GSMA

# Igniting Mobile Investment in Eurasia

## An evaluation of infrastructure policy readiness



September 2026

## Introduction

As Eurasia's digital economy continues to expand and evolve, the need for robust, future-ready connectivity has never been greater. It is therefore essential that stakeholders work together to promote policies that support mobile infrastructure development.

To help address this challenge, the GSMA has developed the Infrastructure Policy Readiness Framework, which supports regulators by enabling them to compare policy and regulatory environments across selected countries and identify strategies to accelerate mobile infrastructure investment in their own markets.

By adopting the recommendations from the Framework, regulators across the Eurasia region can create a more enabling environment for innovation, investment and the expansion of mobile connectivity.

This paper highlights the key insights generated through the Framework's holistic approach, including industry challenges, policy gaps and practical recommendations to strengthen mobile infrastructure development.

GSMA – Policy and Regulation

Subscribe to the GSMA Eurasia Newsletter

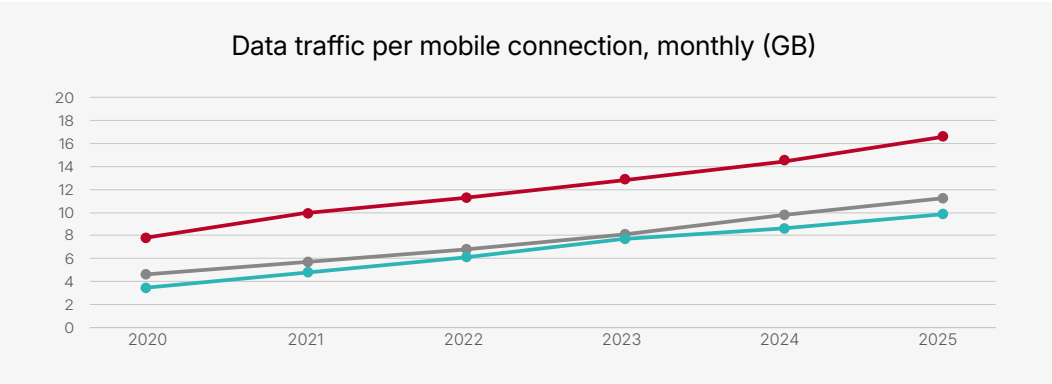
GSMA

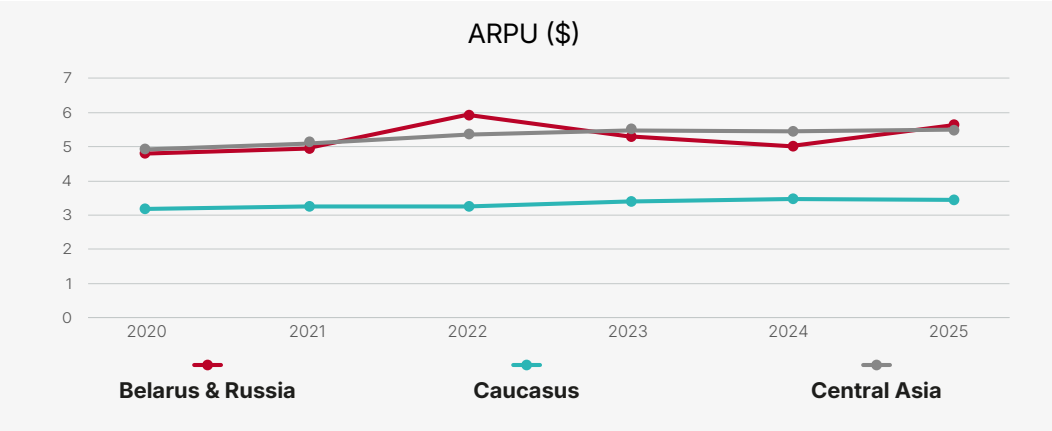
Copyright © 2026 GSMA

# Mobile operators face a challenging business environment

While Eurasia has made encouraging progress in mobile network development, including widespread 4G adoption and the ongoing transition to 5G, operators are facing increasingly complex market conditions. This affects their ability to continue modernising their networks and make the investments needed to meet growing connectivity demands.

