

Digital Inclusion Strategies

A Primer for Latin American
Policymakers

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Introduction

Why Does Digital Inclusion Matter?

Digital policies without inclusion principles risk underperforming and having a reduced impact. As more countries look to scale up their digital economies and create favorable investment conditions for information and communication technologies (ICTs), inclusion will be a critical factor in distinguishing between localized and widespread impact. Early investment in digital inclusion leads to greater returns, economically and socially, for policymakers.

Countries that fail to build inclusive foundations for their digital economies will lose out economically and socially. When designing major digital policies, policymakers need to account for human interaction with the technologies that these policies develop. This adds steps in the policymaking process that will extend the timeline from political will to policy adoption, but early interventions to build inclusion by design will pay dividends in the years to follow.

This report provides a broad landscape to inform policymakers who are about to embark on the process of writing a digital inclusion strategy or policy. It assumes a national-level context; however, lessons and details presented here may be applied to an international, subnational, or municipal level, too.

1

The first section focuses on the concept of “digital inclusion” and its place within digital policies.

2

The second section explains the impacts of effective policy and regulation for digital inclusion and digital development more broadly.

3

The third section examines the current policy context—with a focus on countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)—and helps identify where gaps are present.

4

The fourth section explores a number of thematic elements of a digital inclusion strategy that are important to consider and uses examples of good practice from across LAC to illustrate the potential for effective policies.

5

The fifth and final section presents initial steps for developing a digital inclusion strategy.

By the end of this report, readers should feel confident in taking first steps towards implementing a successful digital inclusion strategy and designing an overall project timeline from ideation to implementation.



What Does Digital Inclusion Mean?

What Does Digital Inclusion Mean?

This section...

- » Provides a literature review of global digital policy.
- » Explores the concept of digital inclusion and its impact.
- » Emphasizes the importance of digital policies being inclusive by design.

After reading, you will...

- » Have a stronger understanding of current digital policy trends.
- » Understand digital inclusion and what it means for you and others.

Digital technologies have changed the policy landscape over the past decade, with unprecedented advancements influencing the way governments approach information and communication technologies (ICTs). Not only have governments been racing to make internet access as far-reaching as possible, but we have witnessed the rapid digitization of public programs and services. The COVID-19 pandemic, as an example, acted as a catalyst and accelerated the adoption of digital technologies to address immediate challenges such as remote work and learning, education, healthcare, and crisis communication. This transformation underscores the increasing importance of digital technologies in building inclusive economies, driving economic growth, and delivering public goods.

Understanding Digital Policies

Globally, digital policies address one of three problems: access, transformation, or innovation. Rarely will a single governmental policy address all aspects of digital technology comprehensively. Most policies focus on one of these three challenges or a specific challenge within one of these three categories. However, all such policies represent an opportunity for digital inclusion principles to be considered and included.

Figure 1. Areas Addressed by Digital Policies

		
ACCESS	TRANSFORMATION	INNOVATION
Digital access policies guide infrastructure development to reduce the digital divide and provide universal connectivity.	Digital transformation policies implement ICTs into the delivery of public services such as healthcare, education, and transportation.	Digital innovation policies support research and development of new technologies and applications.

Digital access policies aim to increase the number of people who can access and use ICTs. Examples of such policies include national broadband plans or universal access strategies. They focus primarily on the infrastructure, its availability, and the affordability and quality of services provided. ICT ministries, regulators, and service providers are key stakeholders for these policies. The State of Broadband Report (ITU and UNESCO, 2023) and the State of Mobile Internet Connectivity Report (GSMA, 2023) are examples of major research that contrasts and compares the relevant policies.

*Inclusive Policy Example: **Australia’s First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan***

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) published the First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan in mid-2023. The plan measures the current disparities in access for indigenous communities within the country, sets out a strategic framework for the next three years in addressing the disparity, and establishes specific programs to bridge the divide (NIAA, 2023). The policy was developed as a result of consultations with indigenous community leaders and other stakeholders.

Digital transformation policies look at applications of ICTs in various aspects of public life ranging from e-health to e-education and financial inclusion. Typically, they involve the use of ICTs to create efficiencies, develop scale for greater impact, or create greater adaptability/personalization in service provision. Development of these policies typically requires engagement from a range of government ministries, depending on the scope and applications under consideration. Illustrations of comparative practices come from the Digital Transformation Strategy (AU, 2020), Digital Economy Report (UNCTAD, 2021), Green Digital Transformation (World Bank, 2023), the Government Digital Transformation Guide (IDB, 2022a), and Digitalizing Public Services (IDB, 2022b).

*Inclusive Policy Example: **Mexico City's Plan Digital***

Local authorities in Mexico City established a citywide Plan Digital in 2019 (ADIP, 2019). This plan included the creation of a new dedicated digital transformation agency, the Agencia Digital de Innovación Pública (ADIP). This agency led the development of new software to support delivery of public services in Mexico City, such as the city's Llave program for digital identification (Bloomberg Cities Network, 2023). The program garnered over 6 million users and was able to become a foundation for other new digital processes through the city's administration.

Finally, innovation policies look at the development and impacts of new emerging technologies. Such policies may first focus on the research and development of new technologies and provide support to local industry for it. In addition to this role, innovation policies may address potential consequences of new technologies as they proliferate in society. These consequences may be positive (such as further applications of digital transformation) or negative (such as the proliferation of cybercrime or misinformation). Examples of these policy practices can be found in reports from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) on blockchain (IDB, 2023a), generative artificial intelligence (AI) (IDB, 2023b), and the metaverse (IDB, 2023c). The scope and prominence of such policies may be affected by the prioritization of these topics by government officials, but broadly they work to cultivate a positive future and anticipate potential negative impacts from technological development.

