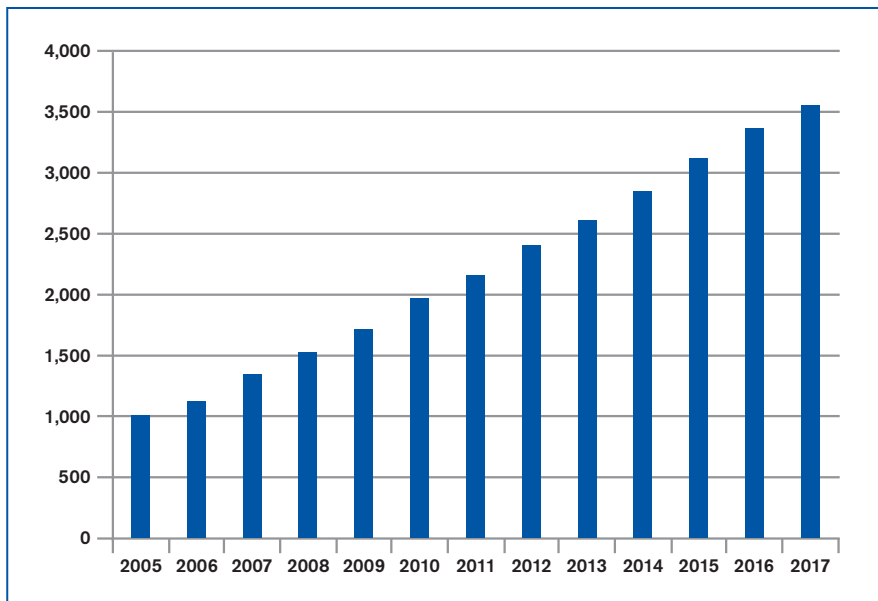


In short, Blockchain has the potential to empower individuals and companies around the globe to make transactions more efficiently, economically and quickly. It could lower barriers to entry into international trade for small companies and producers, and could be a powerful force for their inclusion, provided that they have the technical knowledge required to participate in the technology – or the resources to use a service provider – and that they have adequate internet access.

While significant progress has been made in connecting an increasing number of people to the internet (see Figure 14), more remains to be done to close the digital gap between advanced and less developed economies. Disparities remain significant both in terms of access and bandwidth. Close to 80 per cent of Europeans use the internet, compared to less than 20 per cent of Africans (see Figure 15), and the digital gap between Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and least-developed countries (LDCs) has been growing sharply since the beginning of the millennium, with a slight improvement since 2013 (see Figures 16 and 17). There is a long way yet to go before the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 9c, which calls on the international community to "significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020" is implemented.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 14** Number of people using the internet, in millions, 2005-17<sup>a</sup>



Source: ITU/ICT indicators.

<sup>a</sup> estimates