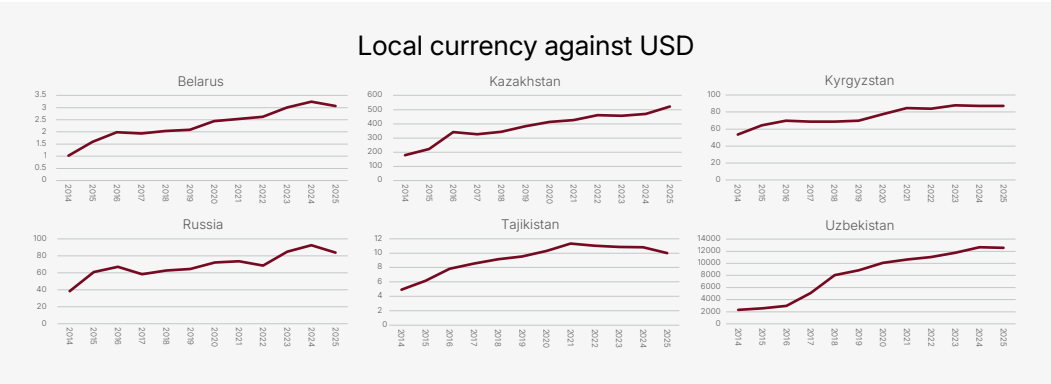
## A. Revenues have not kept pace with data traffic growth



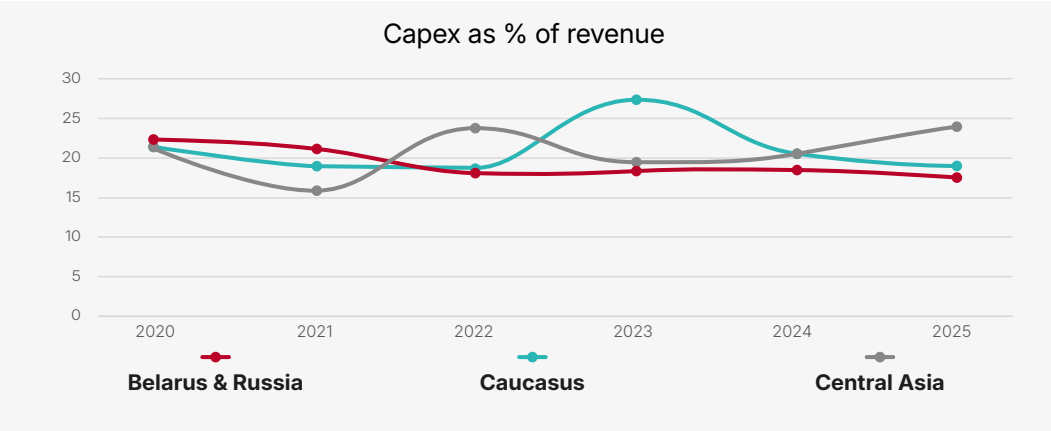




Source: GSMAi
- Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan)
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan)