*Inclusive Policy Example: **United Kingdom's Digital Catapult***

The United Kingdom's Digital Catapult program supports local development of emerging technologies. This includes access to infrastructure and facilities to enable tech entrepreneurs in the country to test and develop new technologies (Paunov, Planes-Satorra, and Ravelli, 2019). In addition, it, like other programs in OECD countries, provides networking and mentorship support for prospective developers, helping to cultivate local talent and diversify innovation within the country.

Digital inclusion operates as a theme across all three policy types. The most common areas for digital inclusion principles are within access policies, focusing on gaps in ICT use by gender, age, rurality, ethnicity, and income. Reports such as Facts and Figures (ITU, 2023e) from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the OECD’s Digital Economy Outlook (OECD, 2020) measure comparative progress across different countries along these metrics. However, in addition to access, policies can consider inclusion and equity metrics within digital transformation and innovation. For example, whose needs does innovation address and who benefits from the adoption of new technologies? These questions can be critical considerations for consultation and co-designing inclusive digital policies.

Figure 2. Examples of Inclusive Digital Policies

		
INCLUSIVE ACCESS	INCLUSIVE TRANSFORMATION	INCLUSIVE INNOVATION
Inclusive digital access policies look at the unique barriers that can disproportionately affect specific communities —such as indigenous communities in Australia—and consider how to bridge digital disparities.	Inclusive digital transformation policies implement ICTs into the delivery of public services such as healthcare, education, and transportation with broad consideration of the different use cases and user needs of a diverse population , such as in the example from Mexico City.	Inclusive digital innovation policies support research and development of new technologies and applications and make specific efforts to support and include underrepresented communities and populations within the ICT field, as was done with the UK’s Digital Catapult program.

As policymakers start the process of mapping out the potential for digital inclusion, the process can start with understanding the policies already in effect and classifying them within this structure. From here, stakeholders involved in the policy design process can begin to understand where there are gaps and identify where progress must be made.

Understanding Digital Inclusion

What does “digital inclusion” mean? Broadly, stakeholders can agree on the intention of digital inclusion, particularly within access policies—that is, closing gaps of inequity based on recognized characteristics such as gender or age and mitigating the barriers that disproportionately affect certain groups or communities.

However, beyond this, digital inclusion principles can challenge policymakers to not simply look backwards to mitigate emergent disparities but also proactively address and encourage a different culture in ICT use, application, and development. The UN’s Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology provides the following definition for digital inclusion (UN Tech Envoy, n.d.):

Digital inclusion is defined as
“equitable, meaningful, and safe
access to use, lead, and design
of digital technologies, services,
and associated opportunities for
everyone, everywhere.”

Digital inclusion holds benefits for a number of different people. As mentioned before, disparities are well documented across boundaries of gender, age, income, ethnicity, and rurality in ICT access and use. In addition, other communities may be uniquely affected within a particular country. Across LAC, indigenous communities have a particular context and relationship with ICTs that is worth consideration in digital inclusion strategies.

*Policy Challenge: **Meaningful Connectivity for Rural Communities in LAC***

Compounding challenges make it difficult for rural communities across LAC to obtain adequate connectivity that can meaningfully support their lives (IICA, 2022). This is due to infrastructure challenges for remote and more difficult terrain and a lack of measurements for rural connectivity in several countries across the region. In addition, due to the lack of meaningful connectivity, people in rural communities are less likely to be able to benefit from potential digital transformation projects such as remote healthcare and e-learning opportunities.

In addition, individuals can be uniquely affected by the intersections of different characteristics. For example, an older woman in a rural area is less likely to have had access to higher education compared to a younger man in a city. Quickly, this can expand into a consideration of several different barriers and challenges for policymakers. This underlines the importance of stakeholder engagement and consultations, as will be discussed in the concluding section of this report.

Table 1. Examples of Inclusive Digital Policy Objectives

	Access	Transformation	Innovation
Gender	Challenging social norms around girls' and women's use of technology and access to education, including in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)	Creating relevant applications that address women's needs	Supporting and encouraging women and girls in STEM careers, entrepreneurship, and use of digital tools
Rurality	Closing infrastructure gaps for remote and rural areas	Ensuring connectivity is of sufficient quality in rural areas to participate meaningfully	Supporting tech development for rural community needs, such as e-agriculture
Age	Raising public awareness of the benefits of internet access for young people and for the elderly	Deploying digital transformations that are inclusive across a range of digital literacy levels and competencies, considering language and content needs	Supporting young people in starting a business and pursuing a career in technology
Ethnicity	Ensuring devices and data are sufficiently affordable that anyone can access them, regardless of disparities in wealth and income	Considering different needs (e.g., language, relevant content, skills) and experiences of working with public authorities in the design and deployment of digital transformation projects	Supporting people from underrepresented backgrounds in starting a business and pursuing a career in technology

However, it's important to note that digital inclusion holds potential benefits not just for affected individuals and communities. For example, digital inclusion can help address linguistic disparities that exist online today. English-language content on the internet is disproportionate to the number of English speakers in the world (ISOC Foundation, 2023). Indigenous languages and those spoken by smaller communities are the most at risk for underrepresentation or erasure through ICT proliferation (Whose Knowledge? et al., n.d.). Research by Ugandan-based organization Pollicy explores these linguistic challenges in further detail with an African focus (Kupfer and Muyumba, 2022) and UNESCO developed a toolkit on how to protect and promote indigenous languages through digital means (UNESCO, 2023).

In tech development, digital inclusion can help address disparities when it comes to funding and support for new technologies. The disparities in gender and ethnicity are well documented (Morgan Stanley, 2022). The exact design of a relevant policy intervention to this problem should be adapted to a country's circumstances; however, this exemplifies a critical example of how digital inclusion principles can extend beyond access policies and into transformation and innovation policy as well.

