



TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY COMMITS TO DISABILITY INCLUSION

- Industry organisation GSMA, representing the interests of mobile network operators worldwide, joins global disability inclusion movement The Valuable 500
 - It joins BT, O2, Orange, Telefonica, Verizon, Virgin Media and Vodafone as members
 - GSMA research shows a mobile disability gap which must be addressed urgently

8.12.20: Today, The Valuable 500 – the largest network of global CEOs committed to diversity– welcomes industry organisation GSMA to the movement – ensuring disability inclusion is on their board agenda. More than 750 mobile operators are full GSMA members and a further 400 companies are associate members.

"I am delighted to announce our commitment to the Valuable 500, as there is an urgent need to close the disability gap in mobile," said Mats Granryd, Director General of the GSMA. "Only 10% of people currently have access to the assistive technology they need to live independent and autonomous lives."

"As we enter the 5G era, the mobile industry has a responsibility to step up and ensure everyone benefits from the life-changing potential of connectivity. By taking swift action to ensure mobile products and services are accessible to persons with disabilities, we can ensure that nobody gets left behind."

Launched at Davos in January 2019 by Caroline Casey and Paul Polman, The Valuable 500 remains the only global CEO community dedicated to radically transforming the business system across the whole supply chain for the benefit of all those with a disability. In under two years, 365 CEOs have joined this community.

The telecoms industry has shown particularly commitment to The Valuable 500, as GSMA joins several other industry giants already members. These include BT, Beeline, Cisco, Google, IBM, Lenovo, Microsoft, NTT, O2, Orange, Safaricom, Salesforce, Sony, Telefonica, Telstra, Verizon, Virgin Media, Vodafone and Zain Group.

The announcement comes shortly after the GSMA announced their commitment to disability inclusion with the launch of their *Principles for Driving the Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities*. The Principles aim to inspire the mobile industry to help close the mobile disability gap. They set out a framework for action together with recommended activities to help address the barriers that currently prevent people with disabilities from accessing and using mobile-enabled products and services.

In the face of the pandemic, the world's reliance on digital connectivity and internet connectivity has become even more apparent. [4.8 billion of the world's population – or 62%](#) – are smart phone and feature phone users – illustrating the importance of inclusive design for the 1.3 billion people globally who have a disability. Mobile phones provide cost effective tools for people with disabilities to navigate their lives – increasingly they are enabling multiple assistive technologies accessible through one device, from speech to text, to increasing font size.



Despite its potential to offer such life-changing innovations, mobile access and use remains unequal when it comes to disability. For example, GSMA's Understanding the [Mobile Disability Gap Report](#) highlights that there is a significant mobile disability gap which still needs to be overcome. Its research shows that in Kenya and Bangladesh there is a mobile disability gap in ownership of over 10%. The GSMA also highlights in its *Principles for Driving the Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities* that only one in ten people have access to the assistive technology they need to live independent and autonomous lives.

Companies are beginning to make bold steps to inclusion. Since joining the Valuable 500 Virgin Media automatically switch customers with disability to cheaper deals to ensure they could stay connected during the pandemic. O2 introduced UK Zero Rates Data Usage, allowing customers to access important websites, such as scope.org.uk and rnib.org.uk, without using data allowance. Vodafone also recently introduced its Code of Ethical Purchasing Policy, which sets out Supplier's obligations in relation to social, environmental and ethical compliance.

Caroline Casey, Founder of The Valuable 500, commented:

“We are delighted to welcome the GSMA as members of The Valuable 500 and delighted to hear about their new principles which will drive inclusion of people with disabilities. Its global ecosystem of mobile operators has significant power to drive forward the disability inclusion agenda across the whole business supply chain. In a time when digital connectivity has never been so important as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, I am proud to see our members working to unlock this potential, for a more inclusive and fairer society.”

The technology industry has the potential to be one of the greatest enablers when it comes to disability inclusion, from ensuring accessibility on all devices and online platforms is made readily available to all disability categories. Inclusion drives innovation, and it is no coincidence that some of our most prominent innovations such as the keyboard or remote control were designed with disability in mind. Much has already been achieved by digital service providers, however, more remains to be done and accessibility for disabled people isn't an issue on which we can halt progress.

