# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2008

*Focus on access to infrastructure*

# Global Information Society Watch

## 2008

**Global Information Society Watch** 2008

**Women in Connection (Mujeres en Conexión), Diego Portales University**
Patricia Peña Miranda
www.mujeresenconexion.org

## Introduction

Like many other countries in Latin America, Chile today is bearing the fruits of more than ten years of public policies that promote universal access. These have included a national programme promoting the educational use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), digital literacy programmes for citizens, and a telecommunications legal framework that allows the entrance of new operators.

The continuity of many of these initiatives has given Chile a good reputation in the region, with impressive positions in indices like the World Economic Forum (WEF) Networked Readiness Index,[1] where it was ranked 34th among 127 countries in 2007-2008 – higher than any other Latin American country.

This was all the result of a vision that began during the administration of former president Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (1994-2000), and the formation of a special committee dealing with the information society in the early 2000s. This effort allowed the Ricardo Lagos administration (2000-2006) to develop a Digital Agenda (2004-2006), with the participation of the private sector, which included 34 programmes and initiatives.

Under the current administration of President Michelle Bachelet, the Chilean ICT development vision is facing some controversy, although there is a Digital Development Strategy 2007-2012 that sets 25 objectives and goals to promote the effective use of technology. The last United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) National Human Development Report on Chile, released in 2006, was dedicated to examining the impact of new technologies in Chilean society. The main finding of this study was that 50% of Chileans do not feel a part of the process, and the causes for this were cultural and subjective (UNDP, 2006).

## Physical access to technology

Statistics indicate that almost 30% of Chileans have access to a computer with an internet connection on a daily basis in their homes, workplaces, schools or public centres (such as cybercafés). A recent telecommunications consumer survey (SUBTEL, 2008) showed that by June 2008, 1,405,510 Chilean households had access to fixed-line connections to the internet, and one in every three homes had access to broadband. Moreover, 79% of internet users access it in their homes, 53.1% at cybercafés, 50.5% at their workplaces and 28.1% at their schools.

In the 2008 Information Society Index developed by the International Data Corporation (IDC),[2] Chile retained its position as the country with the highest scores in Latin America. The index is based on variables like personal computer ownership, internet access and telecommunications services, as well as social variables such as education. Chile ranked 29th overall out of the 53 countries studied worldwide, and 26th with regard to internet access.

Table 1 shows the distribution of different ICT services in Chilean households. The percentages indicate the availability of the services according to socioeconomic level.

The Digital Strategy 2007-2012 shows the main goals achieved for the first Digital Agenda in Chile (2004-2006). These include:

- 1,095,000 internet connections

- 976,000 people trained between 2003 and 2006

- 68% of businesses connected

- 776 infocentre networks established.

The major programme for connecting public schools is Enlaces (Links), launched by the Ministry of Education. The programme has resulted in the provision of one computer for every 29 students, with 4,895 schools connected to broadband by 2006, 670 of them in rural areas. The programme decided not to participate in the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) initiative, nor is it considering free and open source software (FOSS) for education, although there are pilot projects exploring low-cost alternatives like Classmate, an Intel laptop.

The success of the Enlaces programme has been mixed. The last evaluation report (2004) revealed that it is an expensive programme with poor use made of the equipment installed. The average cost per student is USD 46 (47.8% higher than the international standard), and the average price for every computer installed between 2001 and 2003 was USD 1,450. The report also shows that only 13% of Chilean students use the computers three times a week, and that 9% use the internet three times a week.

## When connectivity does not mean social inclusion

The UNDP report mentioned above found that 50% of Chileans do not feel included in the information society or consider themselves beneficiaries of new technologies. This shows us that it is not enough to guarantee access to technology in a developing country like Chile without

1   www.weforum.org/pdf/gitr/2008/Rankings.pdf

2   www.idc.com/groups/isi/main.html

| Table 1: **ICT services in Chilean households** | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Service | Socioeconomic level* | | | | | |
| | A/B/C1 | C2 | C3 | D | E | Total |
| Telephone | 88.2% | 79% | 59.7% | 46.2% | 19.6% | 54.5% |
| Long-distance telephone service (carrier) | 21.1% | 16.7% | 5.6% | 4.7% | 3.2% | 7.8% |
| Mobile phone (prepaid or with contract) | 96% | 91.9% | 88.7% | 89% | 86.8% | 89.5% |
| Internet connection | 75.9% | 55.5% | 28.8% | 16.7% | 4.6% | 28.5% |
| TV (cable/satellite) | 73.3% | 54% | 34% | 25.9% | 8.7% | 33.5% |
| None of the services | 0% | 0.2% | 0.8% | 1.9% | 5.4% | 1.0% |

*A, B, C1, C2, C3, D and E indicate socioeconomic levels with A being the highest income level, C2 and C3 medium income level, and D and E the lowest income levels.

Source: **SUBTEL (2008)**

promoting public policies for the social appropriation of ICTs.

