

Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024-25 Digital Divide & ICT Access



PRESS RELEASE

Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024-25

Internet Access Reaches 69% of Households, Yet Deep Gender, Rural, and Skills Gaps Continue to Limit Pakistan's Digital Inclusion

Islamabad, March 19th, 2026

The PSLM–HIES 2024–25 Social Report presents Pakistan's most comprehensive and up-to-date picture of digital access, usage, and exclusion at both household and individual levels. As digital connectivity becomes increasingly central to education, employment, financial inclusion, and access to public services, understanding who is connected—and who remains left behind—is critical for inclusive growth. Drawing on nationally representative data collected digitally from over 32,000 households, this edition examines not just access to devices and internet connectivity, but also effective usage, digital skills, and participation in the digital economy. The findings highlight rapid expansion in infrastructure and connectivity, alongside persistent inequalities shaped by gender, geography, affordability, and capability.

What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?

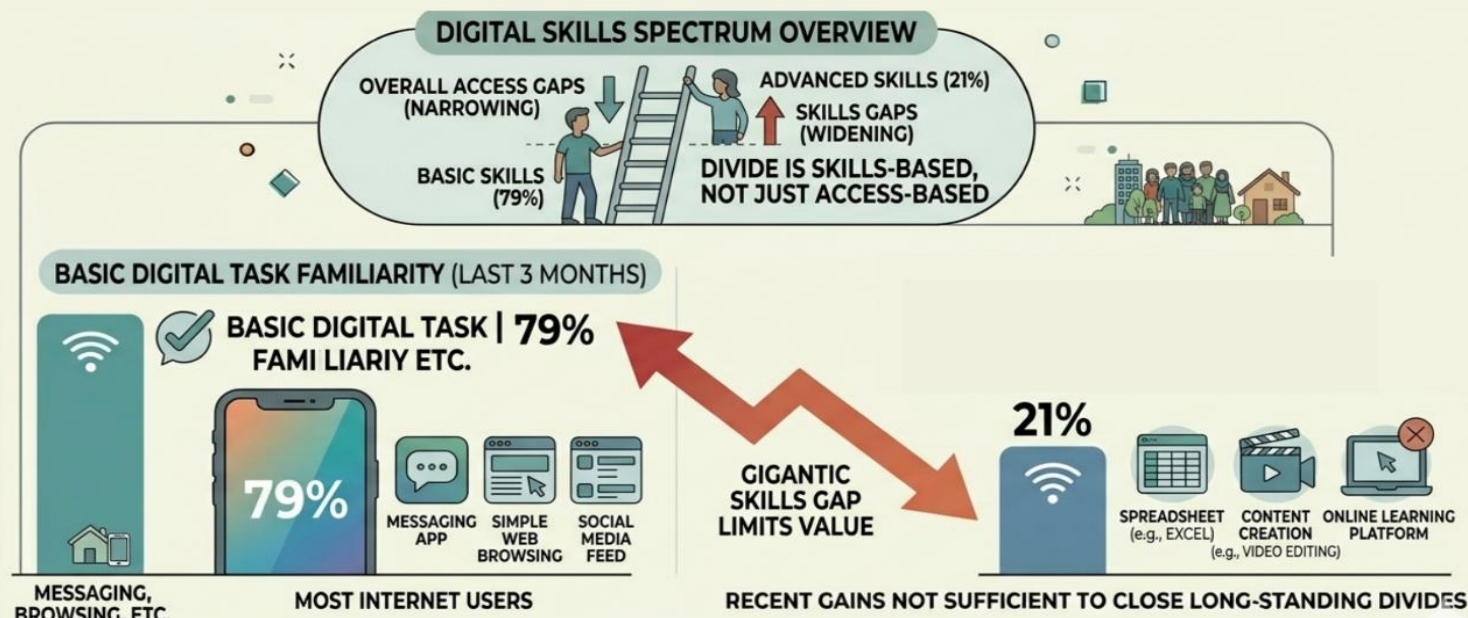
Gallup Pakistan's Big Data series was initiated by Bilal I. Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. As he explains: *"Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of data, but from limited accessibility and weak translation of numbers into understanding. Gallup Pakistan bridges this gap by analyzing large, often under-used datasets — from PSLM and Labour Force Surveys to Economic Surveys and National Census data — so these statistics can meaningfully inform policy and public discourse."*

