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Accessibility of data published by national statistical offices in Latin America and the Caribbean

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National statistical offices (NSOs) disseminate statistics through various mechanisms and channels, including publications, databases, information services, and, increasingly, institutional websites and/or institutional data portals. Through their institutional websites, data can be made available both for direct consultation by users and for reuse by automated systems, in formats intended for human reading or machine processing.

This work takes place within complex sociotechnical ecosystems. These networks are made up of people and technologies that interact with each other at multiple scales. These interactions are governed by norms, such as technical standards and legal frameworks, that shape how statistical information flows from production to use.

This document focuses specifically on access to data through the institutional websites of NSOs and does not aim to address the complexities associated with the governance of statistical data more broadly, both within and outside the producing institutions. Instead, it focuses on the extent to which these institutions enable open and reusable access to statistical data such as through the use of application programming interfaces (APIs) and machine-readable data formats.

It is taken for granted that official statistical systems will effectively share statistical data in a way that is accessible to those who wish to employ it. That being said, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and automated

data aggregation systems are fundamentally transforming this landscape. These technologies, including large language models and third-party data platforms, increasingly serve as intermediaries between NSOs and end users. This affects not only the accessibility of official statistics but also their interpretation and application. This introduces risks. Inaccessible or hard to access statistical data can lead the inappropriate data reuse, compromised accuracy, loss of provenance, and overall loss of NSOs credibility (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine et al., 2021; United Nations, 2025).

To begin to address this needed analysis, a typology of data accessibility is created and an overview of the accessibility of statistical data from NSOs in Latin America and the Caribbean is presented. Three persistent challenges in the region are identified: prioritization of human-readable over machine-readable data, overly complex data platforms, and unclear data architecture.

Finally, recommendations are offered to address these challenges: prioritizing dual-purpose data formats, simplifying access pathways, and ensuring comprehensive documentation. These requirements may appear daunting. Thus, implementation guidance is provided that underscores the importance of simplicity, open-source tools, and modularity.

All of these ultimately can help reduce the resource burden of improving data accessibility in the region.

1. Definition of data accessibility

This analysis is limited to the statistical data released by NSOs in the region.¹ In terms of scope, it focuses on the exchange of aggregated data rather than microdata, which poses its own privacy challenges (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine et al., 2017).

Currently, there is a lack of dedicated mechanisms for systematically measuring the accessibility of national statistical data across Latin America and the Caribbean. Existing global platforms and indices for measuring open government, such as the *Open Government Partnership's Open Government Database* (Open Government Partnership, 2020) and the *Open Knowledge Foundation's Global Open Data Index* (Open Knowledge Foundation, 2017), do not focus on the accessibility of national statistical data given the projects' broader focus.

What is known is that national statistics are provided in disparate formats, with each country employing different data architecture, including but not limited to metadata standards, definitional frameworks, and methods of presentation.

Building on the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, data accessibility is defined as a dimension of Principle 1: Relevance, Impartiality, and Equal Access. Equal access facilitates the practical utility of statistical data and "honour citizens' entitlement to public information" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2014).

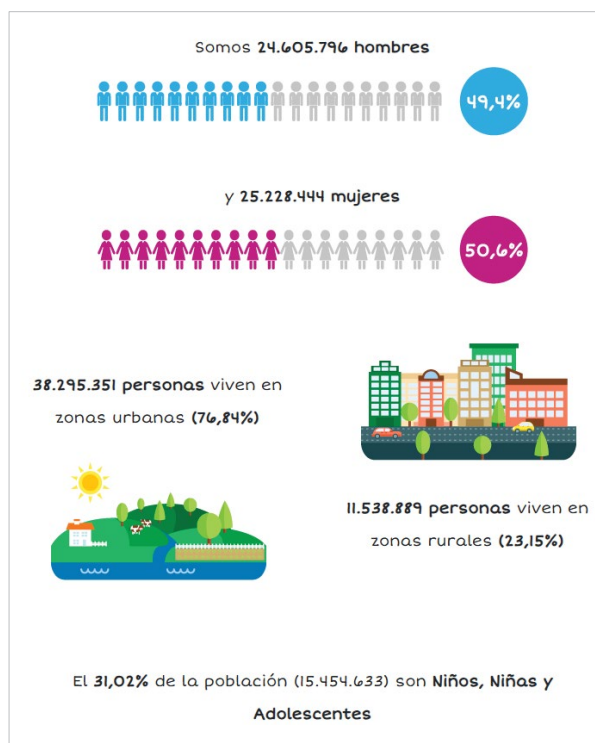
2. The importance of data accessibility

Data accessibility is a broad concept. Data can be made accessible to humans and to machines, with each of these looking very different. Figure 1 depicts data accessibility for two different audiences: humans on the left, with a child-appropriate data portal; machines on the right, with a computer-accessible APIs.

