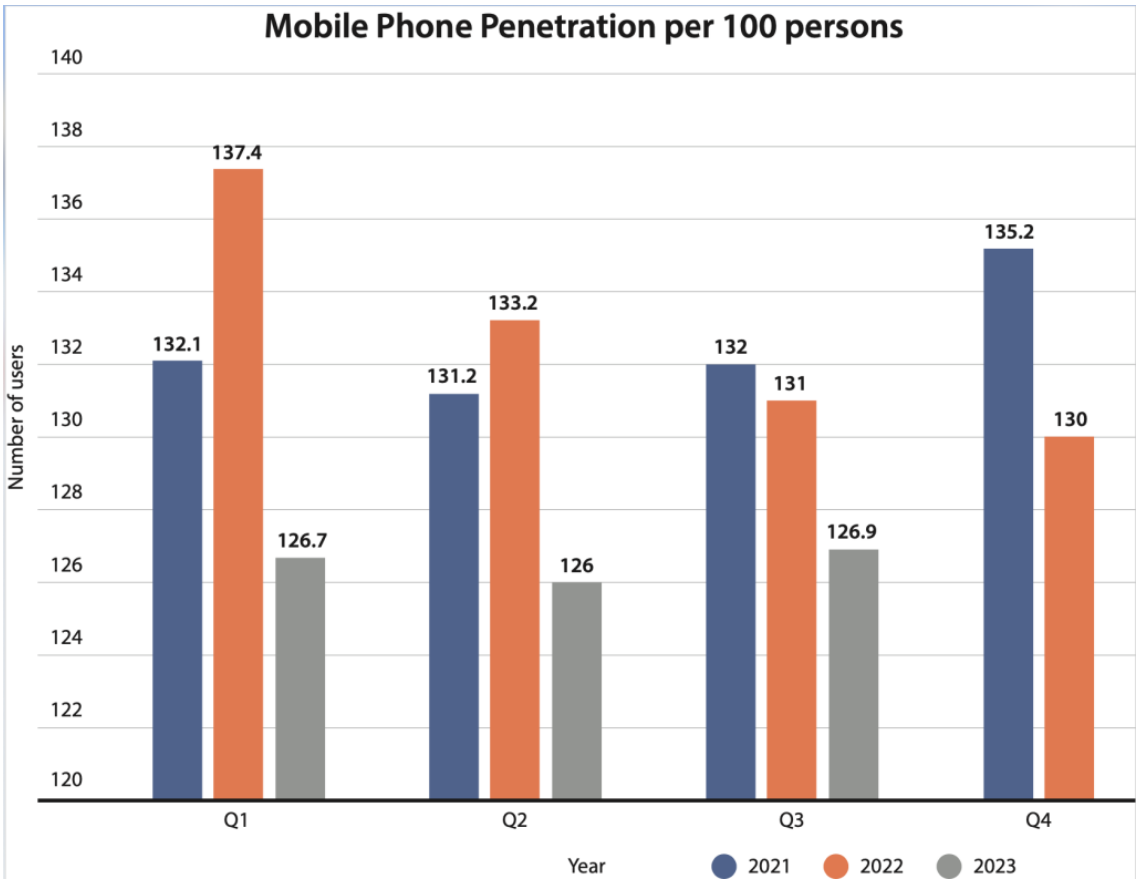
Plentiful Phones – Trends in the use of Cellular Phones

Sri Lanka is evidence of the power of a small handheld device to fulfill many human needs. Mobile phones and the internet are giving people new opportunities they never had before. No wonder Sri Lanka has more mobile phones than the country's population, showing the widespread ownership of mobile phones nationwide. If we leave aside the young population who don't own a mobile phone, the adults, it seems, are harnessing the benefits of multiple devices for daily navigation.