What data points this current edition covers:

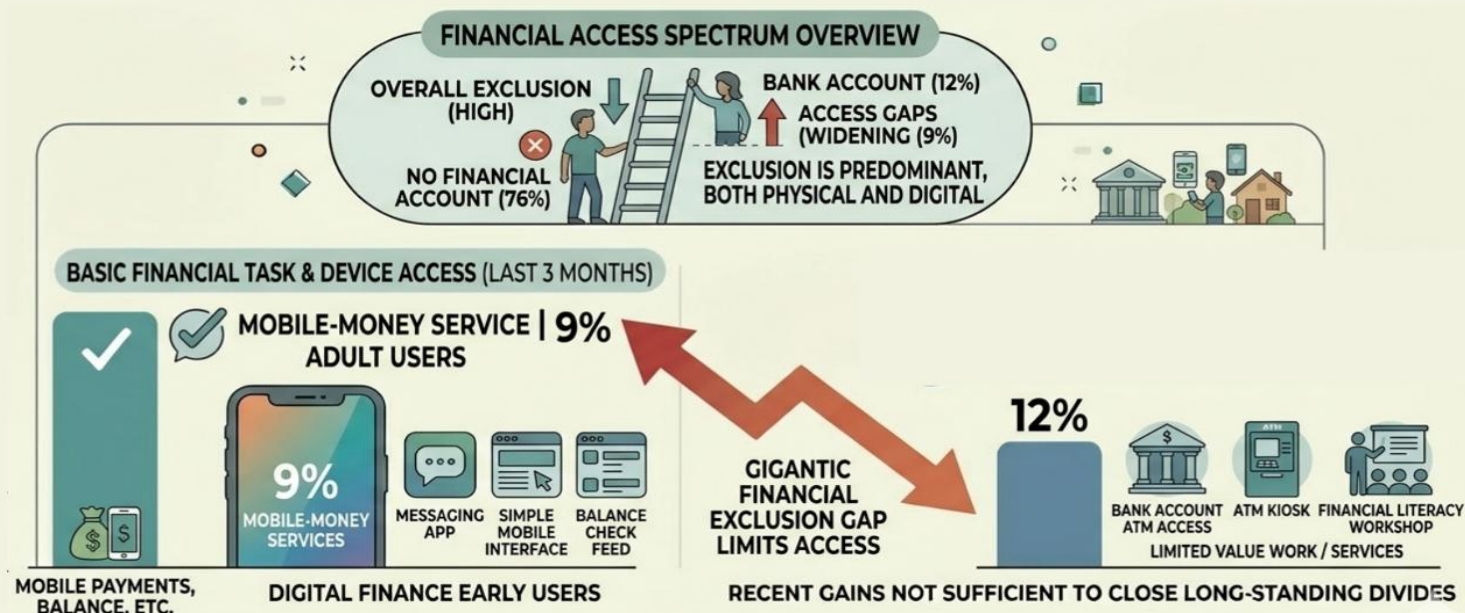
This press release draws on the Information & Communication Technology (ICT) module of PSLM–HIES 2024–25, covering both household-level access and individual-level usage among the population aged 10 years and above. Indicators include ownership of mobile phones, smartphones, computers and tablets; household internet connectivity; individual internet usage in the last three months; reported barriers to internet access; ICT skills (basic and advanced); and access to physical and digital financial accounts among adults aged 18 years and above. Wherever relevant, comparisons are made with the previous HIES 2018–19 round to highlight medium-term shifts in Pakistan's digital landscape.

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Digital Divide & ICT Access



Pakistan's digital divide is increasingly skills-based rather than access-based. Nearly four in five internet users (79%) report familiarity with basic digital tasks such as messaging or browsing, but only about one in five (21%) can perform advanced skills like spreadsheet use or content creation—restricting access to higher-value digital work and online learning.