## B. Tough business and macroeconomic environment

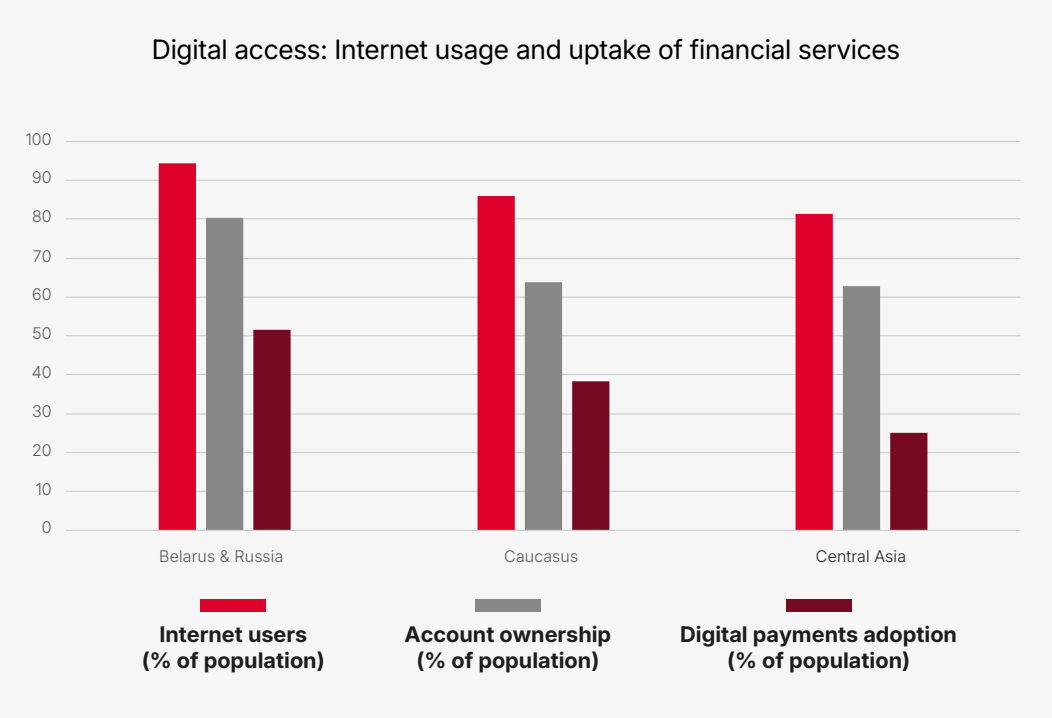



Source: World Development Indicators - World Bank



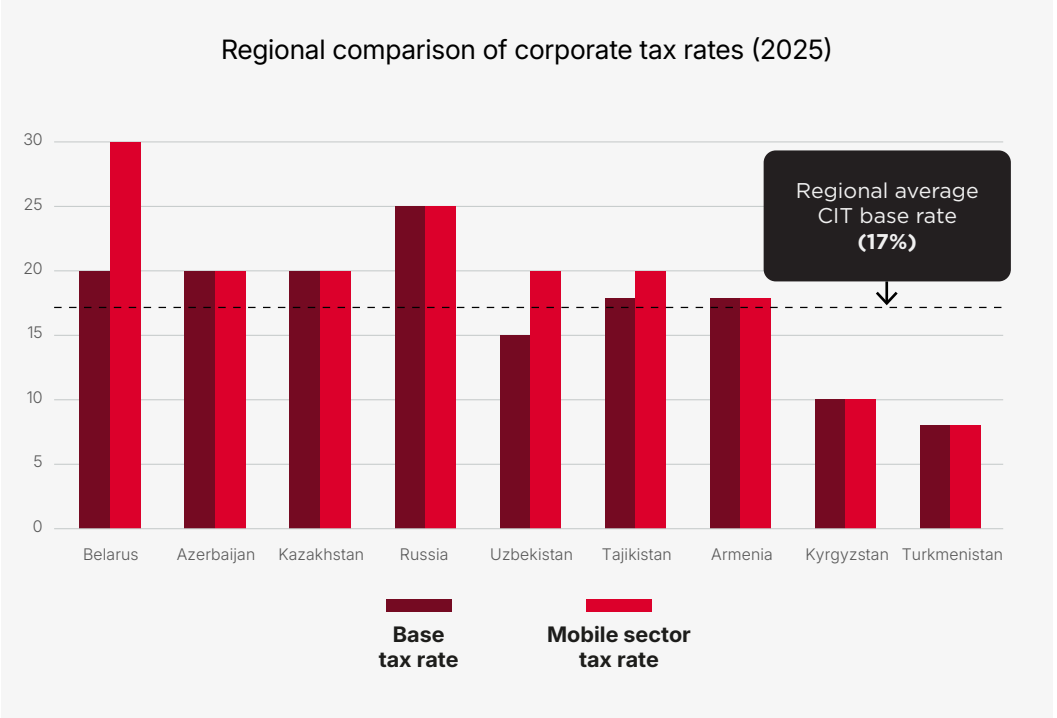

Source: GSMAi

## C. While internet adoption is high, adoption of digital payments remains low




Sources: World Development Indicators 2024, Global Findex Database 2025, Statista 2024

## D. Higher-than-average and sector-specific corporate taxation places additional burden on mobile operators




Sources: Operator data and GSMA analysis

## Policies impacting mobile infrastructure development

Using the MIPS tool[1], the GSMA reviewed policies across the Eurasia region to identify barriers that constrain mobile investment. These are grouped into the four broad themes outlined below.



### Consultation process

- → Public consultation
- → Time to respond
- → Consultation documents published on website



### Regulation

- → Universal Service Funds
- → Retail tariff regulation
- → Quality of Service (QoS) fines
- → Technology neutrality



### Network deployment

- → Right-of-way (RoW) policy
- → EMF restrictions
- → Tower-related restrictions



### Taxes and fees

- → Sector-specific levies on operators
- → Sector-specific taxes on consumers

1. https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/public-policy/mips-evaluating-your-national-policy-environment-for-mobile-sector-investment/

## Key policy issues requiring improvement

The table below outlines the key policy issues identified across the four themes in nine markets in the region. Each dot (●) denotes an area where policy and regulatory frameworks could be strengthened.

| Theme | Issue | Belarus | Kazakhstan | Uzbekistan | Tajikistan | Russia | Azerbaijan | Armenia | Kyrgyzstan | Turkmenistan |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Consultation process** | Lack of consultation procedure | ● | ● | | ● | | | | | ● |
