

Policy Brief - Towards human-centric digital government in Latin America and the Caribbean

How can the digital transformation of governments support proactive and human-centric public services in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Key highlights

- **The digital transformation of governments offers Latin America and the Caribbean countries a unique opportunity to foster more inclusive, proactive, and human-centric public services.**
- Governments in Latin America and the Caribbean can leverage data and technology to **rethink how they design and deliver public services**, for example strengthening data governance and promoting the use of digital identity solutions.
- Latin America and the Caribbean countries could explore further collaboration in the development of interoperable digital public infrastructures - including solutions for digital identity and better access and sharing of data - to **progress towards inclusive and resilient cross-border service delivery.**

What's the issue?

The digital transformation of governments presents a unique opportunity for Latin America and the Caribbean countries to foster more inclusive, proactive, and human-centric public services. Digital government, including through the use of data and artificial intelligence, can improve the capacity of governments to respond to dynamic needs of citizens and business. Digital government can help in the understanding of needs and expectations from citizens and business and create ways to provide services through diverse channels (omnichannel). However, governments across the LAC region are still grappling with how to adopt technologies in a way that aligns with strategic goals and key policy priorities, to maximise sustainable economic growth and maintain social and economic inclusion.

Governments should develop more coherent approaches across the public sector to mitigate potential risks and ensure that technologies are used to deliver the intended benefits. This is especially relevant in countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, as their governments still face significant challenges in achieving a human-centric, integrated, and sustainable digital transformation of the public sector¹. Digital government strategies play an essential role in steering digital transformation efforts in the public sector to deliver more proactive and human-centric public services.

In a dynamic digital and societal environment, governments in Latin America and the Caribbean should consider digital government as a critical enabler of an ethical and sustainable transformation of the public sector to deliver more proactive and human-centric public services. To move in this direction, governments could refocus their efforts to strengthen data governance, promote digital public infrastructure, including digital identity, and uplift the capacity of public institutions to deliver public services in the digital age.

Rethinking the design and delivery of public services to deliver more equitable and human-centric results.

Public services represent the most common interactions that people, businesses, and organisations have with governments². Rethinking the design and delivery of public services can allow governments to advance towards more efficient and responsive services, enabling a better understanding of citizens and business' needs and to meet their expectations. The adoption and use of public service standards can help public sector institutions take a common and consolidated approach to their design and delivery.

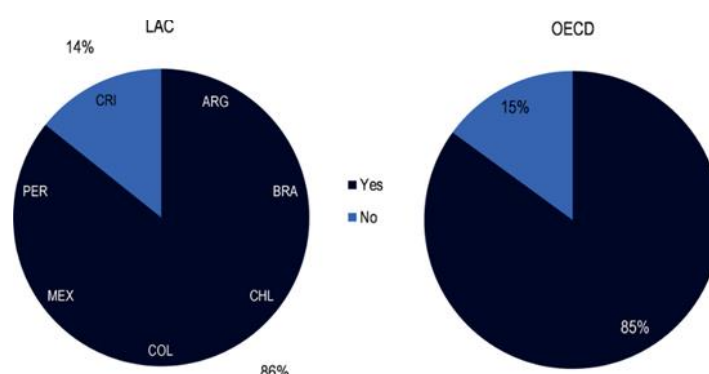
The OECD 2023 Government at a Glance of Latin America and the Caribbean, **shows countries in the region are adopting standards to define a common approach when designing and delivering government services.** Six out of seven surveyed countries have developed a service standard (86%), compared to 85% of OECD countries (28 out of 33) (Figure 1).

To better meet user needs and expectations, governments in the LAC region could make greater efforts to employ service design and user research methods to effectively involve users while designing government services. According to the OECD 2023 Government at a Glance of Latin America and the Caribbean, less than half of the surveyed LAC countries have adopted methods facilitating a deeper understanding of user needs. Just three LAC countries each use design thinking sessions, focus groups, public consultation through websites and usability testing. (Figure 2)

¹ OECD/CAF (2023), Digital Government Review of Latin America and the Caribbean: Building Inclusive and Responsive Public Services, OECD Digital Government Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/29f32e64-en>.

