

## **Progress and challenges of measuring the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean ICT**

**Mariana Balboni, UN-ECLAC Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC)**

Key words: ICT Measurement, Information Society, Digital Divide, Latin America

Measuring Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) access, usage and capabilities is a key process to allow sound assessments and monitoring on the advances of countries. It has become clear that this does not only apply to advanced countries as ICT poses significant opportunities and challenges to the developing world. The measurement of the phenomena and its dynamics becomes indispensable to understand the development of today's Information Societies and to support adequate policy-design and assessment. Particularly developing countries need to comprehend the dynamics of the ICT evolution and revolution and its possibilities to support socio-economic development. Literature argues that equity can be increased by a broader access and usage of ICT, showing them as an opportunity for development. However some indicators elaborated by the UN-ECLAC Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC) allow concluding that although the usage of some ICT like mobile phone is growing widely, the level of internet use is still very far from use in developed countries, and broadband access indicators shows that Latin America is not growing as fast as advanced countries. Therefore, in order to elaborate accurate policies for information society, exercises to assess current dynamics and to establish the real digital divide and stage of ICT evolution in countries of the region are a crucial step of the process.

The present unequal access within and between developing countries can be worsened if there are no policies to guarantee the digital access to all or most sectors of society. Existing social and economical differences can be both deepened by the lack of or deepening the access to ICT. OSILAC work has demonstrated how social and economical factors are still determining internet access, particularly the level of income and education and the geographical location which is mainly rural or urban. At the same time, OSILAC has established that other common social determinants for gaps like gender and age do not represent significant differences for access and use of ICT. OSILAC has done multidimensional regressions on the data of household surveys and it became clear that the most dominant demographic characteristics are income and educational level (both of them naturally closely related). The isolated effects of gender, age and ethnic origin have no clear explanatory power to determine the digital divide. This is good news, as it means that ICT access and use does not discriminate between old and young, man and women, indigenous and non-indigenous users. Considering that outside of the digital world there are however significant discriminations in these groupings, ICT can be seen as a special opportunity to offer women, elderly and indigenous new possibilities to overcome existing gaps.

The objective of this paper is therefore to present the "Progress and challenges of measuring the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean ICT". Special attention will be given to the initiatives that have been undertaken to harmonize indicators, as the "Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development", an inter-agency initiative in which OSILAC has been playing an important role, and the results of the analyses carried out with the available statistical information on ICT access and usage produced by OSILAC in order to monitor ICT related policies in Latin America and the Caribbean.