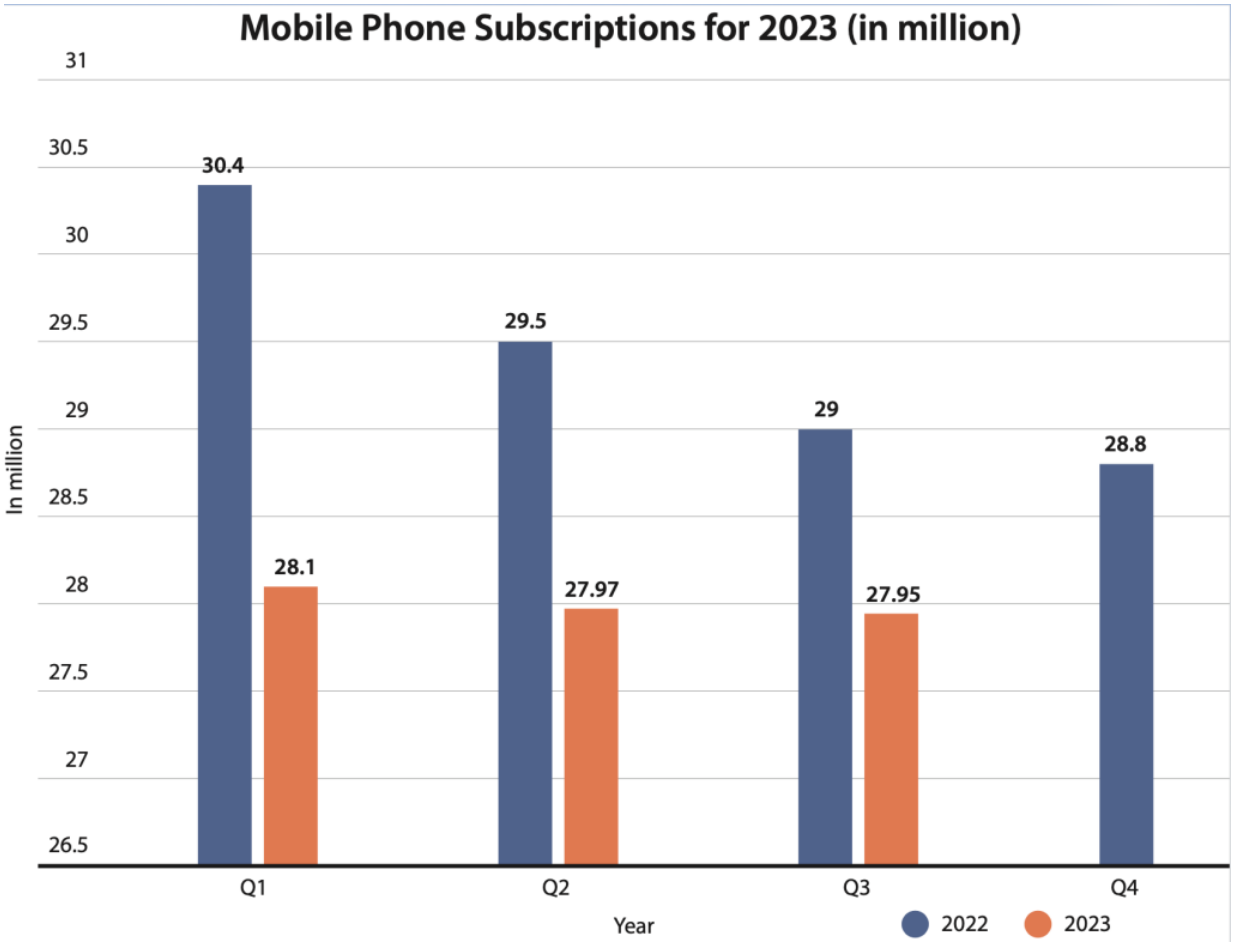
Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.



With a population of 21.9 million in 2023, Sri Lanka’s mobile phone subscription amounted to 27.9 million at the end of the third quarter of 2023, equal to 127.3 percent of the total population. However, this number reflects a decline of 3.1 percent in comparison to the number at the end of 2022, that is, the fourth quarter of 2022, which stood at 28.8 million mobile phone subscribers. Mobile phone penetration per 100 persons by the third quarter of 2022 stood at 131 (excluding fixed lines), which declined to 126.9 by the third quarter of 2023, a 3.1 percent decline. Meanwhile, internet users increased by 1.3 percent for the third quarter of 2023 to 22 million compared to 21.8 million in the same period in 2022. By the end of 2022, internet subscribers stood at 21.6 million, a two percent decline from the previous year.

According to monthly economic indicators released by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the statistics on mobile phone usage reflect changes over several successive periods. The latest data, up to the third quarter of 2023, shows the high penetration of cellular phones locally, surpassing the country’s population. This trend has been changing for a while, reflecting periods of increases and declines. Although this article does not compare data predating 2021, perusal of statistics before 2020 shows high numbers of mobile phone subscriptions surpassing 30 million, reflecting a decline from 2020 second quarter onwards. On the other hand, internet subscriptions reflect an upward trend since 2020, which could be attributable to most sectors in the country adapting to remote learning and working. The general trend from 2021 onwards through 2022 to the third quarter of 2023 shows downward movements in the number of cellular phone subscribers, which could be in response to external factors impinging on decision-making.

Beginning with the first quarter of 2021, mobile subscriptions, which stood at over 29.2 million, had increased by 700,000 by the fourth quarter of the same year to 29.9 million subscription. By the first quarter of 2022, the numbers had risen to 30.4 million, then declined by 7.7 percent to 28.1 million by the first quarter of 2023. At the end of 2021, which is by the fourth quarter, there were 29.9 million mobile phone subscription, and at the end of the fourth quarter of 2022, it stood at 28.8 million, a 3.6 percent decline. The third quarter cellular phone subscriptions in 2021 and 2022 stood at 29.2 million and 29 million, respectively, 1.3 million and 1.1 million, more than the 27.9 million subscribers recorded for the same period in 2023.


Mobile Phone Subscriptions for 2023 (in million)
31
30.5
30
29.5
29
28.5
28
27.5
27
26.5
In million
30.4
28.1
29.5
27.97
29
27.95
28.8
Q1
Q2
Q3
Q4
Year
2022
2023