

Asia-Pacific



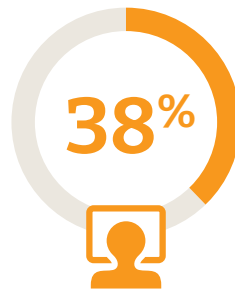
A global coalition working to make broadband affordable for all

[www.a4ai.org](http://www.a4ai.org)

# Bangladesh

## Affordability Report Highlights 2021

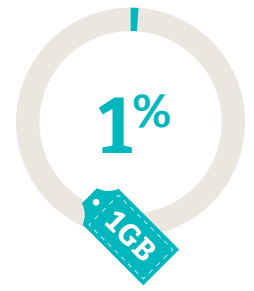
Bangladesh is working towards attaining the status of being a middle-income nation from its current status of low-income nation, as envisioned in its Vision 2021. Bangladesh has made strong progress in mobile internet penetration and it has increased nearly six-fold over the last decade. The country has invested in 4G networks covering 97.6% of the population. Bangladesh has 90 million unique mobile subscribers with a mobile penetration rate of 54% and 48.4 million mobile internet subscribers with a mobile internet penetration rate of 29.2%. Whilst Bangladesh meets the A4AI target of 1 for 2, device affordability still remains a huge barrier — the cost of internet enabled mobile handsets is still expensive. To ensure broadband connectivity for all, Bangladesh needs to have an effective National Broadband Policy and good spectrum management.



**ONLINE POPULATION**  
(Inclusive Internet Index, 2021)



**MOBILE INTERNET SUBSCRIBERS**  
(GSMA Intelligence, 2021)



**COST OF 1GB MOBILE BROADBAND**  
(AS % OF GNI)  
(A4AI-ITU, 2021)



### Bangladesh's Performance on the 2021 Affordability Drivers Index

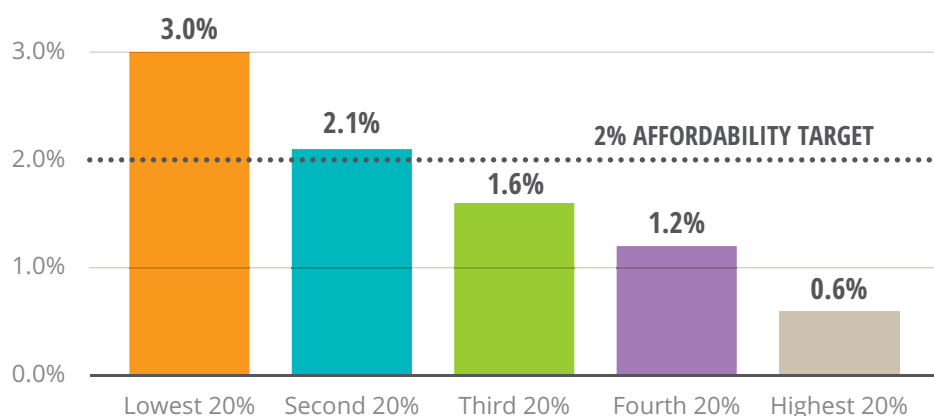
Bangladesh ranks 46th (out of 72 countries surveyed) on the Affordability Drivers Index, ADI. The ADI is a composite measurement of a country's policies, regulations, and market conditions as they relate to greater internet affordability.

ADI RANK	COUNTRY	ACCESS	INFRASTRUCTURE	ADI SCORE (OUT OF 100)
46	Bangladesh	47.8	46.6	50.0

Despite Bangladesh meeting the '1 for 2' affordability target at the national level, the price of 1GB of mobile broadband remains unaffordable – that is, more than 2% of the project monthly income – for the poorest 40% in the country.

This demonstrates the importance of continued efforts towards greater affordability to ensure that the internet is affordable for as many as possible.

**Affordability of 1GB by income quintiles, 2021**



## Policy Priorities for Bangladesh

### Gender

**POLICY SCORE: 2/10**

Bangladesh scores 2 out of 10 in women's mobile access, usage and empowerment. There is a huge divide between women and men in internet access and usage - 86% of men own a mobile phone, compared to 58% of women. Women and girls are still at a disadvantage despite efforts in reducing the gender gap in the use of digital technologies, digital skills and the use of mobile phones. These barriers are often driven by socio-economic and cultural factors. To reduce the gender digital divide, we need to provide opportunities to women and girls in Bangladesh to enable them to reap the benefits of digital technology. The Digital Bangladesh and the broadband policy should be evaluated using a gender lens. Government should look at ways to reduce the price of broadband and mobile data to allow more women to access the internet.

### Spectrum Management

**POLICY SCORE: 4/10**

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) monitors the use of spectrum management and is responsible for assigning frequency from different bands to mobile operators, broadband Wireless Access Service Providers, Satellite channels and Internet Service Providers. To date, seventeen ISP licenses have been assigned spectrum from different bands. The cost of acquiring spectrum is still expensive. Bangladesh needs to revise its spectrum management policy for operators to thrive and raise quality of service for its citizens.

### Universal & Public Access

**POLICY SCORE: 4.3/10**

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) created the Social Obligation Fund (SOF) to extend broadband connectivity and telecommunication facilities to people in rural and remote communities. Mobile operators are required to contribute 1% of the total gross revenues to the SOF. The SOF has been utilised to provide 772 unions with internet connectivity and is being used to connect the unconnected in Bangladesh. To ensure a successful implementation of the funds, the government needs to develop a Universal Access Policy with an action plan that benefits the citizens of Bangladesh. Bangladesh Government has implemented free and low cost internet access, free Wi-Fi, Digital Centres and free broadband connectivity in secondary schools.

## A4AI's Policy Recommendations

Bangladesh meets the 1 for 2 affordability target but there are a number of factors that hinder Digital Bangladesh progress - the tax on imported smartphones, the gender disparity between men and women using the internet or smartphones, the outdated regulations and policies, the lack of spectrum management policy and the under-utilised social obligation fund. The policy recommendations:

- 1 Champion gender-responsiveness in broadband policy and reduce the costs of broadband for women and girls**
- 2 Improve the spectrum management policy and allocate more spectrum to operators at a reasonable rate**
- 3 Develop the Social Obligation Fund/Universal Access policy to increase access to telecommunication services to rural and remote communities including vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities**
- 4 Develop a new National broadband policy with short-term, mid-term and long-term goals**
- 5 Connect all primary schools with computer laboratories and public libraries with low cost Wi-Fi and broadband connectivity by 2030**