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International Telecommunication Union
Development Sector

Measuring digital development

Facts and Figures

2026



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Measuring digital development

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Foreword



The 2026 edition of *Facts and Figures* offers a fresh snapshot of global digital connectivity, highlighting both the progress achieved and the challenges that remain on the path towards universal and meaningful connectivity.

This year marks an important milestone: more than three-quarters of the world's population are now online. An estimated 6.3 billion people use the Internet, up from 6.1 billion in 2025. Yet 2 billion people remain offline, reminding us that the benefits of digital connectivity are still far from universal.

Behind the global figures, significant divides persist. Internet use stands at 93 per cent in high-income countries, compared with just 32 per cent in low-income countries. Women remain less likely than men to use the Internet, and substantial gaps persist between urban and rural populations. Although Internet use is growing relatively rapidly in least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, these countries continue to face considerable challenges.

There are also encouraging developments. 5G now covers almost six in ten people worldwide, while 97 per cent of the global population has access to a 3G or more advanced mobile network. Broadband services are also becoming more affordable. Notably, landlocked developing countries and Small Island Developing States have, for the first time, met the 2 per cent affordability target for data-only mobile broadband.

These advances are essential, but connectivity is not an end in itself. It opens up opportunities in education, healthcare and economic development, and provides the backbone for emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Yet without adequate connectivity and digital skills, the benefits of these technologies risk remaining out of reach for many, reinforcing existing digital divides.

The findings also highlight the importance of better data. Reliable, timely and disaggregated statistics are essential for understanding digital divides and shaping effective policies. Yet fewer than half of countries have reported recent official data on Internet use, with even lower coverage for digital skills and mobile phone ownership. I therefore call on ITU Member States to strengthen the collection and reporting of ICT statistics, particularly through regular household surveys and timely, disaggregated data.

The progress recorded in 2026 gives us reason for optimism, but also a clear call to action. We must accelerate our collective efforts to close the remaining digital divides and ensure that everyone, everywhere can benefit from meaningful connectivity.



Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava
Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau
International Telecommunication Union

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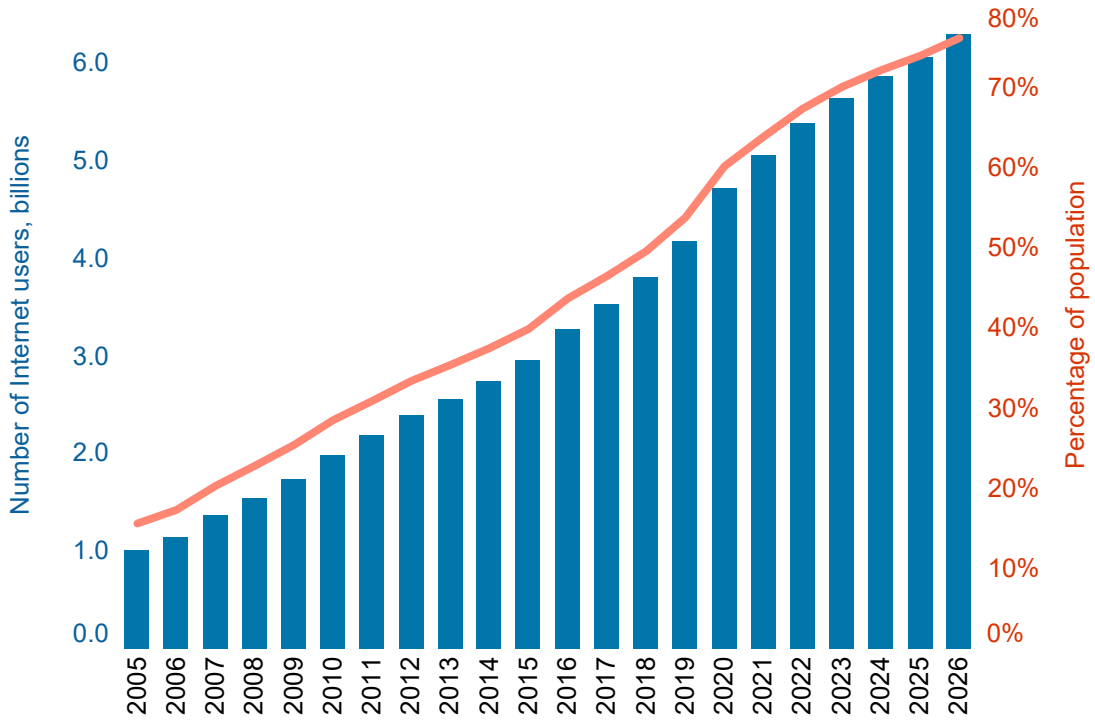
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An online version of this publication featuring interactive charts is available at https://www.itu.int/ff2026/

Internet use

More than three-quarters of the world's population are online

Individuals using the Internet



Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

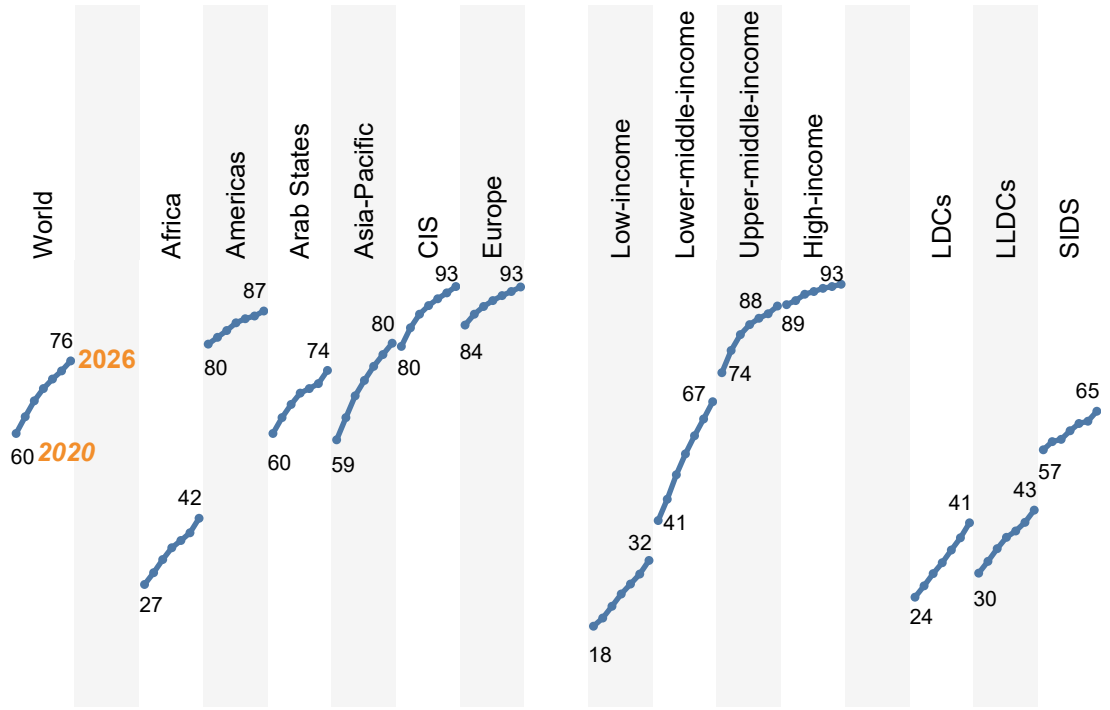
In 2026, 76 per cent of the world's population is online, compared with 74 per cent in 2025. This corresponds to 6.3 billion people, up from 6.1 billion last year. Year-on-year growth has increased slightly to 3 per cent, up from 2.5 per cent. While surpassing three-quarters of the global population represents an important milestone on the way to universal connectivity, 2 billion people remain offline.

Internet use remains closely linked to level of development. High-income countries[1] are nearing universal Internet use, with 93 per cent of the population using the Internet.[2] In contrast, only 32 per cent of the population of low-income countries use the Internet.

In the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Europe and the Americas, between 87 and 93 per cent of the population use the Internet. In the Asia-Pacific and Arab States regions, Internet use stands at 80 and 74 per cent, respectively, close to the global average. In Africa, by contrast, only 42 per cent of the population uses the Internet.

Universal connectivity also remains a distant prospect in least developed countries (LDCs) and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), where only 41 and 43 per cent of the population are online, respectively. Although in 2026, Internet use grew by an estimated 8.7 per cent in LDCs and 6.5 per cent in LLDCs, faster than in most other groups and regions, connectivity levels in those countries remain well below the global average.

Percentage of individuals using the Internet by region, 2020-2026



Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

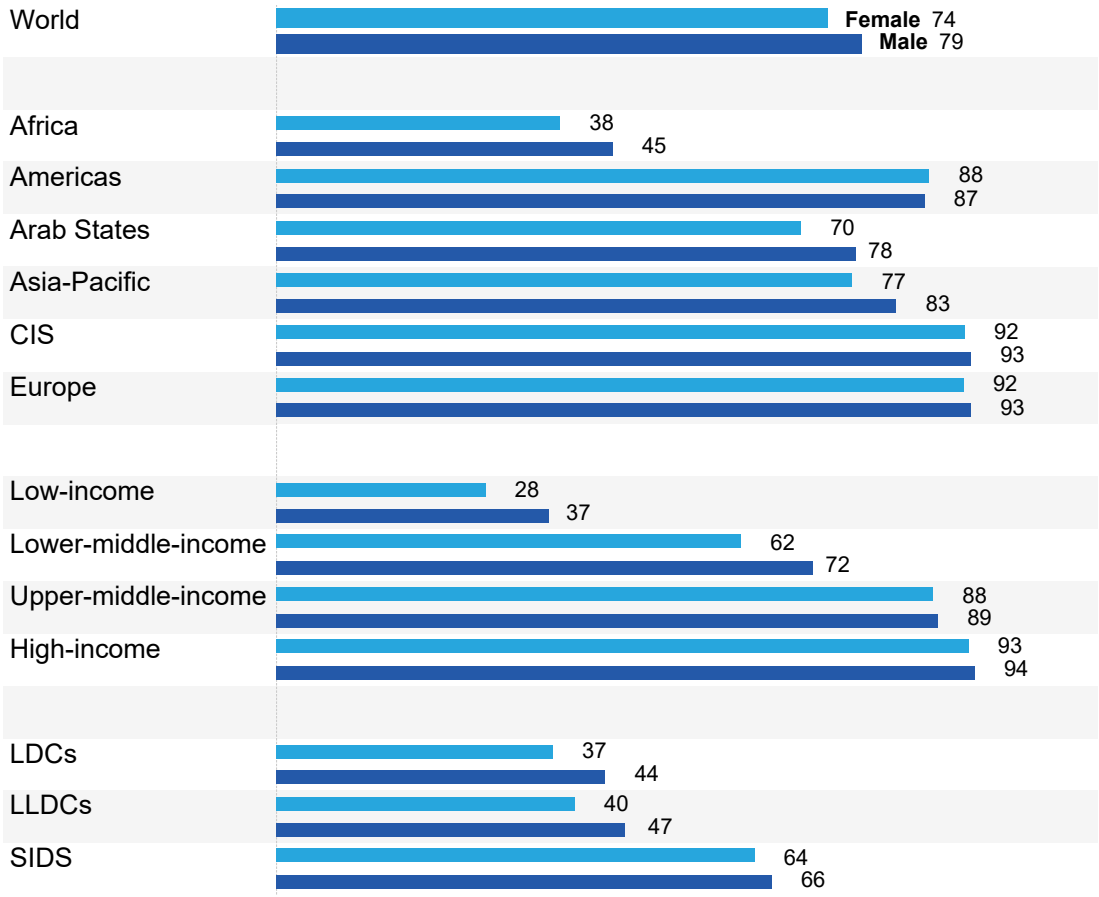
[1] In this publication, regions correspond to the ITU geographical regions, whose composition is available at http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/definitions/regions.aspx. The composition of the special groups – least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) is available at https://www.un.org/ohrlls/. Country groupings by income are those used in the World Bank classification, 2026 July release, available at https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519.

[2] Taking into account that some people may never want to connect, as a matter of convention universality is taken to mean an Internet penetration rate of at least 95 per cent.

