



Connected Women  
**A framework to understand women's  
mobile-related safety concerns**  
in low- and middle-income countries



Connected  
Women

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### About the GSMA

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting nearly 800 operators with more than 250 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations in adjacent industry sectors. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as Mobile World Congress, Mobile World Congress Shanghai and the Mobile 360 Series conferences.

For more information, please visit the GSMA corporate website at [www.gsma.com](http://www.gsma.com)

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The GSMA's Connected Women programme works with mobile operators and their partners to address the barriers to women accessing and using mobile internet and mobile money services. Connected Women aims to reduce the gender gap in mobile internet and mobile money services and unlock significant commercial opportunities for the mobile industry and socio-economic benefits for women.

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## Introduction

## Introduction

Mobile has the capacity to transform lives. It can empower women, make them more connected and provide access to information, services and life-enhancing opportunities like health information, financial services and employment opportunities, often for the first time. Mobile is also the main access point to the internet for most of the world's population, especially in low- and middle-income countries. However, while mobile connectivity is spreading quickly, it is not spreading equally. Women are being left behind as various, interconnected barriers keep them from accessing and using mobile at the same rate as men. This unequal access to mobile technology threatens to exacerbate the inequalities women already experience.

At the same time, there is a paradoxical relationship between mobile technology and women's safety. A 2015 GSMA Connected Women survey found that 68% to 94% of female respondents in 11 low- and middle-income countries reported feeling safer with a mobile phone or that they would feel safer if they owned one.<sup>1</sup> Among other things, a mobile can provide a way for a woman to contact help if she is in trouble and reassurance when she is out and about. However, research has consistently shown that safety concerns related to mobile are an important barrier to mobile ownership and use, with women perceiving safety as an issue more commonly than men.<sup>2</sup>

Mobiles (and the internet) have become conduits for threats that have always existed (e.g. bullying) as well as new ones (e.g. online identity theft). Mobile-related safety concerns are wide ranging and include unsolicited harassing phone calls and text messages, cyberbullying,<sup>3</sup> online harassment, mobile theft and feeling unsafe or uncomfortable when purchasing or topping up devices.



1 GSMA Connected Women, 2015, "Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries", <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>

2 Ibid.; GSMA Connected Women, 2018, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2018", <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/connected-women/the-mobile-gender-gap-report-2018>; Truecaller, 2018, "Truecaller Insights reveals: Women report more unwanted calls than men", <https://blog.truecaller.com/2018/03/08/truecaller-insights-reveals-women-report-more-unwanted-calls-than-men/>; For example, according to World Wide Web Foundation Women's Rights Online 2015 data, 28% of women in Jakarta claim to have experienced threats or direct personal bullying (including harassment or stalking) when using a mobile phone in the last two years compared to 19% of men. In Kampala, 45% of women report experiencing threats or direct personal bullying (including harassment or stalking) in the last two years when using the internet compared to 8% of men ("Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment", <https://webfoundation.org/research/womens-rights-online-2015/#fulldataset>).

3 "Cyberbullying" is defined as bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, text and apps, or online in social media, forums or gaming where people can view, participate in and share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting or sharing negative, harmful, false or mean content about someone else, causing embarrassment or humiliation.

Safety concerns, and a general perception that mobile or internet access and use pose threats, should not however be used as an excuse for denying women access.<sup>4</sup> Rather, their ability to empower women should be emphasised,<sup>5</sup> including the ways in which mobile ownership and access to services can enhance women's personal safety.

This report explores women's mobile-related safety concerns, building on previous research by the GSMA and other organisations.<sup>6</sup> It draws on over 30 stakeholder interviews, desk research and primary research in India and Egypt to provide a framework to understand mobile-related safety concerns, an overview of initiatives (i.e. products, services, policies, or marketing or distribution approaches) that tackle this issue and actionable recommendations for stakeholders (government specific initiatives, in particular those concerning policy and legal frameworks, were not included in this review). Although this report focuses on low- and middle-income countries, we recognise that mobile-related safety concerns are a global issue.

Tackling women's mobile-related safety concerns will have wider socio-economic benefits, both in terms of helping to accelerate digital and financial inclusion for women and creating a significant commercial opportunity for the mobile industry. The GSMA estimates that if mobile operators in low- and middle-income countries could close the gender gap in mobile ownership and mobile internet use today (as a result of addressing safety concerns along with other barriers such as cost and digital literacy), this would generate an estimated incremental revenue of \$15 billion over the coming year.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Broadband Commission Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide, 2017, "Recommendations for action: bridging the gender gap in Internet and broadband access and use", <http://broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/WorkingGroupDigitalGenderDivide-report2017.pdf>.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.; Broadband Commission for Digital Development Working Group on Broadband and Gender, "Cyber violence against women and girls", [http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber\\_violence\\_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259); ODI, 2015, "Do digital information and communications technologies increase the voice and influence of women and girls?", <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9622.pdf>; Association for Progressive Communication, "Women's rights, gender and internet governance", [https://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/issue\\_womenrights\\_digital.pdf](https://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/issue_womenrights_digital.pdf); Digital Rights Foundation, "Cyber harassment helpline: six month report December 2016-May 2017", <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Cyber-Harassment-Helpline-Six-Month-Report.pdf>; Internet Governance Forum, "Overcoming barriers to enable women's meaningful internet access", [http://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot\\_download/3406/437](http://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/3406/437); World Wide Web Foundation, 2015, "Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment", <https://webfoundation.org/research/womens-rights-online-2015/#fulldataset>; GSMA Connected Women and LIRNEasia, "Mobile phones, internet and gender in Myanmar", [https://www.gsma.com/mobileforddevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/GSMA\\_Myanmar\\_Gender\\_Web\\_Singles.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobileforddevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/GSMA_Myanmar_Gender_Web_Singles.pdf).

7 The \$15 billion estimate assumes that the gender gap in mobile ownership and mobile internet use would be closed during 2018, and represents the subsequent 12-month incremental revenue opportunity.

## Key Findings

1

Women's mobile-related safety concerns can be categorised into three types: 'physical world', 'voice and SMS' and 'online':

- **Physical world:** Threats experienced in the physical world as a result of owning or using a mobile (e.g. phone theft).
- **Voice and SMS:** Threats experienced via voice calls or SMS.
- **Online:** Threats experienced via mobile internet.



2

There are six types of initiative that aim to address women's physical world, voice/SMS and online safety concerns:

- **Anonymous top-up;**
- **Female-friendly distribution models;**
- **Call and message blocking;**
- **Web filtering and online security;**
- **Online service provider security settings;**
- **Educational.**



The research also identified four types of initiative that address general safety concerns that are not directly related to mobile ownership and use (e.g. assault)—emergency call services, harassment mapping, panic button apps and wearables—although these are not the main focus of this study. None of the initiative types include government policies and legal frameworks which seek to address women's safety concerns as these were considered out of scope for this analysis.



## 3

## Mobile-related safety concerns reduce mobile access and use for women, and lead to revenue loss for the industry, in four main ways:

- **Reduced customer acquisition:** Fewer women start using mobile due to safety and harassment concerns.
- **Reduced average revenue per user (ARPU):** Women limit or stop using mobile, particularly mobile internet.
- **Increased churn:** Women change their phone number/SIM (and potentially mobile provider) to avoid harassment and other threats.
- **Reduced handset and data revenue:** Women may avoid higher-end devices or smartphones due to fear of theft or online mobile-related safety concerns.



## 4

## Stakeholders can address mobile-related safety concerns by:<sup>8</sup>

- Understanding the scale, impact and drivers of mobile-related safety concerns in their own contexts;
- Designing, launching and/or supporting effective initiatives to tackle mobile-related safety concerns. To make the initiatives effective, the private sector should consider establishing a business case for them, designing them for women with lower literacy and digital literacy, ensuring they are well supported with marketing and incentivising and training agents to promote them;
- Raising awareness of women's mobile-related safety concerns and the urgent need to address them;
- Promoting the positive role mobile can play in making women feel safer;
- Helping women feel safer when using mobiles and mobile internet by raising their awareness of safety-related initiatives, improving their digital skills and building their digital resilience;<sup>9</sup>
- Strengthening measures to protect women against internet-related abuse and harassment.



