

# Digital Mapping & Analysis

## AFGHANISTAN

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## Purpose of this Document

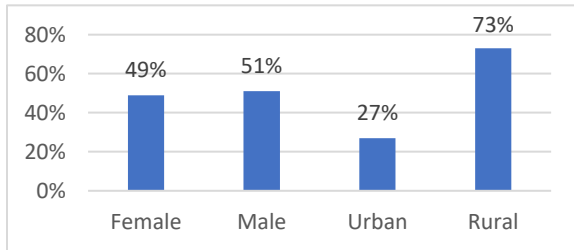
To support the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia’s integration of digital tools, technologies, and best practices into Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) programming, this Digital Mapping outlines the existing digital interests, needs and challenges across Afghanistan. This document outlines the country context, media, digital habits and preferences, emerging trends and recommendations on leveraging the existing opportunities gathered through secondary research.

This document can inform digital SBC programme design, development, and implementation at country-level based on the available insights and data from recent years.

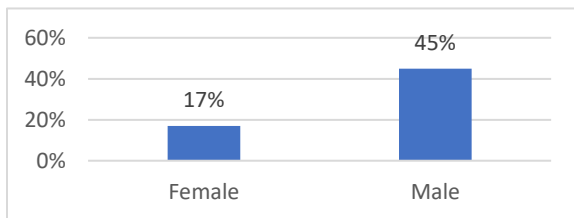
# Demographic Overview<sup>i</sup>

Total Population: 41M

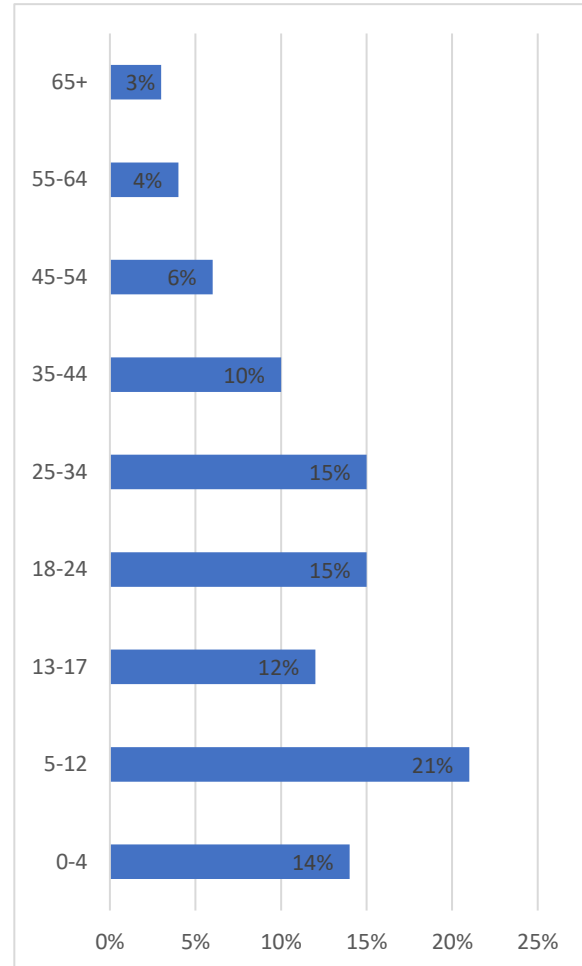
Age Demographics



Literacy Rate: 31.4% of the population over 15



Languages Spoken: Dari and Pashto<sup>ii</sup>

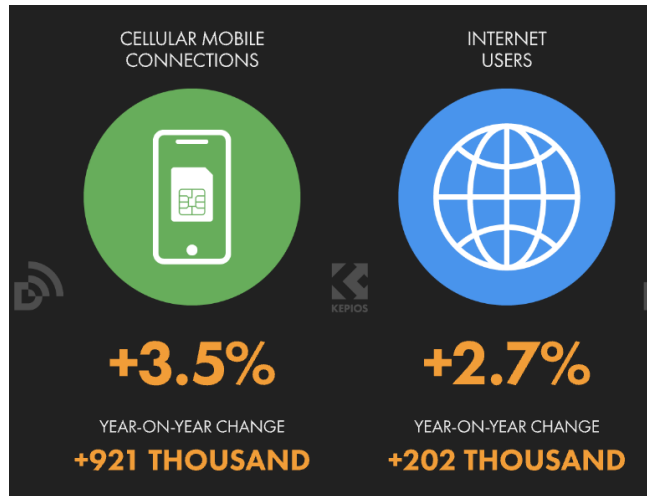


## Digital Connectivity

In early 2023, 7.67M (9.23M in 2022<sup>iii</sup>) of Afghans were internet users, and 26.95M had cellular mobile connections (64.7% of the total population)<sup>iv</sup>. Moreover, 62 national and international internet service providers were noted in Afghanistan (2021 statistics).<sup>v</sup> Devices used to access the internet include mobiles (79.98 (80.7% in 2022)), laptop/desktop computers (19.35 (18.7% in 2022)), and tablets (0.67% (0.6% in 2022)).<sup>vi</sup> 71.2% (63% in 2022) of cellular mobiles have 3G, 4G, or 5G broadband, and mobile internet connection speeds tend to be 5.27 Mbps (5.25 Mbps in 2022<sup>vii</sup>), and for fixed broadband, it stands at 2.25 Mbps, which is too slow for streaming video but suitable for audio streaming.<sup>viii</sup> However, high-speed internet remains costly despite the rapid development of the ICT sector.

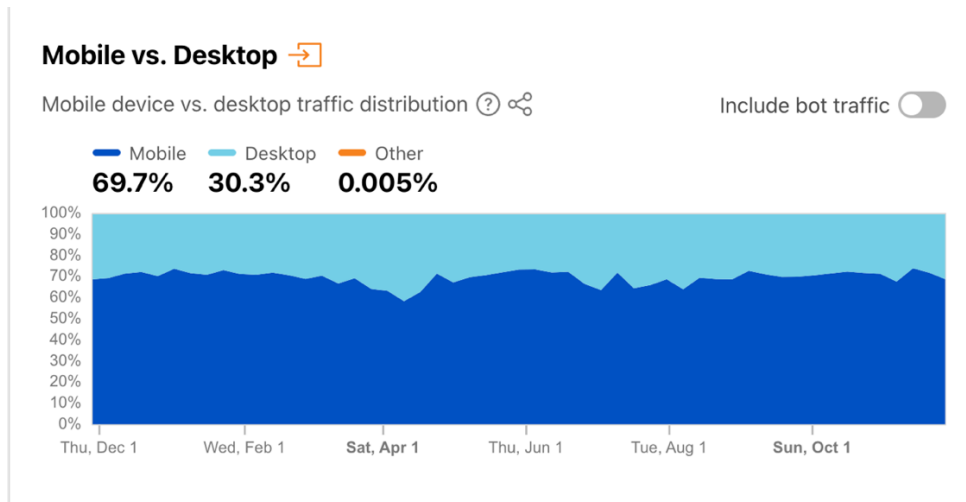
According to the Afghanistan MICS by UNICEF 2023, 96.6% of the urban households interviewed had ownership of a Mobile Telephone, and 80.9% were in rural areas. The % of households with internet was 42.7% for the urban and 22.1% for rural.<sup>ix</sup>

