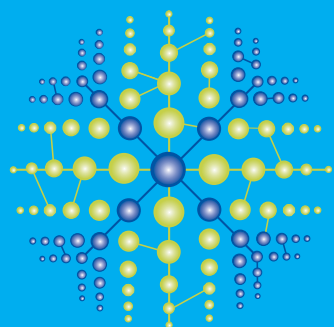


# Newsletter



## eLAC2015

Building inclusive and  
innovative digital  
societies

November  
2010

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## Building inclusive and innovative digital societies in Latin America and the Caribbean



UNITED NATIONS

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# eLAC2010: review of progress achieved during the chairmanship of El Salvador



**Ismenia Moreno,**  
**Ministerial Advisor**  
**on information and**  
**communications**  
**technology, Ministry**  
**of Foreign**  
**Affairs of**  
**El Salvador**

## **What were the principal advances during the period of chairmanship of El Salvador?**

This period saw the adoption of the eLAC2010 Plan of Action, comprising 83 targets. These are grouped into six sections which reflect priority issues in Latin America and the Caribbean. There has been considerable progress towards the agreed targets, which helped to identify opportunities for the development of initiatives, networks and projects; nonetheless, the most significant advances have been in education and in infrastructure and access. As for education, a number of countries have implemented policies to create and strengthen institutions and boost the significance of information and communications technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning process. As for access —whose development contributes directly to achieving progress in other areas of eLAC— the region has seen a boom in mobile telephone use and several initiatives to create public access centres to promote Internet use. The advances in these two areas make it even clearer that broadband access is needed so that infrastructure can be improved, to reduce inequalities in access to technology, overcoming geographical obstacles and reducing the cost of services and equipment.

## **What conclusions can you draw from this period of chairmanship?**

Part of the conclusion is that the second version of the Action Plan has broadened and strengthened several of the targets contained in the previous Plan, and identified opportunities for improvement which we expect to consolidate and implement in eLAC2015, the main goal of which must be to narrow the digital divide —both in the region and throughout the world— for the benefit of society as a whole.

At the same time, it is clear from past experience that follow-up tools and mechanisms are needed in order to systematically facilitate and update the advances achieved in each country; to clearly define the role of each of the actors making up the follow-up mechanism of the plan, creating scope for reviewing progress and solving the problems faced by each actor in the course of his or her activities, and to continue with the structure of focal points and subregional representation on the Bureau.

## **What do you expect from eLAC2015 for the development of the region?**

With a longer timeframe defining the end of the period stipulated at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), this platform will hopefully enable all the projects initiated in earlier periods to reach their concluding stages, producing indicators which will give a clearer picture of the narrowing of the digital divide.

Also, earlier plans revealed a number of problems, gaps and opportunities for improvement, which should be picked up in the new eLAC2015. We therefore look forward to improvements in mechanisms and instruments for follow-up and monitoring, better interaction with national governments, facilitated cooperation between international organizations and other regions, and strengthened public policies to support the implementation of new technology for the use not only of the government sector but also of the target population, that is, society as a whole.

# eLAC2015: The challenges that Peru faces as Chair of the new Plan of Action eLAC2015



**Jaime Honores Coronado, Head of the National Office of E-Government and Information Technology, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Peru**

## **What challenges does Peru face as the incoming Chair of the Presiding Officers?**

The main challenge is to keep the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean moving in the same direction and for each of them to position its strategies at the highest level of Government. That will ensure that the guidelines and actions for the eLAC2015 Plan will remain on the agenda, and will make monitoring them easier.

Another issue is to see that the National Digital Agendas are brought up to date. Most of them are five years old, and technology is changing very quickly. Many targets have been met; some are a work in progress, and others have not been taken into account by the countries. Health and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are areas in which information and communication technologies (ICT) have advanced the least. And there are new areas where ICT can be very useful tools, such as in the event of disasters and for the environment in general.

## **What will the watchword for your term be?**

Several broad guidelines will steer the development of the information society, but all of them must be subject to permanent monitoring in close coordination with ECLAC, civil society and the private sector. We hope the new Plan will be welcomed in the Latin American countries and that they begin to implement it soon so that most of the goals are met by 2015.

## **What are the most relevant goals for this period?**

The goals will be set by the plan to be approved during the Third Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean. Defining them does not fall to the incoming Chair —it is the assembled delegations of the countries that will define regional and national priorities. Broadband is definitely a relevant issue, as is promoting the use of ICT in the health sector. We also believe that it is very important to promote e-government so that citizens regain confidence in the State thanks to simplified transactions, improved processes and applied interoperability.

## **What are your expectations for the information society in the region in 2015?**

A more intercommunicated, better informed society in which technology divides have narrowed. One in which the authorities are fully aware of the potential of ICT as a set of development tools to help them meet their goals and create a more inclusive environment for all.

# eLAC2015: Building inclusive and innovative digital societies

The first Plan of Action for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC2007) was conceived in 2005, during the Regional Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was the first phase of a long-term strategy for the region in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and those of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which see information and communications technologies (ICT) as tools for economic development and social inclusion. ECLAC is the technical secretariat for this regional action plan. The first phase, eLAC2007, had 30 goals (2005-2007); 83 goals were set for the second stage, eLAC2010 (2008-2010).

eLAC is a mature, internationally recognized process providing a platform for public, private and civil action in all of the countries and fostering inter- and intra-regional dialogue and cooperation. It also seeks to provide support for the diagnostic review and design of public

policies, as well as technical support for monitoring and evaluating them.

