AFGHANISTAN
Media Landscape Guide

CDAC
NETWORK
communicating with disaster-affected communities

Preface

This guide is one of a series of Media Landscape Guides which map the media landscape in different countries. The guides have been produced by the CDAC Network in cooperation with DW Akademie and supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. This project is part of the global initiative "Transparency and media freedom - Crisis resilience in the pandemic".

*CDAC Network would like to thank **Atefeh Givian**, the consultant who led the research for the Afghanistan Media Landscape Guide. This work has been made possible with inputs from individuals and organisations working in media, government, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and CDAC Network partners who kindly agreed to provide valuable insights to the research.*

Take a look at all of CDAC's Media Landscape Guides, available in multiple languages, here: https://www. cdacnetwork.org/media-landscape-guides

This Media Landscape Guide was written and edited between October 2021 and January 2022.

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SECTION ONE:

Introduction

1.1 About the guide

This Media Landscape Guide provides a snapshot of the media in Afghanistan, including the audiences, the producers, the preferences of different groups in the community, the communications culture, and the languages associated with the media. It gives an insight into the role of media in development work, crisis preparedness, recent disasters, and the (at time of writing[1]) ongoing COVID-19 response. The guide also gives an overview of each media sector including, digital and social media, radio, television, print and other traditional forms of mass communication.

 It should be noted that with the constantly changing nature of the media landscape, this is not a comprehensive overview of all media outlets and platforms but rather a snapshot summary of those most relevant at the time of writing.

The guide has been written as an introduction to help organisations and individuals engage with media in their work. For example, it can be used by:

» Community, development, and humanitarian organisations; government and local authorities; non-government organisations (NGOs) and UN relief agencies to work with the media on community engagement, communication, outreach, and messaging and mobilisation.

» Development workers building societal resilience to disasters by working with media in disaster preparedness.

» Relief workers using media to engage communities to work together in early recovery from crises.

» Media outlets (including news outlets): to improve their communication and engagement with different groups, particularly during disasters.

» Media Development Organisations: to inform advocacy and capacity-building work to improve people's access to quality information and further development goals through better outreach.

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1   October 2021 and January 2022

1.2 What Does The Guide Cover And Why It Is Needed

Without an understanding of how a society communicates, any communication efforts may struggle and potentially miss large numbers of those for which those efforts are intended. This can cause difficulties when attempting to work with the community in a development project; in an emergency, it could be even worse, as an incoming relief operation may not have time to carry out audience research before communicating vital information, without which communication may use the wrong channels and miss those who need it. However, by engaging media in a country, you are engaging vital partners who know the communications landscape of any given country well and have the means by which to effectively disseminate information.

The aim of this guide is to act as a starting point for communicators, indicating the most effective media to use to communicate with different demographics. Many existing resources for identifying media users and audiences in Morocco are either out of date or limited in scope: this guide will help identify which media is operable at the time of writing and so help facilitate the communication of reliable, trusted and timely information, helping to make the media part of the solution in a humanitarian response.

1.3 Methodology

Research for the guide was carried out in-country and aided by an in-country reference group who provided guidance, expert advice, and quality assurance. Information and data were collected through a detailed desk review and interviews. Interviews were carried out with media organisations, media experts and academic researchers, government officials, media staff (including producers and journalists), humanitarian agencies, UN agencies, and NGOs.

1.4 Potential Role Of The Guide In Disaster Preparedness And Crisis Response

Effective, consistent, and timely communication is vital in humanitarian response and in building sustainable early recovery from crises. Communities, authorities, and responders must be kept informed of the situation of any disaster and planned response, and of any actions they need to take. Proactive communication to dispel rumours or misinformation is vital, as is the building of trust with audiences, which can be facilitated through developing mechanisms for two-way communication. The media can also play a proactive role in early warning which can influence population and response behaviour and potentially mitigate the effects of a disaster.

In aid responses and disaster preparedness it is important to know how best to use media to reach marginalised groups, with considerations of literacy levels and language preferences. It is also important to be aware of, and to address, any enhanced needs, risks, and information gaps. Good communication requires creative thinking, adapting communication tools, message formats. Working with existing media professionals can help to achieve this.

This guide is intended to help practitioners improve their communication, particularly during humanitarian responses – whether they work in the media or are using it to reach affected communities. The goal is for it to be used to improve communications, messaging and information dissemination and contribute to an effective response.

Overview Of The Communications Culture

2.1 General overview

Before 2001, Afghanistan was governed by the previous Taliban administration, who had unilaterally banned or censored majority media types. After this first Taliban administration was overthrown in 2001, the media sector flourished despite issues of insecurity and instability. Nearly 20 years later, on 15th August 2021, the Taliban regained control following the withdrawal of western troops. In the months following the takeover, the Taliban swiftly reinstituted Afghanistan as an Islamic state, introducing new legislation to assert their authority; this led to the suspension of most funding from international donors. In addition to the radical changes to the country's political landscape and economic challenges, Afghanistan has simultaneously experienced the ongoing effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, chronic poverty and drought, factors all contributing to a humanitarian crisis[2]. Temperatures in the winter of 2021 have been described as dangerously cold and hunger levels as truly unprecedented by UNHCR, who further stated that over 3.5 million people have become internally displaced and over 2.2 million people have escaped to neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan[3].

The reformation of the Taliban government has seen a dramatic reduction in liberal forms of artistic expressions and programming. Entertainment shows have been substituted with informative programmes on educational, health and religious doctrines. However, this change has also seen an increase in two-way engagement from the authorities on air. Most programmes offer audiences the opportunity to engage and interact with official guests, often specialists in health and religion.

An example of a popular station moving to this form of two-way communication is Radio Jawanan, a commercial station broadcasting from Kabul on 97.5FM[4]. The station is aimed at the younger 15-30 demographic in both Dari and Pashto. One of their daily programmes has a presenter joined by Taliban representatives to take calls from the audience, which the panel discusses in detail. These issues range from marital or domestic issues family feuds, poverty and religious-related queries.

There is a distinction between the guest experts and the Taliban representatives; where the opinions of the professionals in health, law or science are based on academic qualifications, the credentials of the Taliban representatives are less merited, and they offer pontifications. There are also limits to what can be discussed, with little freedom to cover topics not deemed appropriate by the Taliban[5].

2.2 Media Environment & Landscape

Before the 2021 Taliban takeover, media in Afghanistan steadily grew between 2001 and 2021, despite ongoing insecurity throughout this period. It was supported by relatively generous internationally funded support. An example of the media's progression, despite insecurities, can be seen by the following contrasting events in 2018. In 2018 the Access to Information Commission, established under the 2018 Access to Information Law, brought about change through "addressing registered complaints, public awareness, campaigns, creation and monitoring of information offices, and capacity building programs"[6]. In addition, by 2018, the Government Media and Information Centre had trained over 3,000 individuals. 2018 though, was also a year of unprecedented hostility towards the media, and targeted attacks led to the deaths of 13 journalists and two media workers, it has been named the "deadliest year for the media since 2001"[7].

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2   https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-january-2022

3   https://www.unhcr.org/uk/afghanistan.html

4   http://jawanan.fm/

5   Key Informant Interviews for this research, Afghanistan, January 2022

6   The Asia Foundation, 2019. A Survey of the Afghan People. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Afghan_Survey_Full-Report.pdf> [Accessed 17 February 2022].

