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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2022 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

GSM Association

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 26th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

GSMA's submission to WSIS Reporting Process

Executive Summary

Although the world is more connected than ever before, 3.8 billion people are left excluded from enjoying the benefits of the mobile internet. These people are disproportionately poorer, women, rural and less educated. In fact, across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), women are 16% less likely than men to use mobile internet according to the latest data in GSMA's Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022. GSMA research on the mobile gender gap in LMICs shows that the key barriers preventing women from accessing and using mobile are related to affordability of devices and data, lack of knowledge and digital skills, safety and security concerns, lack of access to networks and enablers and relevant content and services.[1]

The GSMA continues to work with its members and partners on addressing the digital divide and mobile gender gap, which are at the heart of the WSIS outcomes (C-1, C-4, C-5 and C-6). The GSMA Connected Society (CS) and Connected Women (CW) programmes are funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), with additional support from GSMA members. The CS and CW programmes drive impact through industry leading insights, supporting members to implement projects and initiatives, and through advocacy and policy support.

For example, through GSMA's Connected Women Commitment Initiative, mobile operators have made formal commitments to reduce the gender gap in the customer base of their mobile internet or mobile money services in their markets, supported by the CW team. Since the initiative was launched in 2016, more than 55 million additional women have been reached with mobile internet and mobile money services (over 10 million additional women in the last year).

To help policymakers address the gender gap in mobile internet adoption and use, the GSMA has published a report titled 'Policy considerations to accelerate digital inclusion for women in low- and middle-income countries' in September 2022, which provides granular policy recommendations as well as examples of initiatives taken by policy makers from across LMICs.

Another priority for the GSMA is to support our partners to tackle a lack of basic digital skills, one of the most significant barrier to mobile internet adoption among mobile users who are aware of it. In this regard, the GSMA has developed the Mobile Internet Skills Training Toolkit (MISTT), which is a set of free resources to train people with the basic skills they need to access and use mobile internet. As of August 2022, MISTT has been deployed in 27 countries, with more that 50 million people trained.[2]

Trends and Experiences in Implementation

Mobile is the primary way men and women access the internet in LMICs, accounting for 85% of broadband connections in 2021.[3] The GSMA's latest data shows that by the end of 2021, 4.3 billion people were using

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[1] GSMA. (2022). Policy considerations to accelerate digital inclusion for women in low- and middle-income countries.

[2] GSMA. (2022). Introduction to the GSMA Mobile Internet Skills Training Toolkit (MISTT).

[3] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimates for 2020.

mobile internet, equivalent to 55% of the world's population.[4] At the same time, 95% of the population is already covered by mobile broadband. This makes the usage gap - the proportion of the global population covered by a mobile broadband network but not using the internet – the biggest challenge to address to achieve digital inclusion for all. The GSMA has published its annual State of Mobile Internet Connectivity report at MWC Africa in October 2022. The study provides a detailed analysis of the current state of mobile broadband coverage and mobile internet adoption in LMICs to help inform efforts to address the digital divide.

The GSMA has also been tracking the mobile internet gender gap across LMICs since 2017, when women were estimated to be 25% less likely than men to use mobile internet. This gender gap reduced every year from 2017 through to 2020, where it dropped as low as 15%. However, our estimate for 2021 suggested this progress has stalled, with the gender gap in mobile internet use now at 16% (see Figure 1 below). This is the first time the GSMA data has recorded this type of negative trend, which serves as a clear call to action for all stakeholders to take targeted action to close the mobile gender gap and address the barriers to women's digital inclusion.

