

Asiacell to offer free access to Wikipedia in Iraq

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An advertisement for mobile phone provider Asiacell in Baghdad

The Wikimedia Foundation, which runs online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, said Tuesday that telecoms operator Asiacell will offer free access to the website to its nearly 12 million mobile phone customers in war-torn Iraq.

The partnership is the first by a telecoms operator in Iraq and the

foundation's Wikipedia Zero project, which waives [mobile data](#) fees to subscribers of participating [telecom operators](#) so they can access Wikipedia without using their mobile data.

The news was announced at the Mobile World Congress, the biggest mobile event of the year, in Barcelona in northeastern Spain, which wraps up on Thursday.

"Asiacell customers will be able to edit Wikipedia without mobile data charges—adding to and improving articles in their preferred language and sharing knowledge of Iraq's rich cultural history, heritage and its people with the rest of the world," the foundation said in a statement.

Like Wikipedia, Facebook and Google also operate programmes internationally that exempt from users' data caps to help boost access to information in developing nations.

Asiacell was the first mobile telecommunications provider in Iraq to achieve nationwide coverage. Its network covers 99 percent of the Iraqi population.

Wikipedia, which has over 40 million articles in nearly 300 languages, is written by volunteers around the world and its articles are edited by registered users.

It has been run since 2003 by a non-profit organisation, the Wikimedia Foundation, which is headquartered in San Francisco in the United States.

Wikipedia receives more than a billion single visits a month, making it one of the most visited websites in the world, according to the foundation.

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