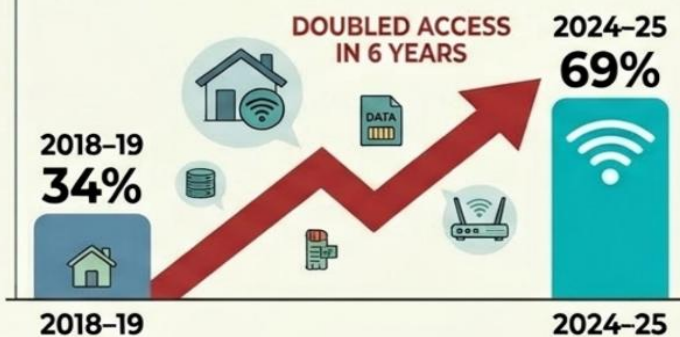
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Digital Divide & ICT Access

NATIONAL EXPANSION

34% to 69% CONNECTIVITY |
Effectively **DOUBLED** Access
within Six Years

COMPARATIVE CONNECTIVITY RATES



Internet access has expanded rapidly, but remains uneven. A clear majority of Pakistanis now live in households with some form of internet access; however, usage continues to lag sharply among women, rural residents, and older age groups, indicating that physical availability has not translated into universal participation.

HOUSEHOLD DEVICE ACCESS

96%
OF HOUSEHOLDS NOW
REPORT ACCESS TO A
MOBILE OR SMARTPHONE



Mobile phone ownership is widespread, but effective internet use remains limited. While most households report access to a mobile phone, only a fraction of users actively use the internet, highlighting a persistent gap between device ownership and meaningful digital engagement.

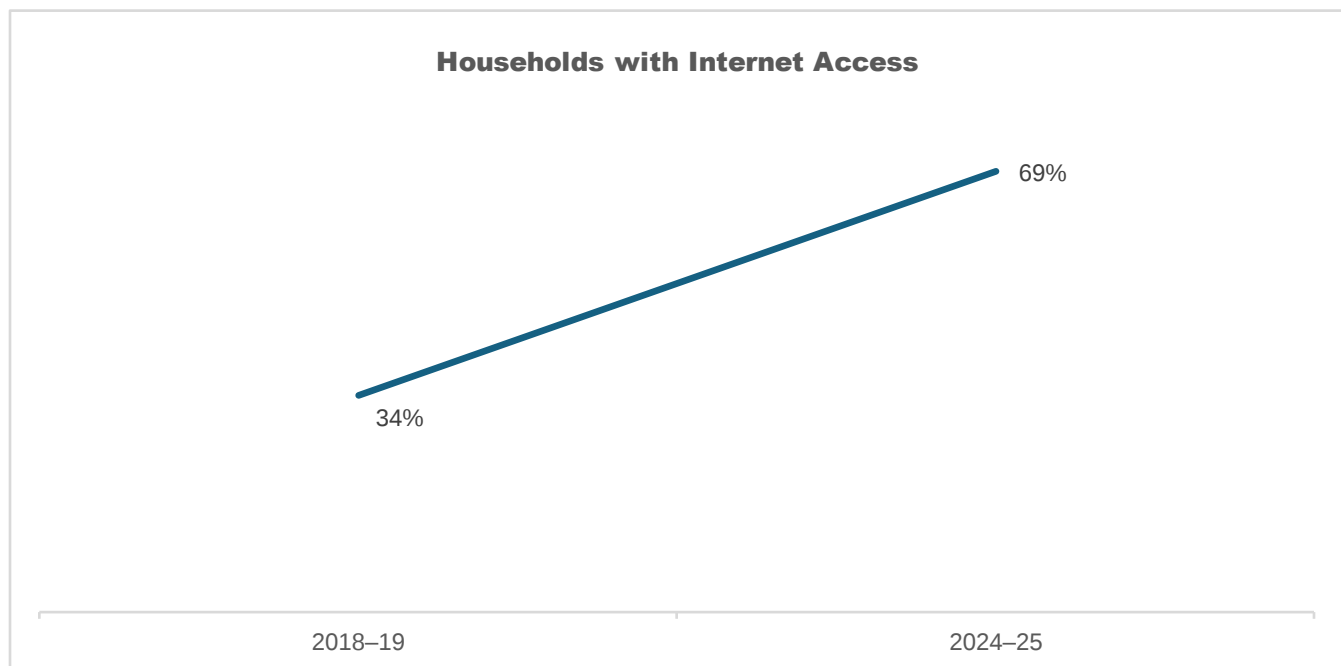
Key Findings:

1. Internet access has expanded rapidly, but remains uneven. A clear majority of Pakistanis now live in households with some form of internet access; however, usage continues to lag sharply among women, rural residents, and older age groups, indicating that physical availability has not translated into universal participation.
2. Mobile phone ownership is widespread, but effective internet use remains limited. While most households report access to a mobile phone, only a fraction of users actively use the internet, highlighting a persistent gap between device ownership and meaningful digital engagement.
3. Affordability and relevance are the biggest barriers to going online. Among those without internet access, cost of devices and data packages emerge as the leading constraints, followed by lack of perceived usefulness and limited digital literacy, particularly in rural areas.
4. Pakistan's digital divide is increasingly skills-based rather than access-based. Nearly four in five internet users (79%) report familiarity with basic digital tasks such as messaging or browsing, but only about one in five (21%) can perform advanced skills like spreadsheet use or content creation—restricting access to higher-value digital work and online learning.
5. Women and rural populations face compounded digital exclusion. Across internet use, ICT skills, and digital services, women and rural residents consistently trail men and urban populations, reinforcing structural inequalities in education, employment, and financial inclusion.
6. Digital financial exclusion remains widespread. Despite growth in digital services, a substantial share of the population remains without any bank or digital account, limiting the reach of digital payments, government transfers, and online commerce.

1. School Internet Access Explosion — Who Is Still Left Out?

Pakistan has experienced a dramatic expansion in household internet connectivity, rising from 34% in 2018–19 to 69% in 2024–25, effectively doubling access within six years. This growth reflects large-scale rollout of mobile broadband, declining data costs, and increased reliance on digital platforms following COVID-19. Provincial gains have been particularly notable in historically lagging regions, with Balochistan recording one of the sharpest increases in household connectivity.

However, this headline progress masks deep structural divides. Urban households remain significantly more connected than rural households, where infrastructure gaps, weaker network coverage, and affordability constraints persist. While internet access is approaching universality in major cities, rural areas continue to lag behind, reinforcing digital inequality along geographic lines. Gender disparities also remain embedded at the household level, as access often reflects male ownership and control of devices rather than shared usage. As a result, connectivity gains have not translated evenly into individual empowerment, particularly for rural women and girls.



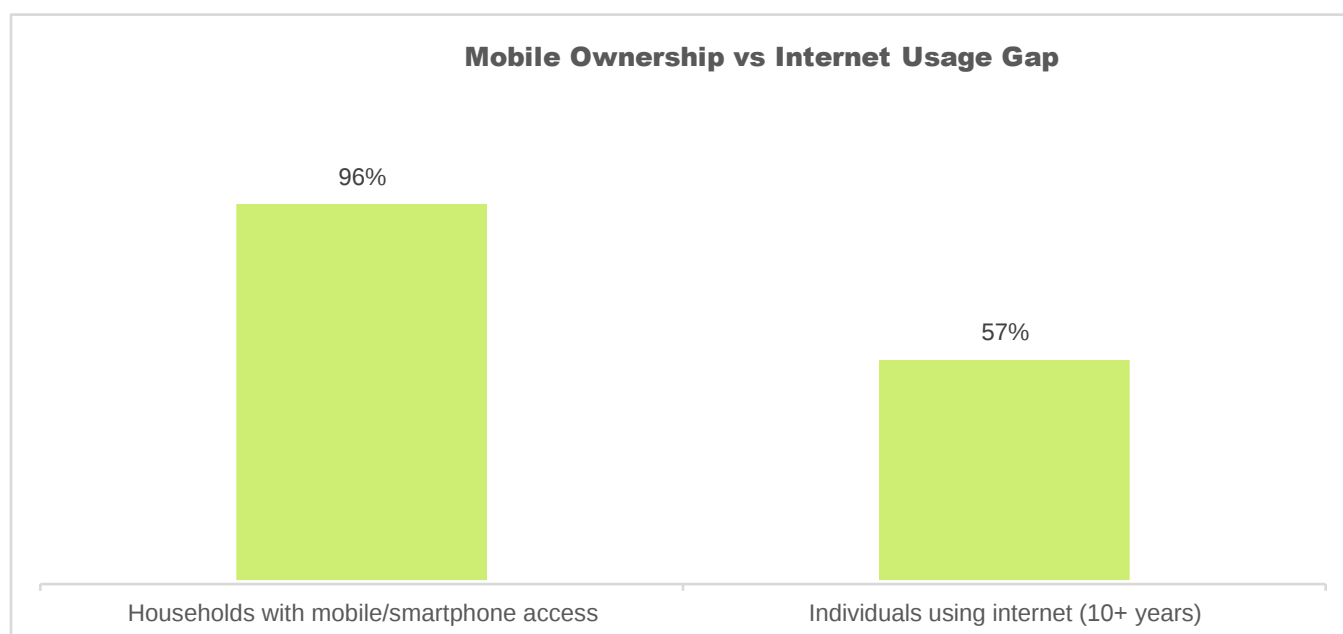
Source: Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) / Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024–25; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