7   https://rsf.org/en/afghanistan

Some support services for media workers dealing with these stresses still functions. The Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) is an independent, non-profit organisation "working towards the advancement of journalist safety and rights". They provide services for journalists and media workers, including a 24/7 hotline, training, advocacy, legal support, psychosocial support and tailored support for female journalists and media workers. Although they are based in Kabul, AJSC maintains a presence in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

The media environment has seen a further drastic change since the Taliban acceded to power in August 2021. Hundreds of media organisations and companies have closed, with a notable gender gap in the number of journalists who have lost their jobs, with 72% of female journalists unable to work, and a rise in self-censorship. However, the new 2021 Taliban administration have stated they "recognise the importance of the role of the media"[8]. In an attempt to encourage the once-thriving media sector to continue during the turbulent period following the Taliban takeover, the interim director of the Taliban's Government Media and Information Centre (GMIC) announced new media regulations for the country in September 2021[9]. However, the articles outlined in the legislation, particularly the lack of operational definitions for terms, are considered equivocal and impractical for media outlets, Journalists and media organisations say authorities provide little information and they are told to go through the deputy minister for culture[10].

Additionally, the Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice issued a directive in November 2021, making the hijab compulsory for female journalists and banning "soap operas or dramas featuring women actors"[11]. The limitation of women's involvement and participation in the media is exacerbated by the Taliban's statement that such directives are a religious guideline rather than an obligation, confusing what is, or is not permitted even further. Given the Taliban's adherence to strict Islamic law, the population constrains themselves from breaching such guidelines for fear of retribution.

The issues surrounding the lack of clarity in legislation, women's involvement, and how legislation will be enforced have led to increased self-censorship[12]. The self-censorship has resulted in a major shift in TV and Radio programming, with a significant decrease in music and entertainment and an increase in educational and Islamic content such as phone-in programmes with specialist guests. These shows are broadcasted live at 4:00 PM and have become popular across Afghanistan for allowing for limited but somewhat effective two-way engagement. One popular programme called Khate Moshawere (Consultation Line) focuses solely on health-related topics and provides specialist advice to the audience's queries. With the healthcare system on the verge of collapse and most of the population unable to afford access to healthcare, these educational discussion shows have also become an accessible way of obtaining health information, as more health facilities are struggling with the lack of funding, medical supplies and resources.

The policies and legislation enacted by the new leadership have also caused commercial and programming obstacles for various media outlets nationwide. Channels unable to withstand the effects of the increasing economic instability in Afghanistan faced indefinite closure. A survey by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) published in December 2021 reported the closure of "a total of 231 media outlets", which had subsequently resulted in the loss of jobs for "more than 6,400 journalists"[13]. More specifically, 51 TV stations, 132 radio stations, 94 print, and 41 online media outlets have ceased operations between 15th August 2021 and 2nd February 2022. Reasons cited for closures have been identified as "financial resources, lack of access to information, programs restrictions, security and threats"[14]. A recent analysis of active and non-active media outlets conducted in February 2022 by the Afghanistan National Journalists Union (ANJU), in collaboration with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), noted there are 305 media outlets still actively operating in Afghanistan[15], consisting of 81 television stations, 161 radio stations, 20 press organisations and 43 online outlets.

8   https://rsf.org/en/news/taliban-tell-rsf-they-will-respect-press-freedom-how-can-we-believe-them
9   https://rsf.org/en/news/afghanistan-11-journalism-rules-imposed-taliban-open-way-censorship-and-arbitrary-decisions-rsf
10   Key Informant Interviews for this research: media staff, Afghanistan, January 2022
11   https://www.dw.com/en/afghanistan-taliban-issue-guidelines-against-women-actors/a-59895874
12   Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
13   https://rsf.org/en/news/taliban-takeover-40-afghan-media-have-closed-80-women-journalists-have-lost-their-jobs
14   https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/Statistics_Report_Newsletter_2_02Feb2022.pdf
15   https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/Statistics_Report_Newsletter_2_02Feb2022.pdf

Following the events of 15th August 2021, the financial and political instabilities have hit print media the hardest[16]. It is reported that only 20 out of 114 outlets continue to function[17.] Though the amount of media produced has reduced, radio and more traditional forms of communication, such as mosque announcements, word of mouth and religious leaders, continue to reach the most marginalised and inaccessible communities.

The popularity of television compared to radio has been steadily increasing amongst the population compared to previous years, which may be attributed to the country's electrical infrastructure improvements. This progress has also influenced internet usage[18]; online access is rapidly improving, with a reported user base of 996,000 in 2021, a 13% increase from the previous year[19]. This significant increase indicates more of the population in Afghanistan is viewing and engaging with online content, replacing or complementing other media types previously accessed for news and information.

2.3 The Internet

Internet penetration in Afghanistan is still relatively low, at approximately 22% in 2021[20], but a twentyfold increase from 2006 at 1.1%. The most popular online activities include social media, with almost four and a half million users in 2021, a 22% increase from the previous year.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) reported that 22% of the population was covered by an LTE/WiMAX mobile data network in 2019, while 60% of the population was covered by a3G/4G mobile network, a 30% increase from 2013[21].

MOBILE BROADBAND	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Mobile-broadband subscriptions	1'910	4'669	5'700	6'997	7'310
Data and voice mobile-broadband subscriptions	1'910	4'669	5'519	5'940	-
Data-only mobile-broadband subscriptions	-	-	181	1'057	3'546
Mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	5.55	13.20	15.70	18.82	19.22
Population covered by at least a 3G mobile network	32%	24%	46%	55%	60%
Population covered by at least an LTE/WiMAX network	-	-	4%	7%	22%

In their 2017 Measuring the Information Society Report, ITU noted that "despite security, economic and geographical challenges", Afghanistan has made significant progress in extending [internet] access to the population through mobile connections[23].

A 2019 survey conducted by the Asia Foundation identified young and better-educated individuals as more likely to access the internet for news and information. Additionally, 46.3% of those who had a mobile phone in their household had an internet connection, which illustrates a significant increase compared to just 25.5% four years earlier.

The Asia Foundation also analysed internet usage by region, and unsurprisingly Central/Kabul region was highest with 25.8%, followed by the South East of Afghanistan, with 18.3%. The lowest internet usage rate was the Central/Highlands region with 2.9%.

The number of mobile phone connections in January 2021 was 27 million, equivalent to 68.7% of the total population and an increase of 38,000 from the previous year[24]. Data on mobile phone ownership was last assessed by the Asia Foundation in 2019 and reported a continued increase, with 91.4% of households owning at least one mobile phone.

The top telecommunications and internet service provider companies currently operating in Afghanistan are included below.

16   https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/Statistics_Report_Newsletter_2_02Feb2022.pdf
17   https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-176581
18   Key Informant Interviews for this research: Telecommunication Researcher, Afghanistan, January 2022
19   https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-afghanistan
20   https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-afghanistan
21   https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/misr2017/MISR2017_Volume2.pdf
22   https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/LDCs/Documents/2019/Data_Aggregates_indicators_LDCs_LLDCs_SIDS_2013-2018.xls
23   https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/misr2017/MISR2017_Volume2.pdf
24   https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-afghanistan

Etisalat - 100% owned subsidiary of international telecommunications company Etisalat Group, has 3G coverage in 21 provinces and provides voice and data services in 34 provinces and over two-hundred districts[25].

Roshan - Part of the Telecom Development Company Afghanistan Limited Liability Company, their network covers all "34 provinces and reaches more than 91% of Afghanistan's population"[26], with approximately six million active subscribers.

Salaam - A government-owned telecommunication company working under the Afghan Telecom Company, aims to provide affordable voice and data services across Afghanistan and started 4G services in Kabul in 2020[27].

Afghan Wireless - Afghanistan's first commercial mobile communications company, says they have "1027 base stations and additional transmission capacity"[28] in the more remote areas of Afghanistan.

MTN - Part of Africa's largest telecom company MTN Group[29], and the market leader in Afghanistan with a 40% share. The company is reported to be in discussions with potential buyers for their business in Afghanistan[30].

