There are now more than 3.5 billion mobile internet subscribers globally and in 2018, for the first time, there were more mobile internet users than non-users amongst the population covered by a mobile broadband network. However, adoption has not been equitable. Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) account for 97% of those globally who live without mobile broadband coverage and 90% of those that do have coverage but do not yet use mobile internet.

The GSMA Connected Society’s Mobile Connectivity Index (MCI) supports the mobile industry’s commitment to drive mobile internet connectivity and accelerate digital inclusion by measuring the performance of 165 countries - representing 99% of the global population - against the four key enablers of mobile internet adoption: infrastructure; affordability; consumer readiness, and; content and services. The data the MCI provides can help focus the efforts that are required by the mobile industry, governments and the international community to accelerate mobile internet uptake.

The index is built up through 38 indicators feeding into 14 dimensions that are aggregated to give a score for each of the four enablers. Scores fall within a range of 0-100.

Source: GSMA Intelligence, 2018. ‘Connected’ refers to the number (in billions) of unique people who have used internet services on a mobile device. Mobile internet services are defined as any activity that consumes mobile data. ‘Usage’ gap refers to those who live within the footprint of a mobile broadband network but are not using mobile internet. ‘Coverage gap’ refers to those who do not live within the footprint of a mobile broadband network.
The coverage gap – people living outside of areas covered by mobile broadband networks – continues to decrease and now stands at 750 million people.

Mobile data continues to become more affordable across all regions. But the cost of internet-enabled devices has not fallen significantly.

According to consumers, the two largest barriers to mobile internet adoption in LMICs are a lack of digital skills and literacy followed by affordability.

Mobile internet use is not equitable - in LMICs, women are 23% less likely than men to use mobile internet and rural populations are 40% less likely to use mobile internet than urban population.