2. Mobile Phone Ownership vs. Actual Internet Use: Access ≠ Usage

Although 96% of households now report access to a mobile or smartphone, effective internet usage remains far lower at the individual level. Only 57% of individuals aged 10 years and above reported using the internet in the last three months, indicating a substantial gap between device availability and functional digital engagement.

This access–usage disconnect is especially pronounced among women. While 50% of the population owns a mobile phone, only 31% of females report owning a device, limiting their independent access to digital services. Even among those with device access, social norms, restricted mobility, and lower digital confidence reduce actual usage. Rural females remain the most digitally excluded group, combining geographic, economic, and gender-based barriers.

Notably, mobile phone usage declined from 91% to 83% between 2018–19 and 2024–25, suggesting that while smartphones have proliferated, consistent and meaningful use is being constrained by cost pressures, network quality, and competing household priorities.

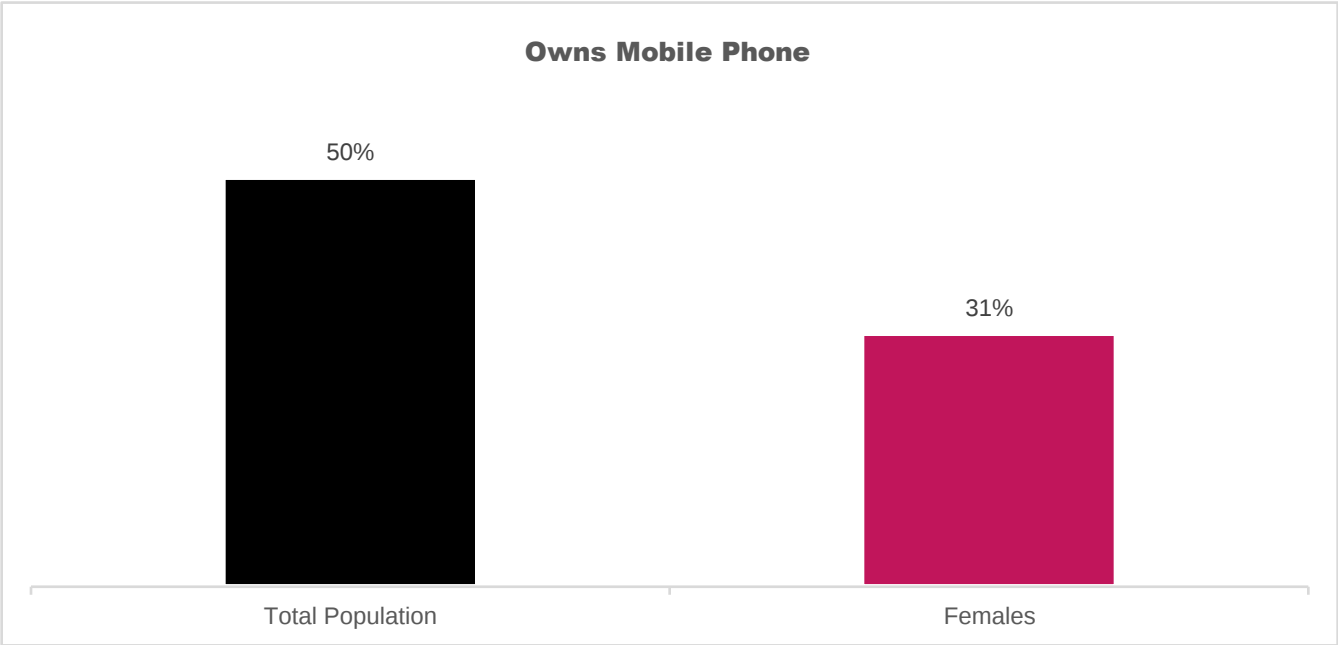


Source: Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) / Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024–25; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

3. Barriers to Internet Access: Cost, Coverage, and Perceived Relevance

Among households without internet access, affordability emerges as the single most significant barrier, followed closely by poor service quality and lack of coverage, particularly in rural and remote areas. For many low-income households, recurring data costs remain prohibitive despite declining headline prices.