The gender digital divide

Slow progress towards gender parity in Internet use

Percentage of female and male population using the Internet, 2026

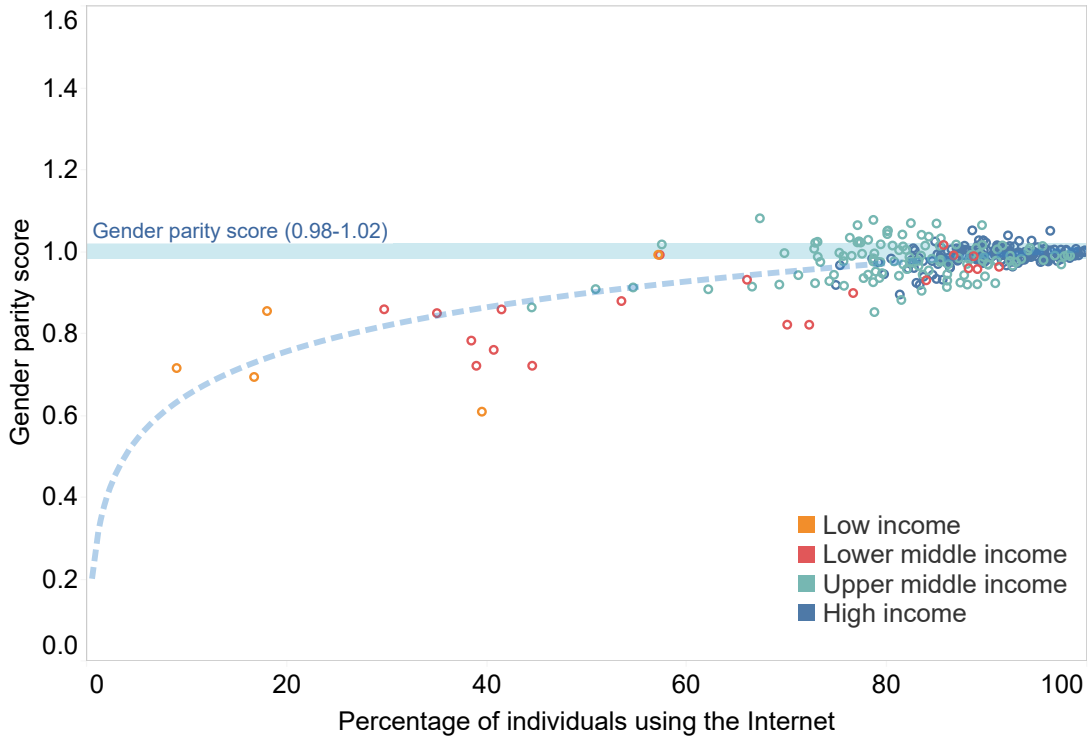


Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Globally, 79 per cent of men use the Internet, compared with 74 per cent of women. Although the number of female Internet users has increased by 54 per cent since 2019, compared with 48 per cent for men, there are still over 200 million more male Internet users than female Internet users worldwide in 2026.

Gender parity is deemed to have been achieved when the gender parity score, defined as the share of women using the Internet divided by the share of men using the Internet, is between 0.98 and 1.02. As is the case for overall Internet use, gender parity is closely correlated with level of development.

Internet use gender parity score vs. overall Internet use, 2021-2025

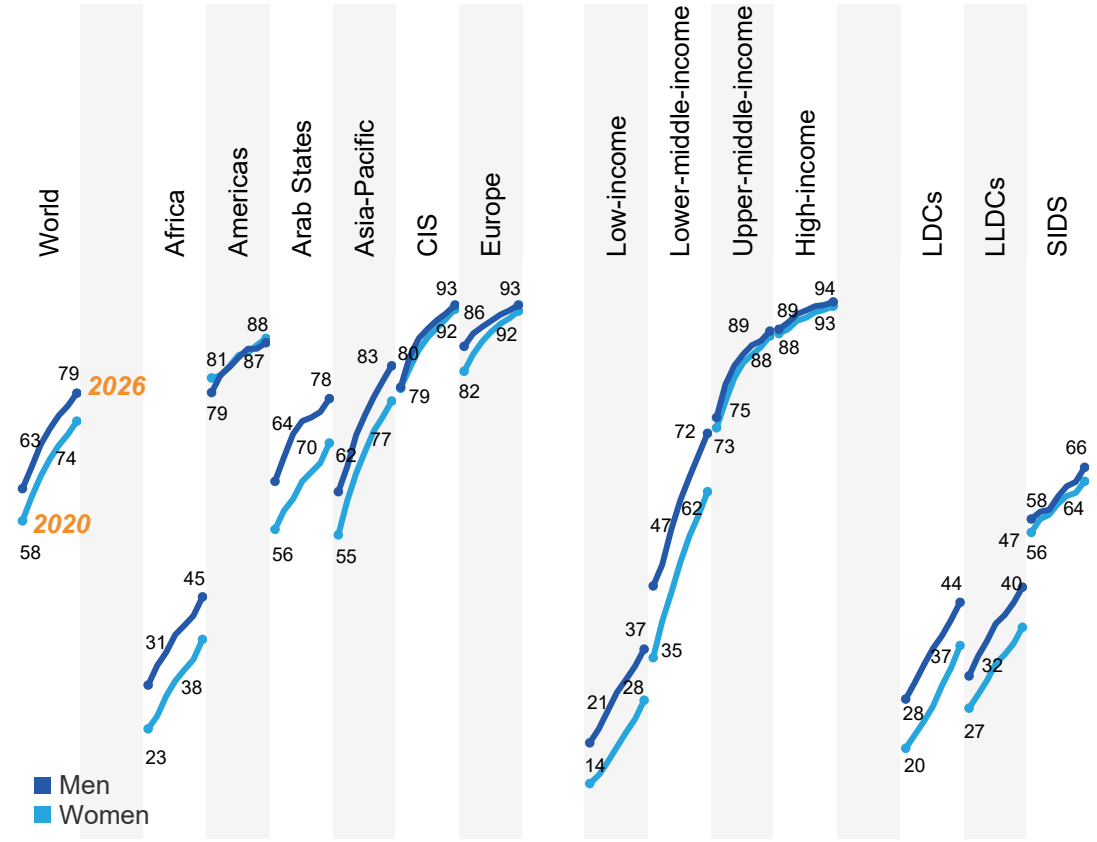


Notes: In-scope ages may vary between countries. The gender parity score is calculated as the proportion of women who use the Internet divided by the proportion of men who use the Internet. A value less than one indicates that men are more likely to use the Internet than women, while a value greater than one indicates the opposite. Gender parity is considered achieved if the value lies between 0.98 and 1.02. Official data is available from 101 countries, with a total of 329 data points. Each point stands for one country in a given year between 2021 and 2025. The blue dotted line is the smoothed trend line for all countries. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

The global gender parity score has improved gradually, from 0.91 in 2019 to 0.94 in 2026. Among ITU regions, gender parity has been achieved in Europe, the Americas and the CIS. In the Asia-Pacific region, the gender parity score has increased from 0.89 in 2019 to 0.93 in 2026. The Arab States region recorded a similar improvement, from 0.84 to 0.91 over the same period. Africa continues to record the largest gender gap, although since 2019 its gender parity score has increased from 0.72 to 0.84.

There have been similar improvements in the gender parity score in LDCs and LLDCs, although men remain considerably more likely than women to use the Internet. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) stand out as a notable exception to the strong correlation between gender parity and overall Internet use, having nearly achieved gender parity even though less than two-thirds of the population use the Internet.

Percentage of individuals using the Internet by gender, 2020-2026

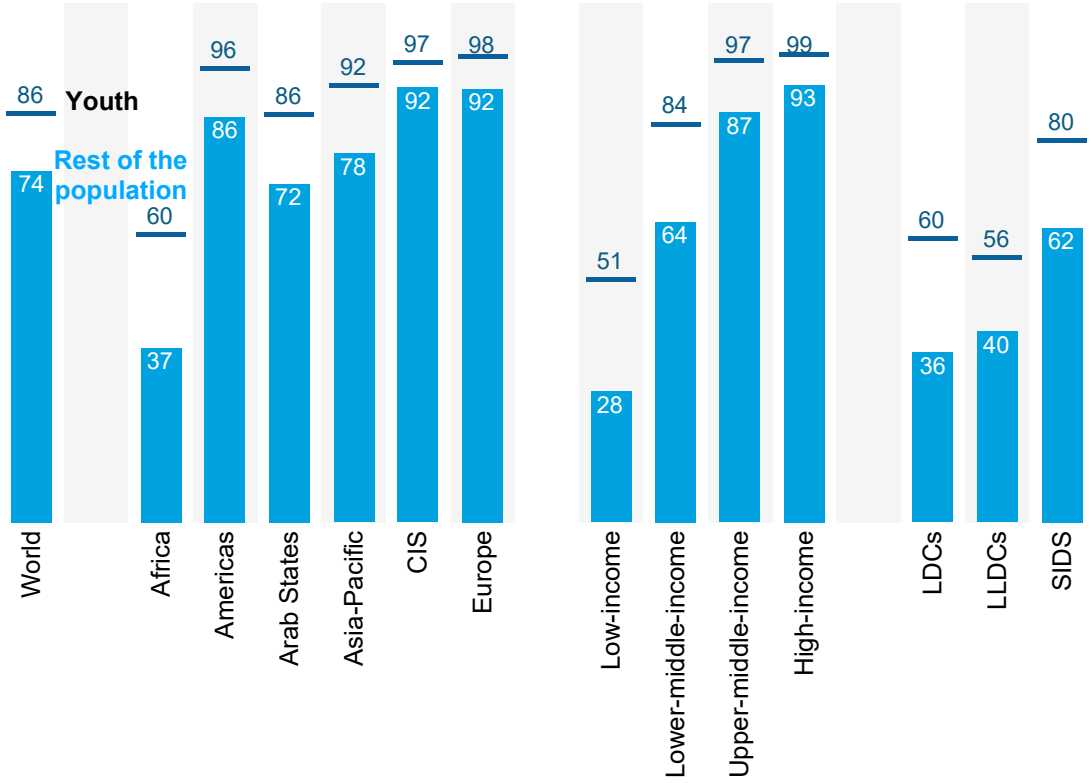


Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Youth Internet use

Universal Internet use has already been achieved among young people in many parts of the world

Percentage of individuals using the Internet by age group, 2026



Note: "Youth" refers to 15 to 24-year-olds. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Globally, 86 per cent of people aged 15 to 24 use the Internet, 12 percentage points more than among the rest of the population (74 per cent). This generational gap, observed in every region, has been shrinking over the last four years, slowly in upper-middle- and high-income economies, but much faster in low- and lower-middle-income economies.

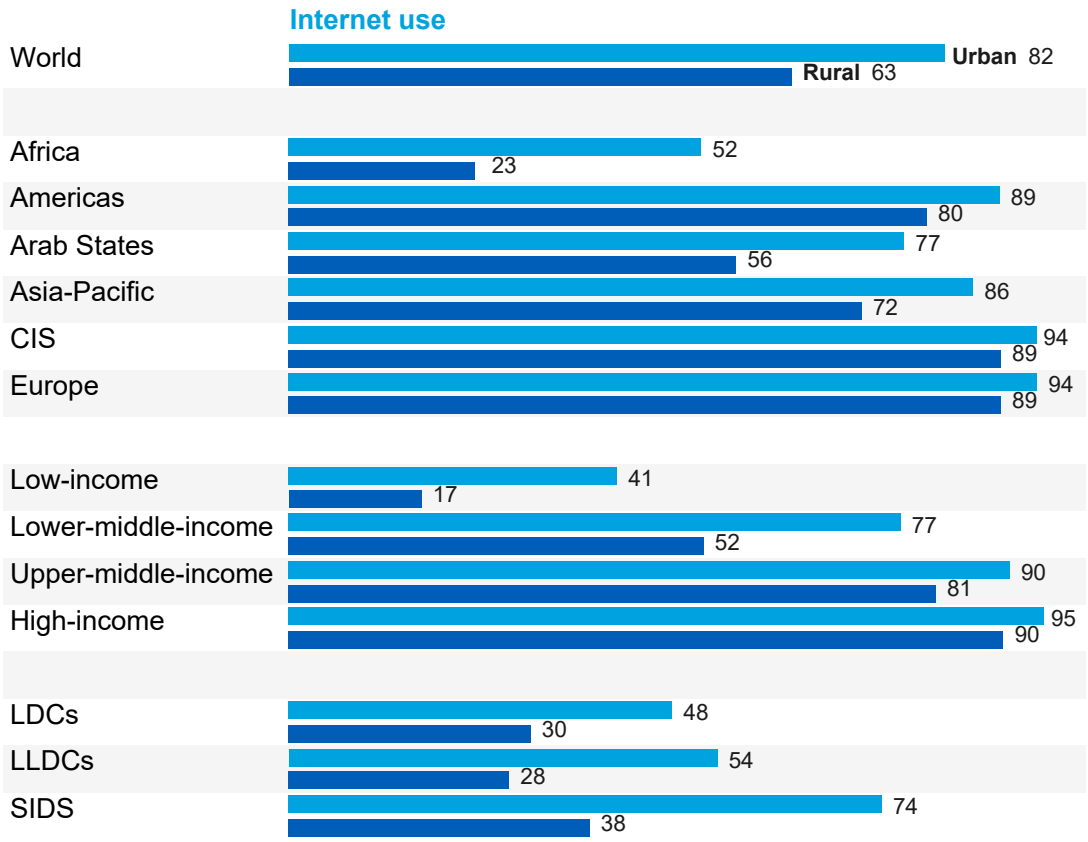
In 2026, 15 to 24 year olds in low-income countries were 1.8 times as likely to use the Internet as the rest of the population. Although this is the largest generational gap of any income group, it has narrowed since 2023 when the ratio stood at 2.1. In lower-middle economies, the ratio has decreased from 1.5 to 1.3 over the same period.

Universal Internet use, defined as a usage rate of at least 95 per cent, has already been achieved among young people in Europe, the CIS and the Americas, with the Asia-Pacific region close behind.