GSMA's State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2023 report noted Afghanistan with coverage gap for connectivity of 10% or more.<sup>x</sup>





Digital Growth<sup>xi</sup> (compared to 2022)

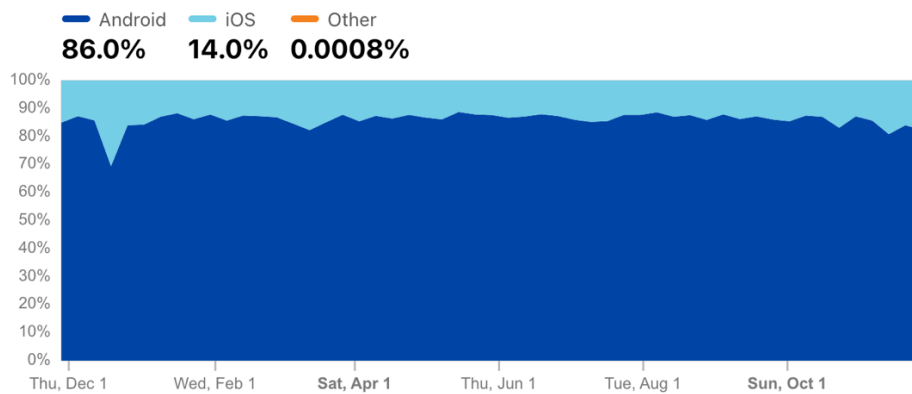
Mobile vs Desktop Traffic (from Nov 2022 to 2023)<sup>xii</sup>



Distribution of Mobile Operating System (from Nov 2022 to Nov 2023)<sup>xiii</sup>

### Mobile Operating Systems

Distribution of mobile device requests to Cloudflare by operating system  

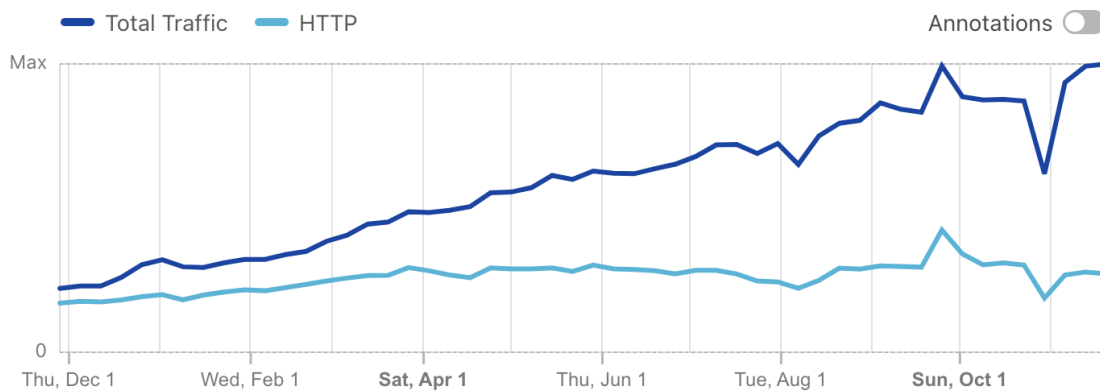


As per the Digital Intelligence Index by the World Bank (*a worldwide index that measures countries' digital adoption across three dimensions of the economy: people, government, and business<sup>xiv</sup>*), Afghanistan had a Digital Adoption Score of 0.43 (on 0 – 1 scale) and sits among the lowest-ranked countries (169th out of 193) in the United Nations global eGovernment Development Index or eGDI.<sup>xv</sup> No recent data is available to note if this score has changed.

### Internet Traffic Trends (Nov 2022 to 2023)<sup>xvi</sup>

#### Internet traffic trends

Traffic volume over the selected time period   



## Digital Divide



### Low levels of education and literacy

Use of the internet requires complex skills, the low levels of education and literacy rate in Afghanistan are barriers towards the use and adoption of digital

channels, tech, platforms etc and the overall development of digital workforce, economy and digital integration.<sup>xvii</sup> Not a lot of recent or relevant data is available on the digital or traditional literacy rates but according to UNESCO country factsheet for 2021, the literacy rate increased from 32% in 2011 to 43% in 2018 (female 29.81 % and male: 55.48%)<sup>xviii</sup>.



### Poor technology infrastructure

The infrastructure of the country as a whole and the telecommunication companies lack up-to-date structure and equipment, which are frequently damaged and targeted due to ongoing conflicts.<sup>xix</sup> There is limited competition between private Afghan telecommunication companies.<sup>xx</sup> Afghanistan’s geography as a landlocked country makes it difficult to access internet connectivity, making it more expensive and slower to run. While 3G and 4G mobile have slowly increased the overall internet penetration in the country, coverage gaps still contribute to low usage. Only 0.4 % of the country’s population is covered by 4G/LTE (introduced in 2017), and while 90% of the country is covered by 3G, rural populations still primarily rely on 2G networks.<sup>xxi</sup>



### Income disparity is driving the digital divide

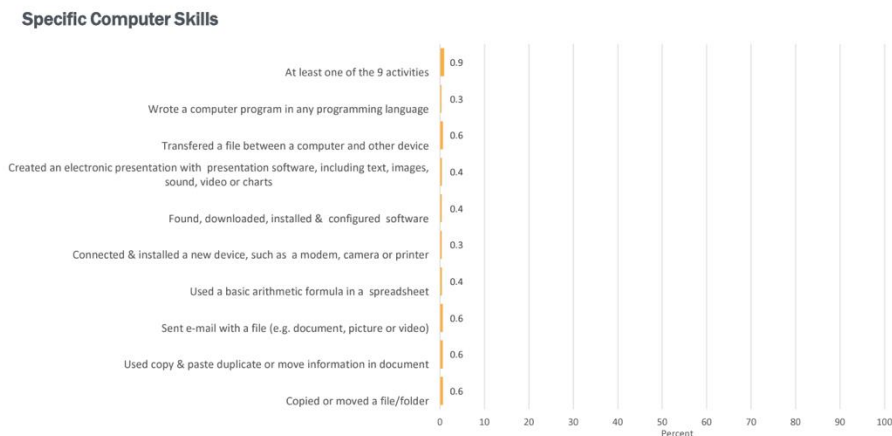
The economics of internet access greatly affects usage due to costs incurred from purchasing internet devices and recurring data plans, which many cannot afford due to the economic crisis.<sup>xxii</sup> Average price of 1GB of data was 0.90\$ in 2022 (2.17% of the average income)<sup>xxiii</sup> (which is unaffordable when looked at from the 1 for 2 measure).<sup>xxiv</sup>



