As an organisation, the Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation receives requests to participate in various projects. This is a good thing. At the same time, we see a value in the region taking advantage of and coordinating knowledge about digital accessibility and participation within its own organisation.



The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation proposes that Region Stockholm should establish a collaboration council for digitalisation and accessibility.

Conclusions

In this report, we have described how people with disabilities are both affected by and influence digital matters, and that many people can – and want to – use products and services, but that more people could use them given the right conditions. It is worth noting that many people find it easier to use products and services for entertainment purposes. What can the public sector learn from streaming services, for example?

The solutions are not always found in costly investments. Instead, digital inclusion is about knowledge and being able to see things from another perspective. It's about challenging the digital norm, and investing in services and products that are easy for all citizens to use. It's also about both lowering the thresholds and raising the requirements; lowering the thresholds for citizens and raising the requirements placed on digital service and product providers.

The Greater Stockholm Disability Rights Federation wants to play an active part in future digital developments. We want to contribute towards positive social development that reduces the digital divides and enables everyone to participate in society on equal terms. Because what's good for people with disabilities is good for all citizens!



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Thank you!

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