| | Less time provided to respond during consultation* | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| | Consultation documents not always published online† | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● | | | ● |
| **Regulation** | Presence of USF | ● | | | ● | ● | | | | |
| | Retail tariffs regulated | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | | ● | ● |
| | High QoS fines | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | ● | | |
| | Technology-neutral licensing not permitted^ | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| **Network deployment** | No consolidated Right of Way guidelines | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| | Restrictive EMF limits§ | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | |
| | Tower-related restriction | ● | ● | | ● | | | | | |
| **Taxation** | Sector-specific revenue-based levies on operators | | ● | ● | ● | | | | ● | |
| | Sector-specific taxes on consumers | | | ● | ● | | ● | | | ● |

* Less than 30 days on average, † consultation paper, stakeholder comments, recommendations, ^ Russia: limited to nationwide operators, Uzbekistan: additional fees might apply for 5G use, § Compared to ICNIRP guidelines
Note: This is based on public information available and industry interviews

# Recommendations: Policies to enable infrastructure investment

Policymakers should actively create an investor-friendly environment for infrastructure development. Reducing investment risks would also support the sustainable expansion of telecommunication networks, particularly as the demand for high-speed connectivity continues to rise. By learning from other markets that have successfully implemented best practices, policymakers and regulators can take specific steps to boost investment in advanced mobile connectivity.

In this section, we provide recommendations based on our previous work *Energising Mobile Network Investment*[2], where each policy action is based on broad principles and has been tailored to be relevant to the policy barriers specific to the Eurasia region.