¹ In this instance, metadata is not included in the analysis.

» Figure 1. Data accessibility by type of user

A. Accessible to humans



B. Accessible to machines

```
{
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  "fecha_modificado": "2021-09-23 17:34:48",

  "imagen": "https://herramientas.dane.gov.co/sites/default/files/2021-09/densidades.jpg",
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  "autor": "DEPARTAMENTO ADMINISTRATIVO NACIONAL DE ESTADÍSTICA (Entidad pública)",
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  "resumen": "Predicción del Índice de Pobreza Multidimensional (IPM) usando aprendizaje de máquinas e imágenes satelitales para los años 2016 a 2020",
  "descripcion": "Predicción del Índice de Pobreza Multidimensional (IPM) usando aprendizaje de máquinas e imágenes satelitales para los años 2016 a 2020. La medida del IPM de fuente censal se encuentra actualmente publicada y desagregada para municipios y a nivel de manzana para las cabeceras municipales. No obstante, es de interés obtener esta medida, no solo para las cabeceras municipales sino también para las zonas rurales. El presente ejercicio pretende mitigar las limitaciones presentadas en el cálculo del IPM censal, así como disponer de dichas mediciones a niveles bajos de granularidad en periodos intercensales, mediante la implementación de fuentes no tradicionales de información, como es el caso de las imágenes satelitales. En esta sección presentamos los resultados de la segunda versión del proyecto de estimación de pobreza multidimensional usando imágenes satelitales, la principal innovación de este ejercicio es inclusión de las imágenes del 2016 al 2020 para tener una visión en el tiempo de los cambios del IPM a nivel de manzanas.",
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  },
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  },
  "tipo_producto": "Proyecto Big Data",
  "impacto_social": "no",
  "descripcion_impacto_social": ""
}
```

Source: A. Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE). (s. f.). ¿Sabías qué? | DANE para niños, niñas y adolescentes. <https://www.dane.gov.co/files/dane-para-ninos/sabias-que.html>; B. Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones. (2026). <https://www.dane.gov.co/resource/4t9r-7v7i.json>.

Machine-readable data can be transmitted more efficiently, analyzed at larger scale, integrated across sources, and incorporated into automated workflows. When data is available only in human-readable formats, users must manually extract, transcribe, or convert it before it can be used in machine-facilitated processes, such as data analysis using statistical software. This introduces opportunities for transcription errors and limits the scale of analysis that can be conducted. Furthermore, many automated systems like search engines and AI models cannot effectively utilize data that is locked in formats designed solely for human visual consumption. The result is that official statistics become less discoverable precisely at a moment when potential demand for such data is growing.

Data accessibility for both audiences is key. The challenge is in doing so appropriately and sustainably (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de Chile, 2025). This accessibility of aggregated national statistical data in Latin America and the Caribbean has taken on heightened importance due to its increasing consumption by third-party systems such as artificial intelligence models, aggregated data platforms, search engines, and automated analysis tools. When properly facilitated, these intermediaries can be beneficial by increasing the visibility of official statistics. At the same time, they also create new risks for NSOs. Below are three reasons why data accessibility should be prioritized to mitigate these risks:

» Enabling appropriate reuse of data

If data cannot be easily used in its native form, it will not be used; or worse, it will be used incorrectly. When official statistical data is difficult to access or interpret, users could turn to other sources that may lack the

rigor and the reliability of original publications issued by agencies that produce official statistics, particularly NSO (United Nations Statistical Commission, 2007).

» **Facilitating provenance**

When data is well-documented and clearly attributed to its source, it is easier for users to maintain these attributions when citing or republishing the information. This matters not only for giving credit to NSOs for their work but also for maintaining transparency about data sources in policy decisions and public discourse.