<sup>8</sup> This is a summary of recommendations for all stakeholders. At the end of the report recommendations have been provided for mobile operators and private sector organisations and for policymakers; however, many recommendations are also likely to be relevant for other types of stakeholders, such as other mobile industry players and NGOs.

<sup>9</sup> 'Digital resilience' refers to building a person's ability to respond confidently to challenges faced online, enabling them to become smart internet users.



**Objectives and approach**

# Objectives and Approach

## → This study set out to:

1. Define and categorise safety concerns related to mobile ownership and use;
2. Investigate how mobile-related safety concerns affect women's behaviour;
3. Identify and investigate initiatives that focus on safety concerns and provide a framework to understand how they address them;
4. Profile mobile-related initiatives from private sector organisations and NGOs that address safety concerns in two markets, including their impact on female end users; and
5. Provide recommendations for how the mobile industry and other stakeholders can address this barrier for women.

The focus of this report is the safety concerns arising from owning or using a mobile phone that can create a barrier to mobile ownership and use. Initiatives that use mobiles to alleviate women's safety concerns, that are not directly related to owning or using a mobile phone (e.g. physical assault), are less of a focus.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this report builds on previous research by the GSMA and other organisations. Telephone interviews with over 30 stakeholders from a range of organisations, as well as secondary research, were conducted to gather insights into women's mobile-related safety concerns and the initiatives that address them.<sup>10</sup> The primary qualitative research was conducted in India and Egypt and focused on four initiatives. Fieldwork consisted of 24 in-depth user interviews (12 per country, six per initiative, conducted by a local female moderator in the users' native language), multiple contextual interviews with local influencers (e.g. teachers, local business owners) and meetings with representatives of the local initiative.

## → Considerations for the analysis

Several factors influenced the scope of the research:

- Absence of an agreed definition of mobile-related safety concerns
- The challenge of researching safety and harassment issues
  - » Approaches need to be very sensitive to socio-cultural, economic and political contexts, as well as differences within countries (e.g. rural versus urban, regional, cultural, religious). What is considered harassment in one society may be viewed as acceptable behaviour in another, making it challenging to collect and compare data across markets. Compounding this issue is the very personal nature of many safety concerns, which can result in underreporting.
- Limited research and data
  - » The lack of a shared definition and the various socio-cultural understandings of what constitutes mobile-related safety concerns (including harassment) likely contribute to the limited amount of available data on the issue, particularly comparable data between countries.

<sup>10</sup> Over 30 telephone interviews were conducted with mobile network operators (MNOs), app developers, NGOs, academics and public sector stakeholders.



**Framing the problem:  
Mobile-related safety concerns**

## Framing the problem: Mobile-related safety concerns

**Mobile-related safety concerns can limit women's use of mobiles or prevent them from owning a mobile phone altogether.** Women in low- and middle-income countries are 10% less likely than men to own a mobile phone and 26% less likely to use mobile internet.<sup>11</sup> Safety and security concerns related to owning or using a mobile have contributed to this gap as they tend to be felt more acutely by women. It is worth noting that not only actual experiences, but also the threat of potential negative experiences, can drive consumer behaviour.

**Mobile-related safety concerns can limit phone ownership.** For example, across 19 low- and middle-income countries, 4% to 65% of women who do not own a mobile phone claimed that "I am concerned that I would be contacted by strangers", was one of the main reasons stopping them from owning a mobile (versus 3% to 49% of men).<sup>12</sup>

"Call harassment constitutes a key barrier to women using and owning mobile phones. I know of a 16-year-old girl who received harassing calls and asked her uncle for help. He then reported the issue to the girl's mother, who then confiscated her mobile." - *NGO, India*



"We women are more afraid of getting mugged because of a cell phone. We don't want to walk around with an expensive phone, because we are afraid someone will rob us." - *Female mobile user, urban, Colombia*<sup>13</sup>

**Mobile-related safety concerns can limit phone use.** For example, safety concerns pose a significant barrier to women accessing mobile internet, and since most people in low- and middle-income countries access the internet via their mobile, this can curtail all internet access. The Broadband Commission Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide report acknowledges that "*fears concerning safety and harassment are significant barriers that inhibit some women from benefitting from or even wanting to access the Internet*".<sup>14</sup>

"Our research revealed that many women are afraid of the impacts their usage of social networks would have on their 'offline' relationships. For example, their husband getting angry at them." - *NGO, Sub-Saharan Africa-focused*



<sup>11</sup> Based on those aged 18+. GSMA Connected Women, 2018, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2018", <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/connected-women/the-mobile-gender-gap-report-2018>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> GSMA Connected Women, 2015, "Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries", <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Broadband Commission, 2017, "Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide Recommendations for action: bridging the gender gap in Internet and broadband access and use", <http://broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/WorkingGroupDigitalGenderDivide-report2017.pdf>.



“Some women are restricted as to what content they can access. For example, educational content is OK while entertainment isn’t. Facebook can be highly controlled by male household members.” - *NGO, India*



“I am not even allowed to put my own picture on WhatsApp as some people can save that image.” - *Female, rural, Jordan*<sup>15</sup>

A recent GSMA study<sup>16</sup> in South Asia found that ‘Potential Adopters’ and ‘New Users’ of mobile internet<sup>17</sup> tend to see the internet as a ‘double-edged sword’. While it was recognised that the internet is a source of information, entertainment and empowerment, there is also a fear of the negative side of the web, such as fears of being exposed to certain content, risks to personal safety, online bullying and harassment, photo/information theft and the perception that inappropriate online relationships can damage reputations. Together with social norms, this fear of the negative side of the web can be a barrier to mobile access for women, either through self-policing or gatekeepers (male relatives or other family members) who restrict access.<sup>18</sup>



“After my sister created a Facebook account, a lot of men started calling her... She cried. And her husband hit her.” - *Female, Potential Adopter, urban, Sri Lanka*<sup>16</sup>



“Sometimes women do ask to buy internet, but I won’t allow it. I tell them, ‘Call the network helpline, don’t come here!’” - *Male, top-up and cigarette kiosk retailer, urban, Pakistan*<sup>16</sup>

## Tackling women’s mobile-related safety concerns will have wider socio-economic benefits

**Addressing women’s mobile-related safety concerns should help to reduce the gender gap in mobile access and use**, driving digital and financial inclusion for women, connecting women to life-enhancing services and supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>19</sup>

**Helping women feel safer when using a mobile is also a commercial opportunity for mobile operators.**

Both the experience and fear of safety and harassment limits mobile operator revenue through reduced customer acquisition (fewer women start using mobile due to safety and harassment concerns), reduced ARPU (women limit or stop mobile use, particularly mobile internet), increased churn (women change their mobile phone number/SIM and potentially their phone provider to avoid harassment and other threats), and reduced handset

<sup>15</sup> GSMA Connected Women, 2015, “Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries”, <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> GSMA, 2017, “Triggering mobile internet use among men and women in South Asia”, [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GSMA-Triggering-Mobile-Internet-Use\\_Web.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GSMA-Triggering-Mobile-Internet-Use_Web.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. ‘Potential Adopters’ are defined as someone who is a phone owner (with regular use); literate; belongs to a lower to middle class; aware of the internet and does not reject it; between 25 and 35 years; and has 3G coverage. ‘New Users’ are Potential Adopters who have been using mobile internet at least weekly for three to 12 months.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> In particular, SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

and data revenue (women may avoid higher-end devices or smartphones due to fear of theft or online mobile-related safety concerns). Initiatives to address mobile-related safety concerns have the potential to not only help mitigate lost revenue, but also attract new female customers as women (and their gatekeepers) are reassured and brand perception is enhanced.

