Academic Assignments

2.6 Billion People Don't Use the Internet: Why?

Assignment Summary:

Over 2.6 billion people worldwide remain disconnected from the internet, unable to access its transformative benefits in education, health, and economic opportunities. Barriers such as a lack of infrastructure, high costs, and limited digital skills contribute to this global digital divide. Efforts by organizations like the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are driving change through initiatives to expand internet access, lower costs, and provide digital skills training, aiming to create a more connected and equitable world.

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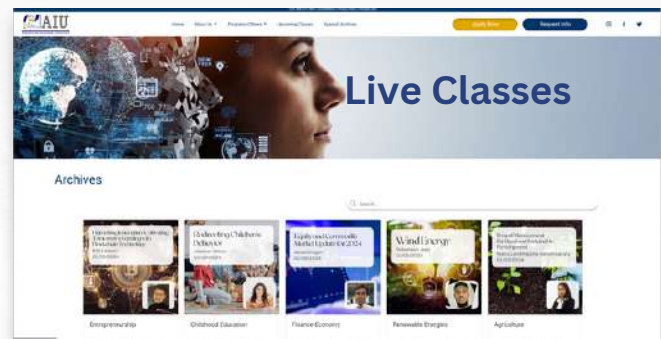
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2.6 Billion People Don't Use the Internet: Why?

Internet access has transformed the way we live, learn, and work. However, more than 2.6 billion people worldwide remain disconnected, unable to benefit from one of the most revolutionary inventions in history. This article explores the reasons behind the digital divide and the initiatives working to close it.
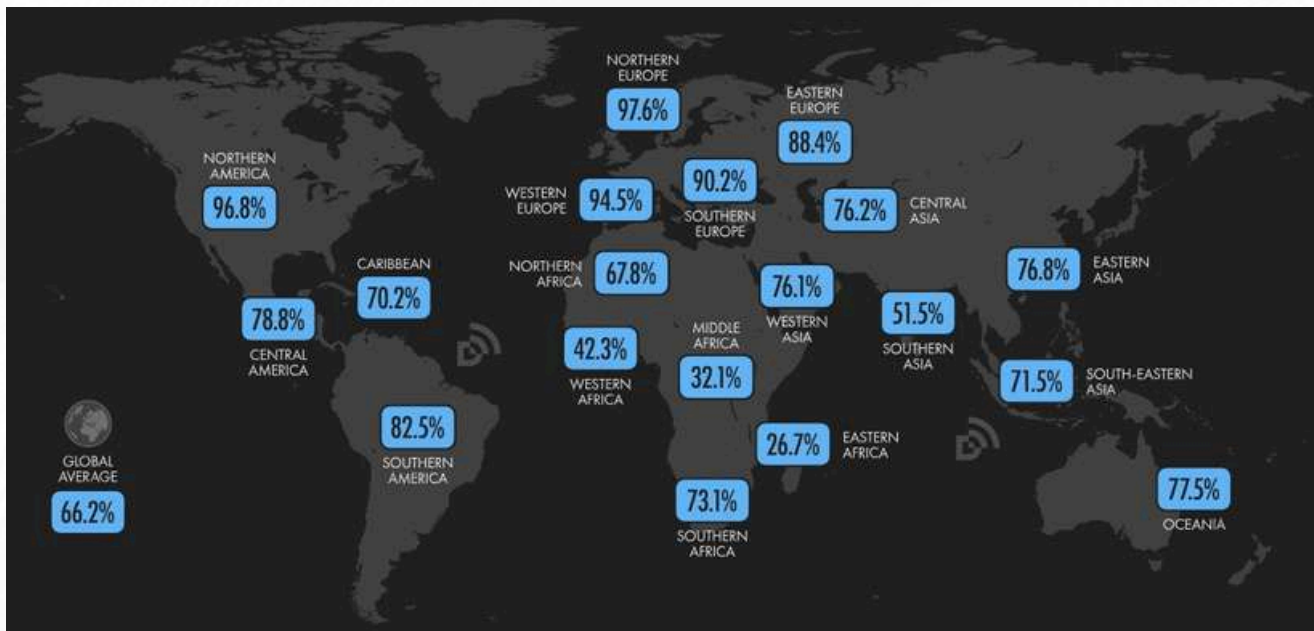
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According to the latest report, the region with the highest internet penetration currently remains Northern Europe (97.6%), but the second place now goes to North America (96.8%), a position held by Western Europe (92%) in 2023. They are followed by Southern Europe (94.5%) and Eastern Europe (90.2%). On the other hand, as in 2023, the regions with the lowest internet penetration are Central Africa (32.1%) and East Africa (26.7%).

