Digital is the path to growth in Latin America & the Caribbean

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Representatives from more than 35 countries came to explore the opportunities and challenges of Artificial Intelligence, Connectivity and Digital Transformation for the EU and Latin America & the Caribbean.

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Digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence, connectivity and supercomputers are not only the future, but they are the present. Latin America, the Caribbean, the EU and its Member States do not want to miss the high-speed train of emerging technologies and the benefits of digital for their

citizens and businesses. With the support of the EU Global Gateway, they have found in the EU-LAC Digital Alliance a reliable platform to boost their digital transformation.

The 'Digital Week in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)' brought to Santiago de Chile representatives from more than 35 countries from the region and the EU and its Member States (MS) to discuss the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation.

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EU-LAC Digital Alliance family photo

Co-hosted by the Government of Chile, the European Commission and the <u>Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)</u> ⧉ from 5 to 8 November 2024, the gathering started with a two-day meeting of the <u>EU-LAC Digital Alliance</u> , followed by the <u>9th Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean.</u> ⧉

The EU and its MS met with their counterparts from the 23 LAC countries signatories of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance[1] on 5 - 6 November 2024 in two high-level Policy Dialogues on Connectivity & Inclusion and Artificial Intelligence followed by a stocktaking session to assess progress and discuss how to take the work forward ahead of the EU-CELAC Summit in 2025.

At the 9th Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean on the 7 - 8 November 2024, authorities and experts from the LAC region met to evaluate the progress of the <u>Digital Agenda for LAC 2022-2024 (eLAC2024)</u> ⧉ and move forward with the agenda eLAC2026.

Government authorities recognised the value of organising the Digital Alliance dialogues back-to-back with the Ministerial Conference on the Information Society to enhance the creation of synergies with the eLAC agenda for the entire region.

From dialogue to action

All parties involved from both sides of the Atlantic seem to agree: the EU-LAC Digital Alliance is here to stay because it delivers on its objectives with pragmatism.

What needs to happen to improve our cybersecurity? How can we protect the private data of our citizens? How can we make sure that AI has a positive impact on our lives? To find answers to those questions, the EU-LAC Digital Alliance Policy Dialogues brought around the table ministers, senior government officials, representatives from the private sector, civil society organisations, academia and technical communities from both regions. The goal was to share experiences and best practices with a view to reinforcing and aligning digital policy and regulatory frameworks on issues of common interest, notably data governance, e-governance, cybersecurity, connectivity and AI. The Policy Dialogues held during 2024 concluded with a set of concrete initiatives to be deployed in 2025.

Connectivity: The Backbone of Digital Transformation

During the dialogue on Connectivity & Inclusion, the representatives explored key areas, such as secure connectivity and infrastructure investment. It recalled the need for innovative investments models through Public-Private Partnerships and the necessity to scale investments, among others on cross-border connectivity and 5G spectrum auctions.

Under the Global Gateway Investment Agenda with LAC ⧉ the EU is deploying large-scale digital projects - some with regional scope - to ensure that the digital transformation matches the EU's and its LAC partners' values and interests.

Meaningful and inclusive connectivity was at the centre of the discussions, to reflect governments' responsibilities to deploy reliable and affordable connections to empower citizens and businesses to fully participate in the digital world—whether for learning, work, or connecting with others.

The dialogue touched upon key aspects such as gender lenses, intersectionality, and last-mile connectivity solutions to ensure a sustainable and inclusive digital transformation is carried out fit for local communities, including citizens who live in rural and remote areas. It concluded with the launch of the 'EU-LAC Female Digital Policy-Makers Network' by the Vice Minister of Information and Communication Technologies of Ecuador, Vicenta Macías Meza together with the Ambassador of Germany in Chile, Susanne Fries-Gaier.

The network will offer a collaborative space where women active in digital policies can share good practices, participate in capacity-building activities and shape a more inclusive digital future for the region. Through this network, participants will be able to contribute significantly to political debates, influencing the formulation of policies that promote gender equality in the digital sphere and open doors for more women to enter the digital economy and politics.

Building digital highways

In the case of a natural disaster, high-speed and reliable access to Earth Observation (EO) data can be a real challenge. For example, an emergency worker in LAC mapping a region of 500km2 would need at least an hour to download EO data over a standard commercial internet service. Since 2021, thanks to the BELLA II high-speed cable ⬀ built by the EU, the same emergency worker can download the required data in seven minutes. The EU's Earth observation programme Copernicus (Regional Centres in Chile ⬀ and Panama ⬀) makes satellite data accessible to scientists, citizens, organisations, policymakers and public authorities in LAC countries.

High on the Chilean Andes in the Atacama Desert, the European Southern Observatory (ESO) astronomic telescopes are the most accurate observers of the universe in the world. In September, an ESO telescope captured the most detailed infrared map ever of our Milky Way. At 500 terabytes of data (200 000 images), this is the largest observational project ever carried out. Some years ago, it would have been impossible to send this data to the ESO HQ in Germany in a reasonable time. Today, BELLA II makes it possible.