» **Maintaining NSOs credibility**

The credibility of NSOs rests on their reputation as authoritative sources of reliable statistical information. Inaccessible data creates an impression of irrelevance or distrust, suggesting that official statistical data is a concealed artifact of bureaucratic processes rather than a useful tool.

Ultimately, data accessibility makes it possible for official statistics to support regional development. Development challenges require evidence-based decision-making grounded in reliable data. When official statistics are inaccessible, decisions need to be made based on incomplete or unreliable data. Alternatively, resources must be invested to recreate data that may already exist. Improved data accessibility thus is a fundamental enabler of development processes.

3. Methodology and proposed classification system for analyzing and evaluating the accessibility of statistical data

The accessibility of statistical data was examined, and the proposed classification was applied to the 46 Member States of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). However, the analysis focuses on the 33 ECLAC Member States in Latin America and the Caribbean, which constitute this document's scope of interest. Therefore, the results and recommendations are presented primarily for this region. To provide a comparative reference point, a box is also included that summarizes, in general terms, the results observed in the other Member States.

The methodology consisted of several sequential stages.

» **Initial review and development of the typology**

An initial review of websites and data dissemination platforms was conducted to understand the current state of data access across the region. To account for the variety of national contexts, the review included both websites belonging to NSOs and national data platforms, when there was evidence that these were affiliated with the NSO. For example, a country may share its data, including data from its NSO, on a common platform. This practice is not widespread in the region, but it is widely used in developed countries (for example, in Spain and Türkiye).

Based on this review, a typology of data accessibility channels was developed, defining six specific categories through which NSOs make data available to the general public (see table 1). This typology distinguishes between different levels and types of data accessibility, from public APIs to basic platform availability. As time delays are a barrier to access, notes on NSO websites indicating that data was available on request were not included as part of the analysis. Further, practices where data is hosted on a third-party platform were also not included as part of the analysis, due to the potential for instability and sustainability issues regarding access.

» Table 1: Typology for evaluating access to data

Category	Definition
1. Platform available	The institution maintains a consistent online presence through a dedicated website or portal, whether it is independent or affiliated with an NSO.
2. Data tables available	The data is visible and readable on that platform. The data is presented in a structured table format on the website (visible, but not necessarily downloadable; extracting it would require manual or technical intervention).
3. Data files available	Data files are available for download, regardless of any accessibility restrictions for people and/or machines.
4. Data files available and accessible	There are downloadable data files that machines can access directly and automatically, without any technical barriers.
5. Partial public API available	A subset of the data available online can be accessed using a computer programming language. There is some level of public access to a data API, including partial or complete endpoints in one or more machine-readable formats (JSON, XML, etc.).
6. Full public API available	All public data can be accessed using computer programming languages. This builds on the previous level by providing comprehensive coverage via API endpoints for all of the institution's data, regardless of whether it includes metadata, documentation, gateways, or authentication requirements.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

» Systematic evaluation

Using the established typology, the full census of each NSO's data accessibility infrastructure online was systematically analyzed, documenting which channels were available and how data could be accessed. This approach helped ensure consistency in categorization and supported the evidence gathered.

» Expert review

The assessment underwent additional expert review within ECLAC's Statistics Division to review findings and resolve any ambiguous cases. This process drew on ECLAC's subject matter expertise about both the technical aspects of data accessibility and the statistical contexts of the region. This provides a systematic and harmonized overview of data access across NSOs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is important to clarify a few points regarding the scope and rationale of this classification. The categories are not mutually exclusive, nor do they form a strict linear scale: a country may have multiple mechanisms in place simultaneously. It is also possible, though uncommon, for there to be jumps between categories.

The criteria applied support the best practice of free public access to data that is self-hosted on the NSO's own websites, excluding third-party platforms. Similarly, preference is given to non-proprietary formats (such as CSV, JSON, or XML), although their absence does not prevent classification in a given category. The presence or absence of documentation and metadata also does not constitute a criterion for inclusion or exclusion, but it is considered best practice. This was not evaluated in the analysis, but its presence or absence was noted during data collection. Best practice is to always include metadata and documentation, as without them it is difficult to use the data.