“Women often rely on men to add credit as they don’t want, or are not allowed, to go to mobile kiosks. This often means zero credit balances persist for longer than necessary so there is a revenue upside for operators [to tackling safety concerns].” – *Technology provider, global*



“Last year we partnered with one of our peers to raise awareness of call harassment. We issued joint press releases and appealed to people not to give out their personal phone numbers to everyone. It was a large-scale campaign conducted through mainstream media, social media and SMS. The campaign was positioned as part of our CSR strategy but there is a commercial argument there; if people do not feel safe when using [a] mobile device, they will not use it as much.” – *Mobile operator, Maldives*



**Closing the gender gap in mobile ownership and mobile internet use presents a significant commercial opportunity for mobile operators.** This will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders and a holistic approach which tackles all barriers to access and use, including safety concerns. In 2018, the GSMA calculated that if mobile operators in low- and middle-income countries could close the gender gap in mobile ownership and mobile internet use today, this would generate an estimated incremental revenue of \$15 billion over the coming year.<sup>20</sup>

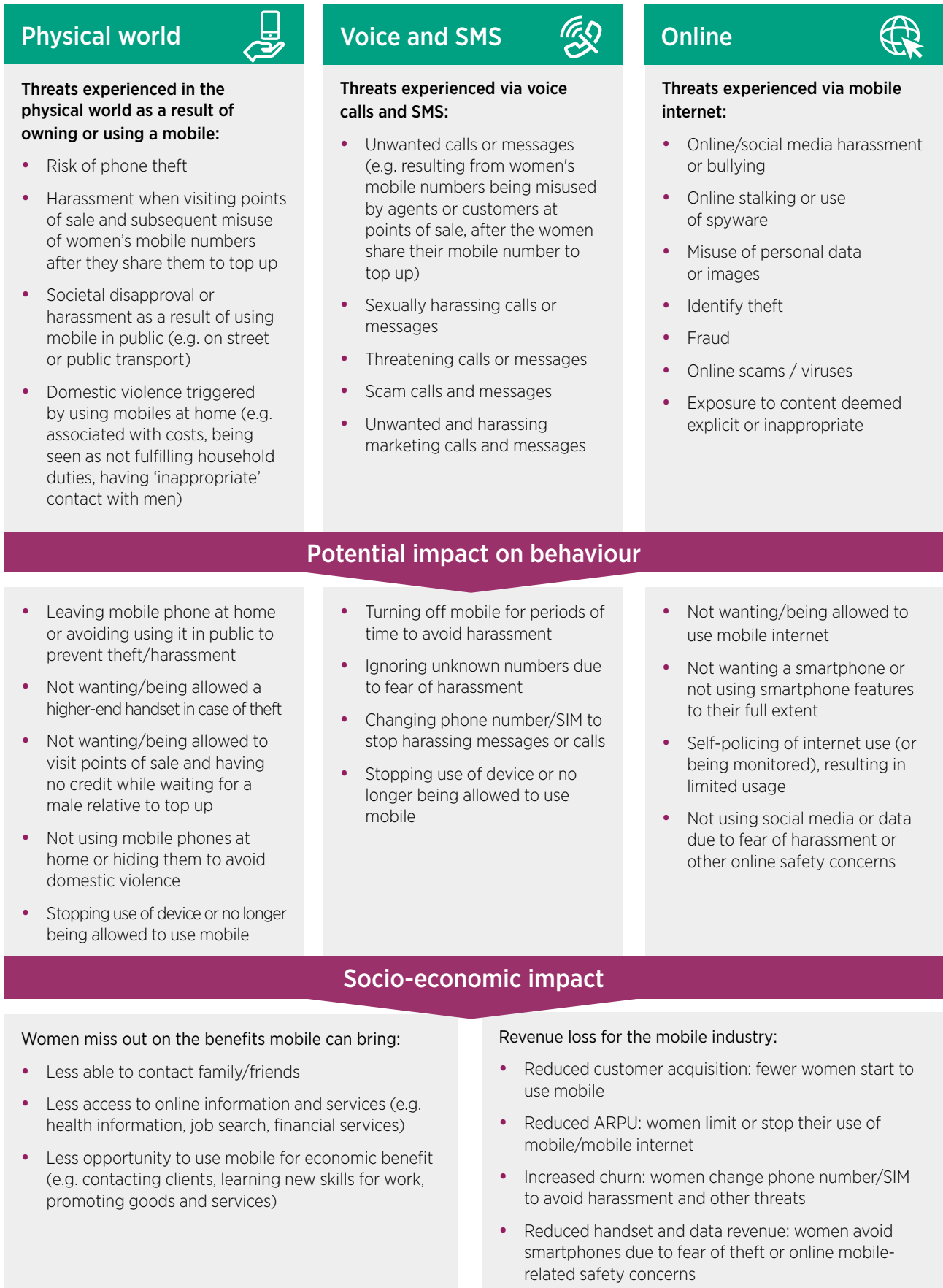
## Categorising mobile-related safety concerns

As with many communication technologies, mobile phones can be a medium for safety threats that have always existed (e.g. stalking) and, especially with mobile internet, a conduit for new ones (e.g. misuse of personal photos online). Based on the analysis in this study, safety concerns arising from owning or using a mobile phone have been grouped into three categories: physical world, voice and SMS, and online (Figure 1).

<sup>20</sup> GSMA Connected Women, 2018, “The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2018”, <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/connected-women/the-mobile-gender-gap-report-2018>. The \$15 billion estimate assumes that the gender gap in mobile ownership and mobile internet use would be closed during 2018, and represents the subsequent 12-month incremental revenue opportunity.

Figure 1

## Categorisation of mobile-related safety concerns



Note: It is often the fear of these threats rather than an actual experience that drives consumer behaviour.



## Regional and socio-cultural contexts have a significant influence

**Mobile-related safety concerns vary between and within regions.** For example, a recent GSMA study found that, of the 23 low- and middle-income countries surveyed, safety concerns were frequently cited among the top three barriers to mobile ownership and mobile internet use in the Latin American region. These safety concerns were felt more acutely by women. In Mexico, for instance, 40% of women who do not own a mobile reported concerns over strangers contacting them as a key barrier to ownership, compared to 24% of men. This concern about being contacted by strangers is also a barrier to mobile internet uptake. For example, 47% of female mobile owners in Chile who do not use mobile internet cite it as one of the main barriers to mobile internet adoption versus 23% of male mobile owners who don't use mobile internet (see [Figure 2](#) for a range of example countries where women cite this as a main barrier more than men).<sup>21</sup>

“Phone theft is a big problem in Latin America. Anyone who has a higher-end device will avoid using it in public. Some people I know carry two phones so if they’re involved in a mugging they can hand over the basic phone.” - *Mobile operator, Latin America*



“I wouldn’t spend so much on a cell phone, it’s too dangerous if you step out on the street and use it, you have to hide and you can’t call.” - *Female mobile user, urban, Colombia*<sup>22</sup>



“My friend accepted a friend request and started to receive messages, bad content and sexual images. She told her brother and he scolded her. That did not help so now she is not allowed to use social media and shares her phone with her brother.” - *Female (aged 33), India*

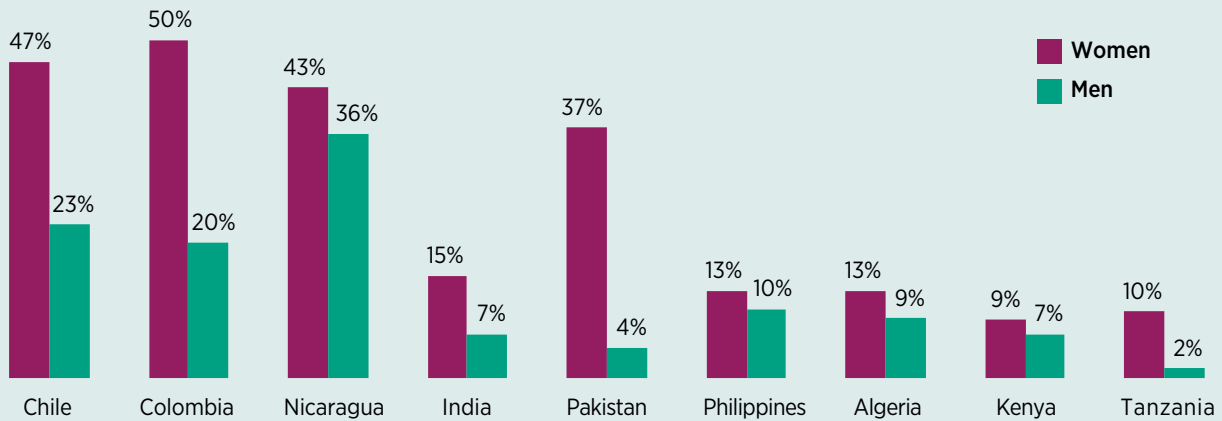
<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Base: adults aged 18+ who have used a mobile phone in the past three months but have never used mobile internet, despite being aware of mobile internet (excludes mobile users who are not aware of mobile internet).

