

# Lack of affordable devices keeps 3.4 billion people from connecting to nearby mobile networks

Article

**The news:** The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development's 2021 State of Broadband report found that **3.7 billion people are not connected to the net—even though 85% of them live within range of a mobile network.** This finding underscores the need for public policy to shift from focusing on connectivity to ensuring access to affordable devices and services, [per](#) The Register.

**What this means:** [The State of Broadband Report](#) reveals that while global internet access and adoption has made progress, greater efforts are needed to provide last-mile access, especially in developing countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The report cites how pandemic-related shutdowns in 2020 and 2021 highlighted the need for a robust and accessible communications infrastructure.
- While the global internet user penetration rate has reached **51%**, only **19.5%** of people in the least-developed countries have access.
- **Houlin Zhao**, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, said, "Digital technologies and services are still out of reach, unaffordable, irrelevant, too complicated to use, or not secure enough for far too many people around the world."

**The problem:** Previously, the lack of broadband and wireless infrastructure was believed to be the key obstacle to greater adoption. But the high cost of smartphones and corresponding services is the real sticking point.

- The average selling price of new smartphones from 2016 to 2021 was \$317, [per](#) Statista. Even used 4G-LTE-capable handsets are priced well beyond the budget of lower-income households—not to mention costly mobile [voice and data](#) plans.
- Possible solutions outlined within The State of Broadband Report include a commitment from Vodafone to embark on a pilot project on "device affordability."
- One option Vodafone has considered includes doubling down on 4G by recycling the spectrum used by older 2G connections.

**What's next?** The findings of the 2021 State of the Broadband report underscore the urgency of making more affordable smartphones and services available to the world's least-developed countries.

- The trend toward ever more [expensive premium models](#) makes this a challenge for smartphone makers. But it could also give them the opportunity to develop entry-level

devices to help billions of people connect.

**Leading Reasons US Adults Do Not Have Home Broadband Service, 2015, 2019, & 2021**

*% of respondents*

	2015	2019	2021
<b>Smartphone does everything they need</b>			
—A reason	27%	45%	45%
—The most important reason	12%	23%	19%
<b>Monthly cost of home broadband subscription is too expensive</b>			
—A reason	59%	50%	45%
—The most important reason	33%	21%	20%
<b>Have other options for internet access outside of home</b>			
—A reason	46%	43%	46%
—The most important reason	10%	11%	9%
<b>Service is not available or speed is unacceptable</b>			
—A reason	23%	22%	25%
—The most important reason	5%	7%	9%
<b>Cost of computer is too expensive</b>			
—A reason	45%	31%	37%
—The most important reason	10%	6%	7%
<b>Some other reason</b>			
—A reason	25%	17%	27%
—The most important reason	16%	13%	22%

*Note: ages 18+ who do not have home broadband service; respondents who did not give an answer not shown*

*Source: Pew Research Center, "Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2021," June 3, 2021*

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