Internet use in urban and rural areas

The urban-rural divide is narrowing but remains wide in regions with low Internet use

Percentage of individuals using the Internet in urban and rural areas, 2026



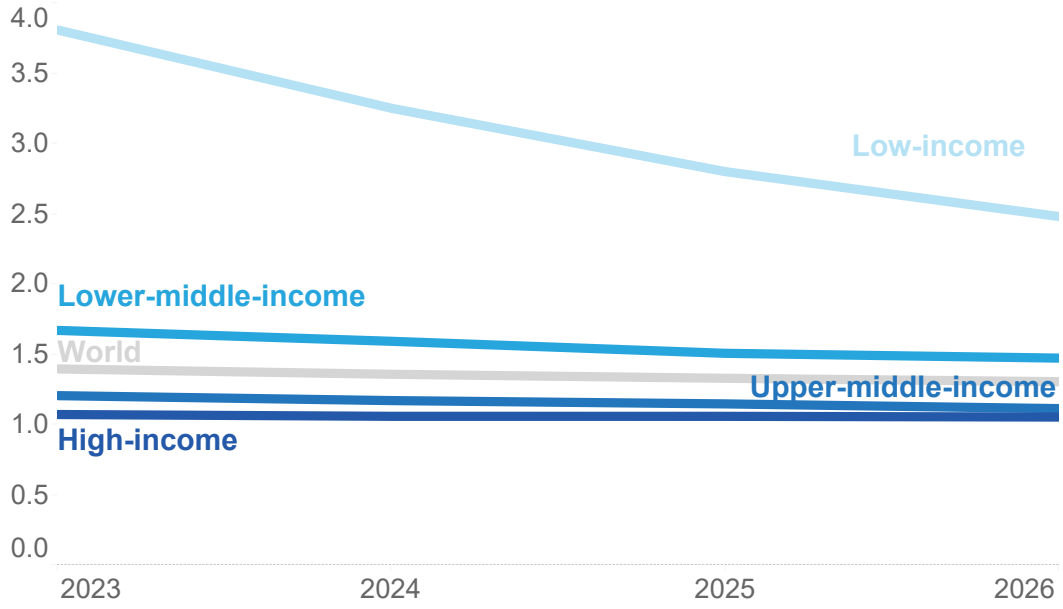
Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Globally, 82 per cent of urban dwellers use the Internet in 2026, compared with 63 per cent of the rural population.

The urban–rural gap, measured as the ratio of the two percentages, narrowed slightly from 1.4 in 2023 to 1.3 in 2026. The gap is smallest in regions with high Internet use, including Europe, the CIS and the Americas, where the ratio is just 1.1. In Africa, the ratio still stands at 2.2, down from 3.1 in 2023.

In high-income and upper-middle-income countries, where 93 and 88 per cent of the population, respectively, use the Internet, the urban-rural gap has almost been bridged, with an average ratio of 1.1. In low-income countries, by contrast, the gap remains wide with only one in six rural dwellers (17 per cent) online, compared with four in ten urban residents (41 per cent). Nevertheless, the gap has narrowed most in relative terms in low-income countries, with the urban-to-rural ratio falling from 3.8 in 2023, to 2.5 in 2026.

Ratio of individuals using the Internet in urban areas to those using the Internet in rural areas, 2023-2026

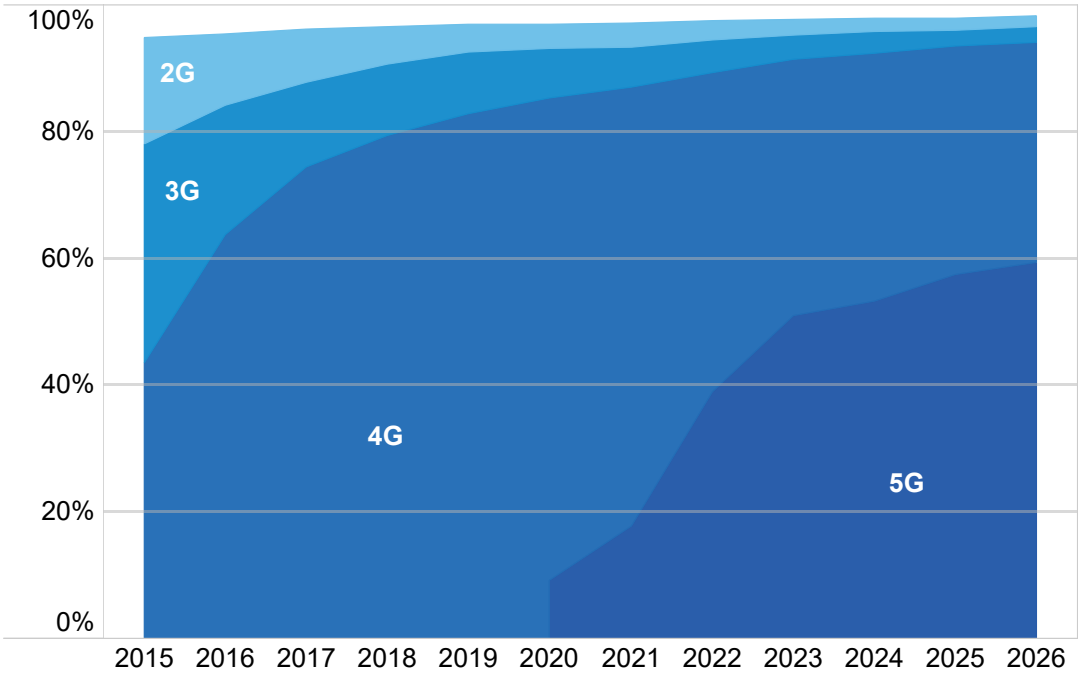


Note: A higher ratio indicates a larger urban-rural gap. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Mobile network coverage

Six in ten people are covered by 5G, but spread is uneven

Population coverage by type of mobile network, 2015-2026



Note: The values for 2G, 3G and 4G networks show the incremental percentage of the population not covered by a more advanced technology network (e.g. in 2026, 97 per cent of the world population is covered by at least a 3G network, with 2.6 per cent having only 3G, 34.7 per cent having 4G but not 5G, and 59.3 per cent having 5G). There are insufficient data to produce estimates for 5G coverage prior to 2020. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Since its commercial introduction in 2019, 5G coverage has expanded to cover 59 per cent of the world's population.[3] 5G already reaches 86 per cent of people in high-income countries, but only 4 per cent in low-income countries, highlighting substantial disparities in deployment.

Europe leads with 78 per cent of the population covered by 5G, followed by the Asia-Pacific region with 73 per cent, and the Americas with 68 per cent. Coverage remains considerably lower in the Arab States (27 per cent), Africa (15 per cent) and the CIS (10 per cent). These disparities are mirrored in subscription levels (see *Subscriptions* section).

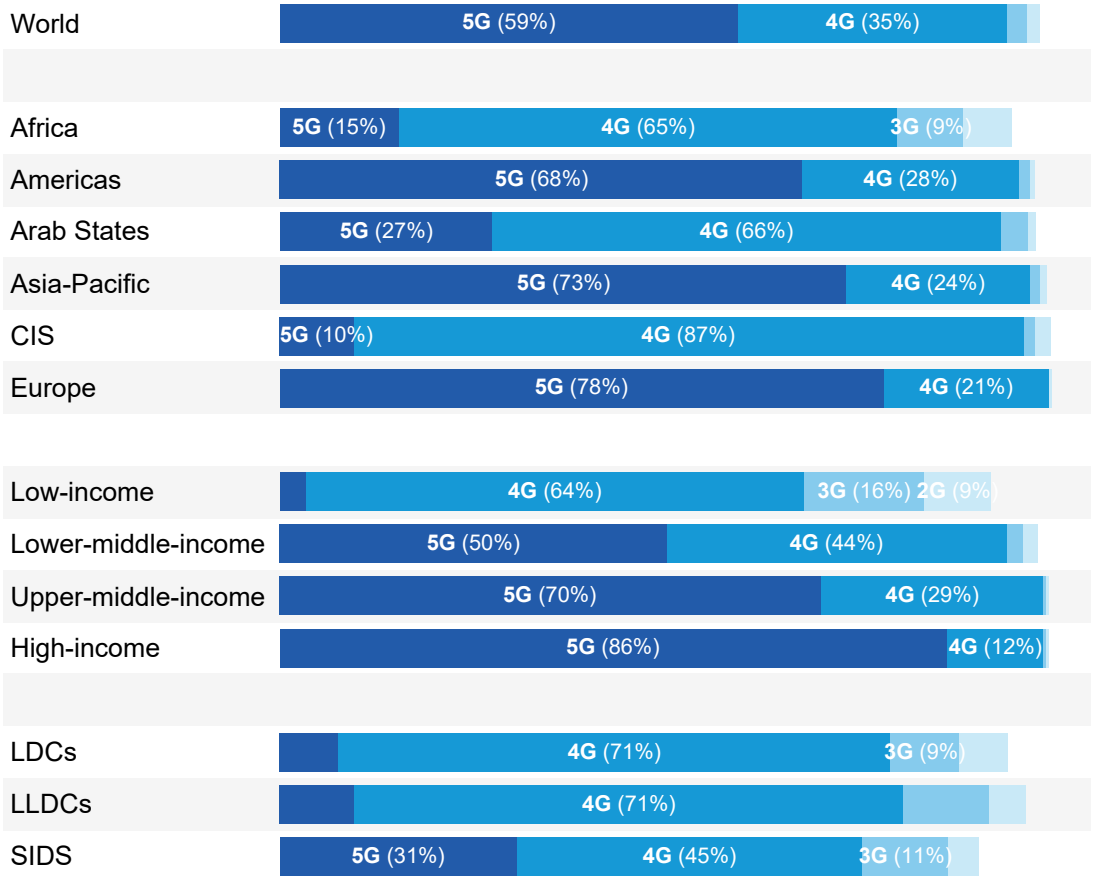
While 5G deployment is still underway in many regions, 4G remains a reliable connectivity solution, currently available to 94 per cent of the world's population. However, in low-income countries, 4G reaches just 68 per cent of the population. In these countries, 3G continues to play an important role in providing Internet access.

Coverage by 3G or higher technology has reached 97 per cent of the world's population. Yet extending networks to the remaining 3 per cent – approximately 282 million people – remains challenging. Since 2018, when coverage first surpassed 90 per cent, the global gain has amounted to just seven percentage points. Just over half of those without access to a mobile broadband network live in Africa.

[3] In this publication, the term *4G* is used instead of *4G/LTE*, and *5G* instead of *5G/IMT-2020*, for readability.

In LDCs and LLDCs, 12 and 8 per cent of the population, respectively, remain without access to mobile broadband, underscoring the unfinished work towards achieving Target 9.c of Sustainable Development Goal 9: *"to significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020."*

Population coverage by type of mobile network, 2026



Note: The values for 2G, 3G and 4G networks show the incremental percentage of the population that is not covered by a more advanced technology network (e.g. in 2026, 97 per cent of the world population is covered by at least a 3G or above network, with 2.6 per cent having only 3G, 34.7 per cent having 4G but not 5G, and 59.3 per cent having 5G). Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

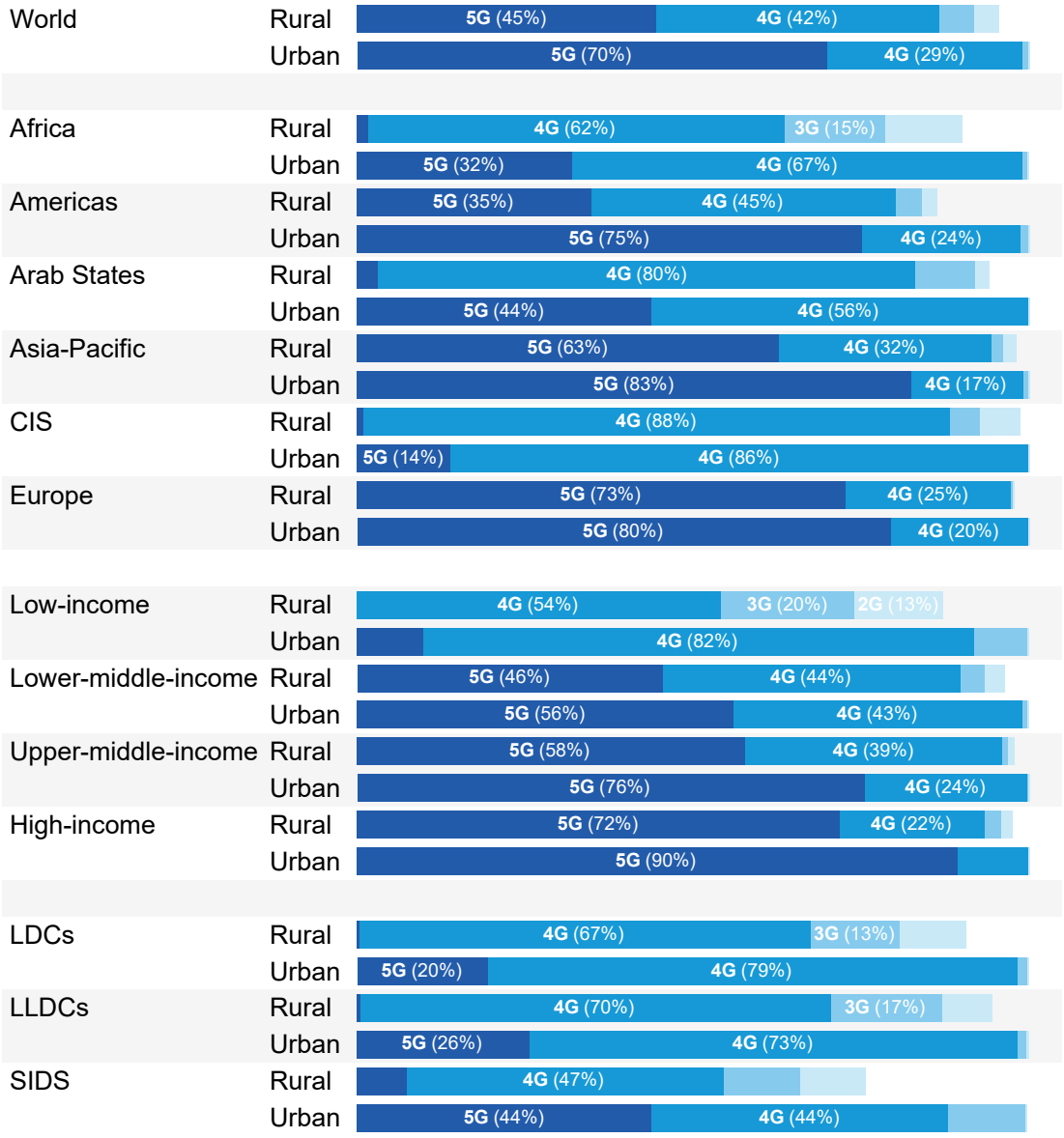
Mobile network coverage in urban and rural areas

5G coverage continues to lag in rural areas

Since urban areas are more densely populated and economically attractive, they are usually prioritized when new infrastructure is deployed. As a result, 70 per cent of people living in urban areas worldwide have access to a 5G network, compared with 45 per cent of those in rural areas, a gap of 25 percentage points.