Although much has been accomplished since the process began, there is still much left to do in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the WSIS goals for 2015. Digital divides remain between the wealthiest and the poorest and between large cities and other areas, and Latin America and the Caribbean is the most unequal subcontinent in the world. There is therefore a risk that the divide could grow even wider. For this reason, and for this plan to be a long-term strategy for public policies that steer ICT towards development and social inclusion, the countries participating in the eLAC2010 process hope to adopt a new Regional Plan of Action, with new goals for 2015, during the Third Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean. The conference will take place from 21 to 23 November in Lima, Peru.

A preliminary document for final political negotiations on the 2015 Regional Plan of Action is needed in order to reach a region-wide consensus leading to a robust, effective eLAC2015. As a starting point, a draft document for the meeting will set out revised priorities and goals in view of new challenges and demands. It will incorporate lessons learned in the region and around the world. This proposal, which emerges from interactions with the national governments and consultations with regional leaders and experts from all sectors of society, also takes the foregoing factors into account.

One of the key inputs for this proposal is the three-stage Regional Public Consultation conducted between December 2009 and July 2010. The consultation sought opinions and proposals from experts and leaders from civil society, the private sector, academia and government in order to encourage broader participation by different sectors in formulating and deciding on public policy within a framework of regional cooperation. The findings from the consultation were one of the building blocks for the eLAC2015 proposal; they were disseminated to the governments and throughout the region to enhance participation in the process.

Another essential resource for drafting the eLAC2015 proposal was the report entitled Monitoring of the eLAC2010 Plan: Advances and Challenges of the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean. The report noted the region's progress towards eLAC2010 goals and identified divides between the region and developed countries. The monitoring report also sets out the status of

the information society in each of the countries and reveals (where possible) the differences among them.

Besides all of the issues addressed in the consultation and the monitoring report, ECLAC, as the technical secretariat, held consultations and meetings with countries of the region to gather their feedback and gain an understanding of their main demands and of what they wanted the proposed plan for Lima to include. Upon conclusion of these three processes, the outcomes of the Plan of Action for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC2010) underwent a critical review in order to incorporate the lessons learned into the draft of the new plan.

This review of the previous plan led to the proposal that the deadlines for its goals be extended in the draft eLAC2015 and that they be subject to interim monitoring and evaluation. The proposed theme for the new Regional Plan of Action is: "eLAC2015: building inclusive and innovative digital societies". The content is structured on the basis of a declaration of principles, guidelines to be implemented in national agendas or plans and a set of specific goals along with their indicators.

The eLAC2015 proposal that was discussed during the Regional Preparatory Meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay, set 8 strategic guidelines and 22 goals for discussion by the countries at the Third Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America, from whence the final Plan of Action for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC2015) will emerge.

The Regional Action Plan eLAC2015 will be approved during the Third Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean. The conference will take place from 21 to 23 November in Lima, Peru.

# Monitoring eLAC2010: The challenges ahead for the region

**This document, which is fundamental input for drafting the regional plan of action eLAC2015, reports on the progress that the region has made towards achieving the goals of eLAC2010 and identifies the challenges that the new phase of the plan poses for Latin America and the Caribbean.**

Monitoring of the eLAC2010 Plan: Advances and challenges of the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean is a document prepared by ECLAC in its capacity as technical secretariat for the Regional Plan of Action, in conjunction with participating governments. It reports on the progress made towards the eLAC2010 goals. The report also identifies the principal divides between the region and developed countries. It assesses the status of the information society in each of the countries of the region and reveals (where possible) the differences between them.

According to the report, eLAC2010 became a benchmark for crafting national policies, creating synergies and reducing the duplication of efforts on the part of the many actors and sectors working on information and communications technologies (ICT).

The monitoring report identified the progress made and the challenges remaining in the areas covered by the Regional Plan of Action

as explained below. It determined that the region has made significant progress, but many challenges are still to be faced to continue moving towards an inclusive, competitive and egalitarian information society that incorporates ICT to the benefit of all the inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean.

## Education

Several countries of the region have implemented policies for ITC use in education, strengthening the associated institutional structure and providing more resources. The greatest progress was in expanding infrastructure, especially the number of computers available to students and teachers. The region's approach to incorporating ICT in the education sector has changed over the past few years, shifting from an emphasis on infrastructure to recognition of the value of ICT in improving the teaching-learning process. But teacher training must be enhanced to effectively incorporate ITC in teaching and learning. National and regional education portals have contributed considerably to e-learning, but they need more interactive educational materials and educational contents tailored to local realities.

## Access and infrastructure

Access and infrastructure are cross-cutting issues affecting all activities that involve exchanging and managing information. There has been considerable progress in this area over the past few years, but not enough to meet current demand. The use of mobile telephones is widespread, but broadband coverage and speed are still limited and its cost is high. Problems such as the rising cost of international connections and the lack of enough local Internet traffic exchange nodes mean that broadband service quality is worse and prices are higher than in developed countries. This is a challenge for the countries of the region.

There are considerable resources in the region's universal access funds that are, in many countries, going unused. These funds could play a significant role in expanding broadband access to heretofore marginalised sectors. Another challenge that the countries face is to make more progress in establishing public access centres, which are essential for social inclusion. Regulation in the region has still not been adapted to the technological changes related to convergence nor to the challenges of universalizing services. Bringing regulations up to date will be a key step in developing a telecommunications infrastructure.

## Health

ICT in health are essential because they can help address the current challenge of ensuring universal access to health care, especially for the most vulnerable sectors. There have been many public and private initiatives in this area over the past few years, ranging from telephone lines to sophisticated systems for transmitting telemedicine data and applications. The overall goals for this area are to expand health care to remote areas, link basic health-care centres to specialists in more fully-equipped centres, gather timely epidemiological data and train personnel in remote locations. Nevertheless, there is consensus that the health sector lags behind others in the incorporation of ITC, making it a challenge for countries as they define specific national policies.