Finally, it should be noted that these levels correspond to the situation at the time of data collection, in late 2025 and early 2026. Technology evolves rapidly, and what may be considered best practice today may not be so in the future. For that reason, it is also difficult to predict what a future additional category might encompass. However, it is an interesting thought experiment, one that could lead to scenarios involving greater integration between human and machine formats.

4. Results obtained from applying the typology to analyze access to data

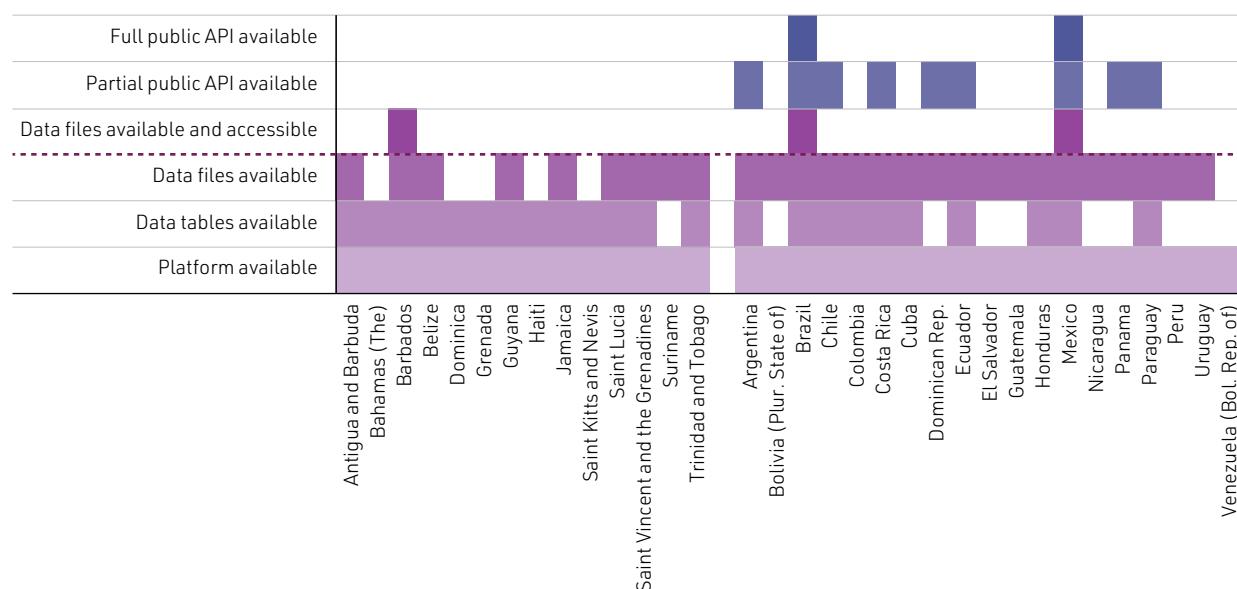
The role of NSOs globally, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, has expanded beyond traditional statistical production within this context. The OECD (2025) identifies NSOs as potential “trusted data intermediaries”, not merely producers of their own statistics but coordinators of broader data ecosystems. However, NSOs capacity to fulfill these expanded mandates varies dramatically. This heterogeneity further creates challenges. A one-size-fits-all approach would either set the bar too high for under-resourced NSOs or fail to leverage the capabilities of better-resourced NSOs.

As d’Alva and Paraná (2024) observe, “the task imposed on the statistical sectors of the Global South is to appropriate the technological development of other dynamic centers, adapting it and creating their own capabilities, guided by the principles of sovereignty, transparency, and democracy”. This captures a fundamental tension in statistical development in Latin America and the Caribbean: the need to adopt global tools while maintaining autonomy over how these tools are implemented and ensuring they serve local needs and contexts.

These theoretical considerations manifest in the region’s statistical landscape. Dargent et al. (2018) identify what they term a “reform paradox”: broad consensus exists on the importance of statistical modernization in Latin America and the Caribbean, yet persistent implementation gaps remain. Despite demonstrable technical capacity, the region faces deficits in implementation and sustainability. These are fueled by financial constraints, resource limitations, and institutional fragmentation that prevent the translation of technical capability into consistent, accessible statistical outputs.