Despite the significant increase in internet use, accessibility remains a barrier. Reports of inconsistent and weak signals, intermittent coverage and extremely slow connections are common issues facing internet users. Additionally, the cost of internet data is reported to be expensive for most users[31]. On average, the cost of 1GB of internet data is 150 AFN to 250 AFN, depending on the provider. There are also monthly packages that can be activated for 4GB data (499 AFN) and 10GB data (999 AFN)[32]. The Afghanistan minimum wage in 2022 for a government worker was reported as 5,000 AFN per month for government workers, and there is no minimum wage for private-sector workers[33].

2.4 Main Media Organisations

The main media organisations in Afghanistan are listed below, with the most popular channels and stations they own and manage.

MOBY GROUP is an independent media company with television broadcasting, media technology, and advertising services across Afghanistan. Media outlets owned by the commercial company include:

» **TOLO TV** - Leading television channel for news and entertainment (Dari)

» **TOLOnews** - Afghanistan's first 24-hour news channel (Dari and Pashto)

» **LEMAR TV** - News and entertainment sister station of TOLO TV (Pashto)

» **Arman FM** - the first general entertainment commercial radio station (Dari)

» **Arakozia FM** - The first talk radio station in Afghanistan (Pashto)

» **Darya** - An online streaming service with live and on-demand entertainment shows (Dari and Pashto)

KILLID GROUP - An independent media company established by the Development & Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan (DHSA) in 2002. Media outlets owned by the commercial company include:

» **Radio Killid Network** - Operated with local stations in Kabul, Mazar e Sharif, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Ghazni, Khost and Herat[34]

» **Publishing** - The Killid and Mursal weekly women's magazines[35]

SALAM WATANDAR - National radio service providing entertainment, news and information programming to a

25 https://www.etisalat.af/index.php/about-us/etisalat-corporation/etisalat-afghanistan
26 https://www.roshan.af/about-us
27 https://tolonews.com/business/telecom-company-starts-4g-internet-services-kabul
28 https://afghan-wireless.com/
29 https://www.mtn.com.af/about/our-story/
30 https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-08/mtn-is-said-to-be-in-talks-with-buyers-for-afghani-wireless-unit
31 Key Informant Interviews for this research, Afghanistan, January 2022
32   Key Informant Interviews: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
33 https://www.minimum-wage.org/international/afghanistan
34 https://tkg.af/english/2010/04/22/about-us/
35 No information on whether magazines are still being published and distributed

"network of 53 Afghan-owned and operated radio stations across Afghanistan"[36], established by Internews in 2003, supported by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives[37]

NATIONAL RADIO-TELEVISION AFGHANISTAN (NRTA) - The state broadcaster operates in Kabul and 32 provinces. Their most popular stations include:

» **National Television Afghanistan** - National television service, broadcasted via terrestrial relays and satellite (Dari and Pashto)

» **RTA Sports Live** - Subchannel of National Television Afghanistan, broadcasting sports

» **National Television Afghanistan Education** - Subchannel of National Television Afghanistan broadcasting educational content

» **Radio Afghanistan** - National radio station (Dari and Pashto)

BAYAT GROUP – is one of Afghanistan's largest private companies with interests in telecoms, media outlets (radio and television), oil and energy companies, philanthropy, and technology, among others[38]. Relevant companies and outlets include:

» **Afghan Wireless** - The first commercial and wireless communications company in Afghanistan. A joint venture between the Bayat Group (80%) and the Afghan Ministry of Communications (20%)[39]

» **Ariana Television Network (ATN)** - Private television and radio network based in Kabul, and includes stations and channels such as Ariana Television, Ariana News, Ariana FM 93.5 & Ariana News FM 100.2. ATN's content focuses on information and entertainment that rekindles Afghanistan's traditions and culture[40].

With thousands of Afghans fleeing to neighbouring countries[41], media outlets for Afghan audiences in Iran and Pakistan have provided cross-border services for Afghan audiences. These outlets will be discussed in the Diaspora and Cross-border Media chapter in Section four (4.3).

2.5 Language and Dialects

According to Clear Global's language data for Afghanistan[42], the number of languages spoken ranges between 40 and 59, including Dari (spoken by 77% of the population) and Pashto (spoken by 48% of the population) as the official and most widely spoken languages. In addition to the official languages, other noteworthy language groups include Uzbeki (11%), English (6%), Turkmeni (3%), Urdu (3%), Pashai (1%), Nuristani (1%), Arabic (1%), and Balochi (1%). Dari often acts as a common language amongst speakers of different languages in Afghanistan. Within Dari there are multiple dialects, though generally they are mutually intelligible to speakers of the language[43].

Aside from some community radio partners, national media organisations offer few programmes for minority languages and focus predominantly on Dari and Pashto. So, although media outlets try to broadcast in Dari and Pashto for inclusivity, minority communities with a limited understanding of either language are excluded. It's also important to note that minority languages are often the sole vernacular for women. They are more likely to be in the home, in remote villages and uninvolved in trade.

2.6 Religion, Ethnicity and Minority Groups

There is currently no reliable data on ethnic group distribution within Afghanistan. However, previous estimates shared by Minority Rights states the population to be segmented as 42% Pashtun, 27% Tajik, 9% Hazara, 9% Uzbek, 3% Turkman, 2% Baluchi and the remaining 8% of other groups, including Pachaie, Nuristani, Aymaq, Arab, Qirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujar, and Brahwui, amongst other ethnicities[44]. Of note are the Kuchis Pashtun nomads from southern

36 https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/salam-watandar-radio-service
37 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a8de5274a31e0000672/bbc_media_action_afghanistan_is_in_transition.pdf
38 https://www.bayat-group.com/
39 https://afghan-wireless.com/about-us/
40 https://www.arianatelevision.com/about-atn/#:~:text=Ariana%20Television%20Network%20(ATN)%20is,rekindles%20Afghanistan's%20traditions%20and%20culture.
41 https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1350
42 https://translatorswithoutborders.org/language-data-for-afghanistan#:~:text=In%202020%20Translators%20without%20Borders,are%20the%20main%20broadcasting%20languages.
43 https://www.mustgo.com/worldlanguages/dari/
44 https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/afghanistan/

and eastern Afghanistan, reported to be around two million and considered one of the country's poorest and most marginalised groups[45].

Regionally, the main ethnic groups are dispersed throughout Afghanistan as follows: Pashtuns mainly inhibit the south and south-east, whilst Tajiks are mainly in the north, north-east, and Kabul; Hazaras reside in the centre (Hazarajat) and Kabul, whilst Uzbeks are in the north, and Aimaq in the west; Turkmens are also in the north, Baluchis in the west and south-west, and Nuristanis in the east[46].

The main religion of the population is Islam with 99.7%, divided into 84-89% Sunnis and 10-15% Shia and other minority sects[47], including Sikhism, Hinduism and Judaism. Historically, the Shia minority in Afghanistan, regardless of their ethnic background, have faced persecution from the majority Sunni population[48].

As the largest ethnic group, Pashtuns are mostly Sunni Muslims and follow a combination of Islamic law and tribal codes[49]. Tajiks, the second-largest ethnic group, are also Sunnis, though they "identify more with their locality or family than their ethnic group" (ACAPS, 2016). However, in contrast with the significant majority of the country, most Hazaras follow the Shia sect of Islam, constituting a religious minority.

2.7 Education and Literacy

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) estimated that ten million youth and adults in Afghanistan were illiterate in March 2020, meaning the literacy rate in the country stood at 43%[50]. They noted remarkable progress compared to previous years (2016/2018 literacy rate 34.8%) and highlighted the substantial improvement in literacy rates amongst youths aged 15 - 24 years old (65%). There remained, however, a significant gender gap in the literacy rates, with men at 55% and women only at 29.8%.