### Women and girls continue to be marginalised

UNWomen’s Gender Alert in 2021 had stated there was a ‘reversal of women’s and girls’ rights in all areas of life’, with increased levels of restrictive gender norms and practices<sup>xxv</sup>, and the situation has only worsened since then.<sup>xxvi</sup> Women face far more exclusion and restriction than before, with ‘closing of the political, social, and economic spaces for women’. <sup>xxvii</sup> Furthermore, according to Gallup, in 2022, 25% of men reported having access to internet ‘versus 6% of women’ (noted at 2% in 2021).<sup>xxviii</sup> While according to the MICS 2022-23 by UNICEF (44,341 women interviewed), only 57.3% of women in Afghanistan have access to mobile phones (not all have

#### Information & Communication Technology Skills



Percentage of women age 15-49 years who in the last 3 months have carried out specific computer related activities and the percentage who have carried out at least one of these activities

access to smartphones), 1% of women in Afghanistan have access to computers, and only 8% have access to internet use.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Furthermore, the telecom companies and shop owners had been banned from selling mobile SIM cards to women which resulted in a larger digital divide among the population, with women already lacking access to digital devices and services, including basic identification<sup>xxx</sup> and needing to depend on men in their households to access and use the internet and a mobile phone<sup>xxxi</sup>.

MICS 2022-23: Data on ICT Use & Skills among women in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is at the bottom of both the regional and global ranking in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2023, having closed only 48.1% of the gender gap. It has a score of 0.405 (on a 0-1 scale), a -0.030 change from 2022<sup>xxxii</sup>. Afghanistan has the lowest performance across all subindexes, such as for Education Attainment, Afghanistan scored 0.482, 0.952 for health and survival and 0.188 for economic participation and opportunity.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

 **Security (overall and related to data)**

Afghanistan ranks 171 out of 194 countries in the ITU’s Global Cybersecurity Index (2020).<sup>xxxiv</sup> There is no structure for effectively coordinating and sharing data among different organisations. The legal and regulatory environment for data protection is weak, with online privacy only in the cybercrime code.<sup>xxxv</sup> According to the World Bank in 2022, Afghanistan ranked the lowest out of all South Asian countries

Province	Computer Use	Mobile Phone Use	Internet Use	Performed at least 1 Computer-related Activity
Afghanistan	1.0	57.3	8.0	0.9

regarding safeguards and enablers of data transactions. While Afghanistan doesn’t have a general law about safeguarding internet users’ personal data, some sector-specific laws exist. However, the country does not have an open data policy.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Security challenges and connectivity disruptions also continue to be barriers to telecommunication ‘infrastructure upgrades’ and digital adoption.

 **Low levels of trust in technology**

The lack of cybersecurity and safeguarding measures has contributed to low trust in technology.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

 **Slow uptake: Digital Financial Services and e-commerce**

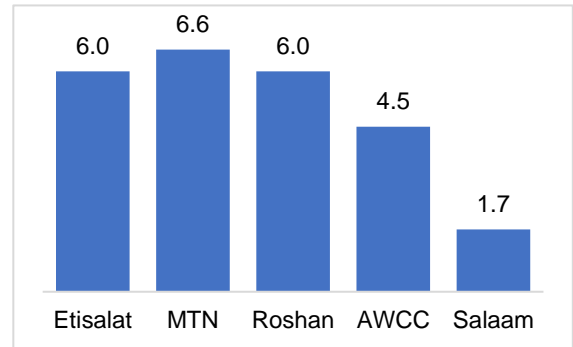
In 2022, it was announced that the country’s internet will upgrade to 4G, the higher-speed internet expected to allow Afghans to start adopting and participating in more digital financial services and e-commerce. However, challenges remain; for example, while some small digital start-ups are already operating in the country, the landscape for digital businesses is still relatively young.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Furthermore, while some companies may have shifted from paying their employees from cash to digital

payments (e.g., direct deposit), only 15% of the Afghan population uses digital payments.<sup>xxxix</sup>

## Digital Communications

### Telecommunications

The Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority (ATRA) is Afghanistan's telecom market regulating state agency. There are five<sup>xi</sup> main telecommunication providers in Afghanistan and the graph on the right shows the distribution of the subscribers.<sup>xli/xlii/xliii/xliv</sup> As of 2020, there were 2.8 million 2G subscribers, 5.9 million 3G subscribers, and 1.4 million 4G subscribers.<sup>xlv</sup>





Active Subscribers (in millions)

In Early 2023, 26.95M (64.7% of the population) cellular mobile connections were active in Afghanistan<sup>xlvi</sup>. While in 2022, according to the GSMA Intelligence data, this number stood at 27.49M cellular mobile connections (*to note: the number may be projected higher than reality as people tend to be connected via more than one device*).<sup>xlvii</sup>

### Domain Insights (Nov 2022 to Nov 2023)<sup>xlviii</sup>

#### Top 10 Domains

Daily insights into domain popularity derived from Cloudflare 1.1.1.1 data  

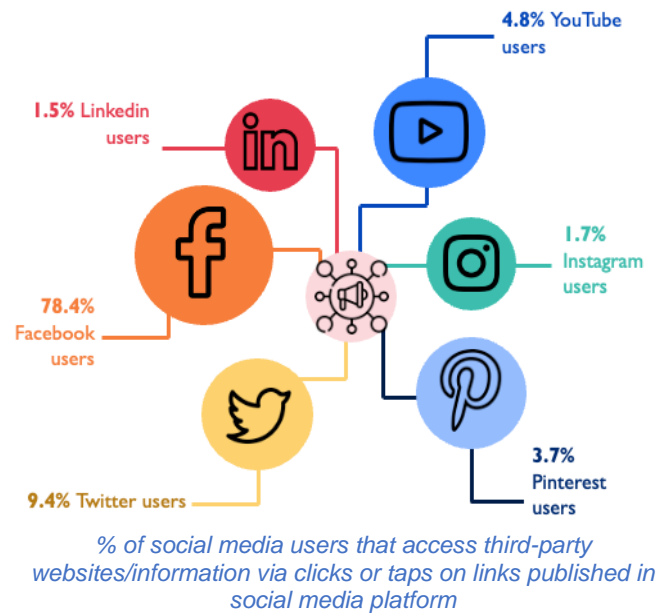
1 tiktokcdn.com	2 facebook.com	3 googleapis.com	4 tiktokv.com
5 google.com	6 whatsapp.net	7 gstatic.com	8 instagram.com
9 apple.com	10 igracej.com		