Economically, digital inclusion enables scaling effects for e-commerce. Closing disparities in access represents not just a moral advancement but also a growth of the potential market base. Research into the “costs of exclusion” by the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) estimates the potential macroeconomic benefit of gender parity in internet use and profiles the economic benefits that women find today in the online world (A4AI, 2022). Indeed, the role of women in the digital economy is an increasing area of importance for development policy (USAID, 2023). Gender is a key example in this area, but it extends into other realms of digital inclusion as well: closing disparities in access and use poses macroeconomic benefits both on the supply and demand side of e-commerce.

Digital inclusion makes policies more resilient by challenging them to consider a wide array of different circumstances and increases the potential for positive impact through implementation. This makes policy development a more complex process, but good public policy is not designed without consideration of the social environment. Policymakers looking to adopt new digital policies or renew preexisting ones can strengthen these policies in their later implementation by integrating digital inclusion principles.



Why Do Policy and Regulation Matter?

Why Do Policy and Regulation Matter?

Technology does not grow in a vacuum: policy and regulation affect its development. Striking a delicate balance between fostering innovation and safeguarding public interest, policymakers set the conditions within which technology can flourish. Policy and regulatory frameworks can affect a wide range of factors including fair competition, open sourcing government data, and funding for start-ups. As ICTs continue to redefine the way we live and work, the collaboration between the public (including through diverse community representation) and private sectors becomes increasingly crucial to navigate the evolving challenges and opportunities in this interconnected world. Policymakers can change the direction of history.

This section...

- Illustrates the impact of policy and regulation on technological development.
- Identifies trends in digital policymaking today, with a focus on frontier technologies and technological development.

After reading, you will...

- Understand how policy and regulation affects technological development.
- Be able to identify ways in which policy and regulation can positively or negatively impact digital inclusion based on technological development.

Research shows that policy frameworks have an impact not just on technological development but on affordability and availability as well. The history of the internet is a clear example of how technology develops based on the policy and economic environment (Leiner et al., 1997; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 1999). Indeed, economists have more recently proposed theories around the use of public power to intentionally influence and encourage technological development (Mazzucato, 2021). Recommendations from the ITU map onto and continue to encourage countries to adopt policy and regulatory frameworks that align with free market competition and lower ICT prices for consumers (ITU, 2020b, 2023c). This history demonstrates the potential impact of public policy to influence technological development—including for digital inclusion.

In addition to affecting consumers' experiences, policy and regulation will affect the business models that thrive within a country. In ICTs, this impact is most clearly demonstrated through licensing regimes. More restrictive regimes limit

the types of businesses that are able to provide services such as broadband access to consumers and, in turn, limit the development of the market. More permissive regimes, such as those found in Mexico and Argentina, have enabled community networks to flourish (ISOC, 2018). These networks can help address digital inclusion by providing access to underserved communities (APC, 2019). However, these developments depend on an enabling policy environment where policymakers have identified a public good in permissive, open, and competitive markets.

Writing Policies for Inclusion

Policy and technology evolve together. Just as policy and regulatory frameworks can affect the trajectory of technological development, policy responds to the new consequences and dynamics enabled by technology and its proliferation.

While key digital policies will have multi-year lifespans that help set direction within the market, they will require constant attention and iteration. This includes consultations with stakeholders to inform performance on digital inclusion principles within these policies.

Policymakers should not consider digital inclusion to be a single task to be checked off once every few years: it is an ongoing process that will extend through stages of a policy's enactment. Successful digital inclusion strategies will iterate based on feedback received and in response to evolving dynamics in technological development and social norms around inclusion. Policymakers should guide the development process with this long-term responsibility in mind.

Policy and regulatory frameworks offer an opportunity for policymakers to set the trajectory of ICTs' impact in a country. This includes digital inclusion: policies will be assessed domestically and internationally on their ability to bridge digital divides and address inequalities within ICTs. Policymakers can leverage their authority to cultivate positive public goods such as greater digital inclusion through technological development.



What Is the Current Policy Environment for Digital Inclusion?

What Is the Current Policy Environment for Digital Inclusion?

Given the comparative wealth of policy analysis on digital inclusion within access policies and the continued urgency to addressing the digital gender gap (ITU, 2023b; GSMA, 2024), this section focuses on digital access policies as the most urgent priority for digital inclusion. Policymakers looking to comprehensively review their digital policies for opportunities to embed inclusion principles within them may wish to start here.

This section...	After reading, you will...
› Lays out the current state of key digital policies globally. › Notes the importance of key policies for digital inclusion. › Affirms the importance of embedding digital inclusion principles within these policies.	› Understand different types of major digital policies and their importance. › Have the tools to design measurable indicators for digital inclusion. › Be able to identify potential policy and regulatory gaps in your country.

Countries generally perform well in the adoption of national broadband plans and universal access strategies, but gaps remain. These two access policies are key opportunities for embedding digital inclusion principles and are measured indicators by the ITU (n.d., “DataHub”).

National broadband plans (NBPs) set the government’s ambitions for broadband access and affordability over a period of a few years. As of 2020, a little over half of the world’s countries had such a plan; across the Americas, this number is just below the world average at 51 percent (ITU, n.d., “Broadband”). Because of their scope, NBPs can be essential vehicles for setting government targets in closing the digital gender gap and addressing other inequalities that are relevant to digital inclusion. Previous IDB reports have gone into detail on the benefits of an effective NBP, case studies, and key elements for policymakers to consider in designing an NBP (Garcia-Zaballos et al., 2021).

Figure 3. Map of National Broadband Plans and Universal Access Strategies in the Americas



Source: ITU (n.d., "DataHub").

Universal access strategies (UASs) are important for defining priorities for a universal service and access fund (USAF), where one exists, and for other public spending that supports ICT access in unserved and underserved areas. As of 2021, nearly two-thirds of all countries have a UAS, with the Americas exceeding the world average with 26 of 35 countries reporting they have such a strategy or policy in place (ITU, n.d., “UAS”). UASs are critical mechanisms in mapping out inequalities in ICT access and use and, if done effectively, can help start the process of mapping digital inclusion priorities for other policies in the country.