“I call on the good and the great from across the tech, mobile and telecoms industry to join us in prioritising disability inclusion. Our tech leaders need to design for disabled people so that the 1.3bn people with disabilities worldwide can benefit from the same developing technology, have the same latest devices and live in the same digital world as everyone else.”

José María Álvarez-Pallete, Chairman and CEO of Telefónica comments:

“I'm delighted that we have joined The Valuable 500 and pledged our commitment to disability inclusion. At Telefónica we aim to use the power of technology to improve people's lives, and recognize that having a workplace that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve is vital to understand the needs of our customers. Around 1.3 billion people live with some form of disability and companies are key in promoting concrete measures to ensure diversity.”

Hans Vestberg, Chairman and CEO of Verizon, comments:



“At Verizon, we create the networks that move the world forward, but we cannot fulfill our purpose if any member of society is left behind. Technology has the power to connect and enhance the lives of all people, including the one billion individuals living with disabilities. That’s why we are proud to join the Valuable 500 to drive sustainable innovation and equitable growth with the expertise of the disability community at the forefront. Together, we can build a future where everyone is included.”

Nick Read, Chief Executive of Vodafone Group Plc, said:

“Vodafone is committed to creating an inclusive workplace. We believe that companies and workplaces must be accessible to all and give the opportunity for employees to realise their full potential. Vodafone has made great strides in improving diversity, including launching a number of communications services specifically designed to make the lives of our disabled customers easier. We continue to work hard to build a better future for everyone, where no-one is left behind.”

For more information please visit: www.thevaluable500.com

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Media contacts:

For interviews and further information, please contact:

Harriet Potter
Seven Hills
Telephone: +44 0794 807 4454
Email: harriet.potter@wearesevenhills.com

Richard Poston
Director of Communications, The Valuable 500
Email: Richard@thevaluable500.com

Notes to Editors

GSMA Principles

The Initiative sets out three core principles for advancing the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities:

1. Embrace disability inclusion at every level of their organisation;
2. Understand how to reach and better serve persons with disabilities;
3. Deliver inclusive products and services that meet the varied needs of people with disabilities.

About The Valuable 500

Launched by social entrepreneur and activist Caroline Casey at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in January 2019, The Valuable 500 aims to put disability on the global business leadership agenda.



The Valuable 500 was created by Binc, the organisation founded by Caroline Casey in 2015, with a mission to ignite a historic global movement for a new age of business inclusion - capitalising on Caroline Casey's 18-year track record of success engaging over 450 organisations. The campaign has won three awards: a Cannes Lion, D&AD, and a BIMA.

Our goal is to persuade 500 multinational companies that have at least 1,000 employees to make a public commitment to advance disability inclusion in their organisation. By engaging the most influential business leaders and brands, we want to create a tipping point within business that unlocks the business, social and economic value of the 1.3 billion people living with disabilities around the world, and the millions of us who will become disabled over time

We believe that if business takes a lead, society and government will follow, truly inclusive businesses can build truly inclusive societies.

About The Valuable 500: Phase 2

We have approached over 2,800 leaders across the globe to commit to specific actions including putting disability performance on their leadership agenda.

The deadline to join the Valuable 500 has been extended to January 2021, and we will continue to build momentum and work with business leaders to complete the sign-up formalities to reach our goal of 500.

We also will inaugurate Phase II development in 2020: a three-year effort to turn The Valuable 500 into a community of like-minded business peers committed to raising their game on disability by sharing models, lessons learned, and energy. This will include:

- Helping our 500 CEOs boost inclusivity best practice at the leadership level through our Executive Inclusivity Programme
- Developing a peer-to-peer network of CEOs committed to inclusion
- Providing research and insight around inclusivity and business disability performance
- Empowering our CEOs to integrate disability across the entire value chain and
- Continuing to change the global narrative around disability.