## Social Media

There were 3.15M social media users in Afghanistan in January 2023 (7.6% of the total population)<sup>xlix</sup> 2.95M (aged 18 and above) were using social media in Afghanistan at the start of 2023 (14.2% of the total population aged 18 and above). It was also noted that 41.1% of the total internet user base (regardless of age) ‘used at least one social media platform in January 2023’. 17.3% of social media users were female, while 82.7% were male.<sup>l</sup>

In 2022, 99.6% of social media users accessed social media platforms through mobile devices.<sup>li</sup> 6% (2.4 million) of Afghans used a computer. In public schools, approximately 40% had at least one computer; however, only 5% of those computers had internet access.<sup>lii</sup> News and information are more likely to be shared via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram, and platforms like TikTok are more frequently used for entertainment. Since 2021 TikTok has been banned in Afghanistan. However, Afghans and Afghani influencers still access TikTok via VPNs.<sup>liii</sup>



*\*Reference for the figure<sup>lv</sup>*

## Social Media Platform Overview

Platform	User Demographics	Usage
<b>Facebook</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.95M users<sup>lv</sup></li> <li>17.5% Female, 82.5% Male<sup>lvi</sup></li> <li>Largest user group is 18-24</li> </ul>	Exchange news and information, most mainstream media have Facebook accounts for dialogue with audiences. Facebook was also the most popular tool for “changing or making public opinion...”, including for the election campaigns. <sup>lvii</sup>
<b>Instagram</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>552.700 users<sup>lviii</sup></li> <li>23% Female, 77% Male<sup>lix</sup></li> <li>Largest user group is 18-24</li> </ul>	<p>Sharing photos and videos, staying in touch with friends and family, and connecting with others who have similar interests. Additionally, many businesses, influencers and artists in Afghanistan use Instagram to promote their products or services, connect with customers, and showcase their talent or work.</p> <p>Instagram is also popular among young people in Afghanistan to connect with</p>

		friends and stay updated on the latest trends and happenings in the world. <sup>lx</sup>
<b>Linked In</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 450,000 members<sup>lxi</sup></li> <li>• 18% Female, 82% Male</li> <li>• Largest user group is 25-34 (60% of users)</li> </ul>	Less popular than other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. However, LinkedIn is still used by some professionals in Afghanistan, particularly those who are looking to connect with other professionals in their field, find job opportunities, or promote their businesses. <sup>lxii</sup>
<b>YouTube</b>	<i>Data not available</i>	YouTube accounts for less than 5% of all social media consumption in Afghanistan, due to the cost of the internet and slow download speed. It is mostly used for accessing entertainment content. Music, soap operas, and films are the most popular type of content. <sup>lxiii</sup>
<b>Twitter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 319,000 users<sup>lxiv</sup></li> </ul> <i>User group data not available</i>	Twitter is seen as a valuable tool by citizen journalists and bloggers, particularly for interacting with the international community. <sup>lxv</sup>
<b>TikTok (currently banned)</b>	<i>Data not available</i>	Was mainly used for commentary rather than as a direct news outlet. <sup>lxvi</sup>

### Social Messaging Applications

Chat apps in Afghanistan are primarily used to exchange information, share news, and maintain contact with friends and family. Top social messaging applications are WhatsApp (user data not available), Facebook Messenger (4,232,800 users), and Telegram (user data not available).<sup>lxvii</sup>

### Key Social Media Influencers<sup>1</sup>

The top key influencers, as identified by the criteria indicated in Annex 1. have been identified below. Local macro influencers, who are celebrities or key opinion leaders will be the priority criteria used for this digital mapping. As they have the most potential for meaningful partnerships with UNICEF, engaging and reaching target communities seems most likely with this cohort. However, depending on the Country Office priorities, as well as the evolving nature of social media influencers, key influencers will need to be re-identified.

Influencer	Social Media Platform	Number of Followers	Category	Type of Content
<b>Ayeda Shadab</b>	Instagram	Instagram – 1.3M	Entrepreneur	Social posts

<sup>1</sup> Social influencer statistics may have changed since they were last checked in January 2023.

	TikTok YouTube	TikTok – 442.6K YouTube – 131	Businesswoman Beauty Celebrity Fashion Celebrity	Videos
<b>Afghan Face</b>	Instagram, YouTube	Instagram – 912.6K YouTube – 36.6K	Entertainment Industry Professionals	Videos Social Posts
<b>Hafizullah Mohammadi</b>	Instagram	874K	Entertainment Industry Key Opinion Leader	Social Posts Videos
<b>Zakerinir</b>	Instagram, YouTube	Instagram – 745.4K YouTube - 83	Media Key Opinion Leader	Videos
<b>Najiba Faiz</b>	Instagram, YouTube Twitter	Instagram – 720.6K YouTube – 1.1K Twitter – 5,987	Entertainment Celebrity	Videos Social Posts
<b>Wais Barakzai</b>	Instagram Twitter	Instagram – 83K Twitter – 1.7M	Activist Key Opinion Leader	Videos Social Posts
<b>Madam Frogh</b>	Twitter	178.3K	Human Rights Activist Key Opinion Leader	Social Posts
<b>Adela Raz</b>	Twitter	246.3K	Key Opinion Leader	Social Posts
<b>Shabake Khanda</b>	YouTube	419K	Entertainment Celebrity	Videos
<b>The Afghan</b>	Instagram	266K	Key Opinion Leader	Social Posts Videos
<b>Afghanistan My Passion</b>	Instagram	676K	News Key Opinion Leader	Social Posts Blogs
<b>Sadiqa Madadgar</b>	Instagram Facebook TikTok YouTube	Instagram – 327K Facebook – 850K TikTok – 184.9K YouTube – 39.8K	Singer	Social posts Videos