Resources for Country-Level Information

This section focuses on the current, overall picture of broadband policy across the region and its relevance for digital inclusion. For a deeper dive into these different policy types and current information at the country level across LAC, please consult the following resources.

- *For broadband plans:* the IDB report *Development of National Broadband Plans in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Garcia-Zaballos et al., 2021).
- *For universal service and access funds:* the A4AI report *Universal Service and Access Funds in Latin America and the Caribbean* (A4AI, 2021).

Measuring for Inclusion

Measurable indicators are essential for achieving success in digital inclusion. Measurements create accountability and build trust among stakeholders involved in the policy design process. They also help track incremental progress towards a stated objective. Including targets for closing the digital divide can be one form of embedding inclusion principles within a digital access policy. Another can be to create quantified targets for public interventions that conform to the government’s theory of change towards digital equality. There are different approaches to creating indicators, and policymakers can agree on what may be the most appropriate approach depending on the local context.

Inclusive Policy Example: Gender-Responsive Indicators in Colombia’s Plan TIC

Colombia’s Plan TIC 2018–2022 incorporated digital inclusion principles within its targets (MinTIC, 2018). In addition to broad targets for rural and remote coverage, the plan included measurable targets for gender initiatives *Por TIC Mujer* and *Hackers Girls*, with the target of training over 6,000 women at different levels of digital literacy.

This case study illustrates how digital inclusion principles can be embedded within an NBP or UAS by creating measurable targets for the policy interventions and projects that support closing the digital gender gap.

Scoping the Policy Horizon

The current policy environment is primed for more inclusive design and indicators. Positive practices do exist within LAC and across the globe (see UNICEF Innocenti [2023] for examples). However, several countries still lack strategic focus that incorporates digital inclusion principles or sets measurable targets in this area. Both are important steps towards addressing digital inequalities through policy interventions. As policymakers revisit their digital policies, it is important to understand how digital inclusion fits within the broader policy landscape (top-down perspective) and how digital inclusion will be measured once a policy is adopted (bottom-up perspective).

In addition, policymakers should consider the comparative benefits of a stand-alone digital inclusion strategy versus embedded inclusion principles in other digital policies. A stand-alone digital inclusion strategy might help coalesce political will and focus action among stakeholders where general agreement exists but action has been lacking. However, embedding digital inclusion initiatives and targets within broader policies and strategies might offer a stronger, more sustainable position for such interventions. The ITU recently completed a comparative analysis of such choices—with a focus on gender mainstreaming—that may be of interest to policymakers comparing different methodologies (ITU, 2023d).

Learning from Others: Gender Mainstreaming in ICT

According to the *Handbook on Mainstreaming Gender in Digital Policies* (ITU, 2023d), “Based on the practices collected for this handbook, there seems to be no ‘one size fits all’ approach to gender mainstreaming. It does not seem feasible to implement practices if they are not adjusted to a given country context or reality. For instance, when it comes to practices supporting women and girls’ access to digital skills, replicability and scalability will likely be determined by the existing level of digital skills in each country, its national priorities in terms of skills acquisition, etc.

1

“Gender mainstreaming can be done by including specific objectives (e.g., references) to gender/women/girls in key national strategic documents such as digital agendas, or national financial inclusion strategies.

2

“Another option is to put together programmes or projects that specifically address women and girls. This approach has been followed by most practices in this handbook, ranging from online courses offering digital skills to mentorship programmes especially dedicated to women.

3

“A third option is to set gender criteria for the assessment of project proposals. This approach has been adopted in practices reported by Australia and by the State of Palestine.”

Digital Inclusion Strategies

This transition to more inclusive digital access policies will build the foundations for scalable digital economies. LAC countries perform along world averages in the adoption of key digital access policies such as NBPs and UASs. These policies—and the embedding of digital inclusion principles within them—are a critical first step towards reducing inequalities. Methodologies will differ across countries; however, consistently and critically, policymakers hold the mandate to create strategic direction and establish measurable indicators to track progress over time. As policymakers look to broaden access to ICT services, closing digital divides will help grow the digital economy.



What Are Good Practices for Digital Inclusion?

What Are Good Practices for Digital Inclusion?

Just as inclusive digital policies respond to the needs of different communities, they also benefit from addressing the different challenges and barriers that may exist.

This section...

- Identifies a number of thematic areas relevant to digital inclusion.
- Summarizes examples from across LAC and global resources on good practices for digital inclusion.

After reading, you will...

- Have an extended knowledge of different thematic implications of inclusive digital policies.
- Gain familiarity with good practices of inclusive digital policies and programs across LAC.
- Be able to start mapping out potential thematic considerations in your country.

This section highlights examples and resources to illustrate six areas for impact within a digital inclusion strategy (see Table 2). Broadly, they focus on inclusive markets, a participatory digital culture, and wide stakeholder engagement.

Table 2. Areas of Impact in Digital Inclusion Strategies

IMPACT FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION		
MARKETS	CULTURE	STAKEHOLDERS
Making infrastructure accessible for all	Developing digital skills and literacy among everyone	Engaging communities in the policymaking and project implementation process
Ensuring that meaningful connectivity is affordable for all	Cultivating a thriving online local content ecosystem	Working in collaboration in a multi-stakeholder policymaking model

These illustrative examples of positive thematic areas and good practices are meant to spark exploration and mapping exercises by policymakers; it is not an exhaustive list. Effective digital inclusion strategies respond to the localized needs and concerns of a country. As part of the policy design stage, policymakers may want to consider other areas as well.

Building Inclusive Markets

Fundamentally, digital policies must ensure ICT access and use is a reality for the largest number of people possible. Without this access, underrepresented and marginalized communities are less able to participate in digital transformation or innovation. As a result, the digital divide becomes not just one of infrastructure but of possibilities, limiting the impact that people can have as programmers and designers of the technologies they use. To address this, digital access policies should focus on building inclusive markets that provide affordable and meaningful connectivity that is universally accessible.