The rules of the new Taliban government remain unclear on female education and equal access to schooling at the time of writing, with girls not knowing how long they will be excluded from their educational rights[51]. Research indicates that support for girls' education was growing before the Taliban takeover[52]; in the Asia Foundation's 2019 Survey of the Afghan people, up to 86.5% of respondents supported women's educational opportunities and showed approval for women's education.

Individuals with lower literacy levels prefer media types that offer audio-visual stimuli over text, such as radio and television. This preference carries over on internet and social media use; those with lower literacy levels can access and engage with online content[53]. Social messaging platforms appeal to those with lower literacy levels. It enables them to exchange information, news and entertainment content through embedded accessibility tools such as voice notes, video messaging, and live streaming, removing the obstacles of conventional heavy text-based mediums. Expert interviews consider the key barriers for internet access as coverage issues, cost, and internet quality, rather than education or literacy levels[54].

45 https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/afghanistans-most-vulnerable-women/#:~:text=Kuchis%2C%20traditionally%20nomadic%20communities%2C%20are,and%20camels%20around%20the%20country.

46 https://minorityrights.org/country/afghanistan/

47 https://minorityrights.org/country/afghanistan/

48 https://minorityrights.org/minorities/hazaras/

49 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/c-acaps_countryprofile_afghanistan_26january2016.pdf

50 https://uil.unesco.org/interviews-literacy-rate-afghanistan-increased-43-cent

51 Key Informant Interviews: NGO staff, Afghanistan, January 2022

52 The Asia Foundation, 2019. A Survey of the Afghan People. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Afghan_Survey_Full-Report.pdf> [Accessed 17 February 2022].

53 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022

54 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022

The Media in Disaster Response

3.1 COVID-19

The World Health Organisation (WHO) website at the start of February 2022 noted there were 169,000 cases of COVID-19 with over 7,400 deaths[55]. However, statistics surrounding the pandemic are believed to be underreported as people are often more concerned with the impacts of "poverty, conflict and the threat of violence on their families"[56]. The media in Afghanistan was slow to respond to the pandemic, as it lacked the necessary health reporting expertise required and access to accurate and reliable data from the government[57]. During the early stages of the pandemic, international development and media support projects such as Internews' Rooted in Trust and BBC Media Action worked with local media outlets and journalists to build their capacity through training, resources, grants and mentors. Through this support, the media was able to play an important role by proactively sharing information on COVID-19 through various mediums. However, misinformation quickly manifested and disseminated widely across the Internet, particularly on social media, without effective fact-checking mechanisms in place[58].

In a 2021 information ecosystem assessment report published by Internews and USAID[59], the most frequently used channels to access COVID-19 information in Afghanistan were watching television and face-to-face communication. The most trusted sources were friends and family and health workers in the community.

Most television and radio stations and print and online media outlets shared information from the WHO and other credible health organisations on preventative measures, symptom recognition, vulnerable groups, isolation rules, and vaccinations. TOLO TV broadcasted weekly shows with health specialists answering audience questions. Before each show, questions would be posted on social media on the weekly topic asking audience members to share concerns and to suggest future content in upcoming programmes. Following the broadcast, clips of the shows would be shared on their social media accounts, allowing for further engagement. Two-way communication using media was particularly useful to ease the pressure on the struggling healthcare system of the country at the time[60]. The health system has deteriorated further since then as is now described as on the "brink of collapse"[61].

Any available COVID-19 statistics were also frequently reported by media, though it was difficult to obtain factual statistics from local authorities. Estimated numbers were shared by the audience, with inaccurate numbers causing a loss of trust in the reporting media outlet[62]. Many citizen journalists also shared statistics surrounding the number of COVID-19 infected and related deaths. Rumours were also shared this way. The most common rumour circulated regarding COVID-19 was that the global pandemic was a hoax and that it is a means for authorities to obtain funds, other rumours that circulated regularly were that COVID-19 vaccines are used to control population numbers or that Muslims cannot be affected by COVID-19.
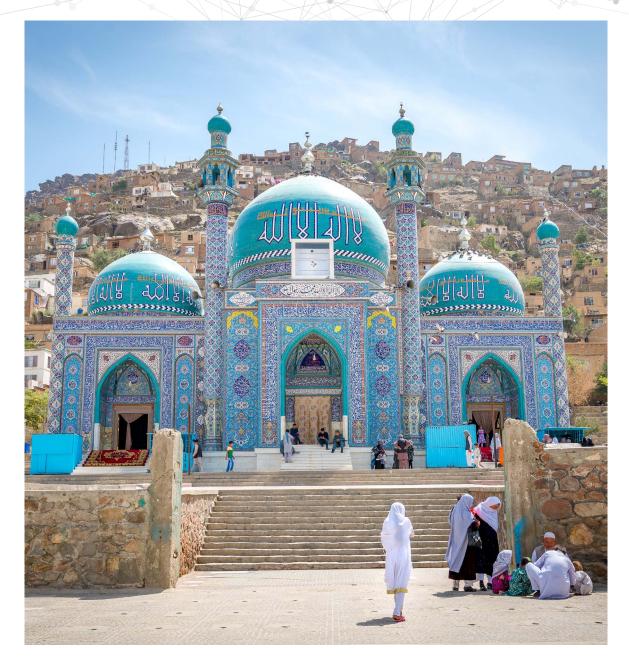
Understanding that many marginalised communities only communicated via traditional forms, such as face-to-face or through the mosque[63], some media outlets provided support to this method of providing information about COVID-19 to reach inaccessible and hard-to-reach groups. They visited inaccessible areas to share brochures, broadcast with megaphone-equipped vehicles, and hold meetings in mosques with religious leaders to encourage regular announcements. Media ways adapted to reach marginalised populations, for example, a female-run media outlet in the Central/Highlands region used only illustrated publications that featured no text to ensure illiterate groups were included. This also proved very beneficial for children and was used to inform younger audiences on COVID-19.

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55 https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/af
56 https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where-we-work/afghanistan-somalia/hbcc/
57 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
58 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022
59 https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/2021-03/understanding_trust_COVID-19_pandemic.pdf
60 Key Informant Interviews: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
61 https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1100652
62 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
63 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022

Efforts to support COVID19 programming included BBC Media Action producing public service announcements (PSA) for radio, television and social media in addition to radio dramas targeting the traditional Kuchi nomads. They noted that 46% of Afghanistan's adult population (7.6 million adults) said they heard these productions.

COVID19 vaccinations were not seen as a priority, with other problems such as political tensions, severe poverty, and drought considered more urgent[64]. At the time of writing, the Taliban are not actively promoting vaccine drives, though they have stated their support for the COVID-19 vaccination[65]. The WHO says that as of 7th February 2022, 5.2 million vaccine doses have been administered in the country[66]. Research interviews suggest that more targeted media campaigns are needed to educate communities on the benefits of the vaccine.

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64 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Health NGO staff, Afghanistan, January 2022
65 https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2022/01/14/1072188527/for-the-36-countries-with-the-lowest-vaccination-rates-supply-isnt-the-only-issu
66 https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/af

SECTION 4:

Media Overview

4.1 Radio at a glance

The combination of current political instabilities and the humanitarian and economic crises in Afghanistan have contributed to the closure of 132[67] radio stations. Many have closed their doors indefinitely; some are still formulating plans internally, adjusting to the new challenges within the country[68].

There has been a dramatic reduction in music and entertainment content in radio programming since the reestablishment of the Taliban; such content has been replaced with informative, educational, health and religious content[69]. Commercial broadcasters like Arman FM (Afghanistan's first private station)[70], Ariana FM and Spogmai Radio, amongst others, have altered their programmes to fit the Taliban-sponsored guidance to include religious content[71]. These changes include the recitation of religious scripture and broadcasting government-approved news and discussion shows, with these replacing music and entertainment shows. Radio Afghanistan, part of Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) state broadcasting, broadcasts similar content as it also follows these guidelines.

