COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

Twenty-fourth session
Geneva, 17 to 21 May 2021

Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2020 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 24th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

IMPLEMENTATION OF WSIS ACTION LINES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN 2020

I. Executive Summary

UNECLAC as co-facilitator of actions lines (C1) the role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development, (C6) enabling environment and (C11) international and regional cooperation, in 2020 aim its efforts to promote the implementation of the WSIS outcomes in the LAC region by fostering policy dialogue among members countries, leading research, providing technical assistance, training, and generating statistical information about access and use of digital technologies.

In 2020 ECLAC co-host with the government of Ecuador the Seventh Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, from the 23th to 26th of November (virtual meeting) (https://conferenciaelac.cepal.org/7/en). At conference government representatives agreed on a digital agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean towards 2022 (eLAC2022), which includes 8 areas of action —in addition to a section on the fight against the pandemic and economic recovery and reactivation— and identifies 39 specific goals for implementation. The Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean, reiterated the principles and objectives agreed upon at the World Summit on the Information Society, regarding the importance of building an inclusive information society and promoting the potential of information and communication technologies to achieve 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Digital Agenda eLAC2022 also acknowledge the impact caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, characterized by an economic and social collapse of unforeseen magnitude. In this new reality, the document highlighted that digital technologies have proven to be essential tools to facilitate physical distancing and mitigate the economic and social effects of the crisis. The adoption of these technologies accelerated considerably during this period, providing solutions for trade, work, education and health. However, is necessary to recognize that access and use of digital technologies are still determined by structural and socioeconomic factors. In the medium and long terms, social welfare will not be possible without access to Internet and digital technologies.

During the opening of the conference, ECLAC´s executive secretary emphasized that differences in access and use of these technologies penalize the most vulnerable groups and proposed to have a basic digital basket that allows universal access. Also, ECLAC address the importance to advance digitization in a sustainable way, some digital solutions allow a 15% reduction in carbon emissions. In the productive sector, ECLAC accentuated the importance of digital transformation to increase efficiency in strategic sectors. Finally, ECLAC accentuated the importance to strengthen mechanisms of regional cooperation to provide the highest standards of information security and personal data protection.

II. Analytical Overview

a. Policy trends and contributions

At regional level UNECLAC promoted the implementation of the WSIS action lines through its role as the technical secretary of eLAC2022, working alongside various stakeholders on numerous activities.

During 2020, UNECLAC led various activities trying to address the importance of digital technologies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. Among, these activities were the publication of the document "The opportunities of digitization in Latin America in the face of COVID-19" with the identification of initiatives in digital matters carried out by governments to control the pandemic. These digital solutions promote greater transparency and reliability of information for users, measuring the spread of the virus, disseminating information in real time, and facilitating diagnosis, prevention, and mitigation schemes that contribute to flattening the contagion curves.

Also, in 2020 UNECLAC within the COVID-19 observatory publish the document "Universalize access to digital technologies", The document also identified the main structural gaps that condition the impact of these technologies on the economy and society. The document makes a series of recommendations on how countries should strengthen their digital policies, recognizing the importance of building an inclusive digital society through access to broadband and devices, promoting productive digital transformation, promoting trust and l digital security and cooperation.

The Latin American Economic Outlook (LEO) publish in 2020 focused on the role of digital transformation in helping to navigate the pandemic. The report explores how digital transformation can help to cope with the current socio-economic situation, boost productivity, strengthen institutions and achieve higher levels of inclusion and well-being. The LEO 2020 also highlights that international partnerships are fundamental to reaping the benefits of the digital transformation. The LEO is a joint annual publication produced by the OECD Development Centre, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN ECLAC), the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) and the European Union (EU).

Also, in June 17, 2020, ECLAC organized a High-Level Dialogue Digital Technologies in times of COVID-19, which had the participation of 13 countries of the region; Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. The event served to share experiences and practical improvements on how to face the pandemic through the use of digital technologies and solutions.

In November 2020, ECLAC published "Internet infrastructure in Latin America: traffic exchange points, content distribution networks, submarine cables and data centers", a document that analyzes the interconnection and distribution infrastructure of Internet content in Latin America and the challenges in terms of Traffic Exchange Points and content distribution in the region are verified.

In 2020, ECLAC organized several webinars and meetings on digital technologies and COVID-19. Some of these meetings were: Preserve fundamental rights and reactivate the economy (May 14,), Digital solutions to face COVID-19 (June 9), Main findings of the Internet and Jurisdiction Report and ECLAC Regional Situation Report 2020 (June 30), Leveraging Digital Government & Spearheading Innovative Digital Solutions to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Caribbean (September 23). All these events had the participation of governments, international organizations, the private sector and experts from the different countries of the region.

Within the eLAC2020 process during 2020, 8 working groups continue to share experiences, best practices and foster networks and mechanisms of collaboration on: i) Digital access and infrastructure, ii) Culture, inclusion and digital skills, iii) Internet governance for the information society, iv) Digital transformation and digital economy, v) Regional Digital Market, vi) Cyber legislation, vii) Digital government and emerging technologies and viii) Telework. For its articulation ECLAC enable a web forum, where working groups can exchange documents and hold debates, today the forum have 231 users (https://comunidades.cepal.org/elac/es).

