



# Assistive Tech



## Advancing digital inclusion for persons with disabilities

The GSMA Assistive Tech programme is working towards driving greater access and use of mobile technologies for persons with disabilities in emerging markets and to maximise opportunities for social and economic inclusion.



Today, **over one billion people** need at least one form of assistive technology (AT), but around **90 per cent** do not have adequate access to the AT they require.

By **2030 two billion people** will need at least one assistive product, with many older people needing two or more.

The lack of access to AT limits the capacity for people to live healthy, productive, independent and dignified lives; and to access healthcare, education, the labour market and civic life.

*“Upholding the rights and ensuring the full inclusion of the world’s one billion persons with disabilities is not only a moral imperative, but a practical necessity” – Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations.*

### The barriers

As more services become ‘digital by default’, there is an increased risk that persons with disabilities may be left behind if technology products and services are not made accessible and affordable to all.

Mobile technology has the potential to deliver services to persons with disabilities, but the barriers to access and usage of mobile phones need to be addressed.

The barriers that need to be broken down are:

- **Awareness**
- **Accessibility**
- **Affordability / Ownership**
- **Usability / Skills**



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## The opportunity

Meeting this challenge is a commercial opportunity for the mobile industry. A well-defined and comprehensive inclusion strategy can increase the customer base and retention of customers with disabilities.

*“Creating an inclusive environment for people with disabilities also makes good business sense. The global disability market is believed to be worth \$8 trillion” – Caroline Casey, Founder of The Valuable 500*

Mobile promotes digital inclusion and the versatile nature of mobile phones makes them incredibly bespoke and cost-effective tools for people with disabilities, clustering together multiple ATs in a single device. Mobile phones are invaluable assets in the day-to-day lives of people with disabilities. For instance, persons with hearing or visual impairment who own a smartphone and use accessibility features may be similar users of mobile internet to non-disabled smartphone users. But, in many low- and middle-income countries, more than 70 per cent of persons with disabilities still own a feature or basic phone.

*“For many of you, mobile is just like any other device, for me it is a companion in my life” – research participant from Kenya, 2018.*

## Our approach

The mobile disability gap is not going to close on its own. Targeted intervention is needed by industry, policymakers, the development community and other stakeholders to address the barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

The GSMA Assistive Tech programme works with the mobile industry and key stakeholders to address the digital inclusion gap of persons with disabilities, and identify innovation opportunities for making mobile technologies enablers of ATs.

We aim to drive greater digital inclusion through:

- **Research & insights**
- **Market engagement with MNOs**
- **Innovation funding**
- **Advocating for enabling environments**

Find out more:

[www.gsma.com/AssistiveTech](http://www.gsma.com/AssistiveTech)