<sup>22</sup> GSMA Connected Women, 2015, “Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries”, <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>.

Figure 2

## Women usually cite concerns about ‘strangers contacting me’ as a greater barrier to mobile internet adoption than men

% of mobile users who have not used mobile internet who claim that ‘strangers contacting me’ is a main barrier:



Source: GSMA Intelligence Consumer Survey, 2017, a range of example countries where women felt this barrier more acutely than men. Please note, due to cultural norms different countries will agree more or less strongly to attitudinal statements in research.

Base: adults ages 18+ who have used a mobile phone in the last three months but have never used mobile internet, despite being aware of mobile internet (excludes mobile users who are not aware of mobile internet).

Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who answered, 'This is one of the main reasons for stopping me' to the question, 'Please indicate to what extent, if at all, this stops you from using the internet on a mobile phone: I am concerned that I would be contacted by strangers'. n= from 52 to 108 for women and n= 53 to 128 for men.

**Safety concerns are likely to vary within countries**, for example, between rural and urban areas, different demographic groups (higher/lower socio-economic class, age and education level) and different socio-cultural contexts, such as religion.<sup>23</sup>

“Cyberstalking and monitoring of devices is also a big problem. Many male family members expect women to share their passwords with them. This is especially the case in rural areas where men still often think women want to mainly use phones to get in touch with men.”

- NGO, Pakistan



**Social norms, particularly in countries and societies with more traditional, patriarchal gender roles, also influence how mobile-related safety concerns affect women’s mobile access and use.** For example, in South Asia fears of the ‘negative side of the internet’ (e.g. fraud, misuse of personal images and exposure to explicit images) were found to contribute to women’s internet access being policed or denied by gatekeepers (typically male).<sup>24</sup> A 2015 GSMA study found that in some countries, notably Egypt, India and Jordan, it was reported as common for young women (but not young men), particularly in more rural areas, to have their mobile access and use monitored and controlled by their families, who want to protect them from harassment and control their communication with men outside the immediate family.<sup>25</sup>

When responding to mobile-related safety concerns, it is important that the mobile industry and other stakeholders understand the types of harassment women face and the social, political and economic context in which the threat is experienced.

<sup>23</sup> For example, data suggests that urban women in Bangladesh who do not own a mobile phone are more likely to cite safety risk, contact by strangers and information security as barriers to mobile ownership than their rural female counterparts. (GSMA Connected Women, 2018, “The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2018”, <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/connected-women/the-mobile-gender-gap-report-2018/>); The World Web Foundation Women’s Rights Online 2015 data also identifies social and demographic differences, for example, in Cairo, 32% of employed men and women reported experiencing threats or direct personal bullying in the last two years when using a mobile phone/internet compared to 49% of housewives/househusbands and 46% of students. (“Women’s Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment”, <https://webfoundation.org/research/womens-rights-online-2015/#fulldataset>).

<sup>24</sup> GSMA, 2017, “Triggering mobile internet use among men and women in South Asia”, [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GSMA-Triggering-Mobile-Internet-Use\\_Web.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GSMA-Triggering-Mobile-Internet-Use_Web.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> GSMA Connected Women, 2015, “Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries”, <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>.



**Initiatives addressing  
mobile-related safety concerns**

# Initiatives addressing mobile-related safety concerns





This study identified over **60 initiatives** from the private sector and NGOs aimed at **tackling mobile-related or general safety concerns**. These were then reviewed and **categorised into 10 different types** based on how they address these threats, for example, through education or call blocking. **Figure 3** maps these initiatives according to the safety concern they address, from those relating to mobile ownership and use (including physical world, voice and SMS, and online safety concerns) to more general, non-mobile-related safety concerns that mobile can also help to address. A full list of these initiatives can be found in the Appendix.

<b>1</b>	<b>Anonymous top-up:</b> mobile top-up services that do not require users to disclose their mobile numbers <sup>26</sup>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Female-friendly distribution models:</b> providers ensure that points of sale (POS) are more approachable for women, for example, by employing female agents	
<b>3</b>	<b>Call and message blocking services</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Web filtering and online security services</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Online service provider security settings and policies</b>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Educational initiatives</b>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Emergency call services:</b> including emergency credit (allowing calls after credit has run out) and helplines	
<b>8</b>	<b>Panic button apps</b>	
<b>9</b>	<b>Harassment mapping:</b> platforms that enable users to report and map harassment and other safety issues	
<b>10</b>	<b>Wearables:</b> wearable technology/gadgets that allow users to send alerts if they need help	

<sup>26</sup> Some of these services may not have been developed purely to tackle safety concerns. For example, they may have been created primarily to provide 24/7 access to credit, but they do also happen to help provide anonymity as well.

Figure 3

## Framework for understanding how initiatives address mobile-related safety concerns

<b>Type of safety concern</b>	<b>Safety concerns arising from mobile ownership and use</b>			<b>General safety concerns</b>
<b>Category</b>	<b>Physical world</b> 	<b>Voice and SMS</b> 	<b>Online</b> 	<b>Not mobile-related</b> 
<b>Examples of the safety concern</b>	Example: harassment at points of sale or as a result of using phone in public	Example: unwanted calls or messages	Example: harassment on social media, misuse of personal data or images	Example: harassment in public (e.g. on street or public transport), assault, theft
<b>Types of initiative that address safety concerns</b>	<p><b>1 Anonymous top-up services:</b> SMS-based, scratch cards, ATM top-up, online top-up, e-vouchers, mobile money top-up services, top-up machines</p> <p><b>2 Female-friendly distribution models:</b> female agents, female-focused retail stores</p> <p><b>3 Call and message blocking services:</b> network-level services, device-level services</p> <p><b>4 Web filtering services and online security</b></p> <p><b>5 Online service provider security settings and policies</b></p> <p><b>6 Educational initiatives:</b> face-to-face initiatives, digital initiatives</p>			<p><b>7 Emergency call services:</b> emergency credit and helplines</p> <p><b>8 Harassment mapping</b></p> <p><b>9 Panic button apps</b></p> <p><b>10 Wearables</b></p>

## Addressing the underlying causes of safety concerns

The initiatives identified and researched in this study (with the exception of certain educational initiatives)<sup>27</sup> focused primarily on addressing how women can prevent mobile-related safety issues or what to do once they have experienced them, rather than addressing the underlying causes. The mobile industry and other stakeholders need to consider how they can help address the root causes of these issues, such as the motivations of the perpetrators or environmental factors that contribute to the problem. For example, the 3-2-1 voice and text-based information service in Madagascar includes information on women's rights (e.g. the importance of equal decision making in the household), and there is some evidence of positive social impacts for both male and female users of the service (e.g. no longer being victims of domestic abuse).<sup>28</sup>








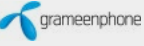

27 Realising they were only alleviating the symptoms of harassment and not addressing the source of the issue, Hamara Internet began holding face-to-face education sessions with men, explaining what constituted harassment and the possible legal repercussions of online harassment. Facebook partners with international organisations and local NGOs to provide offline education (tailored to the market) that covers a range of topics, including what is acceptable online behaviour (e.g. respecting the privacy of content/photos that are sent to them).











28 Provided by HNI and branded and marketed by Airtel Madagascar: <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/HNI-case-study-final-1.pdf>.