## Flexibility to operate

- ✓ Modernise licensing framework
- ✓ Streamline network deployment rules



## Fairness of regulatory framework

- ✓ Minimise regulatory intervention
- ✓ Ensure transparent evidence-based decision-making



## Fiscal burden reduction

- ✓ Minimise sector-specific levies on operators
- ✓ Remove sector-specific levies on consumers



## Facilitation by government

- ✓ Recognise mobile operators as key partners in national digital transformation
- ✓ Encourage mobile operator initiatives to offer new capabilities and services

2. Energising Mobile Network Investment: https://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/resources/Energising-Mobile-Network-Investment

## Flexibility to operate

| Principle | Recommendations |
|---|---|
| **Modernise licensing framework**<br>Licensing authorities should progressively modernise the licensing framework to better align with evolving industry needs | 1. If an existing USF cannot be managed effectively within a reasonable timeframe, it should be phased out.<br>Example: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan do not seek USF contributions from mobile operators.<br><br>2. Allow technology-neutral licensing, including for 5G and beyond.<br>Example: Uzbekistan and Russia have technology-neutral licensing. |
| **Streamline network deployment rules**<br>Leverage network infrastructure policies to encourage greater investment in the sector | 1. Countries in the Eurasia region should have streamlined processes for securing Right of Way to help speed up deployment.<br><br>2. Adopt EMF-related policies in line with ICNIRP recommendations.<br>Example: no evidence identified of restrictive EMF limits for Turkmenistan.<br><br>3. Remove restrictions that prevent or delay operators from installing towers.<br>Example: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan do not have any tower-related restrictions. |

## Fairness of regulatory framework

| Principle | Recommendations |
|---|---|
| **Minimise regulatory intervention**<br>In competitive mobile markets, the regulator should keep interventions to a minimum | 1. Avoid regulatory intervention on retail prices and provide more flexibility to operators to align with market realities.<br>Example: Armenia, Russia and Uzbekistan do not have retail tariff regulation.<br><br>2. Avoid imposing onerous financial penalties, in areas such as quality of service requirements, as these can be counterproductive and add to operators' compliance costs.<br>Example: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Russia do not have high QoS fines. |
| **Evidence-based decision-making**<br>Transparent stakeholder engagement improves the quality and predictability of regulatory decisions | 1. Engage stakeholders throughout the policy-making process to develop inclusive, well-informed policies and foster greater regulatory trust and collaboration.<br>Example: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Uzbekistan conduct consultation processes.<br><br>2. Support evidence-based decision-making by allowing sufficient time for operators to respond to consultations and clearly explaining how stakeholder input shaped the final recommendations and policies.<br>Example: Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Russia mostly publish consultation documents online. |

## Fiscal burden reduction

| Principle | Recommendations |
|---|---|
| **Minimise sector-specific revenue-based fees on operators** | 1. Adopt broad-based taxation and minimise or remove sector-specific revenue based levies on operators.<br>Example: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and Turkmenistan do not have sector-specific revenue-based levies on operators. |
| **Remove sector-specific taxes on consumers** | 1. Remove sector-specific levies on mobile consumers.<br>Example: Uzbekistan abolished the 10% excise duty on mobile services in 2025. |

## Facilitation by government

| Principle | Recommendations |
|---|---|
| **Recognise mobile operators as key partners in national digital transformation** | 1. Engage mobile operators as strategic partners in national digital initiatives, building on their network investments, capabilities and reach to support the delivery of digital services across government and key economic sectors through commercial collaboration.<br>Example: Uzbekistan's Digital Uzbekistan 2030 programme integrates telecom infrastructure development into the country's wider digital transformation, including broadband expansion and 5G deployment. |
| **Encourage mobile operator initiatives to offer new capabilities and services** | 1. Clarify regulatory frameworks that enable operators to offer capabilities such as network APIs, identity and authentication that can be integrated into government, financial and other digital services.<br>Example: Russia's four nationwide mobile operators jointly provide Mobile ID, enabling businesses to use operator-based authentication and verified customer data through a common solution, based on GSMA Mobile Connect specifications. |

GSMA

1 Angel Lane, London, EC4R 3AB, UK