The first connection of its kind between two continents, the BELLA cable is a 35000 km submarine fibre-optic cable connecting the EU (from Portugal) and LAC (through Brazil). Its terrestrial backbone grants access to Brazil, Ecuador, Chile, Panama, Argentina and Colombia. It has connected 65 million people so far, from universities and research institutions, to schools and businesses. The next phase will expand to Peru, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador y Honduras. It is one of the largest Global Gateway Digital flagships worldwide.

Faster, secure and trustworthy data transfers are key to scientific research, to technological development, to inclusive education and to address all major global challenges, like climate change. The same infrastructure can also serve to commercial purposes and boost eTrade in the region.

Artificial Intelligence at the service of humans

Europe and Latin America & the Caribbean share the same challenge: how to identify and mitigate the risks of Artificial Intelligence (AI) while seizing the opportunities for socio-economic growth. The AI dialogue covered AI governance as well as High Performance Computing (HPC) infrastructures, Large Language Models (LLMs) and regulatory sandboxes.

EU and LAC countries are eager to catch the AI wave and take the development of AI models in their own hands for the benefit of their industries and citizens. While the EU is pioneering AI risk management through the recently adopted EU AI Act ⬈ , most LAC countries are currently formulating national policies and strategies on AI to cultivate talent, stimulate research and innovation, and establish regulatory frameworks.

EU and LAC partners believe in a human-centric AI that protects human rights and fundamental freedoms. Those shared principles can facilitate convergence to effectively address these common challenges and boost innovation.

To that end, the EU is accompanying legislative processes and engaging with industry and other stakeholders in LAC partner countries.

In the context of the current legislative initiative on AI in the Brazilian Senate, the EU is engaged in regular outreach to members of Congress and legislative advisors to present the EU's experience with regulating AI. The "EU-Brazil digital industry sounding board" is an exchange platform with EU companies present in Brazil and with representatives of the Brazilian Government involved in defining AI policies. These exchanges will help to better understand the opportunities for the private sector under the Brazilian AI Plan and other related policies.

The same approach applies to the engagement with Brazilian Civil Society Organisations, in particular regarding the impact of biometric identification uses of AI on fundamental rights. There are also on-going conversations with the Brazilian Superior Electoral Tribunal on EU's expertise regarding spread of disinformation about elections using AI.

EU Member States are also engaging bilaterally. The Spanish Supercomputing Center (Barcelona) and Brazil's National Laboratory for Scientific Computing recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding on High Performance Computers cooperation.

The adoption of the EU AI Act has been noticed in Argentina, too. The EU Delegation in Buenos Aires has organised events for the creative sector, digital engineers and scholars to raise awareness of the risks and opportunities of AI.

Diversity can be an opportunity as much as a challenge concerning AI. The LAC region enjoys a rich linguistic diversity, with a multitude of languages alongside English, Spanish and Portuguese. AI and data governance can either foster technical capacity for inclusivity or contribute to discrimination. In the framework of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance, the D4D Hub (Digital4Development) ☑ organised an online technical workshop on AI and data, with a focus on Large Language Models aimed to explore what AI can mean to linguistic diversity in the LAC region, with a key focus on indigenous languages.

The exchanges go back and forth from the two sides of the Atlantic. Last October, representatives from public institutions in Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay visited AI agencies in Spain and Slovenia with a focus on algorithmic transparency, research and innovation, and the role of supercomputers in advancing AI technologies. Among the visited institutions were the Spanish Agency for the Supervision of AI and Slovenia's largest supercomputer centre, the Vega Supercomputer. Likewise, a group of Brazilian researchers will visit Europe to learn about the EU's best practices regarding algorithm transparency.

Digital transformation that leaves no one behind

Launched in Bogotá, Colombia, in March 2023 and supported by the EU's Global Gateway, the EU-LAC Digital Alliance[2] is a model of bi-regional digital cooperation. It has already begun to deliver on a digital transformation that leaves no one behind.

Making up one-third of the United Nations, together the EU and LAC countries can steer global digital governance towards these principles. During the Summit of the Future, in the context of the 78 United Nations General Assembly, the Pact of the Future and its annex the Global Digital Compact were adopted thanks to the firm support of the Global South. Through strengthened collaboration between Latin America, the Caribbean, and Europe, both regions can foster social cohesion and economic growth, with people and human rights at their core.

Global Gateway

The strategy is the EU's positive offer to reduce the worldwide investment disparity and boost smart, clean and secure connections in digital, energy and transport sectors, and to strengthen health, education and research systems. In a Team Europe approach that brings together the European Union, EU Member States, and European development finance institutions, together we aim to mobilise up to €300 billion in public and private investments from 2021 to 2027, creating essential links rather than dependencies, and closing the global investment gap.

The Latin America and the Caribbean Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA) highlights potential investment projects to help address the region's infrastructure needs, while creating local added value and promoting growth, jobs and social cohesion. The EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda is a political commitment to work together, identifying fair green and digital investment opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean, which will benefit from the open environment generated by trade and investment agreements and will help achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals ⬀ . Follow the link to learn more about the Global Gateway ⬀

[1] The EU and the 27 EU Member States, Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay. Grenada is currently starting its adhesion process.

[2] EU-LAC Joint Declaration :
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_3892 ⬀

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