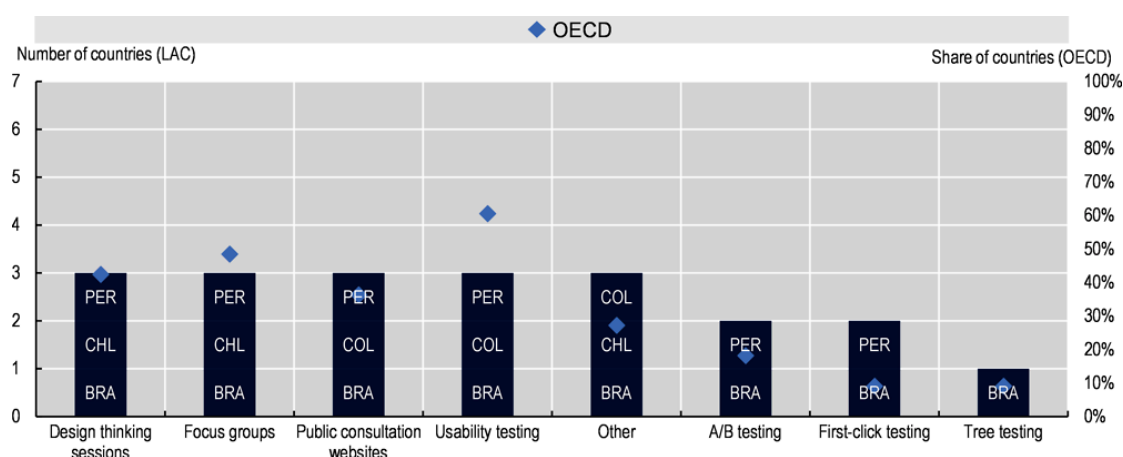
² OECD (2024), Government at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2024, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4abdba16-en>

Figure 1. Whole-of-government service standard in place at the central/federal level, 2022



Source: OECD (2024), Government at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2024, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4abdba16-en>.

Figure 2. Methods used to test digital government services with the involvement of users and/or providers, 2022



Source: OECD (2024), Government at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2024, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4abdba16-en>.

Strengthening data governance for more inclusive and resilient public sectors

Sound data governance ensures government manage data in a secure, ethical and efficient way, enabling evidence-based decision-making³. The rise in the use artificial intelligence by public sectors stresses the importance of adopting robust data governance frameworks to ensure inclusive and sustainable public services. Data governance enables the availability and sharing of quality data, as well as the oversight needed to address risks around data privacy and biased decision-making. Governments could ensure a more people-centred use of AI that is safe, secure, and trustworthy by including improved data governance as part of their strategic approaches to AI.

³ OECD (2019), The Path to Becoming a Data-Driven Public Sector, OECD Digital Government Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/059814a7-en>.

Evidence shows countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have an opportunity to strengthen the data governance framework to advance towards more inclusive and human-centric services. According to the OECD/CAF Digital Government Review of Latin America and the Caribbean⁴ dedicated data leadership roles are scarce in the region, with responsibilities assigned to different institutions, such as digital government agencies or telecommunication ministries. Similarly, the evidence shows that in most LAC countries data strategies are typically embedded within broader digital government strategies or focused on specific areas such as open government data. This leads to fragmented approaches across and within countries, with inconsistent policy tools being used to address interoperability, open data, digital government, personal data protection, and AI instead of a unified strategy⁵.

Finally, the cultural and political similarities in Latin America and the Caribbean are an opportunity to advance towards greater data integration across the region. Countries in the region can advance in this direction through regulatory harmonization, data interoperability, and the provision of digital public goods such as open-source code, open application programming interfaces (APIs), and open data. Regional integration in data management could also enhance the capacity of governments to respond to common policy challenges, strengthening the resilience and sustainability of public policies and services in the region.

Digital public infrastructure for inclusive and human-centric public services

Digital public infrastructure (DPI) refers to standards-based and interoperable building blocks to support the delivery of essential services. DPI includes digital identity, data sharing systems, digital post, notifications, payments, and single digital gateways. Reflecting the *Government as a Platform*⁶, the use and promotion of these building blocks can allow governments to consolidate approaches and advance towards interoperable systems for consistent user experiences when interacting with public services.

Digital identity is especially relevant in the Latin America and the Caribbean context, as digital identity systems are yet not widely available⁷. According to the OECD/CAF Digital Government Review of Latin America and the Caribbean, most countries in the region allow users to create individual accounts for accessing government services, but these systems primarily focus on verification rather than comprehensive authentication. According to this report, six LAC countries have some form of digital identity systems in place: Chile, Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Nevertheless, the evidence shows only Uruguay provides authentication and advanced digital signature as opposed to the rest of the solutions in the region that only enable identity verification.

Digital identity plays a critical role in advancing towards more secure, proactive, and human-centric services. The **OECD Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Digital Identity**, adopted in 2023, encourages countries to develop and govern digital identity systems as a key part of their digital public infrastructure. Countries in LAC could strengthen the existing governance for these solutions to ensure inclusiveness and equity in the provision of

⁴ OECD/CAF (2023)

⁵ OECD/CAF (2023)

⁶ OECD (2020), "The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework: Six dimensions of a Digital Government", OECD Public Governance Policy Papers, No. 02, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en>.

