

Latin America and the Caribbean urged to take ownership of AI

CHILE

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) says in an international landscape in which technological capacities are taking on increasing weight for competitiveness and development, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) must move forward with taking ownership of artificial intelligence to meet its main challenges.

ECLAC, in collaboration with CENIA in Chile, has released the fourth edition of the Latin American Index of Artificial Intelligence (ILIA 2026), showing that connectivity remains essential but is no longer enough.

It says the region's largest gaps are in its computing capacity, Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption in companies, and the implementation of national strategies.

The report notes that the LAC needs to deal with the challenges, especially traps of low capacity for growth; high inequality and low social mobility and cohesion; and low institutional capacity and ineffective governance.

It said that increasing access to these technologies is not enough and that it is also necessary to connect infrastructure, data, talent, research, and institutional capacities to translate them into innovation, productivity, and economic and social value.

The report analyses the AI ecosystems of 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and, for the first time, includes a comparison with Germany, Spain, Estonia, Portugal, and Singapore, based on a selected set of indicators.

“For Latin America and the Caribbean, the question is not only how to access these technologies but how to use them strategically to take on our key development challenges. Passive incorporation may not only deepen

dependencies but even expand existing gaps and inequalities in the region,” said ECLAC’s executive secretary, José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs.

The report identifies areas in which national scale is insufficient, such as computing, research, advanced talent, and participation in international standards.

CENIA director, Álvaro Soto, agreed that the ILIA has become a fundamental tool for decision-making in the region and cautioned that “we are facing a revolution of the computerization of our society.

“Instruments like the ILIA are no longer a need; they are an emergency, because the decisions we make today are fundamental, and cooperation is more than the path; it is the means, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean,” he added.

ILIA 2026’s evidence shows progress in the construction of institutional frameworks for the development of artificial intelligence, though there are still difficulties in putting them into practice.

The report found that 85 per cent of the countries analysed have a national AI strategy in force or in development, and 75 per cent have an institution formally charged with leading this agenda.

However, only Brazil and Colombia have budgets explicitly assigned among their national apparatuses.

In research and education, 65 per cent of countries have specialised research centres, more than half have incorporated artificial intelligence into school curricula, and all 20 countries analysed have graduate programmes.

Despite this progress, the availability of specialised skills in the labour market is still low.

In the business realm, the report’s estimates put adoption of artificial intelligence at 27.6 per cent of large companies, compared to 12.8 per cent of medium-sized companies and 6.8 per cent of small companies. CMC