In high-income countries, 90 per cent of the urban population is covered by 5G, compared with 72 per cent of the rural population. In low-income countries, 5G reaches only 10 per cent of the urban population and is virtually unavailable in rural areas.

Population coverage by type of mobile network and area, 2026

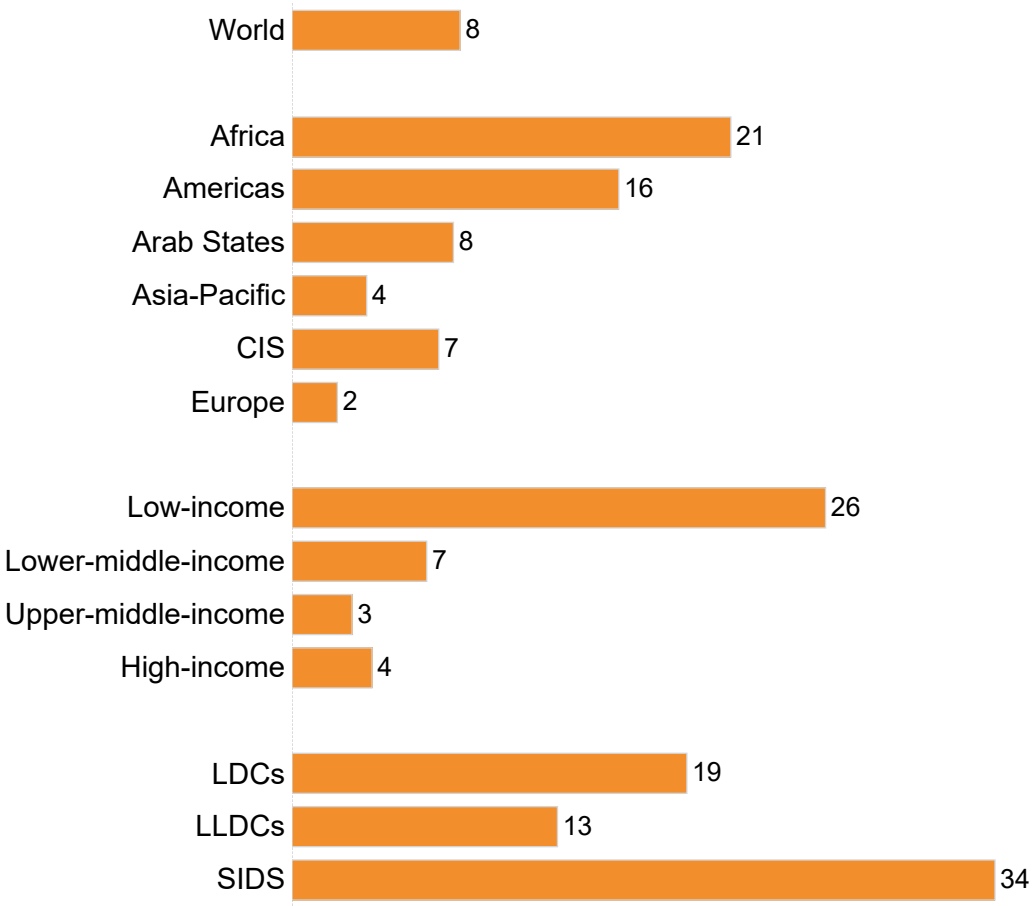


Note: The values for 2G, 3G and 4G networks show the incremental percentage of the population that is not covered by a more advanced technology network (e.g. 79 per cent of Africa's rural population is covered by at least a 3G network, that is 2 per cent + 62 per cent + 15 per cent). Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Older technologies are more widely available. 4G networks cover 99 per cent of the urban population worldwide, but coverage drops to 87 per cent in rural areas. However, these global averages conceal substantial disparities, with only 54 per cent of the rural population in low-income countries covered by 4G.

There are still parts of the world where mobile networks are either unavailable or limited to 2G. These areas are exclusively rural, with the share of the affected population ranging from 2 per cent in rural Europe, to 21 per cent in rural Africa. In LDCs, 19 per cent of the rural population remains without mobile broadband coverage (3G or better), while in LLDCs the share is 13 per cent. The highest proportion is found in rural areas of SIDS, where 34 per cent of the population lacks mobile broadband access.

Percentage of the rural population without access to a 3G mobile network or higher, 2026

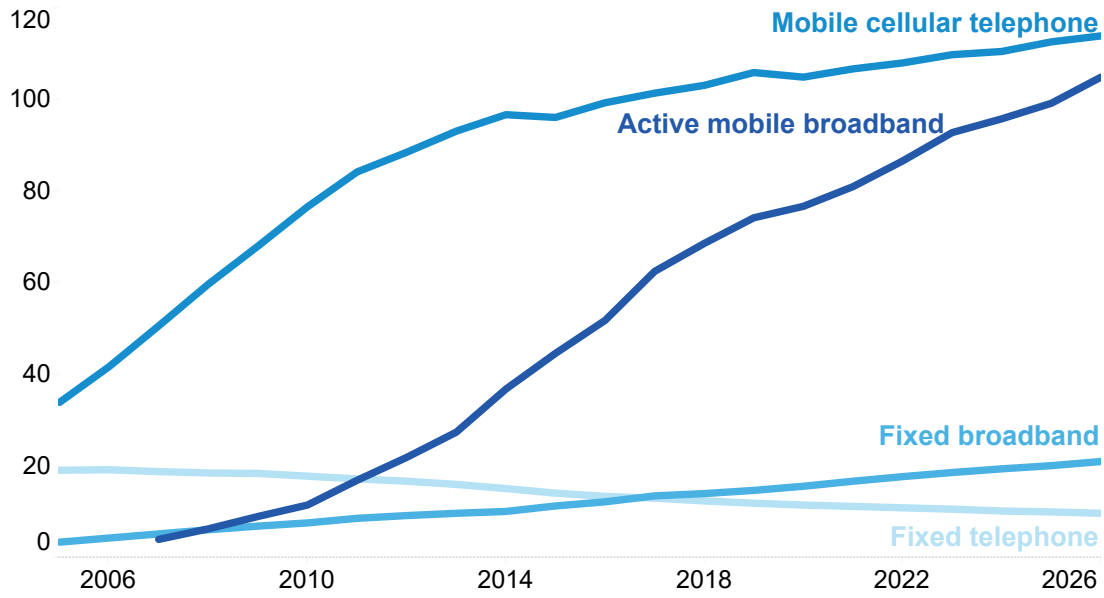


Note: Rural mobile population coverage was estimated by subtracting the urban population from the total population covered by a mobile signal, assuming urban areas were covered first. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Subscriptions

Four in ten mobile-broadband subscriptions are 5G subscriptions

Subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, worldwide



Note: The levels for fixed subscriptions are usually lower than for mobile subscriptions, because the former are usually shared within a household, while the latter are normally tied to an individual. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

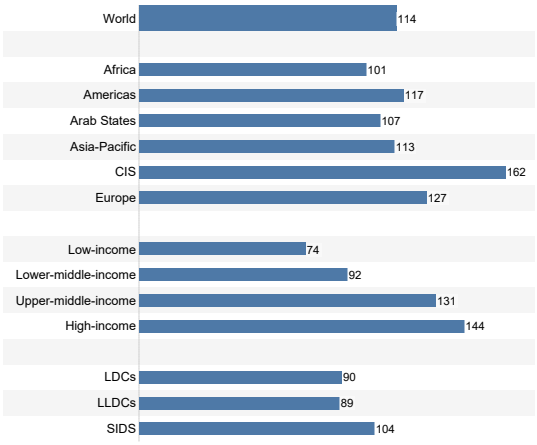
In 2026, globally, there are 9.5 billion mobile cellular subscriptions, corresponding to 114 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. In high-income countries, there are 144 mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, which is almost double the subscription rate of low-income countries (74). Among ITU regions, the CIS has the highest penetration, with 162 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, compared with 101 in Africa.

Mobile broadband continues to drive the evolution of connectivity. In 2026, globally, there are 105 mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Mobile broadband now accounts for 92 per cent of all mobile subscriptions, up from less than 50 per cent in 2015. This shift reflects changing user behaviour, with demand increasingly shaped by data-based services and the gradual phase-out of voice-only plans.

Despite the global subscription rate exceeding 100 per 100 inhabitants, not everyone has a mobile broadband subscription: many individuals hold multiple subscriptions and some subscriptions are used by connected devices (e.g. tablets) rather than individuals. Regional disparities remain significant: on average, there are 138 mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in the Americas region, compared with 57 in Africa.

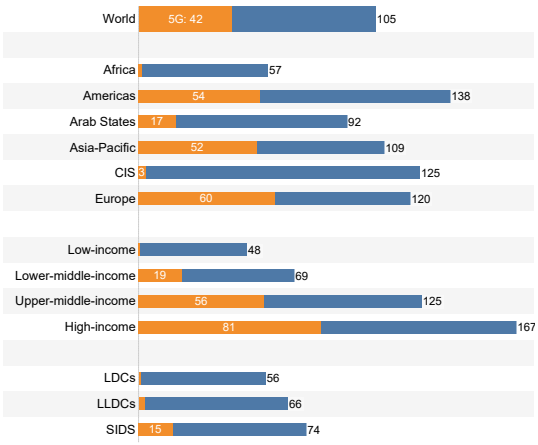
5G now accounts for 40 per cent of all mobile broadband subscriptions. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Americas and Europe, there are between 52 and 60 5G subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, compared with just 3 or fewer per 100 inhabitants in the CIS and Africa. 5G uptake closely mirrors network availability, with lower subscription rates in regions where coverage remains limited (see *Mobile network coverage* section).

Mobile cellular telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, by region, 2026



Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Active mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, by region, 2026

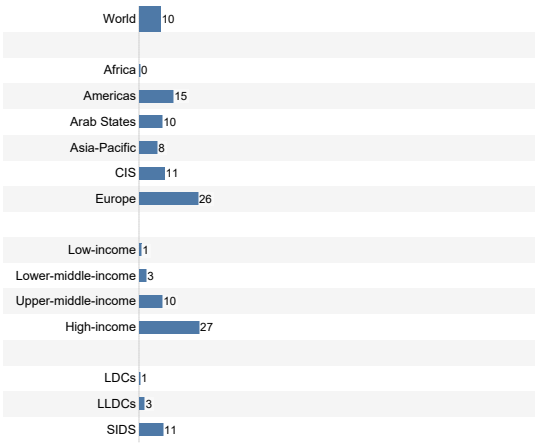


Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

In parallel, fixed broadband subscriptions continue to expand steadily, growing by an average of 4.7 per cent annually over the past five years, to reach 21 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in 2026. During the same period, fixed telephone subscriptions declined by an average of 2.8 per cent per year. In 2024, fixed broadband penetration surpassed the historical peak of 19 fixed telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants recorded in 2006.

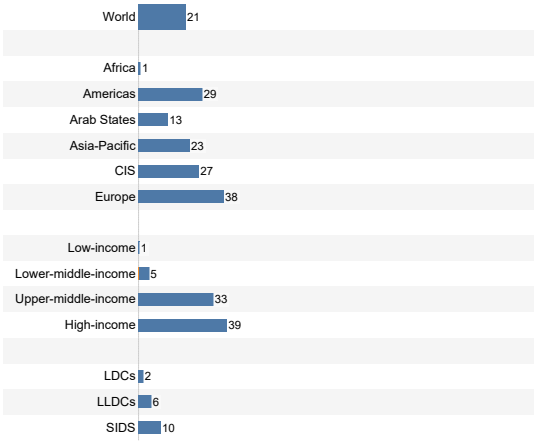
Fixed broadband penetration remains much lower than mobile broadband penetration; fixed connections are usually shared by several people in a household, and rolling out fixed broadband is more costly than mobile broadband.