## Profiling types of initiative that address safety concerns










Table 1

### Types of initiative and examples that address safety concerns












INITIATIVE TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>1</b> Anonymous top-up</p> </div>	<p>SMS</p> <p>Recharge services that allow users to top-up mobile credit in-store without disclosing their mobile number. Normally they work by the customer being sent a one-time password (OTP) usually delivered by SMS. This service can potentially be provided by mobile operators at a low additional cost, as it is sometimes included in their underlying technology platform (e.g. via Mahindra Comviva).</p>	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <span style="margin-left: 10px;"><a href="#">Dialog Axiata Sri Lanka, Secret Code</a></span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <span style="margin-left: 10px;"><a href="#">Grameenphone Bangladesh, Private Recharge</a></span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <span style="margin-left: 10px;"><a href="#">Idea Cellular India, Private Recharge</a></span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <span style="margin-left: 10px;"><a href="#">Orange Egypt, Private Recharge</a></span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <span style="margin-left: 10px;"><a href="#">Vodafone India, Private Recharge</a></span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <span style="margin-left: 10px;"><a href="#">Vodafone India, Sakhi Pack</a></span> </div> </div>
	<p>Scratch cards</p> <p>Scratch cards (available to buy at retail outlets and typically easy to use even with low digital skills or literacy levels) allow users to top-up their mobile phones via SMS without disclosing their phone number.</p>	<p>Offered by the majority of mobile operators in low- and middle-income countries.</p>
	<p>ATM</p> <p>Topping up via an existing network of ATMs as a result of collaboration between mobile operators and banking institutions. The customer is usually required to have an account with the bank operating the ATM.</p>	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <span style="margin-left: 10px;"><a href="#">Grameenphone Bangladesh</a></span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <span style="margin-left: 10px;"><a href="#">Safaricom Kenya, M-Pesa</a></span> </div> </div>
	<p>Online</p> <p>Online top-up services via account management systems or mobile apps that offer customers the ability to recharge their phone using PayPal, PayTM or debit/credit card via an app or account management system. This method requires a certain level of digital skills, but with the rise of connectivity and smartphone adoption, it could provide a cost-effective, instant, 24/7 top-up option.</p>	<p>Commonly offered by mobile operators.</p>

INITIATIVE TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
<p><b>1</b></p> <p>Anonymous top-up</p> 	<p>e-Voucher</p>	<p>Offered by mobile operators in combination with retailers in low- and middle-income countries.</p>
	<p>Mobile money</p>	<p>Multiple mobile operators in low- and middle-income countries.</p>
	<p>Top-up machines</p>	<p> <u>Boonterm, Thailand</u></p> <p> Tigo Bolivia and Tigo Tanzania, Tigo Matic</p> <p> True, Thailand and Myanmar</p>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p>Female-friendly distribution models</p> 	<p>Female agents</p>	<p> <u>Telenor India, Project Sampark</u></p> <p> <u>Vodafone India, Sakhi Pack</u></p>
	<p>Female-focused retail stores</p>	<p> <u>Airtel India, female-only stores</u></p> <p> Telenor India, female-only stores</p> <p> Vodafone India, Angel Stores</p>

















<sup>29</sup> This is especially pertinent in areas where social norms restrict women's interactions outside the family home and with males who are not family members, or where points of sale are often male-dominated spaces that are unwelcoming to women.

INITIATIVE TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
<p><b>3</b></p> <p>Call and message blocking services</p> 	<p>At the network level</p> <p>Network level call-blocking (where the mobile network provide blocks a caller) is a potentially easy-to-scale and cost-effective approach that allows users to quickly block numbers of unwanted callers/contacts.</p> <p>At the device level</p> <p>Mobile applications that allow users to see who's calling and block unwanted calls/messages. Call blockers enable users to identify numbers and provide a range of call management options (e.g. call divert) and the ability to block incoming calls/messages. End users are usually charged a relatively small amount for these services, but there are also free applications that can be downloaded.</p>	<p> Airtel Kenya, Call blocker</p> <p> <a href="#">GloNigeria</a>, Call barring</p> <p> Orange Tunisia, Call blocker</p> <p> <a href="#">CallApp</a>, Caller ID and call blocker</p> <p> True Software Scandinavia AB, <a href="#">truecaller</a></p>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p>Web filtering and online security services</p> 	<p>Web filtering services allow users to block certain content categories (e.g. pornography, violence, racism) or websites at the network or device level. Some also block unsafe files and protect against viruses. Typically offered by operators, they range from default free-of-charge services to add-on services available at a relatively small additional cost. These web- or network-filtering services can address concerns around exposure to inappropriate/ taboo content, but promotion and use must be considered carefully to avoid undue censorship.</p>	<p> Robi Axiata Bangladesh, <a href="#">Safenet</a></p> <p> <a href="#">Vodafone Group</a>, <a href="#">SecureNet</a></p>



<p><b>5</b></p> <p>Online service provider security settings and policies</p> 	<p>Proactive measures from online service providers to counter harassment, improve security and reassure users. These can include settings that allow content to be shared only with known contacts, profile photo protection, processes to block and report inappropriate content and behaviour and employing machine learning to detect and remove abusive speech online.</p>	<p><b>Alphabet</b> <a href="#">Google, Alphabet – Perspective</a></p> <p> Facebook policies and privacy/blocking settings<sup>30</sup></p>
<p><b>6</b></p> <p>Educational initiatives</p> 	<p>Face-to-face</p> <p>Workshops to inform women (and sometimes men) of risks, including mobile- and internet-related risks, how to stay safe and build digital resilience. Topics can include how to protect devices (e.g. choosing secure passwords), how to stay safe online (e.g. privacy settings, awareness of implications of sharing data/photos) and how to respond to concerns (e.g. how to block harassers). They may also address safety/harassment more generally (e.g. what constitutes harassment, respecting rights of others, gender equality).</p>	<p> Facebook (in partnership with local NGOs and international organisations)</p> <p> <a href="#">Digital Rights Foundation, Hamara Internet in Pakistan</a></p> <p> <a href="#">HarassMap Egypt</a></p> <p> <a href="#">SafeCity India</a></p>
	<p>Digital</p> <p>Same as above, but delivered via digital/online tools, platforms or mobile apps. Delivered digitally, they may have greater possibility for scale than face-to-face workshops and could be more cost-effective. However as delivered digitally these initiatives normally require participants to have internet access and at least basic digital skills.</p>	<p> <a href="#">Digital Rights Foundation, cyber harassment helpline</a></p> <p> <a href="#">Every1 Mobile, My Mozilla Club</a></p> <p> <a href="#">Digital Rights Foundation, Hamara Internet in Pakistan</a></p> <p> <a href="#">Telefonica, Dialogando</a></p>

<sup>30</sup> For example, Facebook has specific policies for women's safety, anti-human trafficking and against nudity. It also offers tools that allow users to protect their privacy and control who can see their profile, to block and report inappropriate behaviour, and for suicide prevention. In December 2017, Facebook announced new tools to prevent harassment on Facebook and in Messenger as "part of our ongoing efforts to build a safe community". See <https://www.facebook.com/help/325807937506242/>, <https://heimdalsecurity.com/blog/facebook-security-privacy-guide/> and Facebook's Profile Picture Guard to prevent misuse of profile pictures: <http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/social/facebook-profile-picture-guard-for-india-heres-what-it-does-and-how-to-use-4718126/>.