Throughout Afghanistan's recent history, radio, owing to its cheaper and easier accessibility than other forms of modern mass media, such as TV and the Internet, was a vital source of information consumption for the rural population. Radio Listenership was most popular amongst the working class, including drivers, shop owners, street vendors and bakery staff. This can be attributed to radio's practical and convenient nature, whereby workers can listen and remain productive[72]. The most recent available survey on radio set accessibility[73] found that by household 72.1% could access radio, with most weekly listeners (80.4%) listening on the FM band, compared to the AM (35.4%) and shortwave (21.9%) bands[74]. While these figures may have changed since the survey was taken in 2015 the accessibility of radio remains high. The Asia Foundation's 2019 report states that radio listenership was more common in rural areas (62.4%) than in urban areas (42.2%). By geographical region, radio listenership was the highest in the South West with 81.7%, followed closely by the South East with 80.1%. The lowest results were in Central Highlands with 25.4% and Central Kabul with 47.7%.

The most recent listenership data for each radio station was published by GeoPoll's Media Measurement Service[75] in 2017. According to average ratings and shares, Arman FM took the lead in 2017, with its highest rating at 8:00 - 10:00 AM (average 6.77 ratings, 21.4% share), followed by Khurshid FM (8.5% share) and Azadi Radio (8% share) at 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. The remaining stations such as Shamshad, Arakozia, Ariana FM and Jawanan compete intensely for audience shares.

According to the Asia Foundation's Survey of the Afghan People in 2019, found that 57.3% of participants consumed their news and informative content from the radio. This finding outlines a decline from the previous year's figure of 62.9%. Looking at gender-specific groups, Afghan males showed higher rates of radio listenership (62.6%) than their female counterparts (52.4%).

As most radio shows, particularly discussion programmes, are broadcast live they benefit from high engagement levels from their audience. For example, Radio Azadi encourages audience members to call in and discuss their problems, promising listeners that their voices will be amplified to relevant authorities. Problems being discussed in such shows include unemployment, poverty and health concerns, and they are explored and responded to by guest experts[76].

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67 https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/Statistics_Report_Newsletter_2_02Feb2022.pdf
68 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022
69 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
70 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12013942
71 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
72 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022
73 https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Afghanistan-research-brief.pdf
74 Some listeners tuned into programmes on more than one wave length per week.
75 https://knowledge.geopoll.com/afghanistan-media-measurement-kgmm-report-0-0-1
76 Key Informant Interviews for this research: NGO staff, Afghanistan, January 2022

While some outlets have multilingual programming, most radio stations focus on one language. For example, Arman FM serves a predominantly Dari speaking audience, while Arakozia serves a Pashto speaking audience.

The table below maps out the current top six radio stations[77] in Afghanistan and includes data on ownership, the main source of funding, primary language, most popular programmes, and publicly available contact details.

Name of radio station/ organisation	Weblink	Ownership	Main source of funding	Primary language	Most popular programme type	Publicly available contact details
Arman FM	https://arman.fm/	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	General Entertainment	Address: House 3, Street 12, Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul, Afghanistan Email: info@arman.fm Tel: +93 799 32 10 10
Ariana FM	https://ariana.fm/	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	General Entertainment	Address: Bayat Media Center Darulaman Road, Kabul, Afghanistan Email: sales@arianatelevision.com
Jawanan FM	http://jawanan.fm/	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	Useful information	Address: Radio Jawanan, North of Streat 13, Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul, Afghanistan
Radio Salam Standard	https://swn.af/en/	Commercial or Private company	NGO supported	Dari	General Entertainment	Address: Shahr-E Now, Kabul, Afghanistan 26000 Tel: +93 79 198 9989 Email: info@swn.af
Killid Radio **(7 local and 1 national station, affiliated with more than 100 Afghan stations)**	https://tkg.af/english/	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	Useful information	Address: Sixth Street, Karte Seh, Kabul, Afghanistan Tel: 020 2500 717 Email: info@tkg.af
Radio Afghanistan (RTA)	https://www.rta.live/	Government-owned	Government funding	Pashto	Useful information	Address: National Radio and Television of Afghanistan Great Massoud Road, Kabul, Afghanistan, Tel: +93 20 231 0728 Fax: +93 20 210 1086 Website: www.rta.org.af

4.2 TV at a glance

A survey released in February 2022 by the Afghanistan National Journalists Union (ANJU) in 33 provinces showed only 81 out of 132 television stations were actively broadcasting since the Taliban's accession to power on 15th August 2021, with 51 channels having ceased broadcasting since then[78]. Like radio stations in Afghanistan, television programming after the Taliban takeover has seen a dramatic increase in news, discussion, education and Islamic shows, replacing the very popular foreign soaps and dramas[79].

Although the future of Afghanistan's television channels is unclear, before the events of August 2021the influence, reach, and popularity of watching TV as a source of news and information was high for those who received it[80]. Two-thirds (65.9%) of respondents in the 2019 Survey of the Afghan People[81] stated watching television as a source of news and information. Whilst TV viewership was more common among younger Afghans aged 18-25 than other age groups (68.6%), figures for those aged 55 and above (62.2%) was also noteworthy and could be attributed to the visual nature of television aiding its consumption for those with lower literacy levels[82].

Regionally, watching TV for news and information was highest in Central/Kabul (83.0%), followed by the West and North East (76.6% & 69.9%), and lowest in the South West and East (34.7% and 41%), TV ownership of at least one

77   Key Informant Interviews for this research, Afghanistan, January 2022
78   https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/Statistics_Report_Newsletter_2_02Feb2022.pdf
79   Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
80   Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
81   The Asia Foundation, 2019. A Survey of the Afghan People. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Afghan_Survey_Full-Report.pdf> [Accessed 17 February 2022].
82   Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022

functioning TV set per household was calculated as 69.3%. Given rural Afghanistan's limited access to electricity, TV ownership was unsurprisingly more common in urban areas (91%) than in rural areas (62%); however, this gap has steadily declined. Additionally, USAGM reported in 2015 that most of those who owned a TV used a terrestrial antenna (68.0%) rather than a satellite dish (individual 35% and 2.1% shared ownership) to receive their TV signal[83]. The leading commercial channel is TOLO TV[84]. The self-proclaimed "award-winning and market-leading channel"is operated by the Moby Group and broadcasts in Dari and Pashto on terrestrial transmission and satellite across the region. Other channels are Khurshid TV, an NGO TV channel[85] with a 6.8% audience and Yak TV and Ariana TV with lower audience shares (5.6% and 4.3%), though they have gained popularity with their well-received provision of news and information, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic[86].

However, since 15th August 2021, with the subsequent changes in programming, media consumers have indicated a loss of trust in Afghan national television channels and have increasingly turned to international providers such as Afghanistan International and BBC as their source of news and information on Television[87]. Such international channels are viewed on satellite and online, including BBC Persian, BBC Pashto, VOA and Afghanistan International; they will be discussed below in the digital media chapter (3.4).

The table below maps out the current top six national television channels in Afghanistan and includes data on ownership, the main source of funding, primary language, most popular programmes, and publicly available contact details.

