

Intel calls for end to online gender gap

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Some 2.4 billion people around the world have access to the Web.

But of the 1.4 billion people who have Internet access and live in [developing countries](#), only 600 million are [women](#), according to the survey researched with the help of the US State Department and UN Women.

The report "Women and the Web," unveiled at the start of a two-day conference in Washington, called for action to double the number of women in the [developing world](#) with Internet access to 1.2 billion in just three years.

"My hope is that this report will catalyze action to close the Internet gender [gap](#)," said Melanne Verveer, US ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues, stressing that governments, corporations and institutions all have a role.

The dramatic difference in [Web access](#) meant fewer opportunities for women "to reach their full potential and a loss of significant economic and social contributions to their families and communities," Verveer stressed.

"We need to make the Internet more accessible, more affordable, more convenient, secure and engaging for women," said Renee Wittemyer, director for [social impact](#) at Intel.

Access to the web varies greatly from region to region: In the United States there is a 78 percent penetration rate and in Iceland it leaps to 97 percent.

But in India, despite its booming economy, only 11 percent of people can access the Net, and in Uganda the figure is 13 percent.

While in the developing world the [gender gap](#) shows that 23 percent fewer women are online than men, that soars to nearly 45 percent in

regions like sub-Saharan Africa.

"There's two critical factors that influence women's access to the Internet: [affordability](#) and availability," said Wittemyer.

Many women in [poor countries](#) were also put off by the unfamiliarity of new technologies, or were constrained by social and cultural norms.

One in five women surveyed in India and Egypt told the researchers that "the Internet was 'inappropriate' for them, if they used it their family would not approve," Wittemyer said.

Most women are discovering the online world via mobile phones, but that also led to problems such as increasing harassment calls, the conference was told.

But there are huge benefits to women breaking down the barriers to getting online.

"We found on an individual level that things like self-esteem and expression were key benefits," said Wittemyer.

"Women that we surveyed in those countries felt that the Internet gave them more confidence, gave them a greater voice and an ability to express themselves beyond just their communities."

Giving women greater online access also had enormous economic benefits, as well as unleashing a new market platform of sales estimated at \$50-\$70 billion.

"Our study found that if we double the number of women online in the course of three years this could have GDP benefits ranging from \$13 to \$18 billion dollars across 144 countries," Wittemyer said.

The report's findings were based on interviews and surveys of 2,200 women and girls living in four focus countries: Egypt, India, Mexico and Uganda, as well as global databases.

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