## Public administration

eLAC2010 called for improving the interaction of national and local government entities with citizens, providing better service and making State agencies more transparent. The region has made substantial progress in developing e-government. All the region countries now have government portals, and the number of governments that offer online transactions has increased considerably. But not much headway has been made in terms of interaction with citizens using Web 2.0 tools. The number of government procurement portals has increased. In some countries, more than 80% of the municipalities have a website; some of these allow online transactions. However, there has been limited improvement in basic interoperability,

posing a considerable challenge for crafting national e-gov plans requiring, among other things, the development of common standards.

## Production sector

eLAC2010 goals for the production sector were geared to increase productivity in the region by promoting access to and the use of ICT in production processes at micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, foster the development of companies that produce ICT goods and services (software and applications), support the creative and content industries and encourage telework and other kinds of networked employment. Although the region has made progress in the area of basic ICT infrastructure for companies, that progress has been uneven among different types of companies depending on their size and sector of activity. Moreover, there is a shortage of professionals and technicians qualified in the use of more advanced tools. This shortage affects the ICT industries as well and is thus a niche to be developed by the countries. So far there have been few direct initiatives for companies to incorporate ICT, and there is a need for indirect initiatives that governments can mobilize through government e-procurement policies or by implementing e-billing, among other possibilities.

## Policy instruments and strategies

Most of the countries have made progress in designing and implementing national and/or sectoral digital policies, although with varying degrees of hierarchy, scope and structure. There is also a set of goals that go beyond the sectoral issues referred to above and may be taken into consideration when evaluating policies. For example, the local creation of interactive digital contents for different platforms should be encouraged because at present 70% of the net content used in the region is produced outside the region. Some initiatives are being rolled out to encourage new actors to enter this field of activity. On some cross-cutting issues, such as Internet governance and legal frameworks for developing the information society, several countries have launched interesting, albeit partial, initiatives. On another front, there is new concern as to the appropriate handling of electronic waste, which should be part of the broader issue of ICT and the environment.

# ECLAC's public consultation on ICT priorities enjoys wide circulation

Experts from various sectors of society participated in this online survey, which helped define the relevant guidelines for the information society in the region.

To contribute to the development of the eLAC2015 Plan of Action, ECLAC carried out a public consultation on the priorities and guidelines to be included in the plan. The goal was to encourage and further discussion of the political process while gathering the opinion of experts not directly involved in government deliberations, and to raise awareness in the community of information and communications technologies (ICT) experts as to the importance of the new Plan of Action. The consultation was carried out in three rounds via the Internet; 917 professionals participated.

In the first round of the consultation, 66 people who had already been involved eLAC action plans were asked about their perception of the eLAC2010 Plan of Action and the progress made on its priorities. The second round was conducted in order to assess the thematic areas identified as priorities in eLAC2010 (education, access, health, public administration, productive development, policies and strategies). One hundred three experts and leaders in various areas of digital development and inclusion took part in this phase, in the third round took 801 experts who responded; two thirds were men and one third were women. Participation by sectors was as follows: public sector, 31%; universities and research centres, 25%; civil society, 23%; private sector, 15%; and international organizations, 6%.

The consultation —particularly the third round— was designed as an open, widely disseminated survey. The experts were asked to complete the questionnaires online and distribute them among their peers. Several organizations in the region provided support for this multi-sector effort by posting the questionnaire on their networks or announcing it on their websites or in their newsletters or bulletins.

The experts were asked for their opinion on what the top priorities of a strategy for digital development and inclusion should be, choosing from a set that included

access, e-government, e-learning, e-health and the environment; development of the juridical-legal framework and strengthening of national and sectoral ICT strategies and plans; dissemination of ICT among microenterprises and small businesses; ICT research and development and development of the software, applications and interactive digital content industry.

The experts' responses stressed e-learning, universal broadband access and e-government as the three top priorities. Regarding education, they highlighted the need to improve the quality of education and move towards greater integration of ICT in the teaching-learning process.

As for broadband, broader access to services is required in order to achieve greater penetration and make prices more affordable. In terms of e-government, the experts noted the need to consolidate the transactional phase, improving coordination and interoperability, promoting decentralization and upholding the principles of transparency, personal data protection and civil rights.

Priority number four was to develop competitive skills by putting digital development within the reach of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. In fifth place, the experts noted the need for a more completely developed legal framework to facilitate the full development of the information and knowledge society. The sixth consideration was the need for the countries of the region to consolidate their digital strategies and policies, with the participation of all sectors of society, to promote the implementation of these guidelines through specific initiatives.

The respondents noted the need to expand and enrich the national and regional supply of content and services. Priority number eight was to contribute to sustainable development and deeper mainstreaming of ICT issues in public policy on the environment, energy and clean production as well as for emergencies and disasters. In ninth place was the need to foster innovation and development in ICT-intensive industries. And as priority number 10 was helping ensure access to health care, by increasing the use of ICT in public health systems.





# Regional Preparatory Conference for the Third Ministerial Conference: towards a new regional action plan

Seventeen countries of Latin America and the Caribbean participating in the regional Plan of Action for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean met in Montevideo, Uruguay to agree on the criteria for drafting a preliminary document for the Ministerial Conference in Lima.

The Secretary of the Presidency of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, Alberto Breccia, along with the Chief of ECLAC's Production, Productivity and Management Division, Mario Cimoli, opened the Preparatory Conference on September 23. The agenda included discussion of the current regional plan for the information society (eLAC2010) and the new proposal for eLAC2015. Progress was sought on agreements and proposals in order to arrive at the third Ministerial Conference with a specific proposal for a plan.