⁷ OECD/CAF (2023)

public services in the next decade. These approaches can facilitate the adoption of digital identity solutions to support public services and enable the development of cross-border services.

Good practices from LAC countries

Colombia – Data Governance in the Public Sector⁸

- Colombia's data governance model consists of a coordination mechanism to steer efforts across the public sector and support institutions using data to create public value. The mechanism builds on a three-layer system identifying specific goals and needs at strategic, tactical, and operational levels. The model is based on governance principles of adaptability, coordination, efficiency, and user-driven focus. The model establishes a national coordinator for data, responsible for leading the implementation, and a national committee to support interinstitutional coordination. Key features include a distributed responsibility system involving different stakeholders managing and using data. Through technical, legal, and organizational directives, the governance model addresses complex issues like ethical data management, cross-border data cooperation, data portability, and technology adoption.

Peru - Service design standard⁹

- Inspired by the work of the UK's Government Digital Service, Peru developed a dedicated standard for service design and delivery that comprises key principles and supporting guidance to equip government institutions when digitalising government services. The standard comprises accessibility, user research, testing and implementation guidance with a primary focus on users and their needs. This initiative is framed under ongoing efforts in Peru to advance the country's digital government maturity. The standard defines three main steps for government institutions to digitalise their services including (i) user research, (ii) testing and experimentation and prototyping and (iii) an agile development of government services, including digital public infrastructure and enabling digital tools to scale up and measure performance and satisfaction.

Uruguay - Service Design Toolkit¹⁰

- Uruguay established a dedicated set of methods and supporting instruments for the implementation of its service design standard. The purpose of this toolkit is to assist public sector institutions to operationalise the service standard under the leadership of the Social Innovation Lab for Digital Government (LAB). The toolkit includes dedicated supporting material for understanding users and their needs, identify problems and improve services, e.g., through focus groups, among others. This toolkit is part of a broader strategic approach to secure a user-centred design and delivery of government services in Uruguay. This emanates from the legal mandate of its leading digital government institution to promote and implement actions to strengthen the relationship between citizens and the State.

⁸ https://gobiernodigital.mintic.gov.co/692/articles-273751_modelo_gobernanza_infraestructura_datos.pdf

⁹ <https://guias.servicios.gob.pe/creacion-servicios-digitales>

¹⁰ <https://www.gub.uy/agencia-gobierno-electronico-sociedad-informacion-conocimiento/tematica/metodologias-lab>

Suggested Policy Actions

To support proactive and human-centric public services in Latin America and the Caribbean, governments could:

- **Strengthen the governance for digital government for a sustainable and human-centric transformation.** Government in LAC could develop a robust governance, including actionable and coherent digital government strategies. Latin American and Caribbean countries are well placed to move towards more ambitious goals, such as strengthening digital identity solutions, developing proactive public services, and safeguarding fundamental rights, such as safeguarding privacy in interactions with the public sector.
- **Adopt data governance to advance towards a data-driven public sector.** In the context of increasing adoption of artificial intelligence LAC countries could consider formalising data leadership roles, functions, and data strategies for the public sector.
- **Develop service standards for proactive and human-centric services.** Governments in LAC could consider adopting a structured approaches to the design and delivery of public services to maximize its benefits and minimize associated risks.
- **Consolidate the governance for digital identity solutions to secure inclusiveness and equity in the provision of public services in the next decade.** These approaches can facilitate the adoption of shared and reusable solutions to support public services and advance towards cross-border services.
- **Leverage data and digital to progress towards cross-border services.** Governments in the region have an opportunity to better integrate through regulatory harmonization, data interoperability, and the provision of common digital public infrastructure, including digital identity, to converge towards cross-border services and strengthen the resilience and sustainability of public services in the region.

Further reading

- OECD/CAF (2023), *Digital Government Review of Latin America and the Caribbean: Building Inclusive and Responsive Public Services*, OECD Digital Government Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/29f32e64-en>.
- OECD (2024), *Government at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2024*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4abdba16-en>.
- OECD (2023) Recommendation on the Governance of Digital Identity. <https://www.oecd.org/digital/digital-government/oecd-recommendation-on-the-governance-of-digital-identity.htm>
- OECD/CAF (2022), *The Strategic and Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector of Latin America and the Caribbean*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1f334543-en>.
- OECD (2021), G20 Compendium on the Use of Digital Tools for Public Service Continuity: Report for the G20 Digital Economy Task Force, Trieste, Italy, August 2021, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6f800fd5-en>.