Fixed telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, by region, 2026



Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

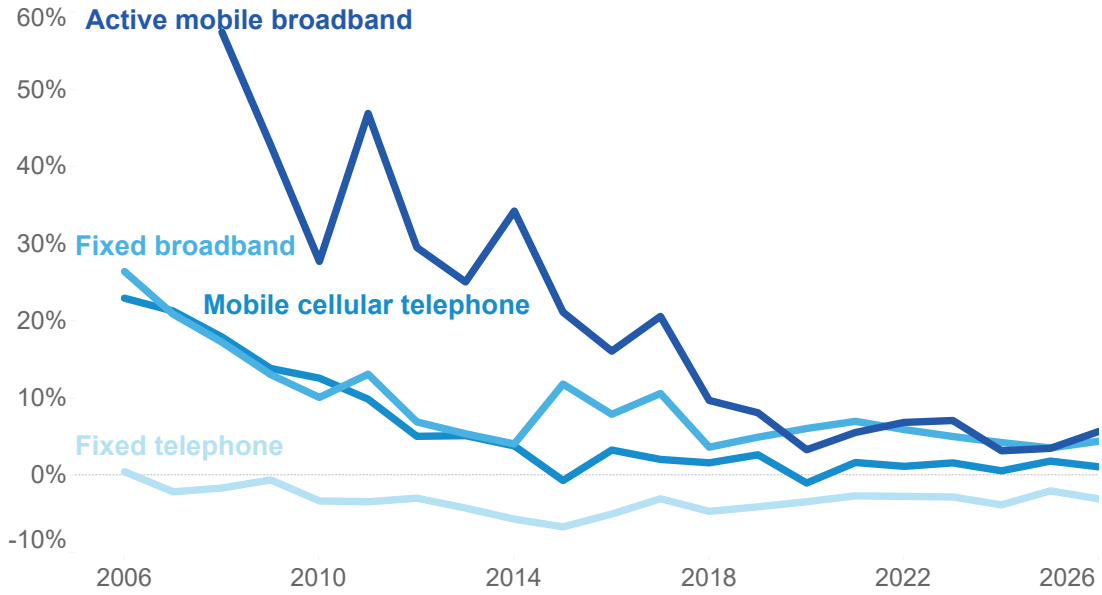
Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, by region, 2026



Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Despite steady progress, fixed broadband penetration varies greatly across countries and regions, with much wider disparities than mobile broadband. There are 39 fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in high-income countries, but just 0.6 in low-income countries, where investment constraints, regulatory barriers and high deployment costs continue to hinder expansion.

Annual growth rates in subscription types, percentage

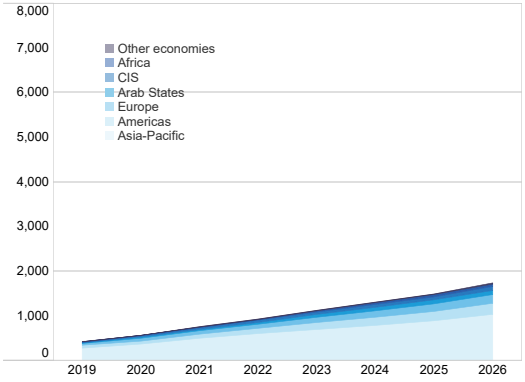


Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Internet traffic

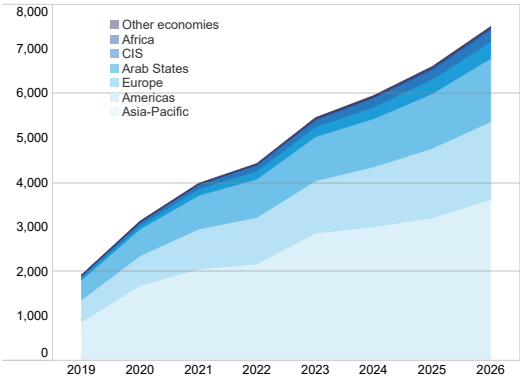
Mobile broadband traffic is growing faster, but fixed networks still carry the majority of Internet data

Mobile broadband traffic, EB



Note: 1 exabyte (EB) = 10^{12} megabytes. Refers to traffic within the country. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Fixed broadband traffic, EB



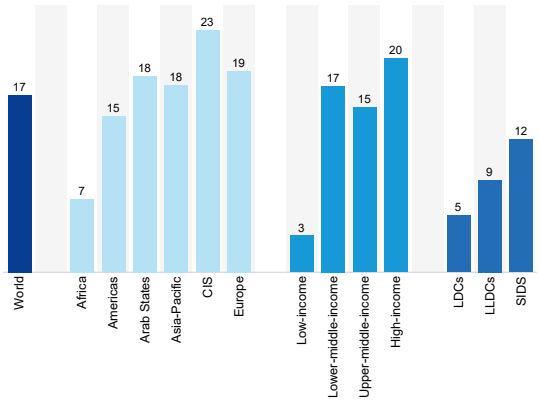
Note: 1 exabyte (EB) = 10^{12} megabytes. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

After crossing the 1 zettabyte (ZB)[4] threshold in 2023, end-user mobile broadband Internet traffic reached an estimated 1.7 ZB in 2026. Fixed broadband traffic was four times greater, at 7.5 ZB, up from 6.6 ZB the previous year.

Fixed broadband networks carry most Internet traffic, including traffic generated by mobile devices and Internet of Things (IoT) devices connected via Wi-Fi. Nevertheless, since 2021, mobile broadband traffic has grown by an average of 18.2 per cent annually, faster than the 13.6 per cent growth for fixed broadband traffic.

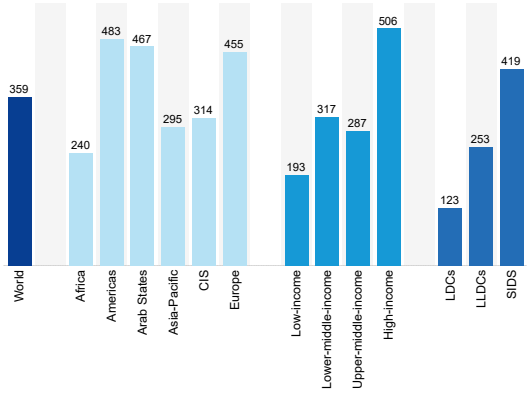
4 1 zettabyte (ZB) = 10^{3} exabytes (EB) = 10^{15} MB.

Mobile broadband traffic per subscription per month (GB), 2026



Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Fixed broadband traffic per subscription per month (GB), 2026



Note: Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Average monthly mobile broadband traffic per subscription reached 20 GB in high-income countries, roughly six times the 3.4 GB average recorded in low-income countries. This means that an average subscription in a high-income country generates more traffic in five days than a subscription in a low-income country does in an entire month.

Regional disparities, while smaller than those between income groups, remain substantial. Africa recorded average monthly traffic of 7 GB per subscription, less than half the global average (16.6 GB) and less than a third of that of the CIS, the region with the highest traffic intensity (22.6 GB).

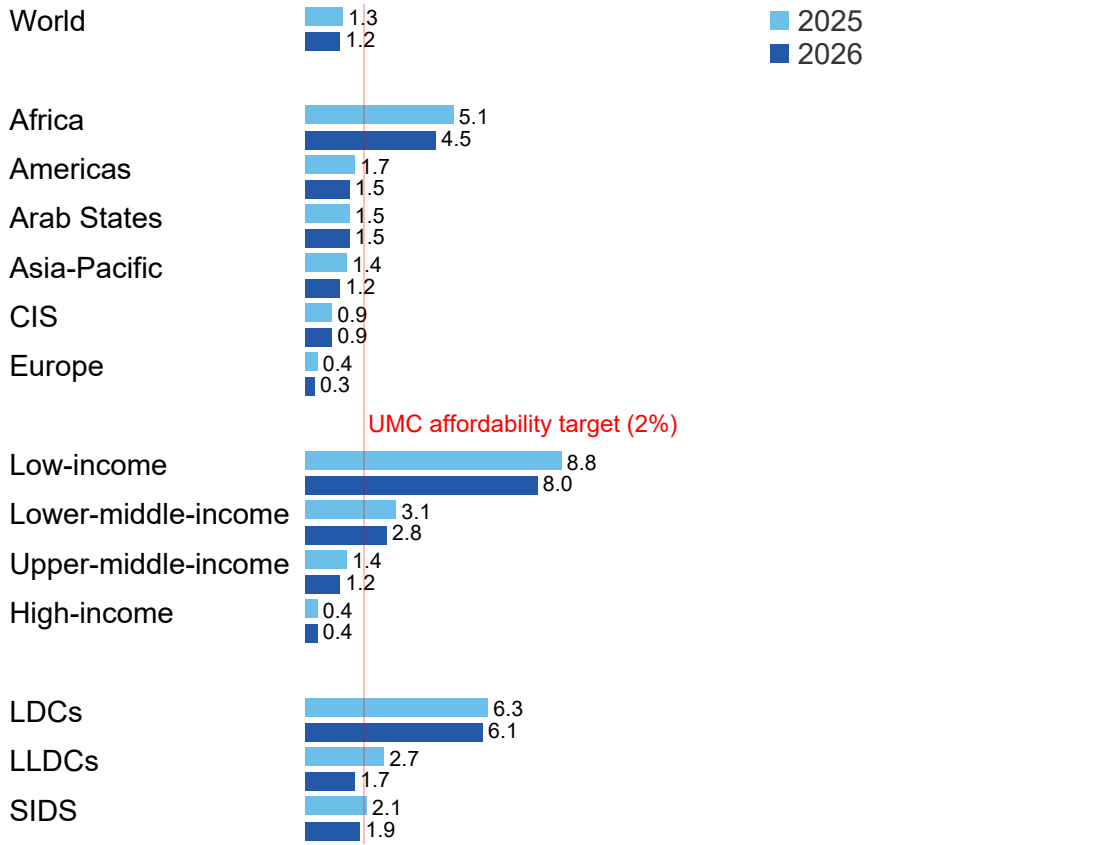
Disparities are less pronounced for fixed broadband traffic. Monthly traffic per subscription in low-income countries is 193 GB, more than half the global average of 359 GB. High-income countries have, however, seen faster deployment of fibre-optic networks, which has contributed to widening the fixed broadband traffic gap with the rest of the world.

In LDCs, average traffic per subscription for both fixed and mobile broadband is about one-third of the global average. In LLDCs, mobile traffic per subscription is about half the global average, while fixed traffic stands at 70 per cent of the global average. In SIDS, a diverse group that includes some LDCs as well as advanced economies, such as Singapore, traffic per subscription is below the world average for mobile broadband, but above the global average for fixed broadband.

Affordability of ICT services

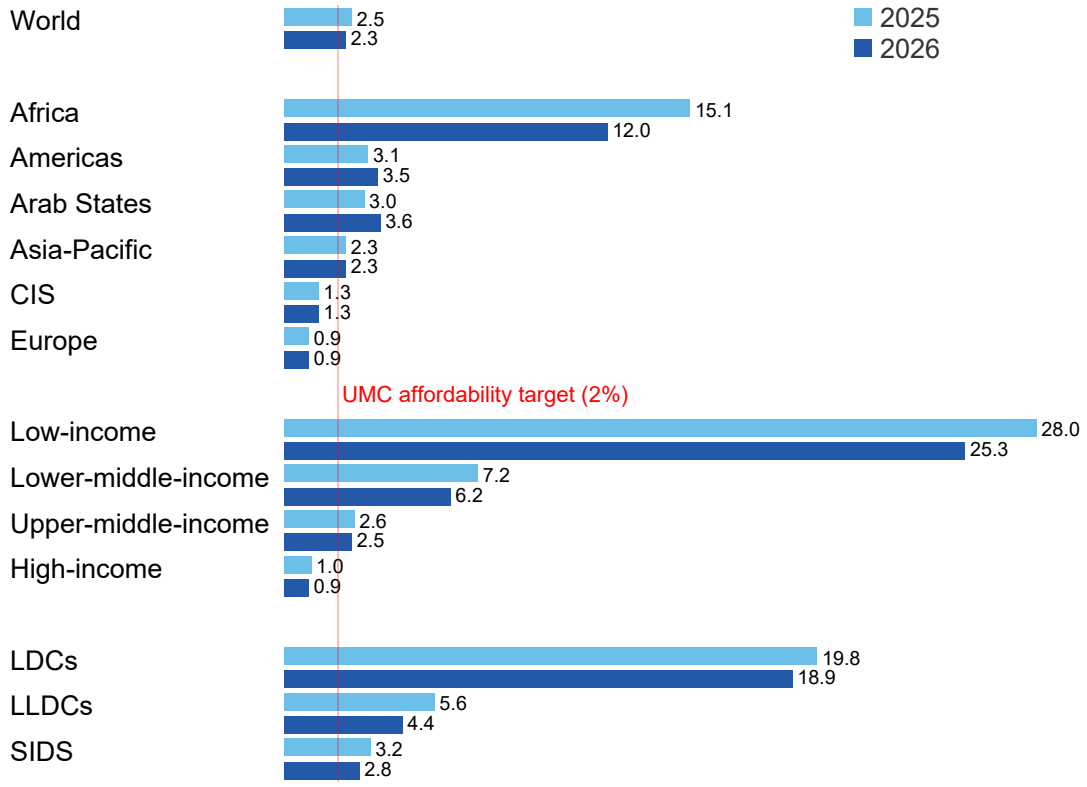
Internet access prices continue to fall, but three in ten economies still do not meet the affordability target for the fixed or mobile broadband basket

Price of data-only mobile broadband (5 GB) basket as a percentage of gross national income per capita, 2025-2026



Note: A data-only mobile broadband basket is defined as the cheapest published non-promotional offering from the operator with the largest market share, providing at least 5 GB monthly data allowance. Medians are computed for the set of countries for which data is available for both years. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Price of fixed broadband (5 GB) basket as a percentage of gross national income per capita, 2025-2026



Note: A fixed broadband basket is defined as the cheapest published non-promotional offering from the Internet service provider with the largest market share using the most common connection technology in the country, providing at least 5 GB monthly data allowance at a minimum speed of 256 kbit/s. Medians are computed for the set of countries for which data is available for both years. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

In 2026, the two connectivity benchmarks, namely the data-only mobile broadband basket and the fixed broadband basket, have become more affordable across all income groups. Globally, the median price of the data-only mobile broadband basket, expressed as a share of gross national income (GNI) per capita, has fallen from 1.3 to 1.2 per cent, while the fixed broadband basket has decreased from 2.5 to 2.3 per cent of GNI per capita.