Name of television channel	Weblink	Ownership	Main source of funding	Primary language	Most popular programme type	Publicly available contact details
TOLO TV	https://tolo.tv/	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	General Entertainment	Address: Tolo tv Street # 12, Kabul, Afghanistan Kabul, Kabul Province Tel: 079 932 1010
TOLOnews	https://tolonews.com/	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	News updates	Address: TOLOnews Street #12 Wazir Akbar Khan Kabul, Afghanistan Tel: +93 711 998 080 Tel: +0093 780389182
Lemar TV	http://www.lemar.tv	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Pashto	General Entertainment	Address: Street 12, Wazir Akbar Khan Kabul, Afghanistan Mailing Address: House 3, Street 12, Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul, KABUL 1003, Afghanistan
1 TV (Yak TV)	https://1tv.af	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	News updates	For Marketing related issues Tel: +93776111111 Email: web@1tv.af
Khurshid TV	https://www.khurshid.tv/	NGO supported	NGO supported	Dari	General Entertainment	Address: Koala Poshta 5th Street, Kabul, Afghanistan Tel: +93 79 88 00 464 Email: info@khurshid.tv
Shamshad TV	http://www.shamshadtv.tv/	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Pashto	General Entertainment	Address: Near Chaman -e Hozuri, Ghazi Stadium, Afghanistan Tel: 0093786676767 Email: sales@shamshadtv.tv

83 https://www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Afghanistan-research-brief.pdf
84 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
85 https://www.developmentaid.org/#!/organizations/view/106234/khurshid-tv
86 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
87 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022

4.3 Print Media at a glance

Although the oldest form of media in Afghanistan, print media has always had limited reach due to low literacy levels, covering only 1% of the population[88]. Moreover, given the high overheads involved in routinely producing and distributing print media, this sector has been most susceptible to the ongoing economic crisis and political change. The costs for print companies and consumers, particularly during economic hardship, have taken a toll on its popularity, encouraging most outlets to move online[89]. Only 20 out of 114 publications are still being published[90].

Popular with the educated groups in urban areas of Afghanistan[91] are secular newspapers such as EtilaatRoz. This publication had a reputation for reporting on nepotism and corruption in government and was Afghanistan's second-most-read daily newspaper.[92] However, like many newspapers, its finances were weak, and it struggled to cover costs[93] Some of the EtilaatRoz staff left Afghanistan on an evacuation flight in October 2022, following the violent arrest of two team members, while reporting on a women's rights protest in Kabul[94]. At the time of writing, it is unknown whether Etliaat Roz continues to print, but their website remains active and publishes numerous articles daily, with 143,000 visitors in January 2022.

Promoting themselves as the most popular newspaper with the largest coverage [95][96] in Afghanistan is Hasht-e-Subh Daily ("8 AM Daily" in English). This independent and not-for-profit newspaper is published in Dari and Pashto; they also have an English language website, with over 273,000 visits in January 2022.

Anis is a government-sponsored daily newspaper and the oldest publication in Afghanistan, dating back to 1946[97][98][99]. It publishes mainly in Dari (80%), with some Pashto articles (20%). The government also owns and manages the Bakhtar News Agency, which has a daily newspaper and online news agency. Although the reach of their newspaper is not known, their online platform received 39,000 page visits in January 2022.

The table below maps out the leading print newspapers in Afghanistan as of August 2021 and includes data on ownership, the main source of funding, primary language, most popular programmes, and publicly available contact details.

Name of media organisation	Weblink	Ownership	Main source of funding	Primary language	Most popular programme type	Publically available contact details
Hasht-e Subh (8 AM)	https://8am.af/eng/	NGO supported	Private funder	Dari	News updates	Editor-in-Chief: Mujib Mehrdad Email: mujib_mehrdad@yahoo.com
Arman-e-Meli	https://armanemili.com	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	News updates	Founder Said Shoaib Parsa Email: shoaib.parsa@yahoo.com Tel: 0093700189494
EtilaatRoz	https://www.etilaatroz.com	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	News updates	Address: Shura 3rd Street, Karte 3, Kabul Tel: 0797435777 Website: www.Etilaatroz.com
Mandegar	https://mandegardaily.com/	Commercial or Private company	Advertising / Commercial	Dari	News updates	Not Available
Bakhtar News Agency	https://bakhtarnews.af/	Government owned	Government funding	Dari	News updates	General Director for Bakhtar News Agency: Abdul Wahid Rayan Phone: +93707609524 Email: a.rayan@bakhtarnews.af

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88 https://medialandscapes.org/country/afghanistan/media/print
89 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Telecommunications researcher, Afghanistan, January 2022
90 https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/Statistics_Report_Newsletter_2_02Feb2022.pdf
91 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022
92 https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-10-22/afghanistan-journalists-flee-taliban-media-control
93 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/03/rattling-afghanistans-powerful-etilaat-roz-newspaper-exposes-corruption
94 https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-10-22/afghanistan-journalists-flee-taliban-media-control
95 https://8am.af/eng/about/
96 https://twitter.com/hashtesubhdaily?lang=en
97 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12013942
98 http://www.afghandata.org/
99 https://content.library.arizona.edu/digital/collection/p16127coll5/id/69

4.4 Digital Media at a glance

Digital media has quickly gained significant traction in urban Afghanistan. The rise in internet usage, coupled with the adoption of smart-enabled devices, has produced new sources of media and communication for citizens. Unfiltered news is shared directly, peer-to-peer using messaging and social media apps, challenging the once-dominant mass media, especially since the need for Taliban censorship (and the perceived self-censorship). International organisations such as the BBC, VOA, and Afghanistan International have not been affected by the current (Taliban) government's media legislation. Audiences who can access them have turned to these for accurate news that has not been influenced by the Taliban. The main digital outlets identified as most trusted sources of information and news[100] include BBC Persian (and BBC Dari), BBC Pashto, Ashna (VOA), Khaama Press, Amaj News and Afghanistan International.

This turn to international digital media has led to some taking advantage of this trust; an example of this occurred during the Panjshir conflict in September 2021, where fake social media posts were shared, inciting conflict posing as trusted outlets. Using the BBC Dari and BBC Pashto logos, fake postings were spread by private profiles that had BBC logos as their profile pictures[101].

The lower cost of online production has seen several media outlets completely shift their operations online because of the deteriorating economic situation in Afghanistan[102].

Khaama Press News Agency is one of the leading online news providers in Afghanistan, publishing in Dari, Pashto and English. They have a notable social media following, with over 1.7 million followers on Facebook[103]. They state they had 252,000 website page visits in January 2022, and their website receives over 3.5 million visitors in a month. Despite its strong online presence, Khaama Press is facing the same economic pressures; their website banner states that they are fundraising for their survival as they are "on the verge of a financial collapse due to the economic downturn in Afghanistan"[104].

Another notable online news agency is Pajhwok Afghan News, with over 2.4 million followers on Facebook[105] and 214,636 page visits in January 2022. Pajhwok's headquarters are in Kabul, and they have regional bureaus in Kandahar, Jalalabad, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Ghazni, Bamiyan, Khost and Kunduz. They produce stories in Dari, Pashto and English. They have their own mobile app available on IOS and Android[106].

Whilst some digital media outlets are closing their doors, others have only begun venturing into the Afghan media landscape. Afghanistan International is the most recent digital television channel and online platform to begin broadcasting and has since gained notable popularity[107]. Its planned launch date was brought forward from September to August 2021[108] as a direct response to Afghanistan's growing crisis and instability. The channel is owned by Volant Media, a private UK-based media company that owns and manages Iran International.

The BBC has long been a trusted outlet for news and information in Afghanistan[109]. The weekly audience figures for its radio, television and digital services was reported as 11.4 million in 2020, with the Pashto service reaching 8.3 million and Dari reaching 4.3 million[110]. The international broadcaster has correlated this reach to the link between the BBC's Pashto, Dari, Persian and Uzbek services with community broadcasting partners111.

