

Mobile phones to match globe's population in 2014

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Visitors look at their mobile phones during the last day at the 2013 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona on February 28, 2013. The number of mobile telephones worldwide is set to catch up to the globe's population next year, the United Nations' telecommunications agency said.

The number of mobile telephones worldwide is set to catch up to the globe's population next year, the United Nations' telecommunications agency said Thursday.

The [International Telecommunication Union](#) (ITU) said mobile subscriber numbers looked set to top seven billion in 2014.

"More than half of all mobile subscriptions are now in Asia, which remains the powerhouse of market growth," the ITU said.

By the end of 2013, overall mobile penetration rates will have reached 96 percent globally, 128 percent in the developed world, and 89 percent in developing countries, it added.

"Near-ubiquitous mobile penetration makes mobile cellular the ideal platform for service delivery in developing countries," said Brahim Sanou, director of the ITU's telecommunication development bureau.

The ITU also forecast that 2.7 billion people, or 39 percent of the world's population, would be using the Internet by the end of this year.

Europe will remain the world's most connected region, with 75 percent [Internet penetration](#), far outpacing the Asia-Pacific region at 32 percent, and Africa with 16 percent, it said.

"Household Internet penetration -- often considered the most important measure of Internet access -- continues to rise. By end 2013, ITU estimates that 41 percent of the world's households will be connected to the Internet," the agency noted.

Over the past four years, household access has grown fastest in Africa, with an annual growth rate of 27 percent, it said.

But despite a positive general trend, 90 percent of the 1.1 billion households around the world that are still unconnected are in the [developing world](#).

It also highlighted disparities in the field of broadband Internet.

It said the star performers in terms of access speeds were [South Korea](#), Hong Kong and Japan, alongside some surprises in Europe, including Bulgaria, Iceland and Portugal.

The cost of fixed-[broadband services](#) has dropped precipitously over the past five years, declining by 82 percent if measured as a share of gross national income per capita, it said.

In developing countries, however, such services remain relatively expensive, with residential fixed-broadband accounting for just over 30 percent of average monthly gross national income per capita.

Broadband is most affordable in Europe, where a basic subscription costs on average less than two percent of gross national income per capita, the ITU said.

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