Nonetheless, lack of affordability continues to be a major barrier to Internet use, especially in low-income economies. Despite some progress, a wide gap persists between high-income economies and the rest of the world. On average, subscribers in lower-middle-income economies spend over seven times the share of their income on a mobile broadband basket as subscribers in high-income economies. Subscribers in low-income economies spend about 20 times as much. A fixed broadband subscription costs the equivalent of more than one quarter of the average income in a low-income economy.

The universal and meaningful connectivity target for affordability is two per cent of GNI per capita. Of the 202 economies for which data is available for the mobile broadband basket, 138 meet this target, eight more than in 2025. For the fixed broadband basket, 91 out of 192 economies meet the target, five more than in 2025. Three in ten economies meet neither the fixed nor the mobile broadband affordability target.

Among low- and middle-income economies, however, only 63, or roughly half, meet the affordability target for at least one of the two baskets.

Mobile broadband affordability has also improved across countries in special situations. For the first time, LLDCs and SIDS met the two per cent affordability target, with median prices expressed as a share of income, falling from 2.7 to 1.7 per cent and from 2.1 to 1.9 per cent, respectively. In LDCs, the median price declined from 6.3 to 6.1 per cent, but remained well above the target.

Country-level and aggregate statistics for all ICT price baskets for 2026 will be released by December 2026.[5]

[5] See https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/ICTprices/default.aspx for more information on ICT prices.

Digital skills[6]

Internet users' digital skills are uneven, with communication and collaboration skills being most widespread

Given that self-reporting may be subjective, digital skills are measured based on whether an individual has recently performed certain activities that presuppose a degree of proficiency in the relevant skills. Digital skills are grouped into five categories: communication and collaboration; problem solving; safety; digital content creation; and information and data literacy.

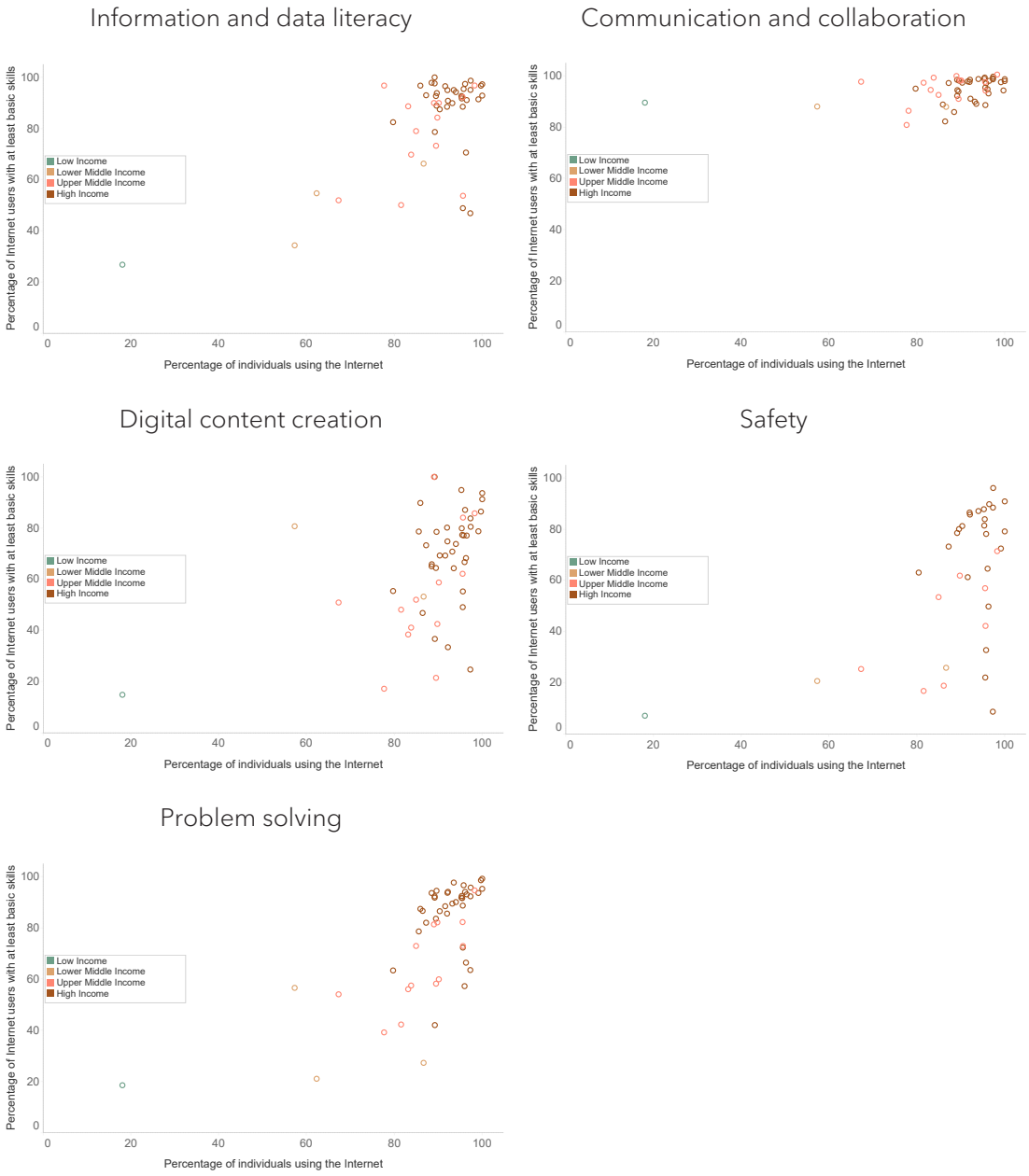
While the importance of digital skills for economic and social development is well-documented, data remains scant. Only 73 countries have submitted data on digital skills since 2023, with very few countries reporting for all skill areas. Of those countries that have reported, 54 provided comparable data on digital skill levels and 22 provided data on overall skill levels (see methodology for calculating digital skill levels, below).

Despite these gaps, some patterns emerge. Internet users consistently perform well in communication and collaboration. In all countries reporting data for this area, at least four out of five Internet users have at least basic skills in this area, with the share exceeding 90 per cent in most countries, regardless of national Internet usage levels.

Skill levels in other areas vary more widely. In countries providing data, the share of Internet users with at least basic skills in information and data literacy tends to be higher than in the remaining three areas. Substantial variation persists across all skill areas, even among countries with similar levels of Internet use.

[6] The term *ICT skills*, used in previous publications, has been replaced by *Digital skills*.

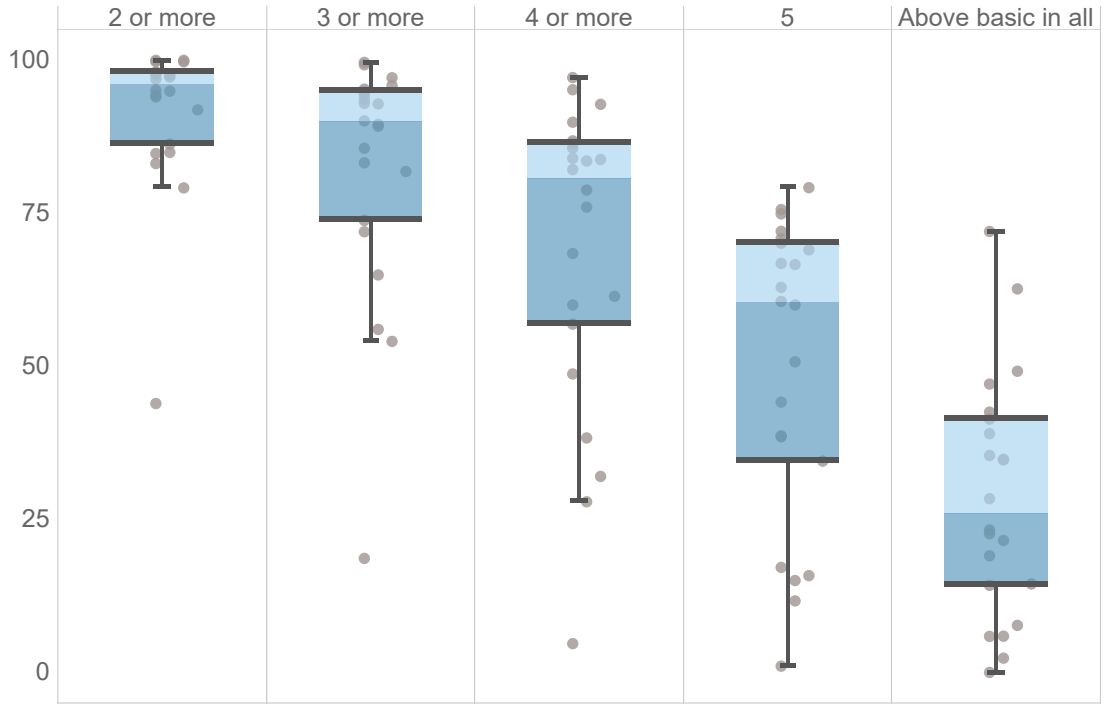
Percentage of Internet users with at least basic skills vs percentage of individuals using the Internet, by skill area, 2025 or latest year



Note: Individuals with *at least basic skills* refers to those who have performed at least one activity in the corresponding skill area during the survey reference period. The *Information and data literacy* area refers to verifying the reliability of information; getting information about goods or services; reading or downloading newspapers, etc.; and seeking health-related information. *Communication and collaboration* refers to sending messages (e.g. e-mail, messaging service, SMS) with attached files; making calls over the Internet; participating in social networks; and taking part in consultation or voting via the Internet. *Digital content creation* refers to using copy and paste tools; creating electronic presentations; using basic arithmetic formulae in a spreadsheet; editing online text, spreadsheets, presentations; and uploading self/user-created content. *Safety* refers to changing privacy settings and setting up effective security measures. *Problem solving* refers to finding, downloading, installing, and configuring software; connecting and installing new devices; transferring files or applications between devices; electronic financial transactions; doing an online course; and purchasing or ordering goods or services.
Data availability: 51 countries for *information/data literacy,* 50 countries for *communication/collaboration*, 52 countries for *digital content creation,* 35 countries for *safety*, and 53 countries for *problem solving*. In-scope ages may vary between countries. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

For the 22 countries reporting overall digital skill levels, the share of Internet users with at least basic skills in all five skill areas ranges from 1 to 79 per cent. These countries generally have high levels of Internet use (median 95 per cent), limiting the representativeness of the findings. Nevertheless, the data reveals substantial differences in digital skills. In most countries, nearly all users have at least basic skills in at least two skill areas (median 96 per cent). However, many Internet users lack well-rounded digital skills. Fewer users have at least basic skills in all five areas (median 60 per cent). In only two of the 22 countries do more than half of Internet users have above basic skills in all areas.

Percentage of Internet users with digital skills, by number of skill areas with at least basic skills, 2025 or latest year



Note: Individuals with *at least basic skills* in a given skill area refers to those who have done at least one activity in the corresponding skill area during the survey reference period.
Data availability: 22 for *overall skill levels*. In-scope ages may vary between countries. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Methodology for calculating ICT skill levels

At its 11th meeting in September 2023, the ITU Expert Group on ICT Household Indicators (EGH) recommended changes to the reporting of data on ICT skill levels and most importantly, that individuals' skill levels should be assessed for different areas.

