Preface

Digital technologies are profoundly changing our economies and societies. Broadband networks are essential in enabling this transformation. By reducing the cost of accessing information and by expanding the means for sharing knowledge, these networks can empower people, encourage greater civic engagement and improve the delivery of public services, as well as helping to create opportunities for new goods, services, business models and jobs. Nonetheless, these opportunities come with challenges, the first of which is to ensure that everyone has access to this extraordinary tool.

The capacity of broadband to accelerate economic and social development is recognised globally. Its importance for the three pillars of development – economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection – was recently acknowledged by the United Nations (UN), which set a provision of universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020 as one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We are also mindful of the UN’s call for sharing knowledge and expertise in the service of the SDGs. Broadband Policies for Latin America and the Caribbean: A Digital Economy Toolkit offers a clear example of partners coming together to share good practices. In setting out some guidelines for designing a whole-of-government approach to policies, this Toolkit aims to assist countries in the region enhance their digital prospects and make progress on international, regional and national policy objectives.

Today, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is experiencing an economic slowdown, but the time is ripe for both implementing much needed structural reforms that can promote sustainable growth and for designing policies that seize the benefits of the digital economy. The first challenge is making sure opportunities are more evenly spread. An estimated 300 million people in the region, half of the population, still have no access to the Internet, with the situation varying greatly between countries, income groups, and those living in rural or urban areas.

Successful broadband policies, designed to improve social inclusion, productivity and governance, can be a catalyst for expanding the “digital dividends” which stem from broadband access and use. Policymakers and regulators have a variety of instruments at their disposal to stimulate and encourage investment, competition and network deployment. They can also assist in making services more affordable, relevant, usable and safer for individuals and businesses.

The OECD is committed to supporting accessible and affordable broadband. This joint publication with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to be presented at the Digital Economy Ministerial meeting in Cancún, Mexico, is designed to generate fruitful
policy dialogue on how to achieve this goal. This will mean enlisting all stakeholders to make the most of the opportunities ahead and to tackle the evolving challenges of the digital economy to promote further social inclusion, increase productivity and enhance governance in the region. It is time to act together to put accessible, affordable broadband at the fingertips of all.

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