IEEE Position Statement

Universal Access to the Internet

*Approved by the IEEE
Board of Directors*

18 November 2018

IEEE endorses the goal of universal access to the internet and supports national initiatives and international collaborations designed to expand access to the billions of people in both developed and developing countries around the world who do not have access to the internet.[i]

The internet today is an essential tool in providing and protecting the fundamental economic, social, cultural, civil and political human rights set forth in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements and treaties.

Universal access to the internet will also contribute to the achievement of the recently adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.[ii] Indeed, it would be very difficult to achieve many of them without use of the internet. World citizens increasingly rely on the internet for access to education, health care, employment, commerce and information, and the emerging Internet of Things has the potential to dramatically increase the positive social and economic impacts of global connectivity.

The challenge of connecting billions of people who do not have internet access will require national, regional and international efforts involving a broad array of public and private organizations engaged in open and transparent collaboration, coordination and innovation.

Through its global reach and capabilities, IEEE has an important role to play in advancing solutions to the global internet access challenge. Promoting universal internet access is inherent in IEEE's mission of fostering technology innovation and excellence for the benefit of humanity. To this end, IEEE calls upon the world-wide community of engineers, scientists, industry leaders, policy experts and others to apply their knowledge and skills to address the challenge of universal access to the internet, and the associated issues of security, safety, trust, privacy, governance, participation, fairness and prosperity.

Subsequent to the approval of this Position Statement, on 18 November 2018, the IEEE Board of Directors approved two Addenda, which address strategies that may contribute to the achievement of universal access, as follows:

1. The Role of Community Networks in Advancing Universal Access to the Internet

2. The Role of Public Internet Connectivity in Advancing Universal Access to the Internet

Both are available at globalpolicy.ieee.org.

ABOUT IEEE

The IEEE is the world's largest professional association advancing innovation and technological excellence for the benefit of humanity. IEEE and its members inspire a global community to innovate for a better tomorrow through its highly-cited publications, conferences, technology standards, and professional and educational activities. IEEE is the trusted "voice" for engineering, computing, and technology information around the globe.

There are more than 420,000 IEEE members in more than 190 countries. IEEE publishes a third of the world's technical literature in electrical engineering, computer science and electronics, and is a leading developer of international standards that underpin many of today's telecommunications, information technology, and power generation products and services.

---

[i] According to the International Telecommunications Union, 3.2 billion people were using the internet globally in 2015, of which two billion live in developing countries. See: http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx (accessed 29 Feb. 2016). ITU also reports that 4 billion people in the developing world remain offline, and that 851 million of the nearly 1 billion people living in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) do not use the internet. See: "ICT Facts and Figures: The World in 2015," International Telecommunications Union (May 2015), accessible at:
http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2015.pdf

A widely referenced 2014 study by McKinsey and Co. estimates that 4.4 billion people, roughly 60 percent of the world's population, do not have access to the internet, and projects that number would only improve to 4.2 billion by 2017. See: "Offline and Falling Behind: Barriers to Internet Adoption," McKinsey & Co. (2014), accessible on-line at:
http://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/dotcom/client_service/high%20tech/pdfs/offline_and_falling_behind_full_report.ashx

[ii] "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," United Nations (2015), accessible on-line at:
http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda.html