Individuals should be assessed on the number of activities within a skill area they report having done in the last three months using the following progression:

None	Basic	Above basic
0 activities	1 activity	More than 1 activity

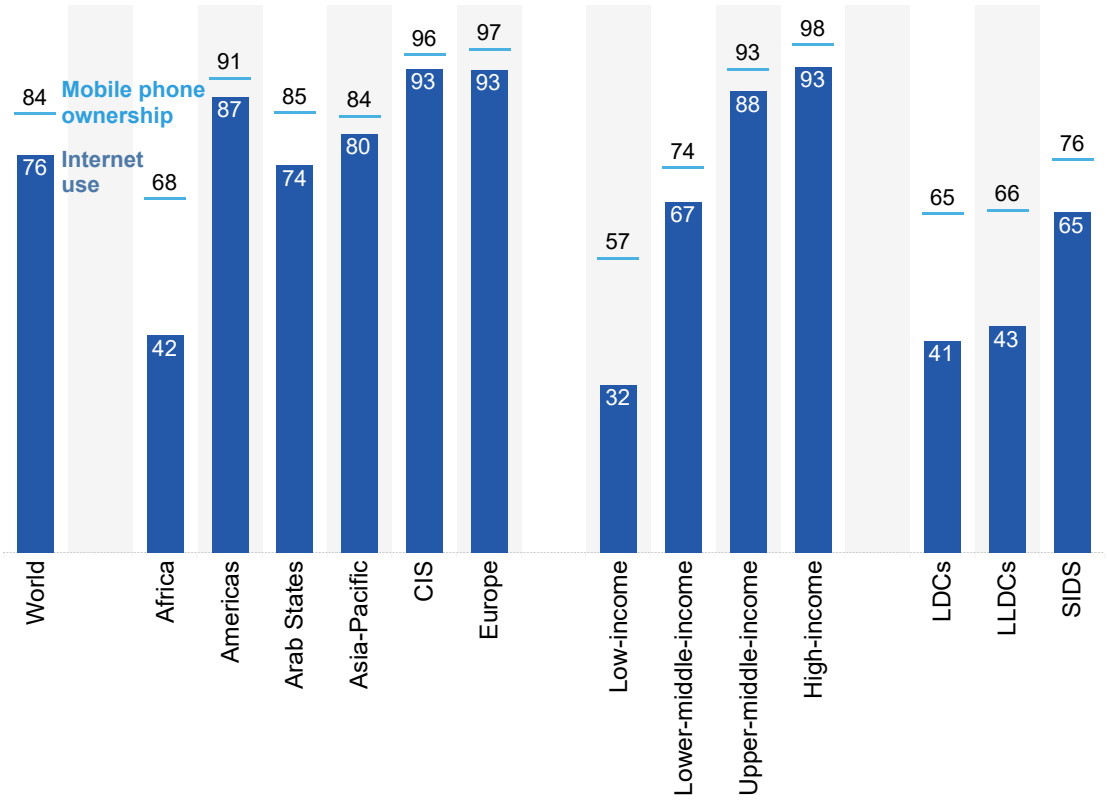
- *Skill levels should not be assessed in skill areas where data are reported for one or no activities.*
- *Activities should be weighted equally within each skill area.*
- *Skill areas with different numbers of components should be treated equally.*

To measure overall skill levels, an individual is classified as having *basic digital skills* if they report having performed at least one activity in each of the five skill areas, and as having *above basic digital skills* if they performed two or more activities in each area. While this recommendation does not require any additional data collection, it does require countries to perform additional analysis on existing survey microdata. It is expected that data availability will continue to improve as familiarity with these new recommendations increases.

Mobile phone ownership

More than four out of five people worldwide own a mobile phone

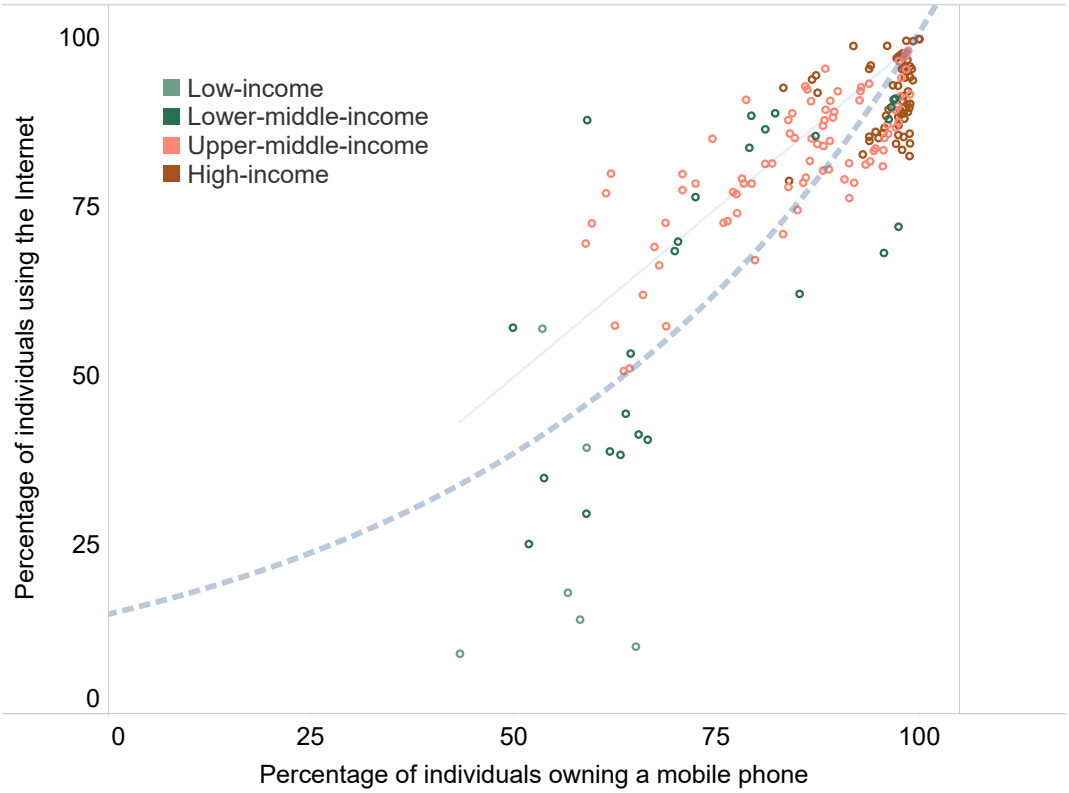
Percentage of individuals owning a mobile phone and using the Internet, 2026



Note: Mobile phone ownership refers to individuals aged 10 years and above. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Globally, 84 per cent of individuals aged 10 years and above own a mobile phone. Universal ownership, defined as an ownership rate of at least 95 per cent, has been reached in high-income economies, while upper-middle-income economies have already surpassed the 90 per cent mark. By contrast, in low-income economies, only 57 per cent of individuals aged 10 years and above own a mobile phone.

Percentage of individuals using the Internet vs percentage of individuals owning a mobile phone, 2021-2025



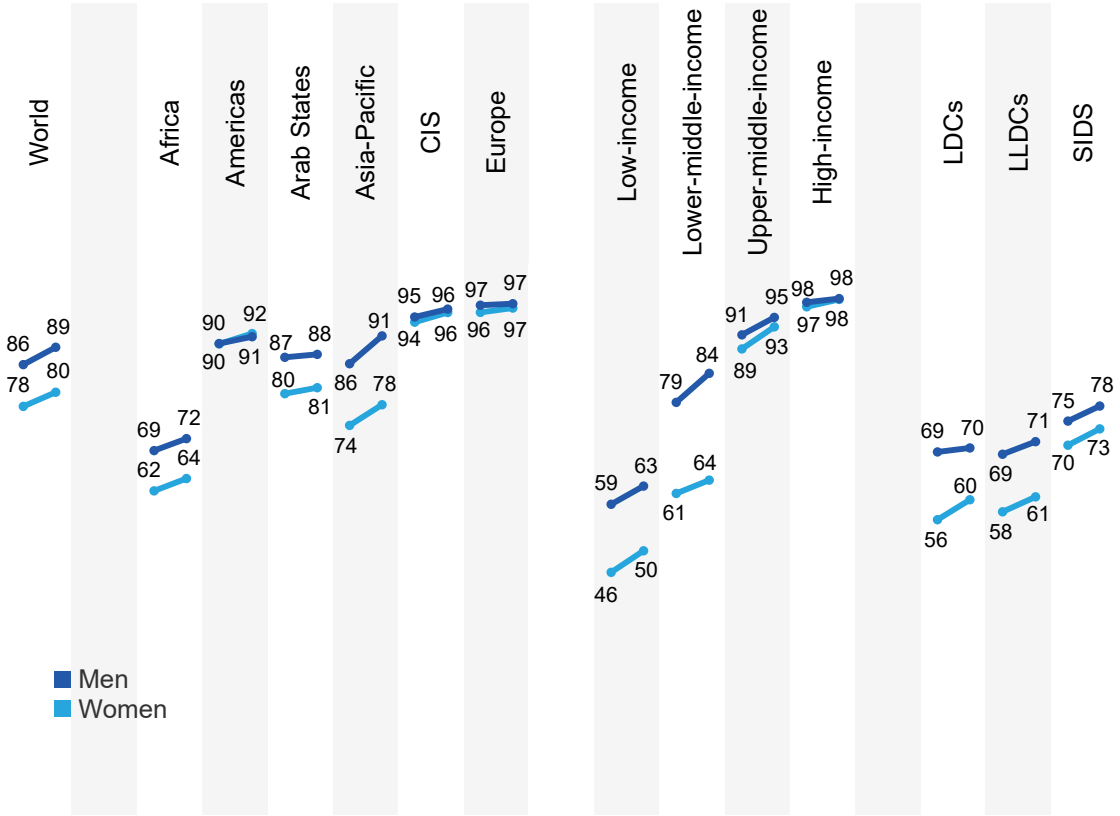
Note: Official data available from 76 economies (190 observations). In-scope ages may vary between countries. Each data point represents a particular year between 2021 and 2025 for one country. The blue dotted line shows the trend across all countries. The grey diagonal line is a reference line indicating an equal rate of mobile phone ownership and Internet use. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Mobile phones are the most common gateway to the Internet, so mobile phone ownership can provide an indication of Internet use. This is not a one-to-one relationship, however, as individuals may access the Internet using someone else's phone, such as children using a parent's device, while some phones are used only for calls. In most countries, the percentage of individuals who own a mobile phone is higher than the percentage of individuals who use the Internet.

The same pattern holds across all six ITU regions. In Europe, the CIS and the Americas, the gap between mobile phone ownership and Internet use is small, with both already close to universality. In the Asia-Pacific region, the difference is also small, with mobile phone ownership four percentage points higher than Internet use. In the Arab States, the gap is 10 percentage points. In Africa, the gap stands at 26 percentage points between mobile phone ownership (68 per cent) and Internet use (42 per cent). The gap is shrinking in all regions, as growth in Internet use continues to outpace growth in mobile phone ownership.

The gender gap in mobile phone ownership is comparable to the gender gap in Internet use. Globally, 81 per cent of women and 89 per cent of men aged 10 years and above own a mobile phone, translating into a gender parity score of 0.90 (skewed against women), which is lower than the 0.94 score for Internet use (see above). Progress towards gender parity in mobile phone ownership has been negligible over the past three years. Globally, women are 9.6 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone than men. Among those who do not own a mobile phone, women outnumber men by 78 per cent. As with Internet use, gender parity in mobile phone ownership is strongly correlated with income levels. The lowest scores are observed in low-income countries, LDCs, and LLDCs.

Percentage of individuals owning a mobile phone by gender, 2023 and 2026



Note: Mobile phone ownership refers to individuals aged 10 years and above. Interactive chart.
Source: ITU

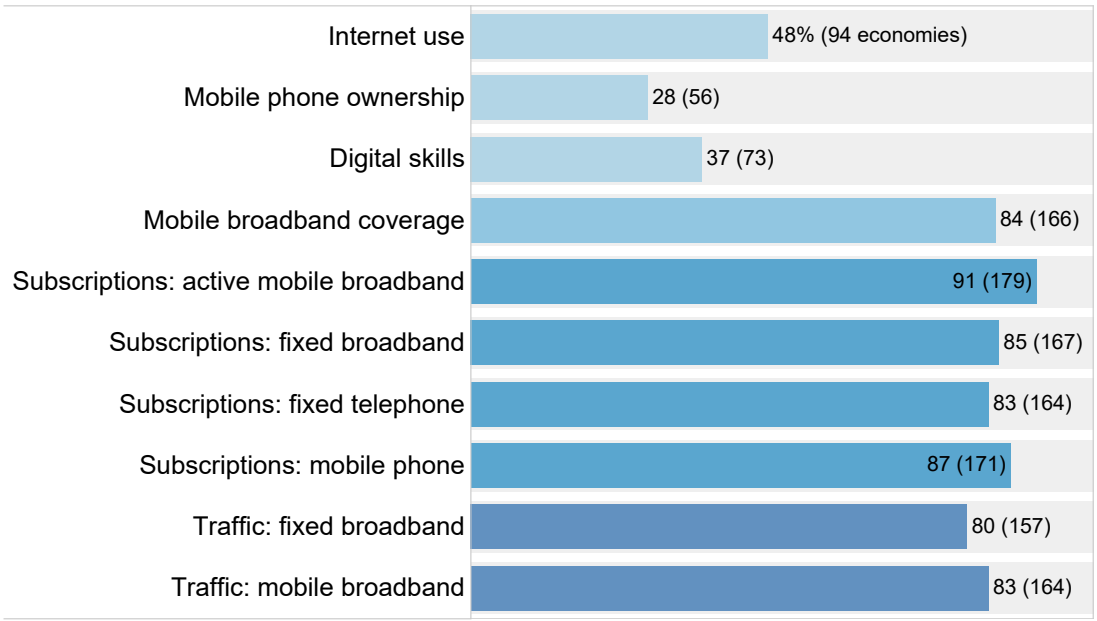
Data availability

Significant data gaps continue to hamper evidence-based policymaking

Reliable and timely data is essential for effective policy-making. Yet significant gaps in ICT statistics persist, limiting policy-makers' ability to identify needs, monitor progress and design effective interventions. These gaps also constrain ITU's ability to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of digital connectivity worldwide.