The table below maps out the current leading six digital media websites in Afghanistan and includes data on

100   Key Informant Interviews for this research, Afghanistan, January 2022

101   Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022

102   Key Informant InterviewsInterviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022

103   https://www.facebook.com/KhaamaPress/

104   https://www.khaama.com/about-us/

105   https://www.facebook.com/pajhwoknews

106   https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/pajhwok-afghan-news/id971662051

107   Key Informant Interviews for this research, Afghanistan, January 2022

108   https://old.iranintl.com/en/world/volant-media-uk-launches-afghanistan-international-tv

109   Key Informant InterviewsInterviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022

110 BBC World Service – Written evidence (AFG0015), International Relations and Defence Committee inquiry into The UK and Afghanistan, September 2020, available at: https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/12006/default/.

111   https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/bbc-news-afghan-adults

ownership, primary language, the monthly number of users, most popular programmes, and publicly available contact details.

Name of media organisation	Weblink	Ownership	Primary language	Monthly number of users	Most popular programme type	Publicly available contact details
BBC Dari/ Persian	https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan	Government owned	Dari	Not available	News updates	Address: BBC Persian, 5th Floor, BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA, UK
BBC Pashto	https://www.bbc.com/pashto	Government owned	Pashto	Not available	News updates	Not available
Pajhwok	https://pajhwok.com/	Commercial or Private company	Pashto	267,810	News updates	Address: Hs. 130/138, st.8, Moy Mubarak bus stand, Taimani, Kabul, Afghanistan Tel: +93 (0) 20 220 1814 or +93 (0) 20 220 1915 Email: sales@pajhwok.com
Khaama Press	https://www.khaama.com/	Commercial or Private company	Dari	216,179	News updates	info@khaama.com
Amaj News	https://aamajnews24.com/	Commercial or Private company	Dari	7271	News updates	Address: Karte Parwan, PD4, Kabul, Afghanistan Email: News@aamajnews24.com WhatsApp: +93747892326 / +905012405040 / +9370 5606057

4.5 Social Media at a glance

Social media usage in Afghanistan is increasing, though both the price and quality of the internet continue to be the main barriers for this medium. Most internet users (70.1%) state accessing social media platforms as their most common activity online[112].

There has, however, been some changes since the 15th August Taliban takeover; some social media users have removed photos and tweets from their profiles, with others deleting their entire profiles due to fears of being targeted by the Taliban for criticising them[113] Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn[114] and Clubhouse introduced measures to protect their users in Afghanistan immediately after the 15th August, including allowing users to lock their profiles, deny access to content and automatically have pictures and personal data removed from their profiles.[115] Beporsed Ma Ra, a community-led online information service project by the Signpost NGO[116], shared a guide on how to stay safe while using Facebook in Afghanistan in Dari, Pashto and English[117].

Social media statistics in Afghanistan reveal Facebook to be the leading platform (79.42% in January 2022); other platforms include Twitter (7.84%), YouTube (4.86%), Pinterest (3.54%) and Instagram (2.26%).

While these older platforms serve to exchange news and information, newer social media platforms such as TikTok are primarily used for entertainment. Although some news content is shared amongst users, TikTok posts more often are of parodies and humorous commentary rather than being directly from news outlets[118]. The number of active users in Afghanistan for the platform was over 294,000 in 2021[119], and indications were that it was set for further growth in users[120]. Most Tiktok users are 25 - 34 years (69.3%), followed by those aged 18 - 24 years (29.1%). TikTok's features support Dari and Pashto text. They are popular for their inbuilt media creativity tools, which contrasts to the traditional American platforms such as Facebook, which are seen as mostly information-sharing platforms[121].

Facebook is popular, with 4.3 million Facebook users, most male (82.3%) and fall into younger age groups (18 - 24 years

112   The Asia Foundation, 2019. A Survey of the Afghan People. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Afghan_Survey_Full-Report.pdf> [Accessed 17 February 2022].

113   https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-58710194

114   https://www.reuters.com/technology/facebook-says-it-is-securing-afghan-user-accounts-amid-taliban-takeover-2021-08-19/

115   https://www.theverge.com/2021/8/21/22635378/clubhouse-removes-personal-info-user-accounts-afghanistan-taliban-safety

116   https://www.signpost.ngo/

117   https://www.beporsed-ma-ra.org/hc/en-us/articles/4411959786519-How-to-stay-safe-while-using-Facebook

118   Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022

119   https://www.start.io/audience/tiktok-users-in-afghanistan

120   https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/new-report-suggests-tiktok-will-surpass-15-billion-users-in-2022/610018/

121   Key Informant Interviews for this research: Media worker, Afghanistan, January 2022

old)[122]. Most media outlets are also active on Facebook Twitter use in Afghanistan is seen as for groups such as citizen journalists and bloggers, particularly for interacting with the international community. Twitter users in Afghanistan predominantly communicate in English, though there are posts in Dari and Pashto, the use of which has increased since August 2021[123].

Taliban members and representatives have utilised social media and their features to maximise their reach and increase their presence across these new platforms. Two of the most influential official Taliban spokespeople on Twitter include Zabihullah Mujahid (495,100 followers) and Suhail Shaheen (581,900 followers), who present the Taliban's views and share announcements.

YouTube is mostly used for accessing entertainment content, particularly with the current laws removing such content from television and radio. Music, soap operas, and films are the most popular content on YouTube. The relatively low number of users may be attributed to the high internet costs and data/speed demands needed for watching videos[124].

Clubhouse is a relatively new social media network launched in 2020, favoured among young, educated Afghans and the Afghan diaspora and refugee communities worldwide. The audio-based social media app allows the creation of virtual rooms on different topics, creating an environment like a live podcast or panel discussion. Despite Taliban members running several rooms encouraging open discussions, they are often hostile to those who criticise them and threaten to ban them from these rooms.[125]

Aside from social media platforms, social messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook Messenger are also very popular for enabling information exchange, sharing news, and maintaining contact with friends and family. Like Facebook, most of the 3.6 million Messenger users in Afghanistan are male (83.2%), though the user age is slightly higher, with the largest user group aged 25 to 34[126].

The level of anonymity provided by WhatsApp and Telegram with their end-to-end encryption features have made them popular compared to traditional social media profiles. However, this alone has not created a fully safe environment for journalists in Afghanistan who have received direct threatening messages on these platforms regarding their work. The ability to be anonymous applies both ways, with journalists and media organisations not knowing who in the chat group is there to monitor them and who is a genuine audience member[127].

4.6 Diaspora & Cross-border Media at a glance

UNHCR lists approximately 2.2 million Afghan refugees outside of the country at the end of 2021[128], with a further 2.25 million undocumented Afghans in Iran[129]. As most Afghans are multilingual[130], it has somewhat bridged language barriers for those displaced in Iran, where Farsi and Dari are closely related, and Pakistan, where Pashto is spoken in large areas.

In 2018, iFilm 2 was launched in Iran, specifically targeting Dari speakers within and outside of the country. The government-owned channel broadcasts films, soap operas and other entertainment content. Other government-sponsored channels for Afghan audiences in Iran include the Afghanistan division of Sahar TV[131], which offers news and information and entertainment content.

There are 48 million Instagram users in Iran[132], and despite its low number of users in Afghanistan, it is considered the most popular platform for the Afghan diaspora in Iran[133], partly due to the Facebook ban in Iran[134]. Afghans living in

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122 https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-afghanistan/2022/01/
123 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Afghanistan, January 2022
124 Key Informant Interviews for this research, Afghanistan, January 2022
125 https://nypost.com/2021/08/02/taliban-members-are-reportedly-running-clubhouse-chatrooms/
126 https://napoleoncat.com/stats/messenger-users-in-afghanistan/2022/01/
127 https://restofworld.org/2021/the-taliban-are-using-private-messaging-apps-to-threaten-afghan-journalists/
128 https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1350
129 https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/
130 https://translatorswithoutborders.org/language-data-for-afghanistan
131 https://af.sahartv.ir/
132 https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/iranians-on-socialmedia/
133 Key Informant Interviews for this research: Journalist, Iran, January 2022
134 https://www.iranintl.com/en/20211103926849

Pakistan still utilise Facebook given its popularity in the country (54 million Facebook users in Pakistan)[135].

