

INTERNET IN PAKISTAN

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Pakistan currently has 184 million cellular subscribers and still growing. Last year in 2018-19 there were only 168 million subscribers. After the COVID-19 the potential number of subscribers have increased significantly. It is because of the certain incentives provided by the cellular companies amidst the pandemic. There are five major companies currently operating in Pakistan namely Zong, Jazz, Telenor, Ufone, and Warid. These companies provided their services at subsidized rates when Pakistan started transforming from a physical mode of work to digitalization or work from home due to the COVID19 attack in early March 2020.

Many challenges were faced by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority for providing access to internet to its citizens. This issue arose because internet access varies from province to province in Pakistan. For instance, in the province of Balochistan, out of 32 districts, nine districts lack the facility of internet, similarly, only 5% of the population residing in the province of KPK has access to broadband internet. To cater for this issue, the government along with the World Bank funding launched a tele-school channel for distance learning of students of the country. Moreover, the government is also currently working on the project of launching a radio school that will help the students of marginalized areas.

To digitalize the whole country, for the first time in the history of the country, Spectrum Auction has been approved for Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Under the Digital Vision of Pakistan, no region in Pakistan will remain deprived of digitalization. Broadband Internet and mobile services will improve in GB after the auction of additional spectrum in Pakistan. As part of the program software technology parks will be soon inaugurated at Skardu, Baltistan, and Hunza. Currently, Pakistan has fourth-generation (4G) facility available but after the new spectrum auction, fifth-generation (5G) services will be available to the people. Under this new spectrum policy for commercial auction of next-generation internet and mobile phones, the internet facility will improve in all the marginalized areas.

According to the policy directive for the auction of NGMS spectrum in AJK and GB:

- a. A transparent, competitive process shall be formulated by the PTA for auctioning 2x16 MHz spectrum in the 1800 MHz band and 2x30 MHz spectrum in the 2100 MHz as made available by the Frequency Allocation Board.
- b. The base price for 2x1 MHz (1 MHz paired) spectrum in both 1800 and 2100 MHz bands is \$0.87 million, respectively.
- c. Additionally, the 2x10 MHz spectrum earmarked by FAB for SCO in both 1800 and 2100 MHz bands is approved for assignment to Special Communication Organization.
- d. the spectrum assignment will be "Technology Neutral" and usable for all existing and upcoming advanced generations technologies within the applicable policy framework of the government of Pakistan.
- e. payment terms shall be a minimum of 50 percent upfront payment within one month of auction date while the remaining is to be paid in 10 equal installments in 10 years.