Mario Cimoli stressed ECLAC's firm commitment to the eLAC process. "Information and communications technologies (ICT) are a driver of growth with equality and regional integration", he said, noting that meetings like this are very useful for furthering

dialogue and reaching a consensus, leading to a deeper understanding of the need for policies that promote the information society region-wide.

Alberto Breccia highlighted the value of the meeting and the need to enhance digital agendas and ICT as tools for development and for advancing social justice.

During the first day of discussions, representatives from the countries examined the guidelines proposed by ECLAC (which is acting as technical secretariat for eLAC2010) for the new Regional Plan of Action for 2015. During the second day the participants arrived at a well-advanced draft of the Plan, with 8 broad guidelines and 22 goals.

The overall goal is for the region to advance towards universal broadband access and transactional, participatory e-government. Other goals are for ICT to be a tool for inclusive public policy and quality in education and health, and to promote digital innovation and the incorporation of ICT in small enterprises.

# eLAC2015: What the experts say

## Experts respond to the question about what will be the main impact of the new regional plan of action eLAC2015

### Francisco Hartmann,

*Director of Strategy of the Office of Computerization, Ministry of Informatics and Communications (MIC), Cuba*

“No specific area of progress can be singled out. We will continue to strengthen digital agendas and expand access, especially for the lower-income population, and we are going to target information and communications technologies in education. The important thing is that we make good use of our resources and potential”.

### Alfredo Morelli,

*Ambassador, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Worship and International Trade, Argentina*

“The impact of eLAC2015 is substantial. In Argentina, Internet growth has been good but a little chaotic. eLAC will thus help get things in order so that all of the actors in this area can join forces to work on this important consolidation process. Since countries sometimes duplicate each other’s efforts, I think that the only way to move forward is by means of regional and international cooperation”.

### Amparo Arango,

*Coordinator, Technical Support Unit (UTEA), National Commission for the Information and Knowledge Society (CNSIC), Dominican Telecommunications Institute (INDOTEL), Dominican Republic*

“eLAC2015 will have two impacts. One, it will be much more geared to mainstream ICT in sectoral agendas, in education and in health. That will be very important because it will move ITC higher up on each country’s development agenda. And two, we are being more specific and realistic, so we are going to target higher-impact outcomes. The agenda is a lot more straightforward, and we are prioritizing”.

### Victoria Kairuz,

*Director of the National Information and Communications Technologies Plan, Ministry of Communications, Colombia*

“I think that the most important component of eLAC2015 is to strengthen national agendas and bring them into line with a regional agenda, understanding that if we are going to move ahead in access to technology it will have to go hand-in-hand with the use and appropriation of the contents and services that we can access over these media and networks. Progress on broadband access makes no sense without the massification of services in all sectors”.

### Rómulo Emiliani,

*Manager, Office of Administration and Projects, National Authority for Government Innovation, Panama*

“I think that eLAC2015 will have an impact on all of the countries of the region, especially in promoting technology for the social well-being of the citizenry in general”.

### Juan Francisco González,

*Head of Electronic Government and Systems Integration, El Salvador*

“The eLAC2015 exercise brings together all of today’s technological advances, and those advances are going to spur progress on all of the social goals set for technology in our countries. Having everyone committed to a benchmark instrument forces us to track the progress being made, not just for monitoring purposes but to focus on the public function of technology”.

### Nadia Márquez,

*Coordinator, Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of People’s Power for Science, Technology and Medium Industry, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*

“In my opinion, the most important thing is for eLAC to promote and further greater social inclusion. ICT are a tool for the equitable development

of our countries, for narrowing divides through cooperation, integration and solidarity. We have countries with different levels of development and countries with a lot of expertise. So we feel that the agenda will indeed help, but this should always be with a view to social development and citizen inclusion in ICT”.

### **Jaime Honores Coronado,**

*Head of the National Office of e-Government and Information Technology, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Peru*

“The most important thing is that we will arrive with a more strongly consensus-based document that has fewer goals and is more realistic, that citizens can understand. Because we are emphasizing issues that are directly related to citizenship, education, e-government, health and broadband, I think it will be different from other meetings where there were a lot of generalities and many ambitious goals that at the end of the day made tracking and monitoring a little more complicated”.

### **Barrymore Felicien,**

*Chief Public Utilities Officer, Ministry of Communications, Works, Transport and Public Utilities, Saint Lucia*

“As far as my country is concerned, I think that eLAC 2015 will help us focus on and prioritize the most relevant areas, such as ICT and education, to integrate ICT into the curriculum, equip schools with computers and train teachers in ICT. That is why we will continue to work on the eLAC process and hope to forge a robust partnership with Latin America”.

### **Rowland Espinoza,**

*Vice-Minister of Science and Technology, Costa Rica*

“The biggest challenge for eLAC2015 is to achieve broadband access and connectivity for most of the population of Latin America, and to narrow the digital divide. The challenge is, above all, to turn access to broadband, contents, applications, ICT and digital contents into a tool for increasing the income levels of the population, reducing the social divide and furthering sustainable development in the region”.

### **José Clastornik,**

*Executive Director, Agency of Electronic Government and Information Society (AGESIC), Presidency, Uruguay*

“The impact of the eLAC process is to put the information society on the public agenda of each and every country in the region and of the region as a whole. Performance on this issue is uneven among our countries. The benefit of these working groups is that they act as a network for policy continuity across the region. The impact is to put this issue on the agenda, make it clear for the countries, renew their commitment and encourage the incorporation of ICT in society with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of our citizens”.