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The Impact of the Digital Divide

Since its creation, the internet has evolved from a limited tool to an essential resource for education, business, and health. Lack of connectivity restricts access to opportunities such as:

- Online Education: Platforms like AIU offer unique resources including a library with over 260,000 books, 3,800 online lessons, virtual labs, advanced artificial intelligence tools, and a language center with over 20 language options. All of this is designed to empower you and take your learning to the next level.
- Employment: Access to remote jobs and professional networks like LinkedIn.
- Health: Information on disease prevention and virtual consultations.

Despite advancements, many people are still unable to take advantage of these opportunities.

Reasons Behind the Lack of Access

- Infrastructure Deficiency: About 5% of the global population lives in rural or low-income areas without mobile internet networks. Building infrastructure in these remote locations is costly and complex. Example: In some regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, setting up telecommunications towers faces geographical and political challenges.
- High Costs
- The cost of a basic internet subscription in low-income nations can account for up to 9% of the average monthly income, a burden 20 times higher than in high-income countries.
- Lack of Digital Skills: Even in areas with affordable connectivity, many people lack basic skills to use the internet or electronic devices. This creates an additional barrier to effective technology use.

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Mobile network coverage by income group*
Percentage of population covered by type of mobile network in 2023

	World	Low-income countries	Lower-middle-income countries	Upper-middle-income countries	High-income countries
2G	98	91	98	99	100
3G	95	78	94	99	100
4G	90	39	92	98	99
5G	38	1	12	57	89
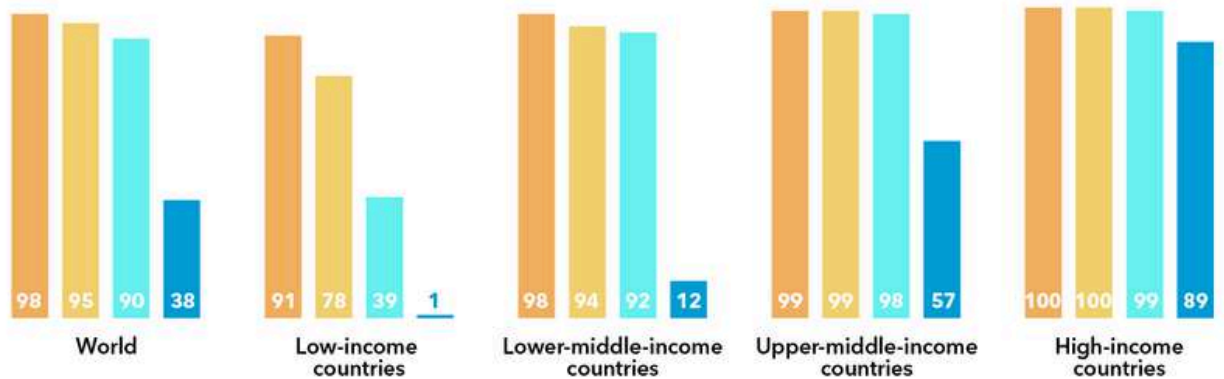
Source : ITU, *Facts and Figures 2023*
*The composition of income groups refers to the World Bank classification.