Also, in November 2020, UNECLAC and the Internet & Jurisdiction Policy Network, publish the report "Key findings of the Internet & Jurisdiction and ECLAC: Regional Status Report 2020" which is the region's first comprehensive exercise to map the different policy trends revolving around the transboundary nature of the Internet and how it affects different stakeholders, such as governments, companies and civil society. How might different regional and national regulations create barriers that hinder cross-border e-commerce and investment in digital markets? What economic and social benefits could be realized by harmonizing frameworks throughout the region? are among the questions that report tries to answer.

As stated in the 2022 Digital Agenda LAC region are pursuing the idea to foster a digital regional market. In the new global economic and technological context, LAC countries face important challenges, in terms of having a coordinated reduction of barriers that hinder digital cross-border digital trade and investment in digital markets in the region. With this objective, ECLAC also continued to work together with cooperation spaces such as the Pacific Alliance and the Mesoamerica Project in the configuration of digital markets within these cooperation and trading agreements.

III.   Innovative policies, programmes and projects

In 2020, UNECLAC continue its work to improve national capacities in Latin America and the Caribbean countries to measure the digital economy using Big Data tools and techniques and their combination with official statistics. Among the activities that UNECLAC published the document "Analysis of the digital footprint in Latin America and the Caribbean: lessons learned from the use of big data to assess the digital economy". This report examines the opportunities and challenges posed by the systematic use of publicly available digital data as a tool for the formulation of public policies for the development of the digital economy in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its objective is to share the experiences acquired to advance a research agenda that allows the countries of the region to create alternative measurement tools based on the digital footprint. Through the use of big data, the digital footprint left by job portals, e-commerce platforms and social networks offers unprecedented information, both in terms of scope and detail.

MSMEs are key to the economic and social development of Latin America since they represent 99% of companies and 67% of employment. But its development is still limited, and this situation generates gaps in productivity. Within this framework, ECLAC, together with the European Commission, is leading a project that aims to strengthen dialogue between public and private actors on MSMEs policies. Within this framework, various studies have been produced on the adoption of digital technologies in SMEs and the challenges ahead. Among these publication are "Policies to promote the incorporation of digital technologies in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in Latin America: review of experiences and opportunities" and "Creative economy in the digital revolution: action to strengthen the regional chain of digital animation in Mesoamerican countries"

Regarding partnerships, UNECLAC continued to build alliances with the private sector; the civil society and the technical community. During the pandemic of COVID19 and in view of the urgency of analyzing its impact on telecommunications networks and digital platforms, ECLAC together with the Development bank of Latin America (CAF), Telecom Advisory Services and DPL consulting published the report "The opportunities of digitization in Latin America in the face of COVID-19"[1], which evidences the importance of digital technologies for LAC countries to counteract isolation, spread prophylactic measures and facilitate the functioning of socioeconomic systems.

Along the same lines, together with the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), CAF, COMTELCA, ASIET and DPL, the ECLAC ORBA organized the international seminar "Iberoamerica digital transformation now", which was held virtually on September 29 as of October 1, 2020, with the aim of promoting public-private dialogue to foster the digital transformation in a post-Covid19 economic recovery scenario[2].

UNECLAC has also led several activities to improve national and sub regional capabilities in the LAC region for the design of digital policies in 2020. One of this activity is the cooperation given to the Pacific Alliance (PA) to build a strategy for the regional digital market. This strategy will be presented in the next presidential meeting of the PA on December 11. The strategy tries to set up a roadmap to ease digital trade and coordinating resources in terms of innovation, entrepreneurship, investment and skills development. Also, UNECLAC help in 2020 the Mesoamerican Countries to build a digital agenda, to try help develop a more robust digital ecosystem in the subregion.

Regarding the production of ICT statistics, UNECLAC has planned to build a Digital Economy Observatory in 2021 to continue to support the production of ICT indicators. This work will be coordinated with the already stablish Regional Broadband Observatory (ORBA), which has been periodically carrying out the collection of statistical information on the development of broadband in the LAC region. The information includes statistics on access, use and quality of the fixed and mobile broadband Internet service.

IV.   Future Actions

- Give continuity to the agreements of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean and draft a cooperation program for the conference

- UNECLAC will continue to act as the technical secretariat of the eLAC2022 process, generating statistical information, research and supporting the steering committee.

- UNECLAC will facilitate the organization of a prepatory meeting in February 2021 to discuss a fund for the development of rural connectivity projects for Latin America and the Caribbean.

- In 2020, UNECLAC will deepen its research agenda on issues related to the digital transformation of the productive sector, the future of work, telecomunications

---

[1] https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/45360-oportunidades-la-digitalizacion-america-latina-frente-al-covid-19
[2] https://itd-now.com/

infraestructure (5G), Regional digital market, cross border data flows and cyberlegislacion and Big data for measuring the digitla economy.