

Argentina

Given high inflation rates, internet subscriptions are relatively expensive in Argentina and present a barrier for those with lower incomes. According to CABASE's report covering the first quarter of 2020, broadband prices were a high economic burden for some 27 percent of Argentine households.¹⁹

Argentina's main service providers have raised the cost of mobile plans. In March 2020, the largest mobile providers—Movistar, Claro, and Personal—introduced further price hikes between 14 percent and 17 percent for mobile prepaid and postpaid services.²⁰ According to the Argentine Internet Observatory (OIA), fixed internet prices can vary greatly: the minimum tariff for 1Mbps was 2.70 pesos (\$0.04) and the maximum was 1,000 pesos (\$14.60).²¹ In January 2020, the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) revealed that the cost of phone and internet services increased by 63.9 percent in 2019, surpassing the average inflation rate of around 53 percent. Perhaps in response to higher prices, a record 3.57 million users changed their mobile provider around the same time, according to ENACOM.²²

Geographic and socioeconomic differences in internet penetration persist: fixed internet subscriptions reach over 60 percent of households in provinces such as La Pampa, Buenos Aires, and Córdoba, whereas others such as San Juan, Santa Cruz, and Formosa are closer to 30 percent.²³ Around a third of the provinces in the country are still below 40 percent internet penetration, including Misiones (39.02 percent), Corrientes (38.73), Chaco (37.48), and Mendoza (33.14).²⁴ Many who lack internet access live in rural regions.

Government initiatives have sought to promote digital inclusion and education, although investment in such initiatives dropped in 2018 and 2019. ²⁵ A National Plan for Digital Inclusion provided training in digital literacy and digital skills to some 100,000 people in more than 100 cities by mid-2018,²⁶ and by July 2020, had reached nearly 370,00 people.²⁷ A program established in 2018, Aprender Conectados, also promotes coding laboratories and robotics kits for schoolchildren.²⁸ According to a study carried out by Google and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Argentina is among the countries in the region where children are given their first smartphone at an early age.²⁹

In February 2020, the Civil Association for Equality and Justice (ACIJ) sued Telefónica for failing to comply with a resolution issued by the Access to Information Agency ordering the ICT company to provide information about their business operations in the poorer neighborhoods of the city of Buenos Aires;³⁰ the company has been accused of discriminating against lower-income residents when it comes to offering telecom services.³¹ Moreover, in June 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic (and beyond the scope of this report's coverage period), several judicial protections were requested before the courts to compel the government of the city of Buenos Aires to provide children in need with the technological means to continue their studies remotely, as well as guarantee access to the internet.³²

In another reflection of the impact of Argentina's digital divide, a May 2020 investigation by the national daily *Clarín*

found that some of those among the 15 percent of the Argentine population that lacks internet access—mainly those in rural areas—did not learn about the COVID-19 pandemic until a month after it had reached Argentina.[33](#)

During the COVID-19 outbreak, the government and private companies announced temporary measures to facilitate better access to certain content and ease financial burdens on consumers. In March 2020, for example, the government announced a partnership with mobile operators to secure zero-rating—the practice of providing free internet access under certain conditions—for the public education platform Seguimos Educando.[34](#) The satellite television company DIRECTV made the education channel Escuela Plus, together with several entertainment channels, available to all its users, as well as their app DirecTV GO.[35](#) The mobile operators Personal and Movistar announced data plans meant to help customers who became stranded abroad.[36](#)

In the spring of 2020, ENACOM issued new regulations for telecommunications providers, including those offering internet and mobile services, that placed limits on when users could be cut off from such services due to unpaid bills. The regulation also instructed companies to allow users to pay pending bills in monthly installments, and prohibited telecoms from applying any kind of interest to those debts.[37](#)

In May, the national government also suspended all raises in telecommunications service rates, including broadband and mobile internet plans, phone and television, until August 31.[38](#) While the price freeze applied to services offered by the companies Telecom, Telefónica, Claro, DirecTV, and Telecentro, services from cooperatives and SMEs were not covered.[39](#)

During the same month, as part of a series of initiatives under the national health emergency, ENACOM announced new projects aiming to guarantee connectivity for marginalized communities. Using a dedicated fund of 100 million pesos (\$1.46 million), one of the programs would improve ICT access in underserved neighborhoods.[40](#)

While Law 27,078 protects net neutrality,[41](#) practices such as zero-rating are commonplace; for example, major mobile providers do not charge users accessing WhatsApp.[42](#) Following the 2017–18 megamerger between Telecom and Cablevisión,[43](#) zero-rated access offers were available to customers of Personal (mobile phone service) and Cablevisión Flow (over-the-top service) to watch the final match of the Copa Libertadores,[44](#) this service was extended to cover other TV content and rebranded as “Flow Pass”, while making it available to Personal customers.[45](#)