<p><b>7</b></p> <p>Emergency call services</p> 	<p>Emergency credit</p>	<p>Allows users to make a limited number of calls after their SIM credit has run out. For some initiatives, the credit is provided free of charge, but for others it is 'borrowed' credit that is typically repaid when next topping up.</p>	 <a href="#">Ooredoo Maldives Emergency Credit</a>  <a href="#">Vodafone India, Sakhi Pack</a>  <a href="#">Vodacom Tanzania, Nipige Tafu</a>
	<p>Helplines</p>	<p>Emergency helplines that women can call for support, advice and guidance on gender-based violence.</p>	<p><a href="#">Argentina Free 144 calls as part of GSMA's We Care campaign</a>   <a href="#">Vodacom Foundation in South Africa, National Gender-Based Violence Call Centre</a></p>
<p><b>8</b></p> <p>Panic button apps</p> 		<p>Panic button apps that allow users to send a notification, sometimes with their current GPS location, to pre-defined contacts and/or emergency services in a dangerous or uncomfortable situation.</p>	 <a href="#">ASAS Tech Solutions India, One Touch Response Panic Button</a>  <a href="#">Hollie Guard App</a>  <a href="#">Usalama Technology Kenya, Usalama panic button</a>  <a href="#">Vodafone Turkey, Red Light Panic Button App</a>
<p><b>9</b></p> <p>Harassment mapping</p> 		<p>Platforms that allow users to report and map experiences and locations of harassment. This allows quick reporting of safety issues in public spaces, mapping of harassment 'hotspots' and raises awareness of the prevalence of harassment.</p>	 <a href="#">HarassMap in Egypt</a>  <a href="#">SafeCity in India, mapping tool</a>  <a href="#">SafetiPin, mapping/tracking tool</a>
<p><b>10</b></p> <p>Wearables</p> 		<p>Wearables/gadgets that allow users to call for help in times of danger or emergency. They can include panic buttons to send an alert to friends, family or emergency services.</p>	 <a href="#">Securella, wearable with panic button</a>



## Case Studies: EGYPT



### Egypt country context

Research from a number of organisations suggests that many Egyptian women have been subject to some form of violence and/or harassment.<sup>31</sup> For example, 51% of women in Cairo claimed that they had experienced threats or direct personal bullying (including harassment or stalking) when using a mobile phone and/or the internet in the last two years versus 21% of men.<sup>32</sup> In 2014, sexual harassment, including verbal, physical, behavioural, phone and online harassment, was criminalised. Nevertheless, episodes of harassment against women are reportedly pervasive. Our research highlighted that voice and SMS harassment, as well as online harassment, are significant concerns for women.



“You may face harassment through words, looks, phones, and touching. There are many different types of harassment. It is very common. You do not feel safe. Any girl only wants a good living, safety, and to be satisfied.” - *Female (aged 30), Egypt*



“Some of my friends have stopped using their phones. Every woman has patience but there is a limit. Some women cannot bear constant phone calls from strangers. Actually, all of us feel really confused. It is possible to just use your phone for calling, and to stop using social media.” - *Female (aged 25), Egypt*



“Internet harassment is another big problem in Cairo. These men can do many different things: he can blackmail the girl with her pictures and send her explicit pictures.” - *Female (aged 29), Egypt*

31 Sources: UN Women, 2013, “Study on Ways and Methods to Eliminate Sexual Harassment in Egypt”; [http://www.dgvn.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/DOKUMENTE/English\\_Documents/Sexual-Harassment-Study-Egypt-Final-EN.pdf](http://www.dgvn.de/fileadmin/user_upload/DOKUMENTE/English_Documents/Sexual-Harassment-Study-Egypt-Final-EN.pdf); Al Jazeera, 2015, “Infographic: Violence Against Women in Egypt” <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/01/infographic-violence-women-egypt-150126150958383.html>; Amnesty International, 2015, “‘Circles of hell’: Domestic, Public and State Violence Against Women in Egypt”, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/circles-of-hell-domestic-public-and-state-violence-against-women-in-egypt/>; UNFPA, 2016, “The Economic Cost of Gender Based Violence Survey Egypt 2015”, <http://egypt.unfpa.org/publications/economic-cost-gender-based-violence-survey-egypt-2015>; GSMA Connected Women, 2015, “Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries”, <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/connected-women/bridging-gender-gap>.

32 World Wide Web Foundation, 2015, “Women’s Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment”, <https://webfoundation.org/research/womens-rights-online-2015/#fulldataset>.

Mobile phones can also be seen as a tool to improve women's safety, a way to keep in touch, let people know that they are safe and to deter harassment on the street.



"Many of my students, especially females, call their parents when they leave school to let them know they're about to catch a bus or travel home. They call again when they're off the bus. It's safer this way." - *Male teacher, Egypt*



"I tell women to always be talking on the phone in public places. It's a distraction and might put people off harassing them." - *Female community influencer, Egypt*

CASE STUDY 1



**Orange Egypt Private Recharge:**

Our research identified that a perceived key driver of voice and SMS harassment is when women recharge their mobile phones at points of sale and either the reseller or a bystander overhears a customer's number, which is often required to add credit to their account.

**In 2016, Orange Egypt launched its Private Recharge service, which enables customers to top-up anonymously in-store**

through a unique and reusable 11-digit code. This eliminates the need to disclose a phone number when topping up and reduces the risk of an unknown party getting access to the number.

Orange Egypt anticipates that the service will deliver:

- Positive impact on customer acquisition, particularly for women
- Increased top-up frequency and reduction in periods of 'zero balance'
- Increased call, SMS and data usage
- Potential for cost savings as scratch card use is reduced

**Sara's story**

Sara is a 22-year-old female. She avoids sharing her number as much as possible as she has previously experienced harassing calls, including from her local mobile agent.



"I recharge my phone every three to four days at a local mobile outlet and I used to give my phone number to the shop assistant so he could add credit to my phone; the shop assistant used to call me repeatedly."

Sara started typing her phone number directly into the agent's system or asking the shop assistant to give her the top-up code so that she could enter it herself, but she still experienced problems. Sara looked online for a way to stop this and found out about the Private Recharge feature from Orange.

"It's great, I no longer have to give my phone number out when recharging my phone. I've even recommended it to my cousin."





CASE STUDY 2



### HarassMap Egypt

HarassMap is an Egyptian NGO that delivers both face-to-face training sessions about harassment, as well as an online harassment mapping tool that provides valuable information on the magnitude of sexual harassment.

The training is provided by volunteers at schools, universities and private companies, and aims to educate participants (both male and female) on what constitutes harassment and how to react to it and prevent it. Many of the workshops and other activities encourage women and men to intervene and/or speak up when they see sexual harassment happening or even just hear people talking about it in a way that normalises it.



The online mapping tool allows victims to tag an incident online with the location, type of harassment and the date, via desktop or mobile. It also includes an option for users to report incidents of people intervening to stop the harassment and support the harassed person, to help track and encourage positive action. Data is uploaded to an online map, which can also log reports.

### Nour's story

Nour is a 25-year-old female student who experienced sexual harassment in Egypt.



"I was leaving school when someone walked beside me and took his penis out. I insulted him but no one did anything. I was shocked. After this situation, I used to be afraid of going down to the street. It is uncomfortable to live like this."

Shaken by the incident, she looked online for help, and found HarassMap. She then attended a three-day session on identifying and combating sexual, physical and mobile-based harassment. She found the training very useful and now volunteers at HarassMap.

"One really valuable element of the course was how they encouraged us to think about what we posted online, and things like how to manage who sees different images on Facebook."



## Case Studies: INDIA



### India country context

In India, many women report regularly experiencing harassing phone calls and messages. A recent study by Truecaller Insights found that **one out of three women (36%) in India cite receiving sexual and inappropriate calls or SMS**. Of those, 78% claimed to receive harassing calls with inappropriate and sexual content at least once a week, and 82% claimed to receive unsolicited videos and pictures with inappropriate and sexual content at least once a week.<sup>33</sup> With the increasing penetration of internet-enabled phones, this harassment is also moving online.

**Despite the widespread harassment, owning a mobile phone can also help women feel safer.**



“When I’m going home late at night after exams, then I’ll feel a bit scared. I just call my parents and stay on the phone the whole time so they know where I am.”

- Female (aged 19), India

**Mobile agents are often very ‘male’ spaces in India.** They can be intimidating for women to visit, and there is a risk of female customers’ mobile numbers being recorded and misused either by the retailer or a bystander.<sup>34</sup> This can make some women avoid recharging their mobile phones as they do not want to publicly disclose their mobile number. Gatekeepers can also prevent women from visiting retailers for these reasons, and, as a result, men typically purchase airtime/data for their wives and other female family members.<sup>35</sup>



Mobile agents in India tend to be male-dominated spaces.

<sup>33</sup> Truecaller, 2018, “Truecaller insights reveals: 1 out of 3 women in India receives sexual & offensive calls or SMS”, <https://blog.truecaller.com/2018/03/07/truecaller-insights-reveals-1-out-of-3-women-in-india-receives-sexual-offensive-calls-or-sms/>.

