



# 2024 Mobile Industry Impact Report: Sustainable Development Goals

**Executive summary**

September 2024



The GSMA is a global organisation unifying the mobile ecosystem to discover, develop and deliver innovation foundational to positive business environments and societal change. Our vision is to unlock the full power of connectivity so that people, industry and society thrive. Representing mobile operators and organisations from across the mobile ecosystem and adjacent industries, the GSMA delivers for its members across three broad pillars: Industry Services and Solutions, Connectivity for Good and Outreach. This activity includes underpinning the technology and interoperability that make mobile work, advancing policy, tackling today's biggest societal challenges and providing the world's largest platform to convene the mobile ecosystem at the MWC and M360 series of events.

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GSMA Intelligence is relied on by leading operators, vendors, regulators, financial institutions and third-party industry players to support strategic decision-making and long-term investment planning. The data is used as an industry reference point and is frequently cited by the media and by the industry itself.

Our team of analysts and experts produce regular thought-leading research reports across a range of industry topics.

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# Digital connectivity is essential for advancing sustainable development

The world is grappling with substantial economic, social and environmental challenges in the face of escalating risks and uncertainties. In an increasingly interconnected world, shocks and crises are occurring with greater frequency and intensity. Recent events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, conflicts and climate-related disasters have significantly hindered progress in eradicating poverty and hunger, reducing inequality and gender gaps, and enhancing health and education outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

The impact of these crises is apparent when measuring progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The world is not on track to achieve most of the SDGs by 2030. The UN's 2024 assessment of the roughly 140 SDG targets with data shows that only 17% are on track, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress and more than a third have seen either no movement or regressed below the 2015 baseline.

Immediate action is required to reverse these trends. Building on the recommendations of the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, the UN has proposed a framework built around six investment pathways for the effective delivery of high-impact, sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to realise the SDGs by 2030.<sup>2</sup> Digital connectivity is one of these six investment pathways, with the UN highlighting connectivity's vital role in providing the foundations on which digital products, service and innovations can be built for the benefit of all of society.

“In an increasingly interconnected world, shocks and crises are occurring with greater frequency”