The diaspora community are more likely to access government-owned channels in Iran such as iFilm 2 and Sahar TV, other Iranian channels, and Instagram for entertainment, whilst refugees with access to satellite or mobile phones opt for TOLO TV, Lemar and Facebook. Both groups stated they watched the national news in Iran during big events concerning Afghanistan, but only to accompany online searches and not as a main news source[136].

The Afghan Voice Agency (AVA) is a notable online news agency popular amongst Afghans living in neighbouring countries (see table below). The news agency has headquarters in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Bamyan, Jalalabad and Kandahar and has representative offices in Mashhad, Tehran and Qom in Iran, and Peshawar in Pakistan[137].

Name of media organisation	Weblink	Ownership	Primary language	Monthly number of users	Most popular programme type	Publicly available contact details
The Afghan Voice Agency (AVA)	https://avapress.com/en	NGO supported	Dari	134,622	News updates	Email: info@avapress.com Tel: 0093700275828 / 0093799343787

In Pakistan, UNHCR has partnered up with radio stations such as Radio Pakistan to produce programmes for Afghan refugees. They have also worked with Pashto-language broadcasters such as Deewa Radio, Mashal Radio, Ashna Radio, Khyber Television, and Mashriq Television[138]. The most popular media outlets followed by Afghan refugees in Pakistan include Shamshad (Afghanistan), Ashna Radio (VoA), Shamal (Afghanistan) and Geo (Pakistan). The BBC remains a trusted source for the displaced population in Pakistan, reaching 50 to 60 million Pashto speakers in Afghanistan and Pakistan and further afield. Several media organisations report locally from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and train Afghan refugees as citizen journalists as part of the DW Akademie project 'Displacement and Dialogue South Asia', these are:

» Power99, commercial radio station with a large reach, which has been broadcasting some Pashto and Dari programmes but has no written or dedicated pages. https://power99.live/

» Tribal News Network (TNN) https://www.tnn.com.pk/ distributes content in Pashto on Facebook and has several online channels as outlined in the table below:

Channel Name	Link	Active since	Number of followers / subscriptions
Tribal News Network –Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/TNNInfotainment	2014	460000 followers
Tribal News TV – YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSGaEBcM49Li9qGtonnhIFQ	2019	4600 followers
Tribal News Network- YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7tdDaKL3JKqSKhkcogyR6w	2015	35000 followers
@TNNEnglish	https://twitter.com/TNNEnglish	2015	6137 followers
@TNN_Updates	https://twitter.com/TNN_UPDATES	2017	1771
Tribal News Network- LinkedIn	https://www.linkedin.com/company/tribalnewsnetwork/mycompany/	2019	429 followers
Tribal_News_Network – Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/tribal_news_network/	2021	207 followers
TNN Urdu website	www.tnnurdu.com	2019	29300 users
TNN English website	www.tnn.com.pk	2014	12000

A qualitative study (2021)[139] with Afghan refugee men and women in Haripur and Swabi, conducted by Power 99, showed that social media is their biggest source of information. This is particularly true for young people. Refugees listen to foreign radio channels with Pashto programming such as RFE/RL's Mashaal and VoA's Deeva. WhatsApp and Facebook are also used for information and to stay in touch with their families abroad. They listen to the BBC Pashto language programme Nara Da Wakh, at 8 p.m and the Pushto and Dari Program from FM99.4 by Parveen Rehmati. Those that have TVs (estimated to be around 20%) access PTV news and PTV Home (terrestrial, state-owned TV) -

135 https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-pakistan/2022/01/
136 Key Informant Interviews for this research, Iran, January 2022
137 https://avapress.com/en/home/aboutus
138 Audience Research Of Afghan Refugees, Tribal News Network (TNN) supported by DW Akademie, (April 2021)
139 Enabling and Strengthening Refugee Voices, Afghan Refugees and Media in Pakistan - Concerns, Preferences and Challenges, POWER99 Foundation, (2021)

those with satellite dishes can access other news channels in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The media mostly followed by refugees are: Shamshad (Afghanistan), Ashna Radio (VoA), Shamal (Afghanistan) and Geo (Pakistan). According to feedback from refugees, their information needs, in order of priority are information about the situation in their villages and towns in Afghanistan, health issues, education, women's issues, and general awareness.

Audience Research conducted in Peshawar and Kohat districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by Tribal News Network[140], shows that TV and social media platforms, especially Facebook, are the main sources of news and information for 78% of Afghan refugees, partly because recorded news and information programmes can be accessed any time on social media though Radio is the preferred information source for 50% of refugees.

Interviews revealed that 94% of Afghan refugees use media sources for news and information almost every day (7 days a week). 89% prefer to do this from 6 PM to 9 PM, 22% before 6 AM, 11% 9 PM to late night, 6% 6 AM to 9 AM and 6% Noon (12 PM to 3 PM). It found that 27% of Afghan Refugees are interested in international media sources, 17% are interested in media sources owned by Afghanistan, 11% are interested in in social media, and 9% are interested in media sources owned by Pakistan. Media outlets such as BBC Pashto, Mashal Radio, and Deewa Radio are felt to report well on Afghan issues, and international media sources are felt to be authentic, sharing accurate and precise news and information about Afghans.

The study found that 67% of Afghan Refugees "don't have easy access to media sources", while for 56% it is "hard to find relevant programmes". In terms of content, 94% of participants were interested in topics around education, 50% health and 28% sports. Pashto and Dari are the preferred languages by Afghan Refugees for news and information programming.

4.7 Traditional forms of communication at a glance

Though television viewership, radio listening, internet usage and digital media in Afghanistan have gained popularity, traditional forms of communication such as mosque announcements and information exchange with friends and family remain equally important. Over 86% of respondents from the Survey of the Afghan People[141] identified family and friends as sources of information in 2019; they were most likely to be from rural areas (87.2%) than urban, and those in the North East were most likely to indicate their friends and family as a source of information (91.2%). Other traditional sources of information included mosques with 45.3%and the regions, where this was most common are the North East (54.8%) and North West (52.6), and mostly male (70%) than female (20.5%), and were older (59.9% aged 55 and over).

Like mosques, community shuras/jirgas are also seen as sources of news and information. Significantly more common amongst males (56.6%) than females (21.2%).

4.8 Media and Journalism Training

Before August 2021, Afghanistan had an active journalism training establishment supported by international media development organisations, with approximately 1800 students graduating annually at various levels of training[142]. This included 30 journalism schools housed in government, private and public universities providing tuition and training up to bachelor's degree level. Kabul University also offered a master's degree in journalism. Diploma level media and journalism training were also provided by the Kabul Journalism Institute and the Nai Media Institute. While the curricula taught within the universities are very traditional, the Nai Media Institute[143] had a more up-to-date curriculum and provided short courses in journalism. It is currently still supported by DW Akademie. The current economic circumstances and withdrawal of support mean that many media training establishments are no longer sustainable[144].

140 Audience Research Of Afghan Refugees, Tribal News Network (TNN) supported by DW Akademie, (April 2021)

141 The Asia Foundation, 2019. A Survey of the Afghan People. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Afghan_Survey_Full-Report.pdf> [Accessed 17 February 2022].

142 https://medialandscapes.org/country/afghanistan/education/media-development-organisations

143 https://nai.org.af/

144 Key Informant Interviews for this research; media development experts

This guide is one of a series of Media Landscape Guides which map the media landscape in different countries. The guides have been produced by the CDAC Network in cooperation with DW Akademie and supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. This project is part of the global initiative "Transparency and media freedom - Crisis resilience in the pandemic".