The UNDP report is based on an analysis of trends in public policies in ICT development and a national survey conducted across the whole country. According to the report, 84% of adolescents between the ages of fourteen and seventeen feel that new technologies are accessible, while 50% of people eighteen and older do not.

The study also includes a subjective category that shows that 21% of people surveyed consider themselves absolutely excluded (for reasons including a lack of income, lack of interest and age); 18% have technological aspirations (they want to use technology, but cannot afford it); and 8% consider themselves "e-workers" (ICTs are used daily in their work environment) or "e-connected" (connected all day, a category made up mainly of young people with a high income). Slightly under 8% of respondents were classified as "e-gamers" (mainly students and young people) and as "technologically insecure" (those who do not use any kind of technology), while 5% said they use the internet modestly.

The main conclusion of the report was that despite the ICT access rate in Chile, there is limited appropriation. The main challenge for Chile is to promote not only a public policy centred on access to technologies, but to think about related cultural and subjective aspects and socio-cultural conditions.

To illustrate these findings, although the Enlaces programme promotes equality in the opportunity of access, an evaluation report from 2004 shows that there was little evidence to suggest these efforts had improved the quality of Chilean education.

On the other hand, since 2000 a digitised civil society has started to emerge, including bottom-up social spaces and networks in education, community telecentre and infocentre networks, FOSS organisations, organisations promoting digital rights, social and community media networks (radio, television and press), social wireless groups, web entrepreneurs, a bloggers movement, "hacktivists" and gender and

ICT groups. These will all help to push the focus of public policies beyond a technocentric approach to access.

## The political view: Digital Strategy for 2007-2012

After one and a half years without a digital agenda, in January 2008 the Bachelet government launched the new Digital Strategy 2007-2012.[3] The strategy was developed through a public participation process that included the input of citizens, professionals, consultants, activists and civil society organisations. The process included a blog to which people could post comments, proposals and contributions over a one-month period.

The main objective of the Digital Strategy is to "contribute to Chile's economic and social development by means of the potential offered by the use of [ICTs] to improve the quality of education, increase transparency, productivity and competitiveness, and provide better governance through greater citizen participation and commitment." President Bachelet has said about the government's vision: "Access to information in modern society is not the privilege of a few, but a basic resource for development, equality and democracy."

The strategy's Action Plan 2007-2012 has 25 objectives, including:

- Extending broadband connectivity to 2.3 million people

- Extending connectivity to 90% of rural areas

- Connecting 200 of the poorest neighbourhoods

- Developing entrepreneurial centres for the promotion of digital and ICT skills for entrepreneurs (micro, small and medium level)

- Extending local e-government services

- Reaching the goal of ten students per computer, improving digital educational resources, and promoting ICTs in the educational management of schools.

_____

3   www.estrategiadigital.gob.cl

## Action steps

In August 2007 civil society organisations opposed the government signing an agreement with Microsoft as part of its Digital Strategy, demonstrating that an active civil society focused on the information society is emerging in Chile. Civil society networks are working to promote issues such as digital rights, access to information and culture, and civil society input into public policies on ICTs.

Despite the Digital Strategy, we need to have a better understanding of how we want to continue growing in the different areas of ICT development over the next years, to be clear about our *sense* and *purpose.* Amongst other things, we need to promote the growth of a local software industry; public policies that allow the social and economic sustainability of community telecentres and Wi-Fi networks; new methodologies for digital literacy programmes for adults, elderly people, people with disabilities and indigenous communities; and the sustainability of the local ICT industry, especially at the small- and medium-enterprise level, and particularly regarding the production of content. ■

## References

Government of Chile (2008) *Digital Strategy 2007-2012*. Available at: www.estrategiadigital.gob.cl

International Data Corporation (IDC) Information Society Index: www.idc.com/groups/isi/main.html

SUBTEL (Subsecretaría de Telecomunicaciones) (2008) *Encuesta Nacional de Consumidores de Servicios de Telecomunicaciones, Primer Semestre 2008*. Available at: www.subtel.cl/prontus_subtel/site/artic/20080902/pags/20080902114148.html

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2006) *Desarrollo Humano en Chile 2006: Las nuevas tecnologías: ¿un salto al futuro?* Available at: hdr.undp.org/en/reports/nationalreports/latinamericathecaribbean/chile/name,3400,en.html

World Economic Forum (WEF) Networked Readiness Index: www.weforum.org/pdf/gitr/2008/Rankings.pdf

**GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2008** is the second in a series of yearly reports critically covering the state of the information society from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.

**GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH** or **GISWatch** has three interrelated goals:

- **Surveying** the state of information and communication technology (ICT) policy at the local and global levels

- **Encouraging** critical debate

- **Strengthening** networking and advocacy for a just, inclusive information society.

Each year the report focuses on a particular theme. **GISWatch 2008** *focuses on access to infrastructure* and includes several thematic reports dealing with key access issues, an analysis of where global institutions stand on the access debate, a report looking at the state of indicators and access, six regional reports and 38 country reports.

**GISWatch 2008** is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos) and the Third World Institute (ITeM).

**GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH**
2008 Report
www.GISWatch.org