Figure 1: Gender gap in mobile internet use across LMICs, 2017-2021
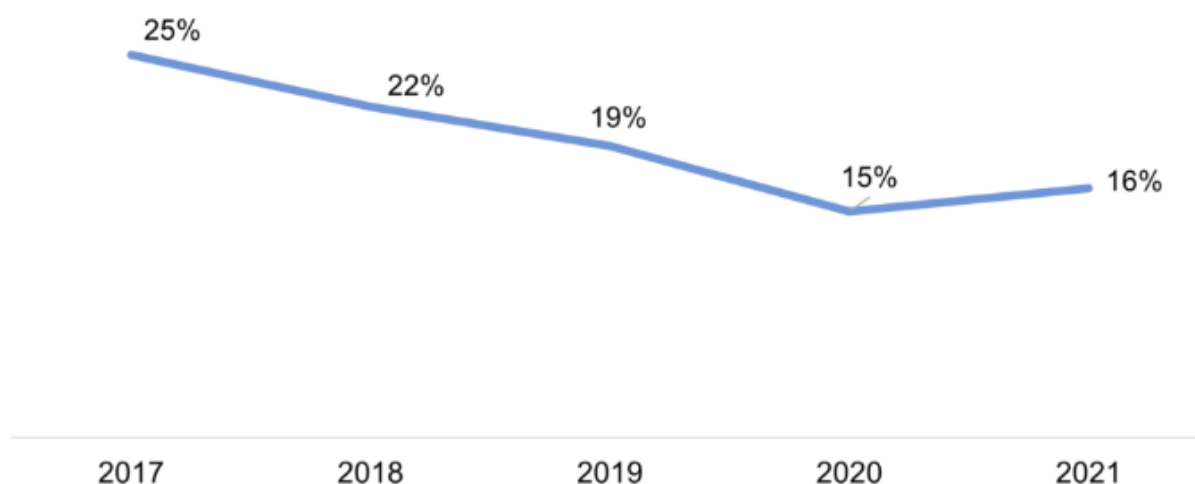
The GSMA Consumer Survey consistently shows that in LMICs, affordability of handsets and data, access to mobile, literacy and digital skills, and relevant content and services are the main factors limiting mobile internet use among mobile users who are aware of it.[5]

Programmes and projects to implement the outcomes

The GSMA Connected Women Programme continues to support mobile operators to address the mobile gender gap through its Connected Women Commitment Initiative.

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[4] GSMA. (2022). Too many are still offline: Global figures mask regional and demographic disparities.
[5] GSMA. (2022). The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022.

Achieving connectivity for all and bridging the digital gender divide is not something any one sector or organisation can do alone. To support policymakers, the GSMA launched a new report titled 'Policy considerations to accelerate digital inclusion for women in low- and middle-income countries' . The report outlines 25 concrete recommendations for policymakers to address the gender gap in mobile internet use. These include addressing the lack of affordability of handsets and data; lack of knowledge and digital skills; concerns related to safety and security; lack of access to networks and enablers; lack of relevant content, products and services; as well as social norms that impact women's ability to access and use digital technologies and participate fully in the digital sector.[6]

GSMA's data, insights and calls to action are already informing the work of many other key stakeholders. For instance, the GSMA has contributed to key initiatives of the Women 20 (W20) group of the G20[7], OECD[8], Generation Equality Forum (GEF)[9], UN[10] and World Bank[11]. For example, At the 2022 W20 Summit in Indonesia, delegates representing G20 countries adopted a Communiqué, which called for halving the mobile internet gender gap in LMICs by 2030.

The GSMA looks forward to continuing to work with governments to improve the availability of gender-disaggregated data, address women's needs, circumstances and challenges in the design and implementation of policies, plans and budgets, and partner with different stakeholders to address the barriers to mobile internet adoption and share lessons learned.

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[6] GSMA. (2022). The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022.
[7] Women 20. (2022). Women 20 Communique Edition 2022.
[8] GSMA has contributed to the OECD Digital Development Co-Operation Report and has authored Chapter 4: Tackling digital disadvantage with people-centred policies.
[9] UN Women. (2021). Action Coalitions Global Acceleration Plan.
[10] UN Tech Envoy. (2022). UN Secretary General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation.
[11] World Bank Group. (2021). Accelerating Gender Equality in Digital Development.