### **Martha Patricia Cardoso,**

*Government Director for Coordination of the Information and Knowledge Society, Secretariat of Communications and Transport, Mexico*

“One of the impacts we are hoping for, and one we are working for, is to continue strengthening regional cooperation to achieve greater access coverage. We also hope to stress the need for national digital agendas that include all sectors in our countries. We should be aware that connectivity is not the entire story. The region needs tools to take advantage of that connectivity and appropriate the technologies”.

### **Livia Sobota,**

*Information Society Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazil*

“The impact of eLAC2015 will be to show the region and the world that Latin America and the Caribbean is no longer outside the information society. Quite to the contrary: the region has much to contribute, working with other countries on these policies. It is only by cooperating that our countries will achieve development and social inclusion and move towards an inclusive information society”.

### **Ana María Troncoso,**

*Coordinator for the Americas, Directorate of Energy, Science and Technology, and Innovation (DECYTI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chile*

“I believe that this consensus-based proposal emerging from a broad process of consultations with governments, civil society and all of the key actors of the information society in the region will have a positive impact, mainly by potentially incorporating information society issues in the digital agendas of our countries—ideally, in the agendas of the national public entities that have some relationship to the commitments made”.

# ICT highlights: advances in the field

## Sharing e-government

*The Organization of American States (OAS) has launched a virtual platform offering access to best practices in e-government.*

eGobex is the name of this new initiative by OAS. In July 2010, through its Secretariat for Political Affairs, OAS launched this virtual platform which is a great help to governments which are setting up or improving e-government. It enables the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to share e-government solutions and, thereby, to progress in the modernization of government structures.

The virtual platform was created at the suggestion of the governments of the region, in the framework of the activities of the regional e-government network, as a facility designed to offer the governments from Latin America and the Caribbean access to a database in which they can find solutions to any problems they may have in the conduct of administrative procedures via the internet. The platform also allows any government which has come up with a solution that might be applicable in other countries to upload it to a database, thereby sharing its achievements with other governments.

For access to eGobex, registration is required. This gives access to the full contents of the portal and its tools and solutions, which can be viewed and downloaded. National, provincial and local governments will find numerous solutions to their concerns, doubts or problems in the implementation of e-government.

## Virtual higher education: learning throughout a lifetime

*Colombia has launched an initiative which enables people to continue their higher education through a high quality distance-learning facility.*

In order to provide all Colombians with access to higher education and raise the number of students at that level, Colombia has launched a virtual higher-education campaign, designed to exploit fully the advantages of ICTs for the educational development of the country's population.

The campaign seeks to attract parents, young people, workers and any person desirous of self-improvement and education through certified virtual teaching programmes, making it possible to study without attending lessons in a classroom, simply by logging onto a computer. In order to be able to correctly implement such a programme, teachers in higher-education institutions were trained as early as 2005 in the use of ICT, so that they would be comfortable with them and in order to change paradigms and approaches to knowledge.

The virtual education programmes available in Colombia come under an approved registration system which guarantees their quality and is a prerequisite for any institution offering an academic programme, whether virtual or classroom-based. There are currently 194 virtual education programmes in the country: 34 at university level, 52 specialized courses, 7 master's-degree courses, 52 technological and 49 technical courses, totalling over 29,000 students and 3,200 subjects. These are listed at [www.colombiaprende.edu.co](http://www.colombiaprende.edu.co).

## Mobile medicine

*Health applications on mobile phones are expanding rapidly. A mobile-phone based survey in Mexico helped to research the feared A (H1N1) influenza epidemic and measure its spread.*

In March 2010, the website [www.mobilehealthnews.com](http://www.mobilehealthnews.com) estimated that there were around 6,000 health-related mobile-phone applications, many of which were free of charge. These products cover a variety of areas, from how to find a doctor to instructions for exercising. Many of these applications, however, are not medically certified. They are therefore seen as sources more of guidance than of diagnosis, since the latter should always come from a health professional.

Applications not involving diagnosis are those which show trends in certain illnesses, such as Swine Flu Tracker by IntuApps, a program that can be downloaded onto a mobile phone. It can let the user know whether there are any cases of influenza A(H1N1) in his or her vicinity by showing the user's position on a map which also displays the known cases of influenza. Another influenza-related application is Cold and Flu Companion, which shows the numbers of persons suffering from colds or influenza in the area where the owner of the mobile currently is.

One way of using technology for the benefit of health has received applause: the Mexican initiative of Telefónica México and the German corporation Myriad Group AG to survey the country's population on the subject of the A(H1N1) influenza epidemic. Jointly with the Mexican Ministry of Health and researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health, the two companies developed a brief questionnaire consisting of six questions, which was sent using the same system that Telefónica México uses to deliver top-ups to over 18 million users. It was the first time such mobile phone-based research had been carried out in Mexico, and the largest health survey ever conducted anywhere by means of mobile phones. This application has been shortlisted for the Global Messaging Awards 2010 in the category "Messaging Application or Service: Social Use", owing to its social character and the invaluable information it has provided to scientists seeking to understand the potential pandemic of the virus, as their studies required a strong corpus of data on how the virus was spreading.

## Chile guarantees net neutrality by law

*In August, the Government of Chile passed an Internet and net neutrality act, making Chile the first country in the world to legislate on this issue.*

It was in 2007 that the National Congress of Chile first discussed a bill that would guarantee Internet users' ability to use, send, receive and offer any legal content, application or service over the Internet without arbitrary blocks or discrimination. And on World Telecommunications Day (17 May), Chile's Minister of Transport and Telecommunications, Felipe Morandé, announced that the Government would make passage of the law a priority.

