

Solomon Islands

The introduction of competition in the mobile sector has rapidly increased mobile access and coverage. The launch of an undersea submarine cable is expected to further boost the ICT sector in the Solomon Islands.

Mobile services: The incumbent Solomon Telekom launched its GSM network in September 2003. Bemobile from Papua New Guinea entered the market in 2010. Until the arrival of Bemobile, mobile coverage was essentially limited to urban areas, only ten percent of the population being within reach of a mobile signal. Subscription penetration rose five-fold between 2009 and 2011, from less than 10 per cent of the population to just over half. Coverage of mobile networks has grown rapidly with 78 per cent of households having a mobile phone in 2015 (97 per cent in urban areas and 74 per cent in rural areas) (NSO Solomon Islands, 2017). In the third quarter of 2011, both operators launched 3G (HSDPA) in Honiara and coverage remains limited. Most of the other islands are restricted to 2G Internet access (i.e., GPRS and EDGE).

Fixed services: Solomon Telekom was a joint venture between the Government and the United Kingdom's Cable & Wireless. Most of the Government's shares, held by the Investment Corporation of the Solomon Islands (ICSI), were transferred to the National Provident Fund (NPF) so that at the end of 2013 NPF owned 65 per cent. In 2014, CWC sold its shareholding to NPF. Solomon Telekom is the only fixed telephone provider and the number of subscriptions is limited. Solomon Telekom offers ADSL broadband in Honiara, Auki and Gizo. Satsol, a satellite TV provider, also offers Internet services using WiMAX technology with a top speed of 512 kbps. Microwave is used for some domestic backhaul routes but is not a feasible nationwide solution since many islands are too far away. More costly domestic satellite links are used for these locations. International connectivity is via satellite using several providers. In 2012, plans were under way, with the support of the Asian Development Bank, to deploy an undersea fibre-optic cable for international connectivity, and the Solomons Oceanic Cable Company (SOCC) was formed to manage and operate the cable with the proposed route from Honiara to Sydney. However, a rival option emerged and the process was delayed. In

Key indicators for Solomon Islands (2017)	Asia & Pacific	World	
Fixed-telephone sub. per 100 inhab.	1.2	9.5	13.0
Mobile-cellular sub. per 100 inhab.	76.1	104.0	103.6
Active mobile-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	18.7	60.3	61.9
3G coverage (% of population)	25.0	91.3	87.9
LTE/WiMAX coverage (% of population)	19.0	86.9	76.3
Individuals using the Internet (%)	11.9	44.3	48.6
Households with a computer (%)	7.3	38.9	47.1
Households with Internet access (%)	8.1	49.0	54.7
International bandwidth per Internet user (kbit/s)	12.3	61.7	76.6
Fixed-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	0.2	13.0	13.6
Fixed-broadband sub. by speed tiers, % distribution			
<i>-256 kbit/s to 2 Mbit/s</i>	50.0	2.4	4.2
<i>-2 to 10 Mbit/s</i>	50.0	7.6	13.2
<i>-equal to or above 10 Mbit/s</i>	-	90.0	82.6

Note: Data in italics are ITU estimates. Source: ITU (as of June 2018).

mid-2017, the government announced it would fund the cable running some 3 400 kilometres to Sydney, including a domestic spur linking two provincial cities to Honiara. The cable should be completed in 2019.

Government policy: The Ministry of Communication and Aviation (MCA) is responsible for sector oversight. An ICT policy is under development. Meanwhile, the country's *National Development Strategy 2016-2035* lays out the Government's two key mid-term activities for the ICT sector: i) linking communities with telecommunication networks and ii) establishing a fibre-optic submarine cable system and providing broadband services. The *Telecommunications Act* of 2009 prepared the way for sector liberalization by introducing competition. The Act also established a regulatory agency, the Telecommunications Commission of the Solomon Islands (TCSI). A 2009 Settlement Arrangement ended the exclusivities of Solomon Telekom, the incumbent telecommunication operator.

Conclusion: Sector reform, including the introduction of competition in the mobile market, has increased access to mobile services. The eventual launch of the submarine cable will sharply increase Internet capacity at lower cost, which should trigger wider access and higher speeds.