<sup>34</sup> Hindustan Times, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/girls-mobile-numbers-up-for-sale-in-uttar-pradesh-price-rs-50-to-rs-500/story-5IYPcav12h7rnW6A6UDLLI.html>.

<sup>35</sup> In many circumstances, gatekeepers (often male relatives but can also be community influencers) play an important role in women’s access to and experience of mobile in India. Previous GSMA research found that only 61% of female SIM owners in India had bought credit on their own in the last four weeks compared to 89% of men. GSMA Connected Women, 2015, “Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle-income countries”, N= 434 and men: N= 174 <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>; GSMA, 2017, “Triggering mobile internet use among men and women in South Asia”, [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GSMA-Triggering-Mobile-Internet-Use\\_Web.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GSMA-Triggering-Mobile-Internet-Use_Web.pdf).

hindustantimes

### Stalkers' delight: Mobile numbers of girls for sale in UP recharge shops

Mobile numbers of unsuspecting girls are being sold from recharge outlets across Uttar Pradesh for prices based on their looks and are being used by men to harass them over the phone

Updated: Feb 03, 2017 19:16 IST

Shigsha Poonam  
Hindustan Times, Lucknow



“Mobile numbers of unsuspecting girls are being sold from recharge outlets across Uttar Pradesh for prices based on their looks and are being used by men to harass them over the phone, police say.” - *NGO, South Asia*



“On Facebook we get ‘hi’, ‘hello’ messages and then we will ask them how they got our number and why are they bothering us by sending the messages. They will ask for our number again and again and even after blocking them, they will send us the friend request with a different ID and that is a very big problem. They are not using any wrong words but they are continuously poking us by sending the messages by asking the number and all. They are asking our details which we don’t like.” - *Female (aged 19), India*

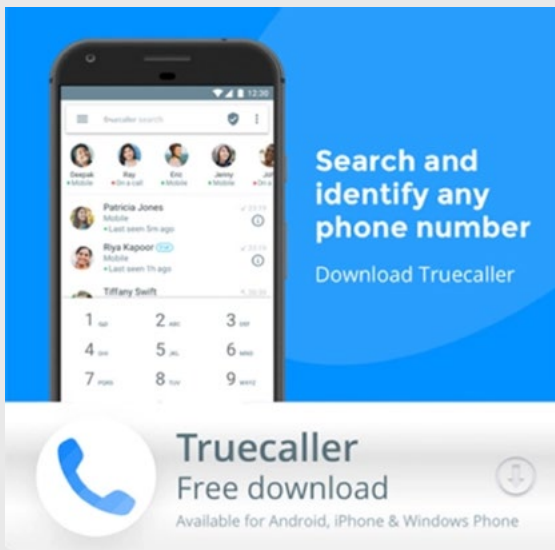


“Till now I have changed numbers 5 times. Whenever unknown people have this number then I want to change the number on the spot. If I don’t want to talk to them and if they become serious and want to be your boyfriend it’s better to change your number. Whenever increasingly people have your number they get excited and make mischief so it’s better to change the number then they don’t make calls to you.” - *Female (aged 33), India*

36 Hindustan Times, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/girls-mobile-numbers-up-for-sale-in-uttar-pradesh-price-rs-50-to-rs-500/story-5IYPcav12h7rnW6A6UDLLI.html>.



CASE STUDY 3



### Truecaller in India

The fact that harassment via mobile is a serious and pervasive issue is supported by the rise in popularity of call blocking apps and services over the last few years, as well as apps aimed at increasing one's personal safety.<sup>37</sup>

**Truecaller is a call blocking app** available primarily for smartphones. It allows users to identify inbound phone numbers, block unwanted calls or hidden numbers and see when friends also using the app are available. It was recently updated to extend these features to SMS; for example, it can automatically identify unknown SMS. **By January 2017, Truecaller had reached 250 million users worldwide.**<sup>38</sup>

Over 50% of Truecaller's total user base is in India, where over 2.5 billion calls were blocked through the app in a 12-month period. In 2017, Truecaller and Bharti Airtel in India partnered to bring the Truecaller Caller ID function to the operator's feature phones, even those without a data connection.<sup>39</sup>

Truecaller has invested in ensuring its user experience is intuitive, even for those with low digital literacy, and has made it available in multiple local languages. It has also benefited from negotiating pre-installing the app on some handsets; in some instances, the app is co-branded with the device manufacturer.

"When someone knocks at your door you have the choice of seeing who it is before you open it. When someone sends you an email you can see their name before you open it. We want to give our consumers the same choice when they receive a call. Every consumer has the right to know who's calling them." - *Truecaller*



### Pavati's story

Pavati is a 20-year-old student living in New Delhi. She values her smartphone as a tool that increases her safety—when she goes out, she regularly shares her location with her friends via WhatsApp and whenever she feels uncomfortable she calls her friends or her family. She often receives sexually harassing calls, which has led her to change her SIM regularly. Since she installed Truecaller, this is no longer an issue, as she can now block harassing calls.



37 GSMA Connected Women, 2015, "Kenya and the rise of the call blocking app", <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programme/connectedwomen/kenya-and-the-rise-of-the-call-blocking-app>.

38 "Truecaller in 2017", <https://blog.truecaller.com/2017/01/18/truecaller-in-2017/>; Truecaller, 2018, "Introducing Truecaller 8 for Android with SMS capabilities and a brand new look!", <https://support.truecaller.com/hc/en-us/articles/115002193709-Introducing-Truecaller-8-for-Android-with-SMScapabilities-and-a-brand-new-look->.

39 The Hindu, 2017, "Truecaller announces partnerships in India", <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/truecaller-announces-partnerships-in-india/article17709213.ece>.



“I received a call this morning, a man was talking in very rough language, asking for my details. I asked him who he was, then I ended the call. He then called again so I blocked it on the Truecaller app.” - *Pavati*

“Without Truecaller, incidences of stalking would be higher as you’d have to answer every number.” - *Pavati*



CASE STUDY 4



**Vodafone India Sakhi Pack:**

In 2017, Vodafone India launched ‘Sakhi’, a special pack aimed at ensuring the safety of women mobile users.

**Sakhi facilitates a ‘private recharge’ service that enables female customers to top-up anonymously in-store.** Women are able to top-up using a one-time password (OTP) code, without sharing their mobile number. They also receive 10 minutes of free local emergency calls per month, and 90 days of free SMS-based beauty and health information. Vodafone has also looked at the distribution of Sakhi Pack aiming to target women in female friendly environments, for example, selling it at temporary kiosks in local female-friendly markets, at women’s college campuses, etc.

Vodafone India’s primary commercial objective is to increase acquisition of female customers and, ultimately, enable these customers to start using mobile internet.



By **December 2017**, the Sakhi pack had been **sold to over 123,000 women** of whom Vodafone estimates that **over 70%** of these customers are **rural women**.

**Kalinda’s story**

Kalinda is 19 years old and lives with her husband in India. She has had a phone for more than four years. Her father bought it for her so that she could call him and she shares it with her sister. While she never experienced harassing calls, she knows about them and her brother checks her phone regularly as he is concerned about the issue. Kalinda found out about Sakhi Pack from a friend, told her brother and he went and bought the SIM for her. She likes the private recharge feature of Sakhi Pack, as her brother is no longer needed to go to the shop with her when she tops up her phone and since she has had it she has never had a zero balance.



“Sakhi Pack is better than the other SIMs I’ve had. The way you can recharge is good—nobody gets to know my number. That’s the best part.”





**Recommendations for stakeholders to tackle mobile-related safety concerns**

# Recommendations for stakeholders to tackle mobile-related safety concerns

Mobile-related safety concerns are one of many barriers standing in the way of women owning or using a mobile phone or mobile internet, and gaining equal access to the transformational services that mobile technology can offer. These safety concerns are unlikely to be resolved on their own, and as mobile internet use increases, they may become even more of an issue, potentially exacerbating the mobile internet usage gender gap. A concerted effort by the mobile industry and other stakeholders is needed to address women's mobile-related safety concerns effectively, build women's digital resilience and

ensure mobile technology is a platform for enhancing women's safety. The following section draws on the primary research, stakeholder interviews and secondary research to provide recommendations for stakeholders to address women's mobile-related safety concerns. Recommendations have been provided for mobile operators and private sector organisations launching initiatives to combat mobile-related safety concerns, and for policymakers<sup>40</sup>; however, many recommendations are also likely to be relevant for other types of stakeholders, such as other mobile industry players and NGOs.