Indeed, three months later, on August 26, Sebastián Piñera, President of the Republic, signed the Internet and net neutrality act into law. The act, which also was published in the Official Gazette of Chile, regulates transparency issues, establishes the principle of net neutrality and sets up clear, straightforward procedures for filing complaints when promised commercial and technical terms are not met. "This is definitely a step towards a more transparent broadband market, spurring competition based on quality of service", said the Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications.

This law, the first in the world, enjoyed support from all political quarters in Congress, and, in the words of Undersecretary of Telecommunications Jorge Atton, ushered in "a new, consumer-centred era in the Internet industry. Now it is the users who are in control, choosing the provider with the best service and navigating the Web freely without abusive blocks or restrictions".

The lawmakers saw the net neutrality act as a significant step towards protecting the rights of Internet users. Its passage was widely highlighted in the international press as a welcome initiative in the field of telecommunications.

The Department of Telecommunications (SUBTEL) has 90 days from enactment to issue an implementing order for the law; it should thus be ready by late November 2010.

## Free Wi-fi access is spreading throughout Argentine cities

*A variety of initiatives to provide citizens with free Internet access are taking shape in some of the provinces of Argentina.*

Free Internet access for city-dwellers is a growing trend in Argentina. Three of the country's cities are on the way to the establishment of free Wi-Fi: Córdoba Capital, San Luis and La Plata are preparing to connect their residents to the wireless network.

In Córdoba, the connection will be established by July 2011. The city will provide free Wi-Fi access for 1.5 million people, between the inhabitants of Córdoba, Villa María, Rio Cuarto and San Francisco. Daniel Alejandro Pastorino, Undersecretary for Informatics and Telecommunications in the Government of Córdoba Province, explains that a decision has been made to develop a wireless network to serve as the platform for a set of services which will be used not only for Internet access in educational institutions, but also for public administration and service provision to the community of citizens resident in the area.

In July 2010 the province of San Luis passed a law guaranteeing free Internet access throughout its territory, taking a major step forward towards ensuring e-inclusion for its citizens. Approved unanimously by the provincial Senate, the project provides for free access through the information superhighway. Connectivity can also be provided through free Wi-Fi access.

The example given by these cities is being followed by La Plata, whose Deliberative Council met in August 2010 to consider a draft bylaw whereby the city would guarantee Wi-Fi access, with a minimum data transfer rate of 512 Kbps and access points in busy public places such as bus terminals, museums, cultural centres, libraries, parks and the zoo. One area in the city which already benefits from free Wi-Fi is the Plaza Moreno, where users can surf the Web freely on their laptops.

Furthermore, in August the Government of Argentina began working to create public wireless Internet access areas throughout the country, as announced by the country's Minister of Planning and Public Investment and Services, Julio de Vido. As instructed by President Cristina Fernández, he explained that the country would soon have large areas with free Internet access.

## Brazil, a giant that moves millions in electronic commerce

*Over the past few years, Internet commerce has become a major channel for buying and selling services, moving millions of dollars each year. E-commerce is no longer just for geeks. It is a booming business.*

It is hardly news that e-commerce has become a formal business channel around the world. Buying goods and services over the Internet is no longer a novelty —it is a part of life for the millions of people who do so every day. In Latin America and the Caribbean, e-commerce grew by 39.2% in 2009 and moved US\$ 21.8 billion, according to a study by Visa. The study also found that between 2007 and 2009 online purchases in the region grew by 106%; the greatest increase was in Brazil, at 170%. The Visa report noted that Brazil accounts for the largest share of the region's e-commerce: 61% of total online consumption in the region. And e-commerce in Brazil accounts for 0.84% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) —the highest percentage in Latin America and the Caribbean. During the first half of 2010, e-commerce in Brazil generated some US\$ 3.72 billion in sales, up 40% from the same period in the previous year according to the consulting firm e-bit.

A study by e-Consulting Corp. puts the number of online buyers in Brazil at 16.9 million, with credit cards being used for 55% of Internet transactions. The products with the highest share of Internet sales in the first half of 2010 were CDs, DVDs and games, followed by health and beauty products. Books and newspapers came in third.

But it is not just e-commerce that is breaking records in Brazil. For the first time the Internet led in bank transactions in Brazil, with 30.64% of such transactions being made online versus 29.79% at ATMs, according to a Central Bank of Brazil study on bank transactions during 2009.

# Broadband for all: a new challenge for Latin America

*In August 2010, a meeting took place in Chile for the purpose of strengthening the market for broadband Internet access.*

Government officials from Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay met at ECLAC headquarters and held the first meeting of the Regional Dialogue on the Costs of International Connections and their Impact on Broadband Prices.

The participants agreed that the region is well behind world standards in broadband access and use, owing to the high price of the service and low incomes among the population. In the developed countries, the monthly charge for 1Mbps internet access represents less than 1% of the citizens' average monthly incomes, but for many countries in the region the cost exceeds 10% of that average.

The participants in the meeting therefore signed an agreement for a working group which will include multilateral efforts. ECLAC, which will act as the technical secretariat for the group of participating countries, will be responsible for coordinating and facilitating discussions, as well as convening meetings and disseminating their results to other countries which may be interested in taking part in the initiative. ECLAC was further mandated to conduct an analysis on demand for broadband access at the regional level and an assessment of the limitations of Web hosting, and to collect information on peering points and on best practices in broadband policy.

Participants in the meeting agreed that it is vital to move forward with the sustainable development of the regional broadband market, and also to promote other alternatives such as the installation of submarine fibre-optic cables and the promotion of interconnections in the various countries through regional fibre-optic networks, exploiting the developments already taking place in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. This was explained by Jorge Atton, the Undersecretary for Telecommunications of Chile, the country which proposed the creation of this forum for regional discussions. The participants also decided to set up mechanisms for best practices in broadband policy and to seek to reduce broadband charges to strengthen digital inclusion.