### Online Groups

Group Name	Social Media Platforms	Number of Followers	Category	Type of Content
<b>Afghanistan The Beautiful</b>	Facebook	80K	Travel Photography	Social posts
<b>Afghanistan</b>	Facebook	32.5K	Photos	Social posts

			News Articles	
<b>Afghanistan (r/Afghanistan)</b>	Reddit	32.2K	News	Discussion
<b>News and analysis on the Afghan Conflict (r/AfghanConflict)</b>	Reddit	15.4K	News	Discussion
<b>AF گروه چت افغانستان AF</b>	Telegram	16.2K	N/A	Messaging
<b>Nice Quotes</b>	Telegram	19.5K	N/A	Messaging

### Traditional Media Platforms

Since 2022, it's been reported that there are still 305 media outlets operating in Afghanistan, however, heavily censored.<sup>lxviii</sup> Radio broadcasts tends to be more popular in rural communities. People with lower literacy prefer media with audio-visual stimuli such as radio and television, and TV was the most popular tool for obtaining information during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main media organisations in Afghanistan are listed below, along with some of their most popular channels and stations.<sup>lxix</sup>

- Moby Group<sup>lxx</sup> is an independent media company with television broadcasting, media technology, and advertising services across Afghanistan:
  - TOLO TV - television channel for news and entertainment (Dari)
  - TOLOnews - 24-hour news channel (Dari and Pashto)
  - LEMAR TV - news and entertainment, sister station to TOLO TV (Pashto)
  - Arman FM - general entertainment, a commercial radio station (Dari)
  - Arakozia FM - talk show station (Pashto)
  - Darya – online streaming service for entertainment (Dari and Pashto)
- KILLID Group<sup>lxxi</sup> is an independent media company established by the Development & Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan (DHSA) in 2002.
- Salam Watandar<sup>lxxii</sup> is a national radio service, established by Internews and supported by USAID's office of Transition Initiatives, providing entertainment, news, and information programming.
- National Radio-Television Afghanistan<sup>lxxiii</sup> (NRTA) is a state broadcaster:
  - National Television Afghanistan – national television service (Dari and Pashto)
  - RTA Sports Live – sports broadcasting
  - National Television Afghanistan (education) – broadcasting education content
  - Radio Afghanistan – national radio station (Dari and Pashto)
- Bayat Group<sup>lxxiv</sup> is one of the largest private companies invested in media and other initiatives.

- Afghan Wireless – commercial and wireless communications company.
- Ariana Television Network (ATN) – television and radio network in Kabul with content that focuses on information and entertainment around Afghanistan’s traditions and culture.

However due to ever-evolving regulations, censorship, and financial challenges in the media landscape, the operating capacity of radio and television stations continues to change.

### Streaming Services/VOD

- No data is available on the subscribers for other streaming platforms such as Netflix, Disney+ or Amazon Prime.



## Digital Tools

### Education

COVID-19 has drastically increased the development and availability of online learning platforms across the country. For example, the Ministry of Higher Education partnered with Amazon Web Services to provide students with digital educational content through the Higher Education Learning Management System (HELMS). Additionally, global ed-tech platform EDX (also known as AfghanX) was created through government collaboration with six leading universities in the country, with the aim of developing educational content that would provide both academic and administrative support to higher education institutions.<sup>lxxv</sup>

Online learning platforms have become one of the main channels on which women and girls can learn due to the restrictions around girls’ education. However, online, remote, or distantly earned degrees, certifications and diplomas are not recognized by the current legislative framework for education and that is a concern.

Some examples of existing digital platforms:

- Maktab is a free online e-learning and collaboration platform that aims to help youth, especially girls, in Afghanistan and outside the country to access quality education and resources and collaborate with their peers.<sup>lxxvi</sup>
- Darakht-e Danesh Digital Library (DD Library) is a curated collection of over 6,000 educational resources for students and teachers on 130 subjects in Afghan languages.<sup>lxxvii</sup> This Library was created to increase access to quality and locally adapted resources and to encourage teachers to adapt, create and share their own resources with other educators.<sup>lxxviii</sup>
- TeachTeam is an online educational platform, that provides online classes on the Holy Quran, Islamic studies, and languages (Pashto, Dari, and English).<sup>lxxix</sup>

- Education Bridge for Afghanistan (EBC) is a group of volunteer education activists providing education for secondary-level students, especially for girls who are excluded from school.<sup>lxxx</sup>

### Health

Some effective tools that were found during the COVID-19 pandemic can be found below.<sup>lxxx</sup>

Type	Tools
<b>Electronic Immunization Registries</b>	DHAS2 Tracker, OpenSRP, OpenMRS, Tamanu
<b>Messaging</b>	CommCare, mHero, OpenSRP, 166 Call Center, Viamo's 3-2-1 Service
<b>Microplanning</b>	Healthsites, OpenSRP, Reveal
<b>Patient Monitoring</b>	CommCare, DHAS2 Tracker, Open SRP, SORMAS
<b>Supply Chain</b>	DHIS2, OpenLMIS, Logistimo, OpenBoxes, Product Catalogue Management Tool
<b>Training</b>	CommCare, MHero, OpenSRP, SORMAS
<b>Vaccine Management</b>	CommCare, Logistimo, OpenBoxes, DHIS2 Tracker, DHIS2, OpenLMIS, OpenSRP, Tamanu

More details on these, and other digital health tools mapped in Afghanistan, can be found [here](#).

### Child Protection

No available data on current child protection digital tools in Afghanistan could be found. However, [Awaaz](#) 410 helpline was noted to be active in the country to report cases of child abuse and violence.



## Digital Ecosystem and Infrastructure

Afghanistan laid out some foundational elements for public service delivery such as the *Digital Foundation Strategy for Afghanistan (2019- 2021)*, *The Digital Afghanistan Strategy (2020-2025)*, and the *Afghanistan Digital Economy Strategic Plan (2019- 2023)*. The *Digital Foundation Strategy for Afghanistan (2019- 2021)* sets out a vision for building the country's key digital foundations. Both the *Digital Afghanistan Strategy (2020-2025)* and the *Afghanistan Digital Economy Strategic Plan (2019- 2023)* emphasise the importance of digital transformation and e-government and were launched to support the economic, social and governance needs of the country.<sup>lxxxii</sup>



The government has since implemented several ICT programs, including the e-government program, to improve transparency and efficiency and enable the delivery of key public services.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> But with limited digital access and adoption, Afghanistan needs to catch up in many of the key measures of digitisation and innovation. According to reports from 2020, Afghanistan was aiming to ‘harmonise’ digital regulations with its neighbouring countries and was encouraging private investment in the sector, however, given the ongoing situation, no major movements towards achieving this have been noted.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> In 2019, the government also launched digital training programmes for women; however, there is no available data as to whether this is still ongoing.<sup>lxxxv</sup>



## Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations

Challenge/ Opportunity	Narrative	Recommendations
<b>Challenges</b>		
<b>Lack of access to a reliable connection (and low affordability)</b>	<i>Difficult terrain and sparsely populated areas, coupled with security issues, have restricted the geographic reach of connectivity in more remote areas. Only 0.4% of the population is covered by 4G/LTE; 70% of the population, mainly in rural areas, still uses legacy 2G networks.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with local organizations/relevant authorities/tech firms to conduct research to identify and address connectivity gaps in remote and rural areas (map the digital footprint).</li> <li>Establish partnerships/dialogue with ATRA/policy/decision makers and mobilise them to invest in developing telecommunications infrastructure, expanding coverage and improving the quality of connectivity (and affordability) in remote and marginalized areas.</li> <li>Partner with relevant authorities to develop alternative solutions such as local access community networks, community-led networks and satellite-based internet solutions that expand connectivity to remote and rural areas. Make sure affordability is a core part of every activity/intervention.</li> <li>Advocate for investments in digital infrastructure, such as broadband networks and improved electricity supply.</li> <li>Implement initiatives that bridge the gap between online and offline communities, such as all SBC interventions ensuring that communities can be guided/referred to online via offline means (or vice-versa). Do a service mapping to ensure that SBC digital interventions are linked to relevant support, and this also reduces the online and offline gaps (a community being reached online should be able to get support offline and vice-versa). The loop should be completed.</li> <li>Partner with telcos/mobile network operators/internet service providers to offer low-cost/free internet packages for low-income (rural) communities, as part of the SBC interventions and programmes.</li> <li>Support the development of community-led solutions (engage the youth), such as shared community Wi-Fi networks/centres.</li> </ul>
<b>Low levels of digital literacy and skills</b>	<i>Afghanistan has low levels of traditional and digital literacy among its population and a small digital workforce. Current education curricula are also falling behind and are not as relevant to the evolving job market and demand.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for recent and relevant data to ascertain the situation of digital literacy and skills in Afghanistan (segregated by gender). Support the relevant authorities/partners to carry out the research (nationwide).</li> <li>Advocate for a balanced curriculum to improve both traditional and digital literacy skills.</li> <li>Strengthen the capacity of teachers, educators and parents on digital skills. And train them to provide digital literacy programs to communities and schools. Build the capacity of the Youth groups (for example Qahrmanan) and mobilise them to engage other communities.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote online safety in all digital SBC interventions and activities: promote the already existing regulations, policies and mechanisms in the platforms most frequented by the communities.</li> <li>• Given the active users on social media, leverage this to develop digital literacy skills: promote the use of social media for educational purposes. For example, Facebook Groups can be used for collaboration, co-creation and discussions etc.</li> <li>• Partner with academia to provide accreditation to ensure sustained learning behaviour.</li> <li>• Apply design thinking when creating digital tools and platforms to improve literacy skills.</li> <li>• Partner with tech companies and organisations, especially women-run and focused, to establish platforms and tools (such as online courses, games, training, hubs, labs, centres etc) that can improve digital literacy and that can be sustained.</li> <li>• Partner with telecoms to provide connectivity and data to ensure that digital tools and platforms are accessible to the community. This will also encourage digital adoption.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gender Digital Divide</b></p>	<p><i>The increased restrictions limiting women's movement, agency, autonomy and presence in the public spheres continues to be a challenge. The digital means provides an opportunity to reach and engage girls/women in this difficult situation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the situation of girls and women in Afghanistan: carry out formative research (identify KABP, barriers, challenges hindering the move to digital and opportunities and best practices that can be emulated to bring girls/women online) etc. Understand the divide.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the gender focal points/section and develop a digital SBC strategy (based on the learnings from the research) as a foundation to bring girls and women online; address the negative gender norms (and the hindering social and cultural norms), educate the men/fathers/mothers/community and religious leaders/other decision makers on the positive outcomes of ensuring girls/women have access and devices, create STEM programs/tools/platforms for girls, advocate for/create women/girls only safe online spaces (in consultation with girls/women), ensure online safety (ensuring mental health is a core component as well) is a core part of the interventions/discussions etc.</li> <li>• Embed the discourse about girls' access to digital into the ongoing parenting programmes (or as part of any new intervention).</li> <li>• Advocate for policies and regulations that protect girls/women online.</li> <li>• Mobilise influencers, religious leaders and activists to advocate for online, and device, access for girls/women.</li> <li>• Partner with tech companies to promote their safety measures/safeguarding tools to parents as a stepping stone to bringing girls online and to provide safeguarded devices to girls to ensure ongoing and sustained access.</li> <li>• Partner with telecoms to: Provide connectivity to girls/women: such as special data packages or zero-rated apps/content. Especially for women/girls in rural or remote areas. To expand the reach of existing digital and e-learning platforms, specifically targeting girls/women in rural areas to develop their digital literacy and skills.</li> <li>• Establish dialogue with relevant ministries, private sector firms and organizations on creating and promoting job opportunities specific to girls and women - linked with academic accreditation and programmes.</li> <li>• Establish a social listening mechanism for the 'refine and testing' process for every digital intervention.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of cybersecurity, and hence trust</b></p>	<p><i>People are hesitant to trust the capacity and capability of privacy and cybersecurity infrastructures, as there is a fear of being tracked by their digital history and biometric databases.<sup>xxxvii</sup></i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote online safety in all digital interventions and activities that target everyone in the community: partner with local private sector organizations/relevant authorities to raise awareness about online safe practices (specific target audiences) and develop secure digital platforms (or secure the already operational ones). Ensuring focus on mental health is a core component as well.</li> <li>• Advocate for policies and regulations that protect users' privacy and data. This should be tackled at the policy level first.</li> <li>• Partner with cybersecurity experts and firms to provide cybersecurity solutions and services and incorporate them in SBC programming and work.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with local trusted agencies, networks, platforms, and influencers to advocate for better cybersecurity laws and policies.</li> </ul>
<b>No (little) data found on Child Protection tools or platforms</b>	<i>No (available) data could be found on current existing child protection digital tools or platforms in Afghanistan.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out a service mapping exercise on child protection systems already in place.</li> <li>Leverage digital technology to establish sustainable platforms (in partnerships with relevant authorities/stakeholders): Hotline and reporting systems (mobile apps or data-free platforms), Child protection databases, Child protection case management systems, Child protection training and awareness-raising tools etc</li> <li>Leverage digital technology to raise awareness on child protection issues (social and mass media for example) within the limitations noted in this mapping.</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of enabling environment that supports digital development</b>	<i>No adequate government programmes that support innovation and technology development noted. The domestic market is also filled with foreign products, and local firms lack the skills to be competitive.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for policies and actions that create a favourable environment for digital development and innovation, including funding for digital startups, establishing incubators, etc</li> <li>Support/partner with the digital CASA Afghanistan project, a five-year World Bank project that aims to increase access to affordable internet, improve government capacity to deliver digital government services, and develop regionally integrated digital infrastructure.</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>		
<b>Accessibility of smartphones and mobile phones</b>	<i>Across provinces, in many urban and rural areas, many people have access to smartphones and mobiles.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leverage the accessibility of smartphones and mobile phones to promote digital adoption: develop mobile-friendly digital platforms (or use the existing UNICEF ones), provide mobile-based digital literacy programs etc.</li> </ul>
<b>The reach of Telecom/Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)</b>	<i>23% (9.23M) of Afghans are internet users and 68% (27M) have cellular mobile connections.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> 63% of cellular mobiles have either 3G, 4G, or 5G broadband.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with ATRA and mobile network operators to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the reach of digital interventions and programmes, particularly in remote and underserved areas.</li> <li>Provide subsidised or free data for specific interventions/programmes/activities/community.</li> <li>Develop and implement data-driven interventions to bridge the digital divide.</li> <li>Use their micro-segmentation on high-engagement channels to target communities and people for specific digital interventions.<sup>lxxxviii</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>A large youth population</b>	<i>The large youth population has social media presence, which can act as a gateway towards onboarding and fostering digital integration.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement digital literacy and entrepreneurship programmes targeting youth.</li> <li>Establish programmes/activities (in collaboration with the relevant ministries/sectors/partners etc) that encourage and promote youth-led tech startups (hackathons, investment funds, innovation funds etc).</li> <li>Partner with youth-led organisations to co-create and deliver digital solutions to social challenges. Ensuring mental health is a core component of every digital intervention/activity.</li> <li>Mobilise the youth to address the gender digital divide.</li> </ul>
<b>Available and operating national broadcasting networks</b>	<i>Although there are restrictions, several long-standing networks continue to operate successfully. These networks also have trusted and loyal viewers and listeners.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore partnerships with community/local/diaspora/international broadcasters/MNOs/Private (IT) sector to address the digital divide.</li> <li>Explore partnerships for SBC programming with refugee community organisations and with media outlets working with these communities to expand reach and engagement (such as RFE/RL and the BBC).</li> </ul>
<b>Increase in, and availability of e-</b>	<i>The influx of e-learning platforms has greatly increased the ability to disseminate learning materials. They also act</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement e-learning programs targeting marginalized populations such as women and children, utilising the <a href="#">existing UNICEF platforms</a> or (<a href="#">annex 3</a>).</li> <li>Promote the use of e-learning platforms to improve digital literacy skills.</li> </ul>