Policymakers and regulators in particular can encourage new business models that diversify services and extend coverage to unserved and underserved communities. By creating flexibility in the regulatory framework and supporting alternative service delivery or business models, policymakers can encourage new service providers to enter the market and support innovation. Effective stakeholder engagement and collaboration with private sector actors are essential to ensure that policy adaptations have the intended effect.

Good Practices for Digital Inclusion: Infrastructure

Peru: Flexible Regulation to Support Innovation in Rural Access

Internet Para Todos, a mobile internet provider in Peru, was founded as a collaboration between private sector and public officials in supporting innovative technologies to provide better 3G and 4G mobile broadband coverage in rural and remote areas of the country (IPT, n.d.). The development and deployment of this network relied on a supportive policy environment that enabled OpenRAN technology and shared infrastructure permissions to be cost-effective in Peru's unique terrain. Such policies can also enable greater competition and allow a more resilient network to be built in cooperation among various network operators.

Policymakers can consider digital inclusion principles when they adapt infrastructure regulations to the various types of geography that may be present within a country. This is exemplified by the unique challenges faced by rural and remote communities, discussed in greater detail in A4AI's Rural Broadband Policy Framework (A4AI, 2020).

Colombia: *Regulatory Sandboxes to Extend Coverage*

Facing continued gaps in mobile broadband coverage in rural and remote areas in the country, Colombia's communications regulator adopted a regulatory sandbox approach to enable pilot testing of innovative technologies and approaches to extend coverage in underserved areas (CRC, 2021). This policy was developed in collaboration with private sector inputs and allowed for network operators to deploy different types of technologies such as OpenRAN (also used in the Peruvian example above) to provide better coverage in underserved areas.

This is an example of ways that regulators can create flexibility to encourage private investment and deployment of new networks in underserved areas. This has digital inclusion implications when we consider the challenges faced by rural and remote communities.

Mexico: *Social Purpose Licensing to Support Community Networks*

The adoption of social purpose spectrum licensing in Mexico enabled the flourishing of various local, social purpose, and community-based ICT service providers to emerge throughout the country (APC, 2020). By making spectrum available on terms more favorable and supportive of community networking, public officials have supported the development of a more diverse market within the ICT services sector.

This effort illustrates ways that regulators can support new business models in rural areas and help extend coverage by supporting community networks, many of which appeal to underserved communities with specific needs.

In addition to supporting service providers, policymakers can focus on consumer engagement to help make connectivity more affordable and meaningful for people. While infrastructure development is a digital inclusion imperative, policymakers across LAC have also considered the availability of affordable tariffs and devices from the consumer perspective, recognizing that coverage does not equal access. Consumer-side surveys to measure people's access to and use of ICTs can help inform digital policies, set new targets, and measure progress over time.

Good Practices for Digital Inclusion: Affordable and Meaningful Connectivity

Ecuador: Targeted Data Tariffs to Connect the Most Vulnerable

In 2017, the Ecuadorian government adopted legislation that enabled the creation of social tariffs (Arcotel, n.d.). The program was connected with the government's social welfare system to provide lower cost data services to those earning the lowest incomes in the country. The adoption of such a program required the close collaboration of network operators and the government to make public data records securely available to verify participants' eligibility.

This program demonstrates ways to address the unique challenges of those on lower incomes or without any income and create targeted programs to reduce income-based digital divides.

Costa Rica: Public Funding to Make Devices More Affordable to All

The Costa Rican USAF FONATEL provides support to low-income families by subsidizing the cost of laptop computers and broadband connections to households through its program Hogares Conectados (SUTEL, 2023). This program helps families maintain their connectivity in areas where that infrastructure is available and notes the unique challenges faced by those on lower incomes in being able to reliably access affordable ICT services.

This program shows the ways that USAFs can be utilized to close digital divides and make progress on digital inclusion objectives.

Brazil: Collecting Survey Data to Measure Digital Inclusion

Since 2002, Brazilian telecommunications regulator Anatel has regularly surveyed consumer satisfaction with ICT services (ITU, 2018). Given the regulators' mandate to collect data across different operators and different geographies in the region, this survey exercise can require up to 140,000 interviews per year. This granularity allows the regulator to assess the performance of network operators and also examine potential disparities within the country in terms of service provision.

This example illustrates good practice by the regulator in collecting evidence on a regular basis to systematically measure performance and create accountability within the market by measuring consumer satisfaction.

Inclusive access is a fundamental priority for policymakers looking to advance digital inclusion. Digital access policies have been profiled most extensively in this report as the initial starting point for policymakers to consider. This reflects the consequential importance of closing digital divides: without universal access, steps to address other digital inequalities will fall short of their intended target.

Fostering a Participatory Digital Culture

Beyond access, policy and regulation can cultivate a welcoming online space that encourages not just content consumption but content creation as well. This includes internal and external factors that increase user confidence and reduce potential risks of online participation.

Digital skills and media literacy are bedrock interventions to support a diverse, participatory digital culture. Positive examples of ways to improve these skills include targeted engagement with communities and education-based interventions that support greater connectivity in schools. However, in addition to practical skills, users' awareness of their rights as consumers and on platforms is a critical consideration to ensure that individuals are able to protect themselves online.

Good Practices for Digital Inclusion: Digital Skills and Literacy

Brazil: School Connectivity to Support Youth Digital Inclusion

Brazil's national strategy for connected schools offers a systematic approach to provide universal connectivity with a focus on youth digital inclusion (Ministério da Educação, n.d.). This strategy is based on network performance data collected by the telecommunications regulator and the identification of gaps in service coverage and quality that impede meaningful connectivity for educational purposes. By focusing on connectivity for schools, policymakers are able to prioritize available funding at key points within the community and for vulnerable groups who may not be able to affordably access internet services at home.

This program demonstrates a way to embed inclusion principles within a digital transformation policy. By providing meaningful connectivity through schools, Brazilian policymakers are able to boost digital inclusion for children and young people who may not otherwise be able to reliably access the internet.