The data used in *Facts and Figures* is collected by ITU from countries through three questionnaires, supplemented by desk research: the World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Questionnaire (WTI questionnaire), covering administrative data, including on the three indicators covered in this publication – subscriptions, mobile network coverage and Internet traffic; the ICT Price Basket Questionnaire (IPB questionnaire), covering affordability statistics; and the Questionnaire on ICT Access and Use by Households and Individuals (household questionnaire), covering Internet use, digital skills and mobile phone ownership, among others.

Share of economies submitting data to ITU



Note: Out of 197 economies (194 Member States plus Palestine*; Hong Kong, China; and Macao, China) reporting data for 2023 or later. For digital skills, this refers to Member States reporting data for at least four of the 20 activities. Details on the regions and special groups can be found in the Interactive chart.
* The State of Palestine is not an ITU Member State; the status of the State of Palestine in ITU is the subject of Resolution 99 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference.
Source: ITU

Data availability varies considerably across indicators. Between 80 and 91 per cent of economies have provided official data for 2023 or later on each of the three mentioned areas covered by the WTI questionnaire. For affordability indicators, ITU publishes a nearly complete dataset. In this case, questionnaire responses are complemented and validated through desk research by information publicly available on operator websites. In contrast, household survey data is much less widely available. Fewer than half of economies have reported data on Internet use (48 per cent), while coverage is even lower for digital skills (37 per cent) and mobile phone ownership (28 per cent).

This contrast largely reflects the greater cost and complexity of household surveys compared with the routine collection of administrative and price data. Where survey data is unavailable, estimates are needed, which introduce uncertainty into the assessment of digital divides.

Despite these challenges, available data from household surveys provide valuable insights into digital inclusion by capturing the socio-economic characteristics of respondents. Of the economies reporting survey data, approximately 90 per cent provided a breakdown by gender, 78 per cent by age and 73 per cent by urban or rural location. The insights gained from these data justify continued investment in regular household surveys.

Share of economies submitting disaggregated survey data to ITU



Note: Data availability refers to official data from 2023 or later, considering the economies included in the regional grouping of the Telecommunication Development Bureau. Percentages are shown as a share of economies that have provided official data for the indicator at the overall (non-disaggregated) level. Details on the regions and special groups can be found in the interactive chart.
Source: ITU

Methodology

For this publication, regional and global aggregates up to 2025 have been calculated using data supplied by Member States to ITU, supplemented where necessary by ITU estimates. Aggregates for those years may differ from those produced for earlier editions of *Facts and Figures*, as Member States may have submitted new or updated data. Except for price data, all 2026 aggregates are ITU estimates computed using the methodology described below. For more detailed information, see Estimation methods for selected ICT indicators.

Percentage of population with mobile network coverage: end-2026 estimates

The percentage of the population covered by a mobile signal (2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G) refers to the percentage of inhabitants who have access to such coverage, regardless of whether they use the service. The indicator thus measures the availability of mobile cellular services, rather than the actual level of use or subscriptions. Data are disaggregated by urban and rural areas.

Coverage indicators are reported in aggregate form only (combining urban and rural coverage). As with many ICT indicators, ITU collects this data from telecommunication operators, telecommunication/ICT regulators and telecommunication/ICT ministries. This information is widely available from developed and developing countries alike. For countries that do not submit data, ITU applies two estimation methods: 1) estimation based on published data; and, if not feasible, 2) estimation based on trends.

Estimation based on published data

Data on coverage are sometimes available in the reports or on the websites of regulators or operators. This information can be used to estimate network coverage for the population of a country. The estimation process applies the following steps:

1. **Identification of market players:** First, it is necessary to determine how many mobile network operators (MNOs) and primary market providers offer the mobile service in the country, and obtain related information.
2. **Annual report analysis**: Once the MNOs are identified, their annual reports are downloaded from their websites and used for research.
3. **Alternative sources of business information**: If operators do not publish annual reports, it may be possible to consult reports filed with national stock exchange commissions, or international exchange commissions (such as the Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States of America). These reports, which typically comprise Form 20-F and Form F-6 filings, provide comprehensive information about the company, including subscriptions, tariffs, staffing, financial data and more.
4. **Press releases and other media reports**: If it proves impossible to obtain data either from company annual reports or regulator publications, information can be approximated through industry analysis and news reports from trusted sources in the country, such as operator press releases, official statements from regulators or ministries, and media reports. Such data sources can provide absolute subscription numbers, market shares, penetration rates, growth rates and population coverage, which can be used to derive estimates for the country.

Once data from all operators are available, the total percentage of the population covered can be calculated.

Estimation based on trends

When data are not available from filings or industry reports, it may be possible to produce estimates by analysing trends from the previous five years, using forecasting tools such as Expert Modeler in IBM SPSS.

As the data available for most countries do not differentiate between urban and rural coverage, they require disaggregation. This is a straightforward calculation, since mobile cellular coverage is virtually ubiquitous in urban areas and the proportion of urban to rural inhabitants is published by the World Bank. Rural mobile population coverage is estimated by subtracting the urban population from the total population covered by a mobile signal, assuming urban areas are covered.

The percentage of the rural population covered by a mobile cellular signal (2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G) is then obtained by dividing the number of rural inhabitants with coverage, by the total rural population and multiplying by 100.

Aggregate values for regions, income groups and other groupings are calculated based on a weighted average of the values for individual countries.

Internet use and mobile phone ownership estimates

Household surveys are a valuable source of statistics on Internet use and mobile phone ownership. Owing predominantly to their cost, however, relatively few countries administer such surveys and accordingly, there are large data gaps.

In addition, the delay between the collection of household survey data and their publication can be as much as two years or more, limiting their usefulness for ICT statistics given the rapid pace of technological change.

To overcome these shortcomings, data modelling and imputation are used to estimate missing historical values, and nowcasting techniques have been used to estimate the figures for 2026. The models used to estimate these missing values rely on a diverse range of widely available national indicators for mobile broadband subscriptions, ICT services affordability and GNI per capita, among others, and account for their changes over time. Weighted regression is used to give proportional influence in models to each region based on the number of countries in the region.

As well as official data from the membership, important sources used to obtain data and/or cross-check estimates include the Gallup World Poll and the United Nations Children's Fund household survey – the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. Additional data on socio-demographic characteristics are obtained from the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Labour Organization, and the Population Division in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UN DESA). The 2026 estimates have also implemented new urbanization data from the UN DESA Population Division, which now classifies the territory of countries into cities, towns and rural areas, rather than the previous urban/rural binary classification.[7] The application of this new classification (with cities and towns assumed to comprise urban areas) has resulted in data that show a substantial decrease in the share of the world population residing in rural areas.

[7] https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/world-urbanization-prospects-2025.

Official data and estimates are used to calculate aggregate values for regions, income groups and other groupings, based on a weighted average of the values for individual countries. Since household surveys on Internet use rarely include children younger than five years old, estimates of total Internet users based on this weighted average should be interpreted with caution. Mobile phone ownership aggregates are weighted by the size of the population aged 10 years and older.

Disaggregation of overall values is performed separately. For instance, where official country data on the number of Internet users are only available in aggregate form, available disaggregated data for urban and rural populations from comparable economies are analysed to estimate the percentage point gap between urban and rural Internet use. Existing data on the country's overall Internet usage, population size, and urbanization are then used to derive estimates of the proportions of the urban and rural populations using the Internet. Global and regional figures are calculated by weighting the figures for individual countries by the rural and urban population in each country.

A similar procedure is used to estimate Internet use and mobile phone ownership by gender. Internet use by young people is estimated directly with the "rest of population" derived from this estimate based on overall Internet use and population distribution by age.

For 2026, nowcasting has been used to estimate the proportion of individuals who use the Internet and own mobile phones. Predictions have been made at the country level for overall Internet use and mobile phone ownership based on the country's growth history and that of other countries with similar levels of use. For all other indicators, predictions have been produced for regional and global aggregates only, based on past growth.

Mobile-cellular, mobile-broadband, and fixed-broadband subscription estimates

The data on subscriptions in 2026 have been compiled from publicly available data from telecommunication/ICT regulators or ministries, as well as subscription information published by each country's main operators. When operator data are used, the reported number of subscriptions is divided by the operator's market share to obtain the total number of subscriptions in the country for a particular service. In the absence of annual reports, subscription data are estimated from industry analyses, authoritative news articles, and operator press releases.

Data from these sources include the absolute number of subscriptions, market shares, penetration, and growth rates which are used to derive the country estimates using the same method employed with operator data. In the case of countries for which data are not available either from the national administration or from filings and industry reports, subscriptions have been estimated using univariate time series analyses applied to the data from the last 10 years.

Univariate time series analyses are done by decomposing the time series of penetration data of a particular service to its trend and residual component so as to obtain the autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) models. The resulting ARIMA models have been used to make the point prediction for 2026 for each country and service.

Aggregate values for regions, income groups and other groupings are calculated based on a weighted average of the values for individual countries.

Fixed and mobile broadband Internet traffic estimates

ITU collects Internet traffic statistics on fixed and mobile broadband (inside the country) through its annual World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators questionnaires, according to the methodology provided in the *Handbook for the Collection of Administrative Data on Telecommunications/ICT*. Statistics refer to traffic over the open Internet and thus exclude "walled garden" and IPTV services. Internet traffic over a mobile device connected through Wi-Fi to a fixed network is considered part of fixed broadband traffic.

Traffic figures for 2026 are estimates based on an extrapolation of trends in quarterly traffic per subscription, for countries that publish such figures. For all other countries, model-based estimates have been used, relying on changes in subscriptions (see above) and average download speed, obtained from Ookla Speedtest data.[8]

Where Internet traffic statistics are not available from the questionnaires, the figures are compiled from publicly available sources from regulators, ministries, the OECD Broadband statistics, or operator reports. In the absence of any of these alternative sources, ITU produces estimates, using modelling tools and imputation to estimate aggregates.

Fixed broadband Internet traffic estimates are based on the assumption that traffic is a function of technical conditions, moderating factors such as quality of connectivity, and economic factors influencing demand. Consequently, models rely on ITU indicators, such as the number of fixed broadband subscriptions (overall, and in the speed tier above 100 Mbit/s), the share of individuals and households using the Internet, affordability of the fixed broadband price basket, average download speeds obtained from Ookla Speedtest data, degree of urbanization, and per capita income obtained from the World Bank. Mobile broadband traffic estimates are based on ITU data, including data-only mobile broadband affordability, share of individuals using the Internet, Ookla Speedtest data for average download speed, and per capita income. The actual linear model selected is based on data availability and model fit measures.

In cases where data are only missing for some of the years, extrapolations are made with the help of changes in average download speeds or exponential smoothing functions.

Traffic estimates have several limitations. One is that many mobile operators and Internet service providers do not regularly publish traffic statistics, and the statistics provided by ministries and regulators often include estimates. While there are some good practices for publishing quarterly data on Internet traffic, few sources provide data in a timely manner. A second limitation is that the predictive power of the models used to estimate traffic is lower than for other indicators.

ICT price statistics

ITU price statistics refer to ICT baskets, which are internationally comparable units of ICT services. The *Affordability of ICT services* section presents medians based on the 202 economies for which price data are available for both 2025 and 2026, for the data-only mobile broadband basket, and on the 192 economies for which such data are available for the fixed broadband basket. The data-only mobile broadband basket is defined as the cheapest, non-promotional, data-only mobile broadband offering available domestically with a 3G technology or above, and a minimum monthly data allowance of 5 GB. The fixed broadband basket is defined as the

[8] Ookla Speedtest data. Speedtest by Ookla Global Fixed and Mobile Network Performance Maps was accessed in September 2026 from https://registry.opendata.aws/speedtest-global-performance.

cheapest fixed Internet subscription available domestically with a minimum of 5 GB monthly data allowance, and an advertised download speed of at least 256 kbit/s, using the most commonly available technology in the country.

The 2026 ICT prices refer to retail prices for the basket in effect in February/March 2026 and published on operator websites. GNI per capita figures (in local currency, at current prices) are obtained from the World Bank World Development Indicators and refer to the most recent available year (2025 or 2024), retrieved in July 2026; or, if unavailable, from the UN DESA National Accounts Main Aggregates Database. More information on the ICT service price data collection methodology is available in the Manual.

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