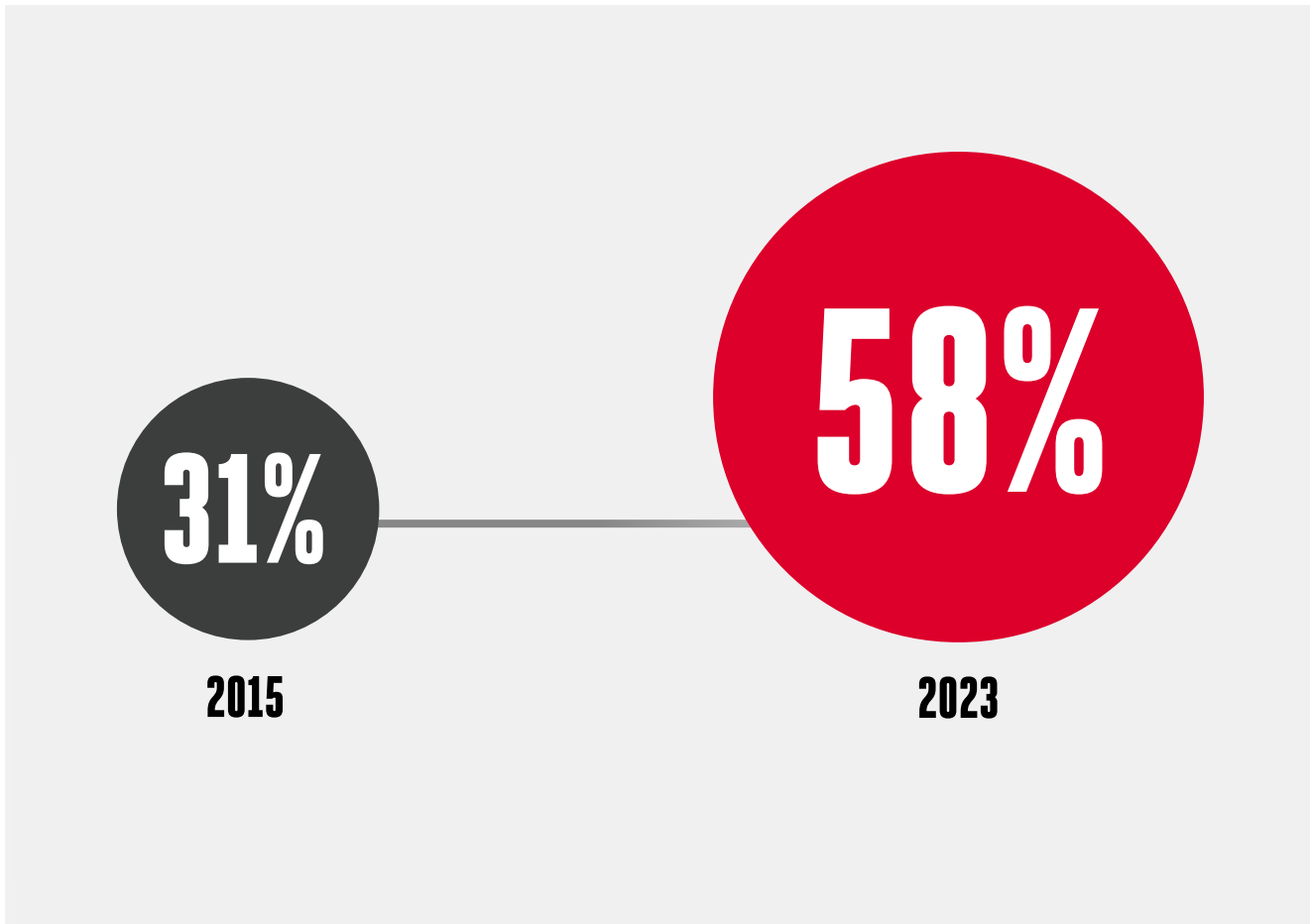


<sup>1</sup> *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*, UN, June 2024

<sup>2</sup> 'Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions', UN, May 2024

# The mobile industry has achieved 58% of its potential contribution to the SDGs – up from 31% in 2015

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The mobile industry makes a significant contribution to driving sustainable development and achieving the SDGs. In 2023, the average SDG mobile impact score across the 17 goals was 58.<sup>3</sup> This means the mobile industry achieved 58% of its potential contribution to the SDGs – up from 31% in 2015. The mobile industry achieved its highest impact on SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, driven by the reach of mobile. By the end of 2023, the share of the world’s population living in areas without mobile broadband coverage stood at just 4% (350 million people), while 57% of the world’s population (4.6 billion people) was using mobile internet.

Growing usage of mobile-enabled activities is also pivotal to the mobile industry’s SDG contribution. For example, 3 billion people (54% of mobile subscribers) used mobile financial services (such as mobile banking and mobile money) in 2023. This drives mobile’s impact on multiple SDGs, including SDG 1: No Poverty and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, by helping individuals to manage their finances while creating employment opportunities and raising productivity. Yet, despite the significant impact of the mobile technology on the SDGs, there is still more work to be done to maximise the industry’s contribution ahead of the 2030 deadline.

<sup>3</sup> For each SDG, the GSMA calculates a ‘mobile impact score’ out of 100. A score of zero means the mobile industry is having no impact at all, while a score of 100 means the industry is doing everything possible to contribute to that SDG. A more detailed description is provided in the SDG Impact Methodology document.



“The mobile industry achieved its highest impact on SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, driven by the reach of mobile. By the end of 2023, the share of the world’s population living in areas without mobile broadband coverage stood at just 4% (350 million people), while 57% of the world’s population (4.6 billion people) was using mobile internet.”

# The UN Summit of the Future is a unique opportunity to enhance cooperation on critical challenges and accelerate progress on the SDGs

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On 22 September 2024, the UN Summit of the Future will convene world leaders to forge a new international consensus on how to deliver a better present and safeguard the future. Digital connectivity will be central to discussions during the event. The UN's Common Agenda proposes a Global Digital Compact to be agreed at the Summit of the Future.<sup>4</sup> This compact outlines three critical areas requiring urgent multi-stakeholder digital cooperation: closing the digital divide; making the online space open and safe for everyone; and governing AI for humanity.

