

ABOUT ECLAC/CDCC

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was established in 1948 to support Latin American governments in the economic and social development of that region. Subsequently, in 1966, the Commission (ECLA, at that time) established the subregional headquarters for the Caribbean in Port of Spain to serve all countries of the insular Caribbean, as well as Belize, Guyana and Suriname, making it the largest United Nations body in the subregion.

At its sixteenth session in 1975, the Commission agreed to create the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) as a permanent subsidiary body, which would function within the ECLA structure to promote development cooperation among Caribbean countries. Secretariat services to the CDCC would be provided by the subregional headquarters for the Caribbean. Nine years later, the Commission's widened role was officially acknowledged when the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) modified its title to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Key Areas of Activity

The ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean (ECLAC/CDCC secretariat) functions as a subregional think-tank and facilitates increased contact and cooperation among its membership. Complementing the ECLAC/CDCC work programme framework, are the broader directives issued by the United Nations General Assembly when in session, which constitute the Organisation's mandate. At present, the overarching articulation of this mandate is the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Towards meeting these objectives, the Secretariat conducts research; provides technical advice to governments upon request; organizes intergovernmental and expert group meetings; helps to formulate and articulate a regional perspective within global forums; and introduces global concerns at the regional and subregional levels.

Areas of specialization include trade, statistics, social development, science and technology, and sustainable development, while actual operational activities extend to economic and development planning, demography, economic surveys, assessment of the socio-economic impacts of natural disasters, climate change, data collection and analysis, training, and assistance with the management of national economies.

The ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean also functions as the Secretariat for coordinating the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The scope of ECLAC/CDCC activities is documented in the wide range of publications produced by the subregional headquarters in Port of Spain.

MEMBER COUNTRIES

Antigua and Barbuda	Haiti
The Bahamas	Jamaica
Barbados	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Belize	Saint Lucia
Cuba	Saint Vincent
Dominica	and the Grenadines
Dominican Republic	Suriname
Grenada	Trinidad and Tobago
Guyana	

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Sint Maarten
Turks and Caicos Islands
United States Virgin Islands

CONTENTS

Director's Desk:

Digital divides and inclusion in the Caribbean “new normal”	3
A deep dive into Caribbean digital divides: A cross-country comparison on internet and computer access and use in the Caribbean	4
Illustrating internet speed divides in the Caribbean during COVID-19	10
Investing in an inclusive digital future for the Caribbean	16

Regular Features

Recent and upcoming meetings	19
List of Recent ECLAC Documents and Publications	19

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DIRECTOR'S DESK:

DIGITAL DIVIDES AND INCLUSION IN THE CARIBBEAN “NEW NORMAL”

The pace of the digital transformation of the Caribbean has increased rapidly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with more governments, businesses and individuals using information and communication technologies (ICTs) than ever before. However, as the digital realm has become more important, the cost of exclusion from it has also increased, and threatens to deepen inequalities in the subregion.

This issue of FOCUS highlights issues relevant to digital divides and digital inclusion among and within Caribbean countries in the “new normal”. In particular, the articles will review key ICT statistics; discuss the Caribbean internet speed divide; and explore financing for digital inclusion.

Inclusion is a central concern of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is evident in its foundational principles to “leave no one behind” and “reach the furthest behind first”.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10, “Reduce inequality within and among countries”, is of particular relevance to discussions on digital inclusion, as the digitally excluded tend to be the most marginalized in society, including indigenous peoples, rural communities, women, people with low education or income, migrants and refugees, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Seeking to support evidence-based policymaking for digital inclusion in the Caribbean, the article presents data related to access to the internet and digital technology for 24 Caribbean countries and territories. Comparing data for such a broad set of countries to global and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) averages, provides new insights into the

digital development of the Caribbean and contextualizes the intraregional disparities. While the lack of disaggregated data for these indicators remains a challenge, it demonstrates that there are valuable insights to be drawn from the data that is currently available.

The private sector is becoming increasingly important as a source of recent and granular data to support policy- and decision-making. Using data from Ookla (a global leader in network intelligence and connectivity insights), we analyse internet speeds and the internet speed divide in the Caribbean since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By examining various groups of Caribbean countries, global medians and targets for internet speeds, we provide the context necessary to understand one facet of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the digital development of the subregion. We also map the data for four Caribbean countries, to illustrate the possibilities that such granular data offers in terms of identifying disparities.

The importance and relevance of digital inclusion to the Caribbean cannot be overstated. Caribbean governments that wish to harness the many benefits that digital technologies can provide, must be prepared to address the risks and threats that accompany them.

In this FOCUS, we emphasize that in order to do so, the development and deployment of new technologies needs to have a solid foundation in human rights. Achieving this goal will, however, require Caribbean governments to invest in the development of new technologies specifically designed for and adapted to Caribbean circumstances. There are many options available for financing the inclusive digital transformation of the Caribbean. The challenge, however, lies in identifying which solutions would be appropriate for the regional, subregional, and national contexts of each government. In reviewing their funding and financing options, Caribbean governments must therefore expend considerable effort on mapping current policies, goals and priorities; the current financing and funding environment; applicable regulations; and the institutional landscape, with digital inclusion in mind.

Yours in Focus

Diane Quarless