Initiatives to Close the Gap

Organizations like the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are leading efforts to connect the unconnected. Key initiatives include:

- **Partner2Connect (P2C) Digital Coalition:** Secured over $40 billion in commitments to improve internet access.
- **Satellite Infrastructure:** Companies like Intelsat are connecting rural schools using satellite internet networks.
- **Digital Skills Training:** Programs like the ITU Academy have trained over 300,000 people in remote communities, enhancing their economic and social opportunities.

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BUILDING AN ONLINE WORLD

1969 — The US government establishes the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) to send data between host computers, or "nodes," at Stanford, UCLA, UCSB, and the University of Utah. Within four years, the network is international, with nodes in the UK and Norway.

1974 — A commercial version of ARPANET, called Telenet, launches. Public and private organizations access the network over existing telephone lines for a monthly fee.

1989 — The first commercial internet service provider (ISP), called The World, launches, signaling a shift from the internet being used primarily by organizations to it being used by individuals, too.

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1991 — Congress passes the High Performance Computing Act of 1991 (HPCA), making federal funding available for projects that will advance computing and high-speed internet access in the US. The HPCA plays a key role in increasing the number of internet-connected computers in America from 313,000 in 1990 to nearly 10 million by 1996.

1996 — By now, the first cable, satellite, and mobile internet services have launched, allowing people to access the internet at high speeds, in remote locations, and on the go.

1999 — Just 5% of the world population is online, but in the US, half of all adults are using the internet. The US Department of Commerce calls the "digital divide" — the gap between those who have access to modern tech, like the internet, and those who do not — one of America's leading economic and civil rights issues.

2008 — Mobile broadband subscriptions surpass fixed broadband subscriptions for the first time.

2018 — Half of the world population is now online, but distribution is uneven — in Africa, just 24% of people have internet access, while 70% of people in the Americas do.

2019 — SpaceX launches Starlink, the first high-speed satellite internet constellation, with the goal of creating a global mobile broadband network. By 2024, the Starlink constellation includes more than 6,000 satellites, providing internet access to 3 million people in nearly 100 countries.

2024 — Two-thirds of the world is now online, though those who are female, older, lower income, or in a rural or underdeveloped area are less likely than others to be using the internet.

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The Future of Universal Access

As technology evolves, the challenge of closing the digital divide becomes increasingly complex. For example, while 89% of the population in high-income nations has access to 5G networks, only 1% in low-income countries can access this advanced technology.
Although progress is steady, technological inequalities continue to emerge with each new generation of technology, perpetuating a digital divide that requires ongoing attention.