## Mobile operators and other private sector providers



### Understand the scale, impact and drivers of mobile-related safety concerns in your market

- **Invest in research to understand the local mobile-related safety concerns** that are barriers to mobile uptake and use in your market.<sup>41</sup>
- **Understand the context and social norms** and how they impact uptake and use when rolling out a product or service. For example, investigate the importance and influence of gatekeepers and how to engage them.
- **Liaise with and learn from other organisations that tackle similar problems for different segments**, sharing lessons and building knowledge and solutions. For example, the international internet safety community and online child protection organisations.

### Design and launch effective initiatives to tackle mobile-related safety concerns in your market.

For example, consider the initiatives highlighted in **Table 1** as well as the following suggestions:

- **Establish the business case for the initiative upfront**, including the relevant costs and direct or indirect sources of revenue, and track these over time to ensure commercial success. Consider strategies to reach scale cost-effectively, for example, through partnerships with NGOs or app developers.

<sup>40</sup> The secondary research included reviewing recommendations from other reports. For example, the recommendations for policymakers included in this report draw heavily from the Broadband Commission Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide's 2017 report, "Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide Recommendations for Action: Bridging the Gender Gap in Internet and Broadband Access and Use", <http://broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/WorkingGroupDigitalGenderDivide-report2017.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> This could include speaking to call centre staff and agents to understand what safety concerns customers are reporting.

- **Consider women's safety concerns at all stages of the customer journey.** For example, distribution strategies should consider broader 'physical world' safety concerns, such as ensuring points of sale are female-friendly and located in safe areas.
- **Design initiatives and content to be usable for those with low literacy and digital literacy.**<sup>42</sup> For example, consider offering IVR<sup>43</sup> alternatives and take the needs of low literacy/digital literacy users into account when designing online security settings.
- **Provide safety-related products and services in local languages** to help ensure greater uptake and use.
- **Ensure initiatives do not exclude users with lower-end handsets or in areas of low connectivity,** as these users are more likely to be women. For example, consider designing call blocking services that work on feature and basic phones and creating content that can also be accessed offline.
- **Consider offering services for free to drive indirect revenue** (e.g. free download of third-party callblocking apps to reduce churn caused by harassing calls).
- **Consider pre-installing safety-related applications/services on handsets** (e.g. call-blocking apps).
- **Pilot initiatives prior to full launch** to help refine the approach, user experience, marketing messages and consumer engagement tactics.
- **Invest in marketing to drive awareness and understanding of safety-related initiatives.** A number of initiatives that were reviewed suffered from insufficient marketing efforts, resulting in low awareness and poor understanding of the service. Use channels that women already use and trust (e.g. radio versus television versus word of mouth), and tailor content to reach those with lower literacy and digital literacy skills.
- **Incentivise mobile agents to promote/sell the safety-related product or service,** educating women on how to use it and the benefits to themselves and their families.
- **Train agents (both male and female) to help women feel safer using mobiles and to build their digital resilience.** For example, train them to educate female customers about setting up privacy features and how to block unwanted calls and SMS. Also consider establishing policies and procedures that deter agents from knowingly misusing the numbers of female customers.
- **Consider recruiting female agents,** as female customers will likely find them more approachable and they are also less likely to disclose a female customer's number to male strangers. Consider hiring female agents both in shops/distribution points and as roving agents in settings where women are less mobile or where social norms prevent women from interacting with male strangers.
- **Raise awareness across your organisation of the need to address women's mobile-related safety concerns** and the positive impact that tackling them can have on customer retention, acquisition and usage.
- **Ensure call centre staff understand and can respond effectively to women's mobile-related safety concerns.** For example, train them to advise women on security settings and call blocking services and/or consider launching a dedicated women's customer service number served by specially trained staff.
- **Consider creating and promoting content and initiatives that address the root cause of safety issues,** i.e. the motivations of perpetrators of harassment and structural issues that have created these safety issues and allowed them to persist.

<sup>42</sup> This is particularly important when targeting women, who are more likely to have lower literacy levels and fewer digital skills. Many of the initiatives reviewed appeared not to take customers digital literacy levels into account, which appeared to have an impact on uptake and use.

<sup>43</sup> Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is technology that allows computers to interact with people via voice and use of a keypad.



## Promote the positive role mobile can play in making women feel safer

- **Create and/or partner with third parties to design mobile products and services that use mobile as a tool for personal safety** (e.g. emergency alerts, helplines, educational platforms, harassment mapping).
- **Invest in marketing to promote mobile services such as these.**

## Policymakers<sup>44</sup>



- **Support and conduct research on the threats, as well as cultural and social norms, that prevent women from accessing and using the internet** in different social and cultural contexts.
- **Increase awareness of the threats that prevent women from accessing and using the internet** and how they can be addressed through awareness campaigns, digital literacy programmes and in formal education programmes/curriculum.
- **Include mobile and digital skills in school curricula**, including primary schools, to ensure girls are reached.
- **Invest in and/or encourage the development of applications and services that make it safer for women to access and use the internet**, addressing issues of harassment, abuse and violence, while ensuring that other fundamental freedoms and rights are upheld.
- **Strengthen measures to protect women against internet-related abuse and harassment**, including through legal and policy frameworks that recognise digital harassment and fraud, and through measures that help address issues and promote access to justice.
- **Make it easy and safe for women to report online abuse** (and ensure that such reports are responded to quickly and effectively).

<sup>44</sup> The below recommendations for policymakers draw heavily from the Broadband Commission Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide's 2017 report. Broadband Commission, 2017, "Working Group on the Digital Gender Divide Recommendations for Action: Bridging the Gender Gap in Internet and Broadband Access and Use", <http://broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/WorkingGroupDigitalGenderDivide-report2017.pdf>.



## Appendix

# Appendix

## Initiatives that address mobile-related safety concerns

Via stakeholder calls and desk research, a wide range of mobile-related safety initiatives were identified. The focus was on those in low- and middle- income countries, however, some from the developed world were also reviewed as examples of what can be done.

INITIATIVES	LOCATION	CATEGORY			
		Physical world	Voice and SMS	Online	General safety concerns
Vodafone India: Sakhi Pack	IN	●	●	●	●
Grameenphone: Alternative distribution channels	BD	●	●	●	
Orange Egypt: Private Recharge	EG	●	●	●	
Grameenphone: Private Recharge	BD	●	●	●	
Idea Cellular: Private recharge	IN	●	●	●	
Safaricom: M-Pesa	KE	●	●	●	
Dialog Axiata: Secret code	LK	●	●	●	
Dialog Axiata: Scratch cards	LK	●	●	●	
Asiacell: Almas line	IQ		●		
Orange Tunisia: Call blocker	TN		●		
True Software Scandanavia AB: Truecaller	GLOBAL		●		
Vodafone India: Angel stores	IN	●	●	●	
Telenor India: Project Sampark	IN	●	●		
APC: Safety toolkit	GLOBAL	●		●	
Telefonica Group: Dialogando	LatAm			●	
EveryIMobile: My Mozilla Club	KE and ZA			●	
Foundation for Media Alternatives: AksyonVAW	PH			●	
Point of View: Digital Security Workshops	IN	●	●	●	
HarassMap: Educational training & harassment mapping	EG			●	●
SafeCity: Outreach programme	IN	●	●	●	
Grameenphone: Safe Internet	BD			●	
Vodafone Group: SecureNet	EU			●	
Airtel Kenya: Call blocker	KE		●		
GloNigeria: Call barring	NG		●		
Call App: Caller ID and call blocker	GLOBAL		●		

TYPE									
Anonymous Top-up services	Female friendly distribution models	Call and messaging blocking	Web filtering and online security	Online service provider security settings	Educational initiatives	Emergency call services	Harassment mapping	Panic button apps	Wearables
●	●					●			
●									
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