

# Free Basics in Colombia

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*This case study was conducted as part of a research project by Global Voices, an international citizen media organization. The findings described here, along with findings from five other countries and can be found in our final report, "Free Basics in Real Life: Six Case Studies on Facebook's Internet "On Ramp" Initiative from Africa, Asia and Latin America." Read the final report at <https://advox.globalvoices.org/2017/07/27/can-facebook-connect-the-next-billion>.*

*Additional screenshots may be found at:*

*<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B4CiTwxNUEN3aXppM3p4ZW9UMUk>*

## Overview

Colombia was the first country in Latin America where Facebook launched the Free Basics App in January 2015, through a joint partnership with Tigo, which is operated by Millicom (operated by Millicom International Cellular SA, headquartered in Luxembourg).<sup>1</sup>

ITU data indicate that since 2013, the percentage of individuals using the Internet in Colombia has hovered around 50%. Mobile subscriptions per 100 inhabitants has been over 100% since 2013. This does not mean that all individuals have mobile subscriptions, but rather that an increasing proportion of the population has more than one subscription.

The Freedom on the Net report gave Colombia a score of 32 out of 100 possible points (with zero indicating a wholly "free" Internet and 100 indicating a thoroughly "not free" Internet) in their methodology, which measures Internet access, limits to online content, and user rights of privacy and free expression.<sup>2</sup>

The most dominant telecommunication methods people use to communicate in Colombia are TV, radio, newspapers, Internet (fixed broadband and mobile data), mobile phone calls and calls through fixed land telephony. The most used and popular mobile messaging apps are WhatsApp (which until recently was available via multiple telco operators at no additional cost to the subscriber) and Facebook Messenger.

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<sup>1</sup> Full story in Spanish in: <http://www.mintic.gov.co/portal/604/w3-article-8152.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/report/table-country-scores-fotn-2016>

Colombians get their news from television, traditional newspapers, radio and social media.

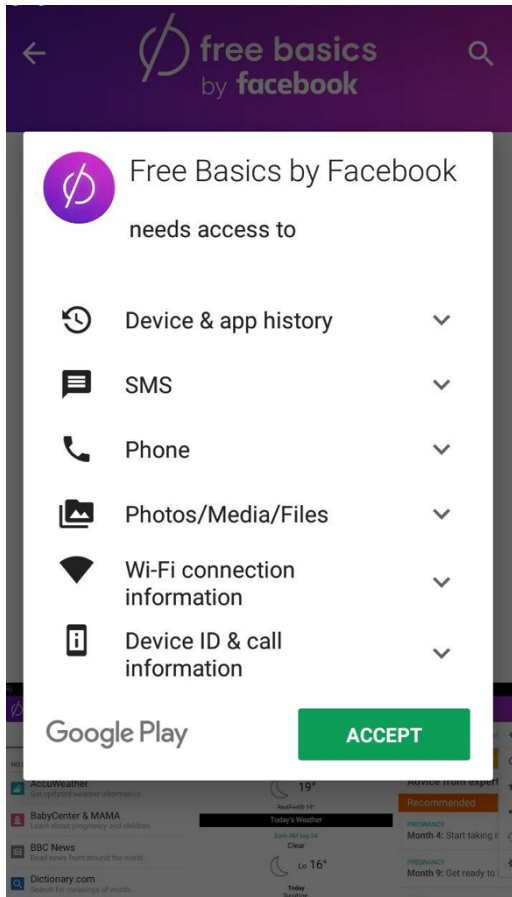
### **How to buy a Free Basics plan**

To use Free Basics, a mobile user needs a basic Android smartphone with a Tigo mobile phone chip. There is no additional cost to the plan, apart from a baseline subscriber fee that covers talk and text services. These can be obtained via a pre-paid or post-paid SIM card, which can be purchased at the sales point offices of the telcos or from one of the telcos' recruited sales promoters. Pre-paid SIM cards are most common.

To purchase a SIM card from any telco, one must present an identification document with personal information including your name, ID number, date of birth and location. If you are a foreigner, you must provide your passport number. Free Basics does not require any additional identifying information at the time of purchase.

### **How do you set up the app? What information or actions are required?**

Upon download, the app presents a pop-up indicating that it will need access to your device & app history, SMS, Phone, Photo/Media/Files, Wi-Fi connection information and Device ID & call information.



*Screen capture from Google Play store*

Once you have authorized it to access these things, another screen appears indicating that by using the app, the user agrees to the policies hyperlinked below. Unlike other versions of Free Basics, the Colombian version does not require users to agree to Terms of Use or any policies concerning the use of their data.



For an experienced Android user, Free Basics is relatively easy to use. The interface is not overly technical and the free service offerings are presented in a clear manner.

When you try to access information beyond the websites and services offered, you are told you must buy a traditional data plan. The screen depicted below represents the featured "Free Services" that are readily presented to the user upon opening the app. There are 16 featured "Free Services", including Facebook (which is featured at the top, and is labeled as the provider of the service), 24symbols, Wikipedia, and various others.

PATROCINADOS POR



Facebook - Datos Gratuitos

Comunícate con amigos y familiares

MÁS SERVICIOS GRATUITOS



1doc3

Recibe respuestas de médicos a tus preguntas sobre salud



24symbols

Lee libros en internet



AccuWeather

Recibe información actualizada del tiempo



BabyCenter – Info del Zika

Lee sobre el Zika, el embarazo y los bebés



EL TIEMPO

Noticias de Colombia y el mundo



Girl Effect

Leer artículos y consejos para las niñas



Instituto Colombiano para la Eva...

Conoce cómo se puede mejorar la educación en Colombia



Messenger

Envía mensajes a amigos y familiares



Mitula

Busca inmuebles, automóviles y empleos



Para La Vida

Mejore la vida de los niños y niñas



Su Dinero

Consigue dinero cuando lo necesitas.



