

Summary

Executive summary

The Internet of Things is weaving a new worldwide web of interconnected objects. By the end of 2018, approximately one billion devices will be connected to wide area networks based on cellular or LPWA technologies. The market is highly diverse and divided into multiple ecosystems. This report will focus on the four most prominent technology ecosystems for wide area IoT networking – the 3GPP ecosystem of cellular technologies, the emerging LPWA technologies LoRa and Sigfox and the 802.15.4 ecosystem.

The 3GPP family of cellular technologies support the biggest ecosystem in wide area IoT networking. Berg Insight estimates that the global number of cellular IoT subscribers increased by 56 percent during 2017 to reach 647.5 million at the end of the year – corresponding to around 8 percent of all mobile subscribers. Yearly shipments of cellular IoT devices increased by 82.2 percent in to 318.1 million units. Growth was fuelled by an exceptional market expansion in China, where the installed base of cellular IoT connections more than doubled.

The cellular IoT technology landscape is in a phase of rapid transformation. Developments in China accelerate a global shift from 2G/3G to 4G technologies. As the initial focus for 5G will be high-bandwidth applications, Berg Insight believes that 4G will become the preferred platform for industrial IoT in the foreseeable future. The move from 2G to 4G began in North America with 3G as an intermediate technology. The region has seen rapid uptake of LTE CAT-1 since 2017 and CAT-M starting in 2018 at the same time as GPRS and CDMA are fading away. Europe will begin to see adoption of LTE CAT-1 in 2018, followed by an accelerated uptake of LTE-M and NB-IoT in 2019. China is moving fast from GPRS to NB-IoT in the mass-market segment with deployments expected to exceed 100 million units by the end of 2018. At the same time there will also be fast-growing demand for LTE CAT-1 and LTE-M, as well as LTE CAT-3+. 2G and 3G will be in steady decline in all developed markets with demand shifting to developing countries with limited availability of 4G networks. Berg Insight expects that 5G will become commercially available for IoT applications such as automotive in 2020.

LoRa is gaining momentum as a global connectivity platform for IoT devices. According to Semtech, the global installed base of LoRa devices was approximately 50 million at the beginning of 2018. The first major volume application segments are smart gas and water metering, where LoRa's low power consumption matches the requirements for long-life battery operation. LoRa is also gaining traction for metropolitan area and local area IoT deployments as a platform for networking smart sensors in cities, buildings, manufacturing plants and similar. Semtech has stated that it generated in the range of US\$ 42 million in revenues from LoRa chipsets in 2017 and expects to reach US\$ 80–100 million in 2018. Berg Insight estimates that yearly shipments of LoRa devices were 17.1 million units in 2017. Until 2023, yearly shipments are forecasted to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 31.6 percent to reach 89.1 million units.

Sigfox has very ambitious plans for establishing the technology bearing the company's name as the leading global platform for ultra-narrow band IoT networks. In order to meet its strategic goals, Sigfox must be able to break into entirely new mass-volume device segments and prove its capability to create value by adding connectivity to things that never communicated before. At the end of 2017, Sigfox reported 2.5 million connected devices and issued a forecast to reach 6.0 million in 2018. In a positive scenario where early trials ramp up to large-scale commercial deployments, Berg Insight forecasts that shipments of Sigfox devices will grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 94.3 percent from 1.2 million units in 2017 to 64.6 million units by 2023.

802.15.4 WAN is an established connectivity platform for private wide area wireless mesh networks used for applications such as smart metering. Faced with increasing competition from emerging LPWA standards, 802.15.4 WAN is however only expected to grow at moderate rate in the coming years. Berg Insight forecasts that shipments of 802.15.4 WAN devices will grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 19.2 percent from 16.2 million units in 2017 to 46.6 million units by 2023. Smart metering is expected to account for the bulk of demand. Wi-SUN is the leading industry standard for smart electricity metering networks in North America, with adoption also spreading to Asia-Pacific and Europe.