Number of internet users worldwide from 2005 to 2024

(in millions)
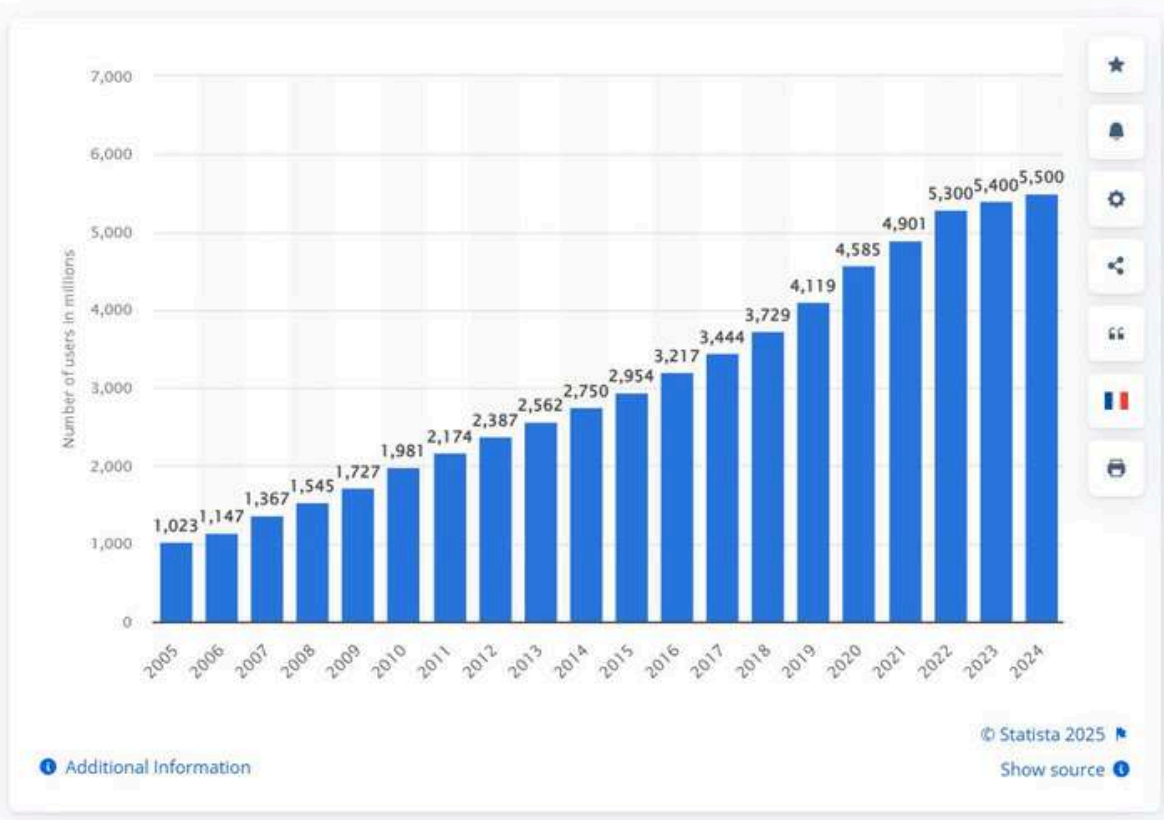
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Final Reflection

Closing the digital divide is not just about providing internet access; it also involves ensuring people have the tools and skills needed to make the most of it. This collective effort has the potential to transform lives, create opportunities, and contribute to global development.

Explore More at Atlantic International University

Digital connectivity is just the beginning. For those interested in leading technological and social initiatives that drive change, Atlantic International University offers flexible programs in technology, innovation, and global development. Expand your knowledge and prepare to make a difference in a connected world.

Also, you can learn more about this and other interesting topics in AIU's, wide range of recorded classes that cover various subjects of interest and that can be very useful to expand your knowledge. If this topic interests you, you can explore related live classes. Our extensive online library is also home to a wealth of knowledge, comprised of miles of e-books, serving as a valuable supplemental resource.

References:
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The number of internet users in the world grows by 1.8% and reaches 5.35 billion (2024)
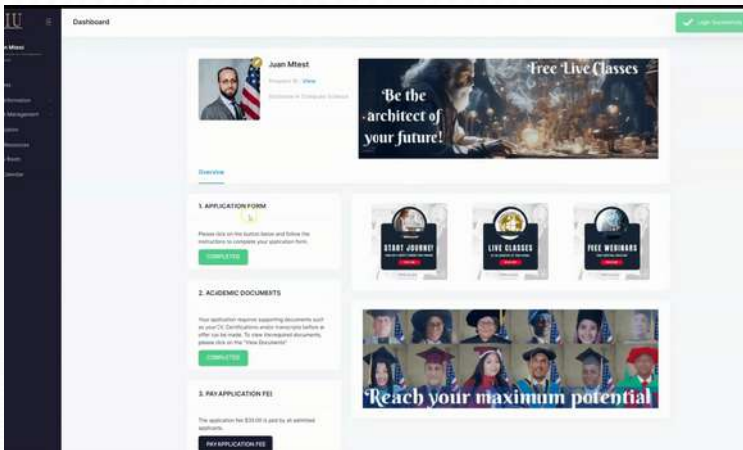Measuring digital development: Facts and Figures 2024
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