Tambero.com

Aumenta la producción agropecuaria



TeRecomiendo.com

Portal de empleo para cargos operativos



UNICEF

Conoce los derechos de niños y adolescentes

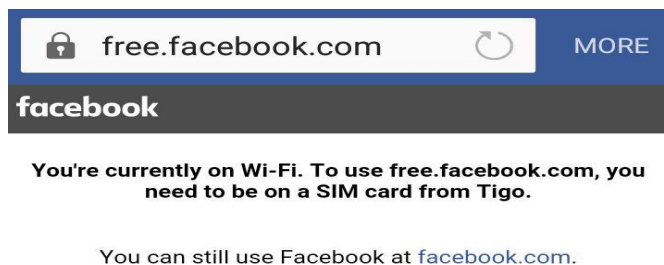
Free Basics Services in Colombia

In addition to this, there are 120 more services that are not found in the main menu, because they have been developed in other countries (for example Mexico or Nepal) and are also in a language other than Spanish. These can be found by selecting the drop-down menu from the upper right-hand corner and selecting "More Free Services."

### Connection, Accessibility and Language

In comparison with other apps, the Free Basics App is very slow. The free services in the app also load slowly, with the exception of Facebook, Facebook Messenger, AccuWeather, 24symbols and BBC Mundo. In addition, the only way to access content is to connect to Tigo's data network.

Free Basics effectively cannot be used over a WiFi connection in Colombia. For example, apps for newspapers load very fast, meanwhile in Free Basics they take much longer to load, despite there being a steady connection. The following message appears when you try to do so:



*Screenshot from Free Basics app.*

The Free Basics App gives two language options, Spanish and English. The default language is English. This is surprising, given that Spanish is the official and most widely-spoken language in Colombia.

The app does not use audio. It would be difficult to use for individuals who are semi or illiterate, and for the seeing-impaired. For hearing-impaired individuals, all content is presented in writing.

### Terms of Use & Privacy

Users of Free Basics in Colombia are not required to review or accept Terms of Use or any policies concerning the use of their data. Instead, these can be found in under the “app information” menu, which includes Facebook Terms of Use, a Data Policy, a Cookies Policy, Tigo’s Conditions and Privacy Policy and a set of terms entitled “Privacy on Free Basics.”

This information is inside the “app options” menu. Once you open the application, there is a menu in the upper right corner. When selected, four options appear (More services, Bookmarks, History and Options). If you select Options, arrive at the screen pictured below. At the bottom of that screen there is a section called 'Information'.

<p>&lt; Opciones</p> <p><b>Cambiar idioma</b> Español</p> <hr/> <p><b>Servicio de ayuda</b> Encuentra respuestas a las preguntas frecuentes</p> <hr/> <p><b>Reportar un problema</b> Avísanos si algo no funciona</p> <hr/> <p><b>INFORMACIÓN</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Visita sitios web populares de manera gratuita cuando uses Free Basics con Tigo.</b></p> <p>Al usar Free Basics, aceptas las Condiciones de Facebook, la Política de datos y la Política de cookies. Al acceder a sitios web a través de FreeBasics.com, Facebook procesa los datos de tu celular en sus servidores. Facebook también podrá usar tu número de teléfono para enviarte notificaciones por SMS, entre otras cosas. <b>Más información sobre la privacidad en Free Basics.</b></p> <p>Al usar Free Basics, también aceptas las Condiciones y la Política de privacidad de Tigo.</p> <p>¿Tienes alguna pregunta? Servicio de ayuda · Reportar problema</p> <p>Obtén información sobre los avisos de terceros.</p>	<p><b>Options</b></p> <p><b>Change language</b> Spanish</p> <p><b>Help Center</b> Frequently Asked Questions</p> <p><b>Report a problem</b> Let us know if something isn't working Information</p> <p><b>Visit popular websites for free when you use Free Basics with Tigo</b></p> <p>By using Free Basics, you accept <b>Facebook's Terms of Use, the Data Policy and the Cookie Policy.</b> When you use website via FreeBasics.com, Facebook processes your mobile data on its servers. Facebook can also use your phone number to send you SMS notifications, among other things.</p> <p><b>More information about privacy on Free Basics.</b> By using Free Basics, you also accept <b>Tigo's Terms and Privacy Policy.</b></p> <p>Questions? <b>Help Center - Report a problem</b> More information about <b>third party notifications</b></p>
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Free Basics Terms of Use.



The information about privacy on Free Basics includes the following excerpts:

"We collect limited device, browser, and usage information when you use Free Basics. Specifically, we collect the type of device or browser and operating system you use, your app version, app ID And device ID, the time and date of your connection, your mobile operator, IP address, phone number, battery and signal strength, country, language setting, and the Third-Party Services you search for or use in Free Basics."

It also says that "this means we collect the domain or name of the Third-Party Service accessed through Free Basics, encrypted cookies (for people who use Free Basics on a browser), and the amount of data (e.g. megabytes) used when you access the service."

To cross check this, I navigated to a free service for news publishing from Colombia and the world. Then I went to Facebook and on my home page I had four news and publications on the same topic, indicating the use of cookies.

The Facebook Terms of Use policy appears in English by default, despite this being the Colombian version of the app. The terms are available in Spanish, but the user must look for them in order to find them.

It also happens with the laws of the United States that are valid in this country, however, the applications are downloaded and used in other countries where the legislation is different.

The content and terms of these policies are difficult to understand, due to the use of complex legal language and technical jargon. The terms are also long and somewhat repetitive. A user seeing the terms the first time could be intimidated by this information and might feel inclined accept them without reading them in full.

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