

TELEPHONE ACCESS

The number of telephone connections – more precisely the number of fixed and mobile telecommunications access paths – has increased dramatically in OECD countries. This is associated both with growing use of the Internet and, particularly in recent years, with the growing popularity of cellular mobile telephones.

Long-term trends

Access to communications networks continues to expand in all OECD countries. At the end of 2004, the total number of fixed and mobile telecommunications paths had increased to more than 1.3 billion. This represented a modest 0.6% increase over 2003 and an average increase of more than 11% in each year since 1998.

Growth was not occurring across all access paths. The number of cellular mobile communication subscribers continues to climb. An additional 93 million mobile subscribers were added in 2004. By way of contrast, some segments of the fixed connection market have begun to decrease. The number of fixed access lines decreased in both 2003 and 2004 and will most likely continue to do so over the coming years.

By 2004, all but four OECD countries – Mexico, New Zealand, Turkey and Poland – had more than one telecommunications access path per inhabitant and eleven countries reported more than one and a half per inhabitant – Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Among the five non-OECD countries shown here, growth has been spectacular in China, which had less than one access path per 100 inhabitants in 1991 but almost 50 in 2004. The Russian Federation has now the highest number of paths per 100 inhabitants among these countries. For four of the five non-members, access paths per inhabitant are between 50 and 78, with India as the exception. Although there has been steady growth over the period, there were still only about 8 access paths per 100 inhabitants of India in 2004.

A growing trend toward liberalisation, and the consequent use of prepaid cards in competitive markets, has helped drive the growth of mobile communications in both OECD and non-OECD countries. In 2004 the total number of cellular mobile users in non-member countries overtook the total for the OECD area.

Definition

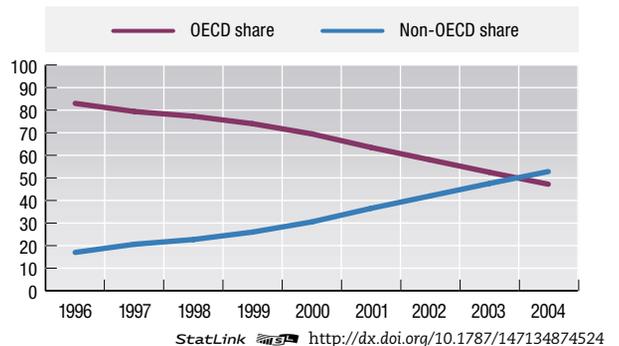
For the OECD member countries, *access paths* are the total of fixed lines (standard analogue access lines and ISDN channels) plus the number of mobile telephone subscribers. For Brazil, China, India, Russian Federation and South Africa, *access paths* are the sum of main telephone lines in operation, ISDN channels and cellular mobile telephone subscribers.

Comparability

For OECD countries, the data are collected according to agreed definitions and are highly comparable. The data shown for the five large non-OECD countries are reported by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The definition used by the ITU is slightly narrower than that used by the OECD, although data reported for the two sets of countries can be regarded as broadly comparable.

Mobile cellular subscribers

OECD and non-OECD share in the world total, 1996-2004



Sources

- ITU (2005), *World Telecommunications Indicators Database*.
- OECD (2007), *OECD Communication Outlook*, OECD, Paris.

Further information

Analytical publications

- Caspary, G. and D. O'Connor (2003), *Providing Low-cost Information Technology Access to Rural Communities in Developing Countries: What Works? What Pays?*, OECD Development Centre Working Papers, No. 229, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2006), *OECD Information Technology Outlook 2006*, OECD, Paris.

Websites

- OECD Telecommunications and Internet Policy, www.oecd.org/sti/telecom.