The second meeting of the Regional Dialogue will take place on November 19 and 20, 2010 in Lima, Peru. Its purpose will be to review progress on implementing the agreements reached during the first meeting, to consider the study requested from ECLAC during the first meeting, and to determine the position of service providers on the subject of the meeting.

## Brazil invests in broadband

A country that is already making progress towards universal access to broadband and lowering its cost is Brazil. In May 2010, the authorities announced an investment plan worth 13 million reais for the purpose of expanding broadband Internet access to the entire country by 2014, by which time there will be 40 million connected households, as well as making the service less expensive. The National Broadband Plan (PNBL) provides for a contribution of 3.2 billion reais to the State-owned company Telebrás, which will manage the project and develop it together with private-sector companies, which will have access to soft loans with special conditions from the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES), a State-owned institution, for a total of 7.5 billion reais.



## @LIS2-ECLAC project: progress and challenges

The project carried out by ECLAC under the Alliance for the Information Society, phase 2 (@LIS2) has posted significant achievements in promoting the information society in the region, and there are interesting challenges ahead.

The European Union's @LIS2 programme is organized around three lines of action. One of them, the Inclusive Political Dialogue and Exchange of Experiences coordinated and co-financed by ECLAC, seeks to put the information society issue on the policy agendas of the countries of Latin America so that more resources are channelled to research and development (R&D) in this area and civil society participates more in the generation of public policies. Another goal is to strengthen the region's social, political and technical ties with Europe and support the countries of Latin America as they develop information society strategies such as the Plan of Action for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, eLAC.

The goals of the @LIS2-ECLAC project are to narrow the digital divide and promote, improve and expand dialogue on and the application of information and communications technologies (ICT) in the region. The project also seeks to foster the development of an inclusive, competitive, innovative and sustainable information society in Latin America.



## Progress

One of the most relevant developments during the first phase of implementing @LIS2–ECLAC under eLAC has been the preparation of a new Regional Plan of Action based on consultations with the countries participating in eLAC2010. It has raised key policy issues concerning the information society in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as establishing a policy hierarchy and coordinating policies on this issue in the countries of the region and working toward intra-regional cooperation by identifying potential joint projects, such as electronic medical records and interoperability in the administration of intra-regional trade. Sub-regional efforts to develop regional broadband are now being coordinated. A good example is the initiative launched by the Government of Chile and coordinated by ECLAC to strengthen the broadband market in South America. To this end, a working agreement was signed during the first meeting of the Regional Dialogue on the Costs of International Connections and their Impact on Broadband Prices, calling for a multilateral effort to massify broadband access and lower its costs.

@LIS2–ECLAC has also produced important studies on specific issues related to the information society, such as ICT in education, access and the production sector. ECLAC has spearheaded making universal broadband access a priority on the development agendas of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Technical assistance has been provided to several countries in the region that are developing ICT policies. Some examples are the training given in Costa Rica on telecommunications regulatory frameworks; support for designing e-government plans in El Salvador and Ecuador; and workshops held in Argentina and El Salvador at which several countries exchanged experiences to support the implementation of ICT policies in education; and support for designing policies to promote the software industry in Ecuador.

The @LIS2–ECLAC project has also helped give continuity to the Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC)

and its work on generating harmonized indicators for measuring ICT in the region.

A significant achievement was the Latin America and Caribbean representation at the fifth European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean Ministerial Forum on the Information Society, held in Segovia, Spain, in March of this year, where agreements were reached on actions and proposals for cooperation between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean. ECLAC was asked to follow up on the initiatives agreed and monitor their implementation in specific projects.

## Challenges

Under eLAC, one of the challenges that ECLAC faces as the Technical Secretariat for the 2015 Regional Plan of Action is how to support the implementation, continuity and deepening of regional cooperation initiatives in areas such as universal broadband access and other projects that may be approved in the framework of the Third Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean. ECLAC will also seek to promote concrete mechanisms for cooperation between the region and Europe in keeping with its mandate from the Ministerial Forum in Segovia.

ECLAC hopes to expand its current activities on two fronts: increase technical assistance and the exchange of experiences, linking them to eLAC initiatives; and make more systematic use of case studies in order to propose a useful interpretative framework for designing information society policies in the region.

Related to OSILAC, the @LIS2–ECLAC challenge is to help make the Observatory a vehicle for identifying and disseminating good practices in the region.

In keeping with these challenges and goals, ECLAC, in conjunction with the European Union, will organize an international seminar next year for discussing and reflecting on the general course of development strategies and ICT.

# News in brief

## El Salvador aims at mobile number portability

It is expected that by 2012, mobile number portability (MNP) will be fully in place in El Salvador. This means that the user will be the owner of his or her mobile number. The Legislative Assembly has made this possible through an amendment to the Telecommunications Act. MNP will enable the users of over 7.5 million existing mobile numbers to switch to a different mobile phone provider without losing their numbers.

## Paraguay incorporates information and communications technologies (ICT) into education

In Paraguay, there are computers in only 5% of educational establishments, and in those few, there are 185 students to each computer. Only 10% of teachers have access to a computer. President Fernando Lugo has therefore signed a decree establishing the Presidential Commission for the Incorporation of Information and Communications Technologies into the National Educational System. The Commission will be tasked with promoting the implementation of public policies to ensure access to ICT and help to narrow the digital divide. The goal is to move towards a “1:1” model, giving access to one computer per student and per teacher.

