

## THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN MEXICO: A MIRROR OF POVERTY

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**ABSTRACT.** *The Mexican digital divide is a problem of inequality that also reflects the poverty of certain cities/areas/groups in Mexico. This note analyzes the digital divide in Mexico, as well as the legal and constitutional efforts the Mexican government has made to breach it. In 2013 and 2014, the government approved an important constitutional amendment and other legal reforms in an attempt to solve this problem with a new fiber optic network and new institutional actors. By setting up a new infrastructure, private actors will be able to offer better broadband Internet services. Nevertheless, these efforts will not benefit those who are not Internet users: the have-nots.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Internet, digital divide, poverty, inequality, constitutional reforms, fiber optics, broadband connection.*

**RESUMEN.** *La brecha digital es un problema de desigualdad y que también refleja la pobreza de diversos(as) grupos/áreas/ciudades en el país. Este texto intenta analizar la brecha digital en México y los esfuerzos constitucionales y legales del gobierno mexicano para cerrarla. Durante 2013 y 2014, el gobierno aprobó distintas reformas constitucionales y legales que intentan resolver este problema con una nueva red fibra óptica y con nuevas instituciones. Se trata de una nueva infraestructura que permitirá a actores privados ofrecer mejores servicios de internet de banda ancha. Sin embargo, estos esfuerzos no beneficiarán a quienes no son usuarios de la red, los have-nots.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Internet, brecha digital, pobreza, desigualdad, reformas constitucionales, fibra óptica, conexión de banda ancha.*

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## I. POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Maria and Francisca do not use a computer or a cell phone. Internet is a vague concept for them. With a kindhearted smile they claim that the Internet and computers are things for educated and wealthy people. They belong to a large number of Mexicans who do not use the Internet. Maria is a single mother of a two-year-old boy. She barely speaks Spanish and finds difficulties in selling handcrafted dresses in a small town in Chiapas—a state in southern Mexico in which one third of its inhabitants live in extreme poverty.—<sup>1</sup> Francisca, her assistant, is younger (14) and only speaks Tzotzil.<sup>2</sup>

Different reasons explain the digital divide in Mexico, but it is essentially a consequence of poverty and inequality. Internet penetration in Mexico is similar to that of other countries in Latin America, with a low average of users in comparison with some European countries.<sup>3</sup> 51.2 million Mexicans have Internet access,<sup>4</sup> which represents less than half of its population.

Internet access has a deeper penetration among wealthier Mexicans than the poorer sector of the population. 7 out of 10 members of the highest income bracket are Internet users, while this is the case of only 2 out of 10 members of the lowest income bracket, despite the fact that this last group represents about the same percentage of the Mexican population.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CONEVAL, *Indicadores de Pobreza*, (2012), available at <http://www.coneval.gob.mx/coordinacion/entidades/Paginas/Chiapas/pobreza.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> A language spoken by 291,550 citizens in Chiapas, most of them in the region called *Altos de Chiapas*. Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, *Atlas de los Pueblos Indígenas de México*, available at [http://www.cdi.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_wrapper&view=wrapper&Itemid=200027](http://www.cdi.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_wrapper&view=wrapper&Itemid=200027)

<sup>3</sup> For instance, in Belgium, Denmark and Norway, Internet access stands at around 85%, 96% and 96.3%, in that order, compared to Colombia, Mexico and Paraguay where these averages are 52.6%, 44.4% and 43%, respectively. World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2014*, available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2>.

<sup>4</sup> AMIPCI, *Estudio sobre los hábitos de los usuarios de internet en México 2014*, (2014), available at [https://www.amipci.org.mx/estudios/habitos\\_de\\_internet/Estudio\\_Habitos\\_del\\_Internauta\\_Mexicano\\_2014\\_V\\_MD.pdf](https://www.amipci.org.mx/estudios/habitos_de_internet/Estudio_Habitos_del_Internauta_Mexicano_2014_V_MD.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> This figure stands at 23% and 26%, respectively. *Vid.* AMIPCI, *Estudio sobre hábitos de los usuarios de internet en México 2009*. Available at [https://www.amipci.org.mx/estudios/habitos\\_de\\_internet/2010\\_Habitos\\_Usuarios\\_Internet\\_Mx.pdf](https://www.amipci.org.mx/estudios/habitos_de_internet/2010_Habitos_Usuarios_Internet_Mx.pdf).

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