In diagram 1, the current state of how NSOs in the region make their data available to the public is presented. This analysis reveals both advances and challenges in data access across Latin America and the Caribbean.

» **Diagram 1. Latin America and the Caribbean: Access to statistical data on the websites of NSOs according to the proposed typology, 2026**



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Note: Data collected between November 2025 and March 2026. There may be inaccuracies due to the instability, complexity, and variable nature of many platforms. The thick black line indicates the division between human-readable and machine-readable formats.

Advances

NSOs in Latin America and the Caribbean are commended for their efforts and the following advances are highlighted:

» Advance 1: Universal statistical platforms

Every NSO in the region maintains a statistical platform and/or website, ensuring that all NSOs have a dedicated web presence. While the functionality and user experience of these platforms and sites vary, their existence ensures that every country has established at least a basic channel for the public to access the NSO.

» Advance 2: Availability of downloadable data

The majority of countries in Spanish-speaking Latin America and the Caribbean, and increasing numbers in the broader Caribbean region, now make at least a portion of their data available as downloadable files. This enables users to conduct their own analyses, integrate data across sources, and preserve local copies for ongoing work.

» Advance 3: API development and integration

Several countries have invested significantly in APIs infrastructure, enabling data access. Geospatial APIs have been deployed by Argentina, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic; full API integration into the statistical system has been achieved by Brazil and Mexico, providing machine-readable access to the full range of their statistical data.

Challenges

Despite these advances, challenges remain across the region that limit access to official statistics. Three primary challenges merit particular attention:

» Challenge 1: Prioritization of human-readable over machine-readable data

Many NSOs continue to prioritize data formats designed primarily for human use such as PDF reports, HTML tables, and image-based presentations over formats that can be easily processed by machines or formats that serve both human and machine needs effectively.

Why this matters: There is a need to share both types of data, as they both serve different audiences. Human-readable data is more accessible to the general public, while machine-readable data allows for automated processing. Prioritizing one at the expense of the other limits the reach and utility of official statistics. Instead, both must be supported in order to reach the broadest user base possible.

» Challenge 2: Unstable and/or overly complex data platforms

Of note is that, even after expert review, it was sometimes difficult to determine the full extent of data access provided by many NSOs. These platforms undergo changes, temporary barriers to access (such as platforms becoming temporarily inaccessible), and suffer from complicated and multiple interfaces that make it difficult to locate data and accurately determine its level of accessibility.

For example, statistical platforms in many countries require users to navigate through multiple levels of menus, filters, and selection interfaces before reaching the actual data. While such interfaces can provide powerful functionality for users who know exactly what they are seeking, they create barriers for both casual users and automated systems attempting to access data.

Why this matters: Potential users may abandon their search before finding relevant data, assuming it does not exist. Researchers may miss important datasets because they are not discoverable through the navigation structure. Automated systems generally cannot navigate complex interactive interfaces, meaning that the data may be effectively invisible to search engines, data aggregators, and other intermediaries.

» **Challenge 3: Fragmented data architecture**

Even when data is accessible, users frequently encounter insufficient or inconsistent metadata, unclear documentation, varying structural formats, and ambiguous presentation. This makes it difficult to understand what the data represents, how it was collected, what it measures, and how it should be properly used and cited.

A fragmented data architecture presents structural challenges: the lack of interoperable standards such as SDMX, the absence of documented APIs, inconsistent data schemas, and the lack of infrastructure to enable automated integration between systems make it difficult to efficiently discover, interpret, and reuse official statistics.

Why this matters: Is this figure a rate or a count? Does it include all regions or only urban areas? Is the format machine-readable, or does it require further processing? Are the data schemas consistent across periods, or do they change without documentation? Without a standardized data architecture, the technical quality of raw data production becomes largely irrelevant if users cannot properly understand and apply the results, particularly in automated analytics environments where systems require clear, machine-readable data.

» **Box 1. Comparison of data accessibility among countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and other ECLAC Member States**

As explained above, the framework for assessing data accessibility was applied to the 46 Member States of ECLAC, including both Latin American and Caribbean countries and those located outside the region. The objective of this exercise was to establish a comparative benchmark that would make it possible to examine whether there are differences in the levels of statistical data accessibility between these two groups of countries.