## A virtual library for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

In Caracas, a project entitled Alma Mater Digital Library is being implemented. This seeks to build a virtual environment containing scientific information, electronic resources and national and foreign texts, to guarantee the quality of higher education. The project, which is being developed by Cuban and Venezuelan experts, provides interactive spaces for social networking in support of research and learning.

## “Online consultations” for health authorities in the Dominican Republic

Thanks to an online system, Dominicans will be able to monitor official authorizations both for medicines and for cosmetics and sanitary and hygiene products. In this way, by visiting the platform [www.drogasyfarmacias.gov.do](http://www.drogasyfarmacias.gov.do), they will be informed of any change or modification that has been made to those products, thereby ensuring that the products are safe and of good quality. The website of the Medicines and Pharmacies Directorate provides the population with requirements, guides, forms and working tools that are needed for requesting a health-related formality.

## **The Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia equips future teachers with computers**

The Plurinational State of Bolivia has 27 teacher training colleges and 20 academic units. In August 2010, these educational institutions were equipped with computers so that the majority of teacher training establishments would be provided with the technology, in order to provide technology-based training to future teachers. Each of the teacher training colleges received between 40 and 80 computers, depending on student numbers and the existing equipment, and in each of the Academic Units, 25 computers. The country's three indigenous universities were to receive computers in the second half of the year.

## **Panama promotes free Wi-Fi access**

For some 80% of the population of Panama to have free wireless internet access; that is the goal of the National Internet Network project being conducted by the Government of Panama. First created in 2008, the project is being implemented by the Universal Service and Access Advisory Board, so that the population can use the service in public places. Up to now, the service is available at 651 access points spread across 22 Panamanian cities, and there are already 50,000 registered users.

## **The Government of Uruguay aims to double the scale of Internet access by 2012**

The Telecommunications Bureau (DINATEL) of Uruguay reports that the Government expects that 60% of the country's households will have broadband Internet access by 2012. Currently, 31% of households are connected —33.5% with fixed connections and 66.4% mobile— in a country which the Cisco Broadband Barometer lists in third place in Latin America in terms of broadband access. The Government's ultimate goal is to bring broadband to the entire population.

## **Medical care via SMS messaging for expecting mothers in Peru**

The Wawa Net project, involving the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Cayetano Heredia University of Peru and Telefónica Movistar, is a pilot project aiming to bring medical advice on pregnancy to 5,000 low-income pregnant women in Peru. Implementation will begin in the El Callao province. Thanks to electronic clinical histories and open software, pregnant women will receive advice on nutrition and on how to respond to certain alarming symptoms which may occur during pregnancy. The project also provides for a free helpline on which women can obtain information on issues such as health centres or emergency services.

## **ICT and the environment in Costa Rica**

In harmony with the worldwide trend towards caring for the environment, ICT businesses will be able to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions thanks to a development agreement between the Costa Rican Chamber of Information and Communications Technologies (CAMTIC) and the Centre for Technology Management and Industrial Informatics (CEGESTI). The agreement seeks to promote projects and initiatives to strengthen the capacity of the technology sector in the promotion of sustainable development. Thus, enterprises will be able to receive training free of charge in the area of environmental management, particularly on greenhouse gas emissions, the "green office" and waste management.

# Latest publications



## Monitoring of the eLAC2010 Plan: Advances and Challenges of the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean

*Information Society Programme, ECLAC. October 2010. pp. 100*

This document presents the progress made in relation to the goals contained in the Plan of Action for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC2010). It also identifies the region's main gaps with respect to developed countries, assesses the position of each country in the region and, where possible, draws attention to differences within countries.

## Public policies for the information society: a shared vision?

*Project documents, No. 314 (LC/W.314), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Guerra, Masiel and Valeria Jordán, March 2010, pp. 26*

This document identifies the reasons why ICT constitutes a public policy objective and the elements that distinguish an ICT policy, given the particular characteristics of the issue. It also describes the extent to which these policies are being implemented in the countries of the region, as well as in Spain and Portugal, identifying different initiatives to promote ICT-related activities, such as eLAC.

## Innovar para crecer: Desafíos y oportunidades para el desarrollo sostenible e inclusivo en Iberoamérica

*(LC/L.3138), Santiago, Chile. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Ibero-American Secretariat (ECLAC/SEGIB), December 2009, pp. 237*

This publication assesses the region's capacity to innovate, analyses the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for the countries in this regard and identifies forums and activities that can help to strengthen this capacity. The study's strategic concern

is to help to define policy guidelines on attaining sustainable growth objectives within a framework of greater inclusion.

## La sociedad de la información en América Latina y el Caribe Desarrollo de las tecnologías y tecnologías para el desarrollo

*Libros de la CEPAL, No. 98 (LC/G.2363-P), Santiago, Chile, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). United Nations publication, Sales No. E.08.II.G.72.Peres, Wilson and Martin Hilbert (eds.), February 2009, pp. 388*

This book examines the development of information societies in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and serves as a tool for formulating public policies on information and communications technologies (ICT).

## Las TIC para el crecimiento y la igualdad: renovando las estrategias de la sociedad de la información

*ECLAC, November 2010, pp. 102*

This document highlights the progress of the information society and sets out the need for a new generation of strategies to make the most of the window of opportunity that the new ICT paradigm is opening for the region.

## Acelerando la revolución digital: la banda ancha en América Latina y el Caribe

*Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/ Regional Dialogue on the Information Society (ECLAC/DIRSI) Hernán Galperín and Valeria Jordán (eds.), November 2010. pp. 270*

The chapters of this book give an account of the importance of broadband Internet access as a platform for economic growth, job creation, integration into productive innovation networks and access to new markets, as well as for enhancing the efficiency of public goods provision.

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