Mexico: Information Portals for Consumer Rights and Awareness

The Mexican consumer rights portal Soy Usuario has been recognized internationally for its progress in empowering consumers to submit a complaint for unsatisfactory services (IFT, 2021). Due to the online submission process and monitoring by PROFECO, the consumer protection agency, the platform accelerates the process for case resolution and helps boost confidence in consumer rights in the ICT sector and other parts of the digital economy.

This is a critical example of how digital skills are relevant not just in how people use technology but also in how people are able to defend their rights as consumers. The design of the platform may also have further digital inclusion considerations (e.g., the availability of such a platform to communities that are less likely to be online).

ITU Regional: Digital Skills Workshops with Indigenous Communities

As part of ongoing work since the adoption of World Telecommunications Development Conference (WTDC) resolutions to improve connectivity for indigenous communities, the ITU has supported the development of training courses, summits, and workshops on the use of ICT services and community networking to build capacity within indigenous communities across the Americas, predominantly in rural and remote areas (ITU, 2021). Because this spans a wide range of potential skill levels, the methods used range from online courses to in-person workshops and trainings, based on input from participants themselves.

Workshop programs such as this illustrate an example of community-level interventions to target underserved and marginalized communities that are particularly vulnerable to digital inclusion risks. The methodology of co-creation and allowing communities to express for themselves the important parts of ICT use is a critical lesson in being able to effectively engage with targeted communities centered by digital inclusion strategies.

Global Resources: Measuring and Analyzing for Digital Skills Success

Creating reliable measurements for quantifying and analyzing digital skills in a society remains an ongoing effort. Resources from the ITU on assessing digital skills proliferation (ITU, 2020a), the World Bank on designing a country action plan (World Bank, 2021), and the European Commission's DigComp (Vuorikari, Kluzer, and Punie, 2022) are all potential examples of good practice for policymakers to refer to as they consider their own strategies for digital skills and literacy promotion.

These resources underline the importance of measurability for impact and also the benefit of international cooperation in learning from comparative practices. While no country has completely “solved” the challenge of digital skills and literacy, policymakers can find plenty of opportunities to compare, contrast, and learn from others and their experiences in this field.

USAID: Seed Funding for Women's Economic Empowerment

The WomenConnect Challenge run by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided seed funding for a number of grantees working across the globe to reduce barriers to connectivity experienced by women (USAID, n.d., “WomenConnect”). In large part, this program focuses on practical motivations to overcome these barriers and to connect access with economic opportunity to create lasting life changes (USAID, n.d., “Closing”).

The program illustrates a method for addressing a form of digital inequality—through seed funding of project-level interventions—as well as strategies to convert interventions into lasting change. As policymakers design digital inclusion initiatives, they should also consider how these initiatives will outlast funding cycles and policy iterations to lead to lasting change for affected communities. Lessons learned from the program's earlier years focus on fostering cultural change, shifting social norms around women's use of technology, and creating technological solutions that address women's specific needs.

Barbados: Engaging MSMEs in Digital Skill Building

Barbados's Inclusive Digital Resilience Program, supported by the UNDP, helped train individuals in the country's tourism sector in practical digital skills (UNDP, 2023). This program helped boost the resilience of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic by developing skills in digital technologies, financial planning, and marketing. Of the 187 Caribbean MSMEs reached by the program, 77 percent were women owned.

This program demonstrates potential ways that targeted programming can bridge digital inequalities by closing skill gaps. In addition, it offers a model for application of digital skills programming that relates to people's everyday lives and means of earning income that will further motivate individual learning and application.

Dominican Republic: USAF Projects to Support Digital Skills

INDOTEL, the Dominican Republic's telecommunications regulator and USAF operator, developed facilitation guides for digital literacy with a focus on gender (INDOTEL, 2022). These guides support external facilitators to lead a community-level workshop series to develop digital skills, all designed with a focus on gender and inclusion to support digital skills among women and girls. This, paired with work on making more devices and subsidized tariffs available, supports greater, more inclusive connectivity within the country.

This is an example of designing inclusively: the literacy guides are available to the public and designed to be relevant to any community, but the focus is on gender dynamics within ICTs to ensure that the guide has a targeted impact on women and girls who are an underrepresented community in ICTs. This is also a model for how countries' USAFs can support efforts to close the digital gender gap.

In addition to supporting digital literacy, policymakers can take positive steps towards supporting the development of local content online. Foundationally, this includes ensuring that recognized human rights—including the critical freedom of expression and a right to privacy—apply online as they do offline. Beyond this, policymakers can develop targeted programs and interventions to support content creation within various sectors to create more meaningful and relevant content for individuals to engage with.

Good Practices for Digital Inclusion: **Local Content**

Peru: Public Funding and Support to Catalyze Local Start-Ups

Peruvian public authorities support the creation of new innovation start-ups through the program Startup Perú (ProInnovate, n.d.). The program offers opportunities such as competitively awarded funding and professional networking to support potential innovators within the country. It includes a women's network as well.

This example demonstrates a method to support local technology development, including by prioritizing the unique needs of specific underrepresented groups such as women in tech.

Colombia: Building an Identity for the Cultural Sector

Colombia's cultural sector has been branded internationally as part of the "orange economy." It has promoted the creative arts as an opportunity for investment and developed the country's local cultural scene as well (MinCultura, 2022). Over time, this contributes to the development of a library of local content in various media, online and offline.

This project presents an example of how policymakers can build a strategic direction around local content creation. As such an initiative is developed, including underrepresented groups can help embed digital inclusion principles within the policy's development and impact.

OECD: Human Rights as a Bedrock for Online Expression

Human rights remain a critical element in a flourishing local content ecosystem. International organizations such as the OECD offer guidance on comparative practice and challenges within this field of human rights as they apply online (OECD, 2022).