This comparison is particularly relevant because several of ECLAC's member states located outside Latin America and the Caribbean are developed economies with more established track records in terms of digital infrastructure, open data policies, and the provision of online statistical services. In this context, the analysis seeks to identify, in general terms, whether gaps exist in areas such as the availability of automated data access mechanisms (e.g., APIs), the use of machine-readable formats, and the clarity of data access architectures.

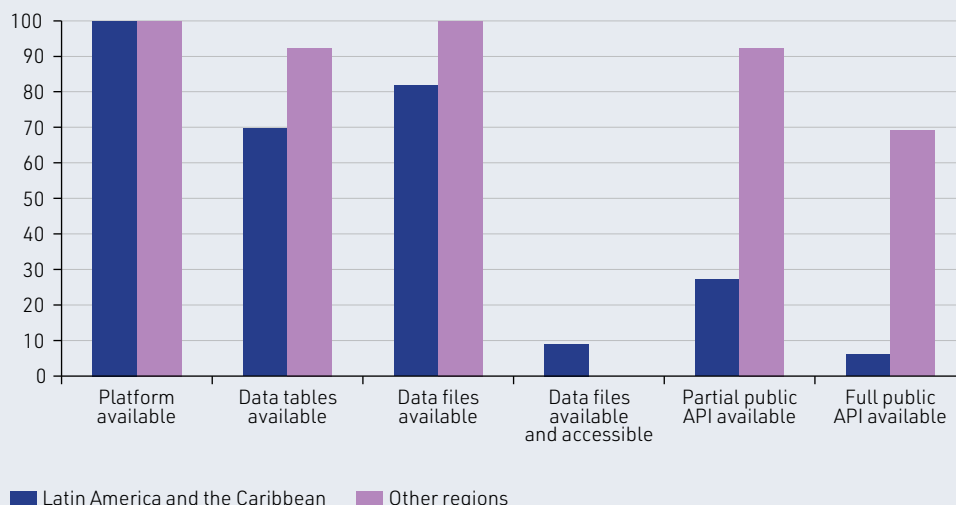
The results presented in this box therefore provide a general point of comparison. Their purpose is not to conduct an exhaustive analysis of the differences between countries, but rather to place the findings observed in Latin America and the Caribbean within the broader context of data accessibility practices among ECLAC member states.

In general, we observe that member states outside Latin America and the Caribbean^a are more likely to have public APIs, whether partial or complete. While both groups have achieved universal coverage on basic platforms, the lack of APIs in Latin America and the Caribbean highlights the gap in technical development levels between member states within and outside the region.

Countries in the region outperform countries outside the region in the category "Data files available and accessible", the only category in which Latin America and the Caribbean lead. This suggests that countries in the region prioritize direct file accessibility but do not yet prioritize automated programmatic access, while countries outside the region have omitted the distribution of files accessible by both humans and machines in favor of splitting these types of access across different sources.

Member States of ECLAC in Latin America and the Caribbean and other regions of the World: access to statistical data on the websites of NSOs according to the proposed typology, 2026

(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

^a ECLAC member states outside the region include: Germany, Canada, Spain, the United States, France, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, the Republic of Korea, and Türkiye. The United States does not have a single NSO, but rather a system of 16 recognized agencies and units (Knoedl, 2025). The United States Census Bureau was used for the analysis.

5. Recommendations

This analysis has demonstrated both the critical importance of data accessibility and the current state of how NSOs in Latin America and the Caribbean provide access to official statistics. The regional assessment reveals advances, particularly in API development, universal platform availability, and the growing provision of downloadable data, alongside persistent challenges in readability, platform complexity, and consistent architecture.

The following recommendations are provided with the above findings in mind, taking into account sociotechnical context at the time of writing this document:

» Recommendation 1: Prioritize dual-purpose data formats

What this means: Provide data in formats that effectively serve both human and machine readers.

What this looks like in practice: For tabular data, provide standard, non-proprietary formats like CSV or JSON formats alongside any visual presentations. These formats can be easily read by both humans (in spreadsheet applications) and machines (in programmatic analysis). For geospatial data, use standard, non-proprietary formats like GeoJSON that can be consumed by mapping applications and analytical tools. Where possible, implement RESTful APIs following OpenAPI specifications, enabling programmatic access while maintaining human-readable documentation. Standards to consider could include the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) for statistical data.