<p><b>learning platforms</b></p>	<p>as a platform to develop the digital capacity of young people and adults. Online learning platforms have become one of the main channels on which women and girls can learn due to the restrictions around girls' education. However, online, remote, or distantly earned degrees, certifications and diplomas are not recognized by the current legislative framework for education, even though e-learning is now being blended with more traditional learning modes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring together the relevant authorities, telcos, academia, tech and other private sector organisations to support the expansion of e-learning platforms, particularly in remote and underserved areas, to improve access to education.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Health and education content</b></p>	<p><i>Health and education content continues to be permitted, and many broadcasters have switched to this kind of content from entertainment programs.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and disseminate mobile-based health and education content – utilize the <a href="#">existing platforms/tools</a> and the e-learning platforms.</li> <li>• Work with local and relevant authorities to provide digital health and education services.</li> </ul>

## Annex 1 – Key Influencer Criteria

For the purpose of this document, key influencers have been defined in three ways - by the number of followers, types of content, and level of influence.

Defining influencers by the number of followers can be categorised into four types.

- **Mega influencers** are people with a large number of followers, usually over 1M followers on at least one social media platform. Mega influencers tend to be celebrities who have gained their fame offline, however, some will have gained their followers online and through social activities.
- **Macro influencers** usually have 40,000 to 1M followers on social media platforms. This group tends to have high profiles and can be great for raising awareness on issues. It may be easier to connect with macro influencers, as there tends to be more of them than mega-influencers.

- **Micro-influencers** have between 1,000 to 4,000 followers and tend to be ordinary everyday people who have become well-known and popular for their knowledge about a specific topic. This means that their followers tend to be interested in that specific topic. These influencers tend to have smaller followings but higher engagement and influence with their followers.
- **Nano influencers** have less than 1,000 followers and tend to be experts in a highly specialized or technical field. Similar to the followers of micro-influencers, they tend to have smaller followings but higher engagement and influence with their followers. However, they will not have as much influence as micro-influencers as they have fewer followers.

Defining influencers by **types of content** can be categorised into four types.

- **Bloggers** tend to have the most authentic, active, and engaging relationships with their followers.
- **Video makers** are popular types of content, and most tend to create and share videos on YouTube.
- **Podcasters** are the newest form of content to start generating followers and is growing increasingly popular.
- **Social posting only** is rare and tends to happen in parallel with other types of content creation.

Defining influencers by the **level of influencer** can be categorised into two types.

- **Celebrities** can sometimes lack credibility with specific target audiences, or around certain types of topics.
- **Key opinion leaders** are industry experts that can also be considered influencers who gain credibility among followers and people in general due to their technical expertise, qualifications, position, and experience. Key opinion leaders can include journalists, academics, industry experts, and/or professional advisors.

Macro and micro-influencers, who are celebrities or key opinion leaders will be the priority criteria used for this digital mapping. As the potential for meaningful partnerships with UNICEF, to reach their target communities seems most likely with this cohort.

## Annex 2 – Digital Public Goods (DPGs) case studies

### *UNICEF Ghana*

UNICEF's Ghana office is a Pathfinder and runs the StartUp Lab, which assists sustainable entrepreneurs to develop their products and business models. The lab also serves as an incubator for open source startups and educates those considering it. The objective is to prepare DPGs from the StartUp Lab to apply for UNICEF's Venture Fund investment. The Country Office evaluates the StartUp Lab's solutions through its programmatic sections and collaborates with national institutional partners to incorporate open-source work into broader policy solutions.