The mobile industry plays a crucial role in each of these three areas. First, addressing the usage gap is integral to closing the digital divide and ensuring no one is left behind in the digital age.<sup>5</sup> Most unconnected

persons live in areas with mobile broadband coverage, but face barriers to adoption including affordability (particularly of internet-enabled handsets), knowledge, skills and relevance. Operators and their partners have implemented several initiatives to tackle these challenges. These include offering financing options to make smartphones more accessible for a wider range of consumers, promoting digital skills and education, and introducing relevant content and online services.

In addition, mobile operators play an important role in providing a safe and secure mobile experience for their consumers while meeting their obligations to protect public safety. Their work includes addressing issues of privacy and security, as well as promoting



<sup>4</sup> The Global Digital Compact will set out principles, objectives and actions for advancing an open, free, secure and human-centred digital future that is anchored in universal human rights and that enables the attainment of the SDGs. For more information, please see 'A Global Digital Compact – an Open, Free and Secure Digital Future for all', UN, May 2023

<sup>5</sup> The 'usage gap' refers to those who live within the footprint of a mobile broadband networks but do not use mobile internet services

the safe and beneficial use of mobile services and the vast array of applications they support. These actions give individuals the confidence to use the full range of online services, providing access to vital information and life-enhancing tools that support the mobile industry's contribution to the SDGs.

The mobile industry is also at the forefront of initiatives to tackle the challenges associated with AI, with operators collaborating with a diverse range of stakeholders to develop ethical guidelines and promote responsible AI practice. Raising awareness and providing education about AI practices and safety is also a critical aspect of maximising the potential of AI solutions. Operator initiatives are helping diverse populations better understand AI and its safety concerns while addressing the needs of underserved communities.

“Operator initiatives are helping diverse populations better understand AI and its safety concerns”



# Key drivers of mobile's SDG impact<sup>6</sup>

## Mobile internet coverage and adoption



# 57%

of the world's population (4.6 billion people) **now use mobile internet**



# 4%

of the world's population (350 million people) **are still not covered by mobile broadband** (coverage gap)



# 39%

of the world's population (3.1 billion people) **live within the footprint of a mobile broadband network but are not using it** (usage gap)



# 49%

**Mobile internet is used by 49% of the poorest 40%**, equivalent to 1.6 billion people



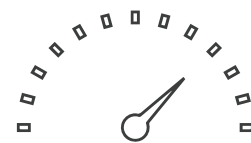
# 41%

**Rural mobile internet adoption has reached 41%** (1.4 billion people)

# 4G

# 60%

**4G accounts for almost 60% of mobile connections**, while 5G's share has risen to almost 20%



# 2x

**Average mobile download speeds have more than doubled** since 2020, reaching 48 Mbps<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Note: all figures correct to end of 2023, unless stated otherwise  
<sup>7</sup> Source: GSMA Intelligence calculations of data provided by Ookla<sup>®</sup> Speedtest Intelligence<sup>®</sup>



# Mobile usage

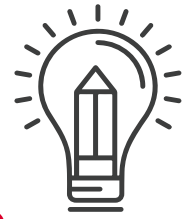
3



**billion people,**

or 57% of mobile subscribers, use **mobile financial services**

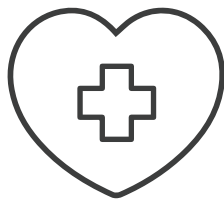
2.4



**billion people,**

or 43% of mobile subscribers, use mobile to access information to **support, training, learning or education**

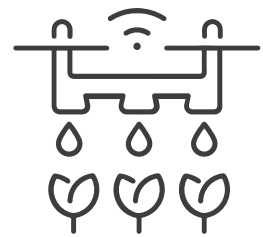
2.3



**billion people,**

or 41% of mobile subscribers, use mobile to access **health services and information**

1



**billion users,**

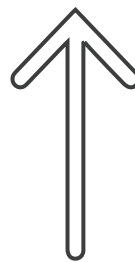
or 18% of mobile subscribers, use mobile to access **agricultural services**



There are

**3.5**  
**billion**

licensed cellular  
IoT connections



rising to

**5.8**  
**billion**

in 2030

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