User confidence for marginalized and underrepresented communities increases when they know their human rights are protected when they participate online. As policymakers consider barriers to participation, they should also consider the legal frameworks that protect the rights of those online.

Argentina: Inclusive Principles by Design in AI Adoption

The proliferation of machine learning and algorithmic decision making offers an as-yet-unmeasurable potential benefit for digital transformation. Recognizing this potential as well as the ethical consequences of using AI in public service delivery, Argentinian officials adopted a resolution of AI guidelines for the public sector in 2023 (Subsecretaría de Tecnologías de la Información, 2023). This policy provides guidance on separate stages of ideation, design, validation, implementation, and maintenance and mandates a gender perspective at each stage.

This example demonstrates how ethical principles, such as gender equality, can be embedded from the beginning in digital transformation policies. Digital inclusion should not be limited to just access policies but considered through the whole of digital policy.

Successful interventions in supporting a participatory digital culture can help eliminate demand-side barriers to internet use and amplify potential benefits of digital transformation efforts. Research suggests that, worldwide, one of the largest barriers to universal ICT use is a lack of understanding about the internet and its potential (LIRNEasia, 2018). Beyond infrastructure, policy interventions can reduce digital inequality by empowering underrepresented communities to engage more with ICTs and use them in ways that they find useful.

Engaging a Wide Group of Stakeholders

In addition to policies that focus on digital inclusion as an end goal, other examples demonstrate how digital inclusion can be a means to a broader policy objective. This includes ways of working with public officials when designing digital policies.

Adopting a digital inclusion strategy represents an opportunity to align stakeholders in common action. International best practice guidance encourages regular and transparent engagement with stakeholders, particularly industry, to enable an effective digital policy framework. More localized examples of good practice demonstrate how to engage stakeholders, including consumers and civil society groups, to participate in the policymaking process and give inputs in the design stage.

Good Practices for Digital Inclusion: Collaboration and Partnerships

Brazil: Engaging Consumers in the Policy Process

Public consultations have been a standard practice in Brazil since they were adopted as part of a federal law in 2017. Brazilian public authorities now operate a centralized digital participation platform called Participa Mais Brasil that supports stakeholders in the process of contributing to consultations and public hearings (ITU, 2023a). This practice is not limited to the ICT sector, but this sector and its relevant authorities benefit from the platform's operation.

This is an example of the ways that governments and regulators can support a wide group of stakeholders in public consultation activities. This is critical when considering digital skills gaps that may prevent marginalized and underrepresented communities from fully participating in the consultation process.

ITU: Benchmarking Regulatory Success with Collaboration

Launched in 2020, the ITU's Benchmark for Fifth Generation Digital Collaborative Regulation (G5 Benchmark) measures development of ICT regulatory frameworks globally (ITU, n.d., "G5"). As part of this benchmark, regulators are required to shift to more collaborative ways of working. From consultations and regulatory cooperation to shifting from rules to principles in regulation, the benchmark provides guidance on how regulators can behave inclusively.

This resource illustrates ways the ICT regulators and other public authorities can engage with stakeholders in the sector to develop a sustainable regulatory framework and strategic direction. Digital inclusion principles apply here when considering how underrepresented groups are included and empowered throughout the process—as consumers, as stakeholders, and as policymakers.

Brazil: Collaborating with Multiple Stakeholders in Building Connectivity

A recent report by the Regional Center for Studies on the Development of the Information Society (Cetic.br) explores the frontiers of digital inclusion within Brazil with a focus on municipal-level connectivity (Cetic.br, 2022). The report looks at the natural limitations of public sector-led efforts and the need for private sector participation to scale impact and reach additional communities. In addition, local governments play a tangible role in making public Wi-Fi points ubiquitous and a reliable point of connectivity for those who may not be able to afford a strong connection at home.

This illustrates the different roles for different stakeholders throughout the ICT ecosystem. Public and private sector actors can create wider impact by working together on promoting digital inclusion. Policymakers may also benefit from looking at the policy dynamics at different levels of policymaking—from the national to the local—to understand how different dynamics may then affect the overall availability of broadband within a country.

Closing the digital gender gap remains an urgent priority—not just for equity in access but for broader digital equity. Given the unique challenges of gender inequality beyond the realm of ICTs, gendered dynamics are important to consider in all three digital policy areas: access, digital transformation, and innovation. Promising examples of good practice exist in each area at varying levels of scale to illustrate a wide range of potential options for policymakers.

Good Practices for Digital Inclusion: **Communities**

Colombia: Importance of Intersectional Data

In collaboration with the IDB, Colombia's national statistical office, DANE, explored the value and importance of collecting and using data that includes underrepresented communities (Munoz and Monje, 2023). This work emphasizes the importance of disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, ability, gender identity, and sexual orientation as examples. It includes regional examples of inclusive data collection and explores different types of data collection, from quantitative to qualitative methods.

This resource demonstrates the importance of inclusive measurements and indicators that address inequalities across communities. In addition, sufficiently rich disaggregated data allows policymakers to see and measure the ways in which intersectionality—that is, the overlapping nature of different markers of individual identity—may affect someone's experience online or their ability to connect.

Brazil: Accessible and Inclusive Institutions and Priorities

Brazil's ICT regulator, Anatel, has undertaken a number of activities to support the ICT needs of people with disabilities (Anatel, 2023a). This includes efforts to close the digital divide that exists in Brazil due to disability. The institution is also improving inclusivity by ensuring that people with disabilities participate as stakeholders in the policymaking process. In addition, the Prêmio Anatel offers an opportunity for private sector collaboration in raising the importance of inclusive and accessible communications for everyone.

This example illustrates the importance of policymakers thinking not just externally about the ICT sector but also internally and finding ways to engage and include different communities within the inner workings of relevant institutions such as the ICT regulator.