Key principle: Data should be structured and documented once, then made available through multiple channels appropriate to different use cases.

» **Recommendation 2: Simplify and sustain access**

What this means: Reduce the number of steps required to reach data, both for human users navigating websites and for automated systems attempting to access information. Platforms should be intuitive, with minimal layers between the user and the data. Platforms should also be consistently available and changes to interfaces should be openly and broadly communicated in advance of any changes.

What this looks like in practice: Design platforms with clear entry points to major data collections. Provide direct download links on landing pages for frequently requested datasets. Ensure that URLs for specific datasets are stable and can be directly bookmarked or linked. Minimize the number of required clicks or selections to access data. For complex databases requiring filtering, provide both simple and advanced interfaces, allowing users to construct complex queries while ensuring that common use cases remain straightforward.

Key principle: Data should be easily and reliably accessible, the less downtime present in the platform and the fewer clicks needed to access it, the better.

» **Recommendation 3: Provide comprehensive documentation**

What this means: Provide consistent contextual information with all data products, ensuring that users can understand what the data represents, how it was produced, and how it should be properly used and cited.

What this looks like in practice: Every dataset should include at least basic metadata (title, description, source, date, geographic coverage, units of measurement, methodology, citation guidelines) in both human-readable and machine-readable formats. Documentation should be present and accessible regardless of how the data is accessed, whether through a web interface, a download, or an API. Build and maintain data structure diagrams, ontologies, typologies, and data dictionaries that help users understand how different data elements relate to each other and what each variable represents. Provide clear methodological documentation that explains how statistics were produced, including information about data collection methods, sampling approaches, estimation procedures, and known limitations.

Key principle: Data without context is just numbers. Documentation transforms numbers into usable information.

Implementation guidance

These recommendations can be implemented without requiring large financial investments, particularly if approached strategically:

» **Guidance 1: Simplicity reduces time costs**

Simple, clear solutions can require less ongoing maintenance than complex solutions. A well-structured CSV file with clear documentation may serve users better than a sophisticated but cumbersome database interface. Time invested in simplifying data structures and documentation at the source reduces time spent responding to user questions and correcting misinterpretations.

» **Guidance 2: Open source reduces monetary costs**

Open-source tools and adherence to open standards reduce monetary costs while often improving accessibility (Corrado, 2005). Tools like PostgreSQL for databases and R or Python for data processing are freely available, widely supported, and often more flexible than proprietary alternatives. Similarly, open standards like CSV,

JSON, SDMX, and GeoJSON ensure that data remains accessible regardless of specific software choices. Using open-source tools and standards also facilitates knowledge sharing across NSOs and reduces dependency on specific vendors.

» **Guidance 3: Start small and expand incrementally**

Rather than an overarching transformation of all data systems simultaneously, begin with a single high-priority data collection and learn from that experience before expanding. This approach reduces complexity, limits room for error and enables organizational learning. Further, success with one dataset builds capacity and confidence for broader implementation. It also allows for user feedback to inform subsequent phases, ensuring that improvements actually address real user needs.

6. Conclusions

It cannot be taken as a given that official statistical data will make it into the hands of the users that need it most. As emerging technologies like artificial intelligence increasingly mediate between data producers and users, the way NSOs structure and present their data becomes ever more critical. Data that is practical, interpretable, and fits diverse user needs, whether accessed by a human researcher or an automated system, serves the fundamental purpose of official statistics: “an indispensable element in the information system of democratic society, serving the government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation” (United Nations Statistics Division, 2014).

The challenge is not solely technical but institutional, and thus social: how can NSOs, operating under diverse resource constraints and mandates, collectively improve how they serve their users? The answer lies in shared learning, appropriate use of open tools and standards, and a focus on practical improvements that can be implemented incrementally. No single NSO needs to solve these challenges alone, and no solution needs to be perfect to be useful.

By prioritizing human- and machine-accessible data formats, simplifying access, and ensuring comprehensive documentation, NSOs in Latin America and the Caribbean can help ensure that the significant investments they make in producing high-quality statistics translate into actual use and, ultimately, more effective development outcomes across Latin America and the Caribbean.

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