BDT COMMUNIQUÉ

New data report tracks SIDS connectivity successes and challenges towards universal and meaningful connectivity

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The *Facts and Figures: Focus on Small Island Developing States* report released today by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), shows that the growth of Internet use in SIDS since the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS3) held in 2014 was higher than the global growth; between 2014 – 2023, the annual growth rate in SIDS was 8.4 per cent, surpassing the global growth rate of 6.7 per cent.

In 2023, 67 per cent of the SIDS population was online, in line with the world's average, which shows that there is a high demand for ICT services in the SIDS. However, infrastructure, capacity and affordability remain key barriers to connectivity.

For example, only 85 per cent of the of the SIDS population was within reach of a mobile broadband network, well below the global average of 95 per cent, and in rural areas of SIDS, only 43 per cent of the population had access to a 4G signal. Furthermore, the price of an entry-level fixed-broadband basket in a typical SIDS was about 46 per cent above the world's median price, while the price of the data-only mobile broadband was almost twice that of the world's median.

"Ahead of the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) to be held in Antigua and Barbuda at the end of May, our goal is to provide stakeholders with accurate data to inform their discussions and decisions," said Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**,** Director, ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau.

"Digital connectivity is crucial in mitigating the challenges faced by SIDS by enabling access to information, facilitating communication, and creating economic opportunities. It can improve disaster response, management, and access to critical services, often constrained by geographic and resource limitations in SIDS. Through collaborative efforts and sharing knowledge and best practices, we are determined to hasten strides toward universal and meaningful connectivity."

SIDS share common issues such as remoteness, limited markets, narrow economic bases, and high costs for energy and infrastructure, and are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, but the group is extremely diverse in terms of digital development.

The report also includes a contribution from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on e-trade, highlighting the interconnectedness of digital infrastructure and the global marketplace, and how e-commerce can serve as a catalyst for sustainable development in SIDS. A section on regulation and digital governance frameworks provides an overview of the state of ICT regulation in SIDS.

Key findings

Among the key findings for *Facts and Figures: Focus on Small Island Developing States:*

Internet use is in line with the world's average: 67 per cent of the population in the SIDS were using the Internet in 2023, in line with the world's average. There were wide disparities, though: the share in Caribbean SIDS (75 per cent) was almost double that in Pacific SIDS (41 per cent).

The gender digital divide in the SIDS is narrower than in the rest of the world: 68 per cent of the male population in the SIDS used the Internet, compared with 66 per cent among women.

Internet usage among youth is higher than among the rest of the population in the SIDS: 77 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 24 years used the Internet, compared with 66 percent among the rest of the population in the SIDS.

Connectivity in the SIDS displayed a stark contrast between rural and urban populations: the urban population was almost twice as likely to use the Internet as the rural population (84 per cent compared with 44 per cent).

Mobile-broadband and fixed broadband penetration in the SIDS lagged behind the world's average: The SIDS reported 63 mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 people, compared with 87 subscriptions per 100 people globally, and just 10 fixed-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, about half the global figure of 19 per 100.

74 per cent of individuals owned a mobile phone, close to the global average of 78 per cent.

Only 85 per cent of the of the population in SIDS was within reach of a mobile broadband network (3G or above), well below the global average of 95 per cent.

Moreover, **18 per cent of the population in the SIDS had access to the Internet but did not use it.** This *usage gap* results from various barriers, including the lack of affordability, digital skills, and of relevant content.

The median price of mobile Internet was 94 per cent higher than world's median.

Read the full report, *Facts and Figures: Focus on Small Island Developing States,* **here***.*

Resources and background information:
- Report website
- Trello

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For questions, please contact:

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