Regional: Community Needs in ICT Policymaking

As more people come online and spend more time online, the range of needs for support grows. Across LAC there have been efforts to recognize and support the different needs of different communities, such as monitoring online gender-based violence in Uruguay (UNDP, 2022) and child protection online (Anatel, 2023b). However, the online experiences of LGBTQ+ people across the region detail the need for further work in protecting targeted individuals and communities (Heggestad, 2023) and also the importance of critical technologies such as encryption to protect users (ISOC, 2019). Policymakers and researchers are also becoming more aware of the intersectionality of these dynamics as they affect online behaviors and experiences; see, for example, Cetic.br (2021).

These examples demonstrate a wide range of budding efforts to understand the online experiences of a wide range of users and cultivate a safe online environment for everyone. They stress the importance of not assuming users' online experience is a monolith and the need to consider and engage with different communities to explore the potential impacts of a single policy on different parts of society.

Wide stakeholder engagement not only applies to testing strategies earlier in the design stage; the process also increases participation and a sense of ownership in later implementation stages, leading to greater success. Digital inclusion, as a practice, requires including the affected stakeholders in the policy design process. This adds time and complexity but offers rewards to policymakers willing to undertake the work required.



How Can Policymakers Take Action for Digital Inclusion?

How Can Policymakers Take Action for Digital Inclusion?

Readers of this report will benefit from the comparative practices detailed in the previous sections:

- The concept of digital inclusion within the broader digital policy agenda
- The importance of policy and regulation in supporting an inclusive digital future
- The current policy environment and its responsiveness to digital inclusion
- Examples to illustrate various aspects of digital inclusion that may be relevant to policymakers in the design stage

Now that the what and why of digital inclusion strategies has been covered, this final section now addresses the how. It discusses some of the initial steps for policymakers looking to embark on a policy design process for a digital inclusion strategy.

This section...

- Provides a summary process for designing a digital inclusion strategy.

After reading, you will...

- Have guidance on initial steps in the policy design process.
- Know important milestones in the policy design process.
- Understand key principles around inclusivity and stakeholdership.

Policy design is a complex and iterative process that plays a crucial role in addressing societal challenges such as digital inclusion. To create impactful and inclusive digital policies, a well-structured approach is essential. This section briefly outlines the seven steps of policy design, emphasizing stakeholder engagement, evidence-based decision making, and continuous evaluation.

1

Gather Stakeholders: The foundation of effective policy design is engaging a diverse range of stakeholders. These include government officials, the private sector, affected communities, and civil society groups. By bringing together various perspectives, the policy design process benefits from a more comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand. Early engagement helps ensure that the policy is informed by the experiences and expertise of those who will be directly affected.

2

Collect Evidence: Informed decision making relies on robust evidence. Before drafting a policy, it is crucial to collect and analyze relevant data. This may involve conducting surveys or focus groups, reviewing existing research, and consulting with stakeholders. Evidence provides a factual basis for policy recommendations, helps identify potential challenges and opportunities, and provides legitimacy for policy decisions.

3

Consult Widely: A key aspect of inclusive policy design is seeking input from a broad range of stakeholders. This involves conducting consultations with individuals and groups who may be impacted by the policy. Public input ensures that the policy reflects diverse perspectives and considers the needs of all stakeholders. Critically for digital inclusion efforts, policymakers should make consultations available and accessible to those centered by the strategy's programs, including those who may have limited or no access to the internet.

4

Draft Policy, Iterate: With stakeholder input and evidence in hand, the policy drafting process can begin. However, this process is not linear. Iteration is crucial. Drafts should be refined based on feedback from stakeholders and emerging evidence. This iterative approach allows for the incorporation of new information and ensures that the policy remains responsive to evolving circumstances. Publishing parts of the iteration process—such as policymaker responses to consultations—can increase trust among stakeholders and add legitimacy to the ultimate policy or strategy adopted.

5

Publish the Policy: Transparency is a cornerstone of effective governance. Once the policy is finalized, it should be made accessible to the public. Publishing the policy allows for accountability and provides an opportunity for stakeholders to understand the decision-making process. Clear communication of the policy's goals, strategies, and expected outcomes—including measurable, time-bound indicators—fosters public trust and increases accountability.

6

Collect Measurement Data: To assess the impact of the policy, it is essential to establish measurable indicators. This involves collecting relevant data before and after policy implementation to set a baseline and measure progress. These indicators could include economic metrics, social outcomes, and other key performance indicators. This data should, importantly, consider the diverse range of stakeholders and their respective needs and gaps. Regularly collecting measurement data ensures that the policy's effectiveness is continually monitored.

7

Reflect on Results, Repeat: Reflecting on the initial results of policy implementation is a critical step in the continuous improvement over a policy's lifespan. This reflection involves assessing whether progress is being made towards intended outcomes and if any unintended consequences emerged. If necessary, adjustments to the policy can be made based on the lessons learned. This cyclical process of reflection and refinement contributes to the ongoing evolution of effective policies. Stakeholders can play a crucial role in feeding back on a policy's progress.

Effective policy design for digital inclusion requires a systematic and inclusive approach. Policymakers need to not just strive for digital inclusion as an objective but act inclusively to demonstrate how to achieve it. This requires constant stakeholder engagement and a degree of transparency to empower stakeholders to give feedback and feel engaged in the policy design process. This complexity and iteration may slow down the policy adoption process, but it also increases the chances for long-term impact.

Policymakers can build the foundations for a scalable, inclusive digital economy. Digital policies are expanding in their typology and development outcomes. As they grow, so too does the need for inclusive outcomes and long-term impact. Policy and regulation have the capacity to change the course of history when it comes to technological development and availability. The current policy environment offers hope and demonstrates clear opportunities for continued growth and policy development to create more inclusive digital societies.

The positive examples of good practice from across LAC demonstrate the potential within a comprehensive digital inclusion strategy. This report highlights that potential and seeks to empower policymakers to do more in the future. The correct approach for each country will depend on local context and local actors. Policymakers can learn from what has already been done and adapt it for their own context.



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