Equally important is the “lack of perceived need”, which reflects limited awareness of how the internet can improve livelihoods, education outcomes, or access to services. This barrier is especially common among older adults, women, and populations with low educational attainment. The persistence of relevance-related barriers indicates that infrastructure expansion alone is insufficient; without parallel investments in digital literacy and local-language content, connectivity risks remaining underutilized.

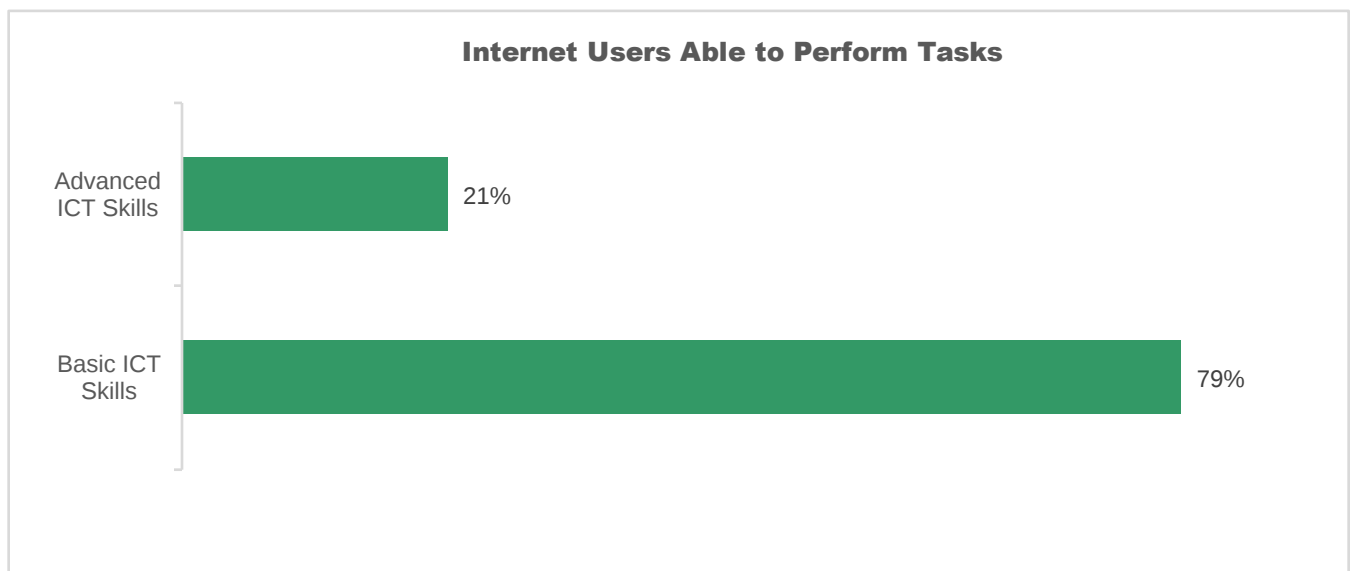


Source: Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) / Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024–25; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

4. ICT Skills Deficit: Basic Tasks Common, Advanced Skills Rare

The survey reveals a sharp divide between basic and advanced ICT skills. A majority of internet users report familiarity with basic functions such as messaging, copy-pasting, or simple browsing. However, advanced skills—such as spreadsheet use, online content creation, or software handling—remain limited, particularly among women and rural populations.

This skills gap has direct economic implications. While basic connectivity enables social communication, the absence of advanced digital competencies restricts participation in higher-value digital work, online learning, and technology-enabled entrepreneurship. The findings suggest that Pakistan’s digital divide is increasingly skills-based rather than purely access-based, underscoring the need to shift policy focus from devices to capabilities.