UNICEF employs various tools, including the StartUp Lab, Venture Fund, and Innovation Hubs, to support innovation at different stages. In Ghana, the UNICEF Country Office used this system to uncover and advance two DPGs: [Bisa App](#) and [EduNOSS](#), as well as DPG nominee [Project Konko](#). For more information visit this [site](#).

### *UNICEF Philippines*

UNICEF Philippines started their DPGs Pathfinding Pilot in early 2021 with two objectives. Firstly, to discover how existing technical country capacity can be advantageous to DPGs and improving Technology for Development (T4D) that are relevant to UNICEF and the government's programmes. And secondly,

developing a tool that would allow the sharing of knowledge and capacity among sectors. For more information visit this [site](#).

#### *UNICEF Innovation Funds*

UNICEF Innovation funds exclusively invest in open-source technology solutions from new and emerging companies. Through its investments, UNICEF is strengthening communities, increasing the number of DPGs, and having an impact on children. For more information visit this [site](#).

#### *Safe YOU: Virtual Safe Space for Women*

Safe YOU was launched in Northern Iraq (Kurdistan) in partnership with UNFPA Iraq and UNFPA Armenia in 2021. With the help of UNICEF Innovation, Safe YOU was recognised as a Digital Public Good (DPG), a digital tool aimed at achieving sustainable development goal number 5 (Gender Equality) as set by the United Nations Secretary General's 2020 Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. Safe YOU aims to be a key resource for evidence-based policy-making through our sophisticated AI data analysis system. This will lead to the prediction & prevention of Violence Against Women & Girls. For more information, visit the site [here](#).

## Annex 3 – UNICEF Digital Platforms

**U-Report** is a messaging tool that enables young people to interact with and raise their voices on issues that are important to them. It is operated by local government, organizations, and young people who record gather information, tips, and opinions from mobile device users on a range of issues. Based on the data and insights gathered by U-reporters, the results are shared with the relevant communities and stakeholders. For more information on U-Report, visit this [site](#). Access UReport South Asia here: <https://southasia.ureport.in/>

**RapidPro** collects data via short message service (SMS) and other communication channels (e.g. voice; social media channels, such as Facebook Messenger, Telegram, WhatsApp) to enable real-time data collection and mass-communication with target end-users, including beneficiaries and frontline workers. The technology allows users to design, pilot, and scale direct mobile outreach services without the help of a software developer in both normal development contexts and humanitarian emergencies. For more information on RapidPro, visit this [site](#).

**Internet of Good Things (IoGT)** aims to build people and communities' knowledge by closing the digital divide. For more information on IoGT, visit this [site](#). Access South Asia IoGT here: <https://sa.goodinternet.org/en/> or the Pakistan site here: <https://nanhayqadam.org/ur/>

**All Children Learning** is a regionally focused platform designed to strengthen assessment capacity and learning. The platform offers four different guidance's (government, emergencies, development, and teaching) to improve the users' assessment capacity and learning. For more information on All Children Learning, visit this [site](#).

**OKY app**: the world's first menstruation education and period tracker app co-created with girls, for girls. Access here: [Okya Nepal](#) and [Okya India](#)

**Bebbo app**, developed by the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, is an application that supports responsive, positive parenting. It aims to provide comprehensive information about early childhood development and parental care in a parent-friendly format. Bebbo also supports the dissemination of messages and information related to COVID-19 prevention and protection for children. For more information: <https://www.bebbo.app/about-us>

**USupportMe**: part of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing Portfolio at UNICEF. It is an app for on-demand psychosocial support services. After successful pilots in East and Central Asia, we're scaling up this innovative solution to meet its full potential.

**UNilearn**: online national learning and knowledge-sharing platform which hosts dynamic education, skills, and other content from different states in India and from other countries.

**AGORA** is a platform that provides learning opportunities to UNICEF's staff, partners, and supporters. The learning opportunities range from specific thematic areas to strategies to languages to career support. For more information on AGORA, visit this [site](#).

**INFORM** provides UNICEF and partners with a turnkey solution for field-based data collection, management and visualization. Inform supports UNICEF's strategic outcomes and strengthens our position as the global leader in data for children. For more information: visit this [site](#).

### UNICEF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

# Endnotes

## Definitions to Note:

- **Fixed Broadband Internet:** High-speed connectivity for public use of at least 256 Kbit/s or more in one or both directions (downloading and uploading). It includes cable modem Internet connections, DSL Internet connections of at least 256 Kbit/s or higher, fibre and other fixed broadband technology connections (such as satellite broadband Internet, Ethernet LANs, fixed-wireless access, Wireless Local Area Networks, WiMAX, etc.).<sup>lxxxix</sup>
- **Mobile Broadband:** Mobile broadband technology allows for a wireless wide area network (WWAN). In simple terms, it provides wireless high-speed Internet access to portable devices by way of radio towers.<sup>xc</sup>
- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per Capita:** is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes (fewer subsidies) not included in the valuation of output, divided by midyear population.<sup>xcii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=AF>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Afghanistan/Languages>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-afghanistan>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-afghanistan>

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<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/reports/afghanistan-multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-mics-2022-2023>

<sup>x</sup> [https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/The-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2023.pdf?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_medium=button&utm\\_campaign=somic23](https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/The-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2023.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=button&utm_campaign=somic23)

<sup>xi</sup> <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-afghanistan>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://radar.cloudflare.com/af?dateRange=52w>

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<sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2016/Digital-Adoption-Index>

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<sup>xviii</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/literacy-afghanistan-fact-sheet-2021.pdf>

<sup>xix</sup> [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/STI%20gap%20analysis\\_Afghanistan%20Report\\_%20Ahsanullah%20Mohsen.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/STI%20gap%20analysis_Afghanistan%20Report_%20Ahsanullah%20Mohsen.pdf)

<sup>xx</sup> <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/4044c18e-d6ba-50aa-8e3f-efade3ca5ab1/content>

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<sup>xxiv</sup> <https://a4ai.org/1for2-affordability-target/>

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<sup>xxvi</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/gender-alert-no-4>

<sup>xxvii</sup> [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/af-IWD2023\\_Gender-Alert-4-ss-020323.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/af-IWD2023_Gender-Alert-4-ss-020323.pdf)

<sup>xxviii</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/471209/digital-freedom-reach-afghan-women.aspx>

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<sup>xxxi</sup> <https://genderit.org/editorial/access-denied-gender-digital-divide-form-violence-south-and-southeast-asia>

<sup>xxxii</sup> [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2023.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf)

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> World Bank Group, "South Asia's Digital Opportunity Accelerating Growth, Transforming Lives",

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