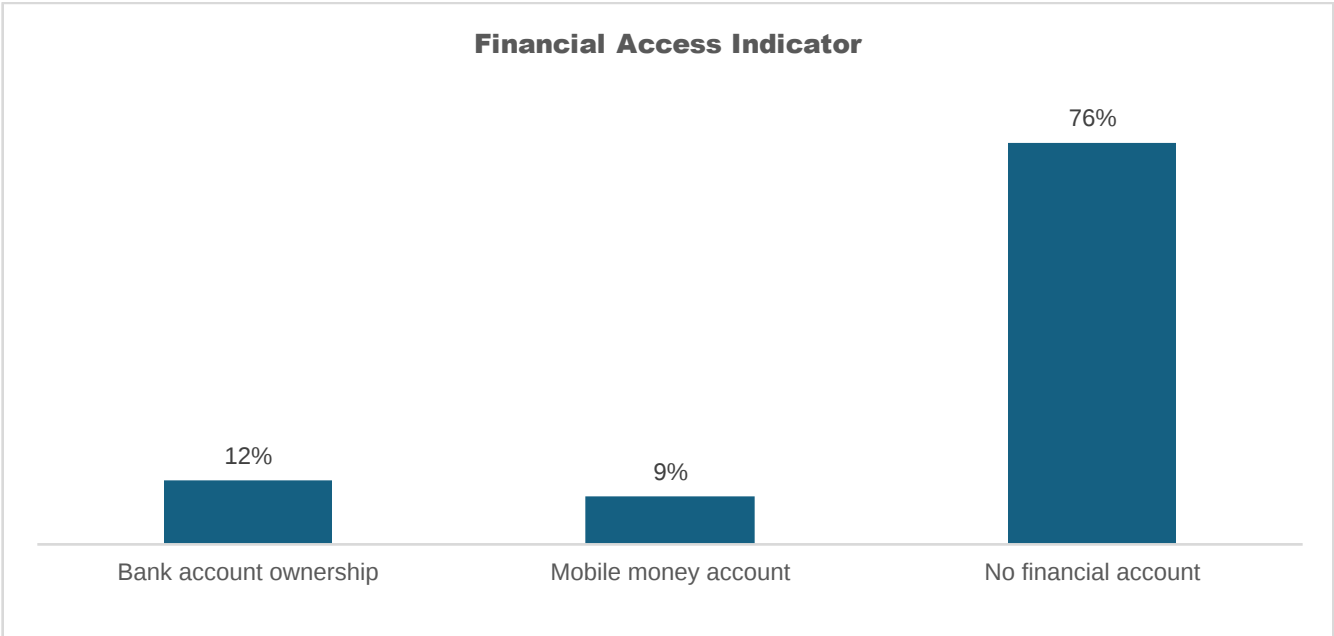


Source: Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) / Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024–25; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

5. Digital Financial Exclusion: Connectivity Without Inclusion

For the first time, PSLM–HIES measures digital and physical financial account ownership, revealing stark exclusion. Only 12% of adults report owning a bank account, while 9% use mobile-money services. Alarming, 76% of the adult population has no financial account at all, digital or physical.

This indicates that rapid growth in internet access has not translated into financial inclusion. Barriers include lack of documentation, low trust in financial institutions, limited digital literacy, and gender-based restrictions on financial autonomy. Women are disproportionately excluded, reinforcing broader patterns of economic marginalization. Without targeted interventions, Pakistan risks entrenching a form of “connected exclusion”, where citizens are online but remain outside the formal digital economy.



Source: Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) / Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2024–25; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

6. Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the PSLM–HIES 2024–25 findings show that Pakistan has entered a new phase of its digital transition—one defined less by infrastructure scarcity and more by inequality in usage, skills, and economic participation. While internet connectivity has expanded rapidly, persistent gaps by gender, region, and income threaten to limit the inclusive potential of digital transformation. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated investments in affordability, digital literacy, gender-responsive access, and integration of digital services with education, finance, and livelihoods.



Wish to Contribute to Gallup Big Data Analysis?

Gallup Pakistan is looking for collaboration with researchers to expand the Big Data Analysis project. If you have any ideas, please write to Bilal I Gilani, Project Director, Big Data Analysis at Gallup Pakistan.

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