

RESEARCH RESOURCE GUIDE

Large-Scale Data Sources for Foreign Missions, Unreached People Groups, and Digital Connectivity Planning

Prepared for internal research and strategic planning · August 2, 2026

Purpose

This guide compiles the large-scale, publicly available data sources most useful for foreign missions planning — covering Bible translation status, unreached people groups, religious persecution, digital/mobile connectivity, Deaf ministry, and general demographics. It is organized by category, with the specific value of each source noted so it can be matched to the right question rather than treated as interchangeable with the others.

How to Use This List

As a rule of thumb: **Joshua Project and Ethnologue/ProgressBible** answer "who and where"; **Open Doors and Freedom House** answer "how restricted"; **ITU and GSMA** answer "can they be reached digitally, and how"; **WHO/WFD/DOOR** answer Deaf-specific questions; and **ECFA/MinistryWatch/Candid** answer "can this partner organization be trusted with resources."

No single source in any category is fully authoritative on its own — cross-checking two sources per question (as already done for unreached people group counts) is the more defensible approach for any figures used in external-facing planning documents.

Updated Figures (from this research pass)

A few headline numbers were refreshed using the sources below and are worth noting up front, since they update figures used earlier in this research:

- **Global internet penetration (ITU, 2025):** 74% of the world online (~6.04 billion people); 2.2 billion remain fully offline. By region: Europe 92%, CIS 93%, Asia-Pacific 77%, Arab States 70%, Africa 36% (rural Africa only 21%). High-income countries: 94%; low-income countries: 23%. Urban 85% vs. rural 58%.
- **Mobile internet usage (GSMA, 2025):** 58% of the world (4.7 billion people) actually use mobile internet on their own device, even though 96% of the global population lives within mobile network coverage — meaning the "usage gap" (3.1 billion people covered but not using it) is roughly nine times larger than the "coverage gap" (350 million people with no network at all). This is a critical distinction for app-based strategy: for most unconnected people, the barrier is not infrastructure but affordability, literacy, relevance, or device access, not signal availability.
- **Least-connected region:** Sub-Saharan Africa — only 27% mobile internet usage, a 60% usage gap and a 13% coverage gap, confirming this as the highest-priority zone for the offline-device track rather than the apps track.
- **Living languages (Ethnologue, 29th edition, 2026):** 7,170 living languages worldwide; 3,078 (44%) classified as endangered. Papua New Guinea alone accounts for 840 languages, 12% of the global total, confirming its outsized weight in the translation-gap picture already identified.

1. Bible Translation & Language Data

Ethnologue: Languages of the World SIL INTERNATIONAL

<https://www.ethnologue.com>

What it provides: The master global reference for language counts, speaker populations, geographic distribution, and vitality/endangerment status (EGIDS scale). Wycliffe's own ProgressBible figures are built on Ethnologue data. More granular than any summary source used so far — searchable by country, language family, or status.

Update cadence / access: New edition roughly annually (29th edition current as of 2026). Core lookup free; full statistical summaries require subscription.

ProgressBible WYCLIFFE GLOBAL ALLIANCE / SIL

<https://progress.bible>

What it provides: The live database behind the translation-status figures cited throughout this research (544 languages waiting, 1,676 with no Scripture and no active work, etc.). Going to the database directly rather than Wycliffe's blog summaries allows filtering by country or region.

Update cadence / access: Updated continuously; public dashboard with downloadable snapshots.

UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger

<https://en.wal.unesco.org>

What it provides: Independent cross-check on endangered and dying languages, useful for identifying where "never translated" and "going extinct" overlap — a distinct urgency signal beyond simple translation-waiting-list status.

Update cadence / access: Periodically updated by UNESCO; successor World Atlas of Languages platform is the current version.

2. Unreached People Groups & Missiology

Joshua Project

<https://joshuaproject.net>

What it provides: The primary reference used throughout this research for unreached/frontier people group counts, the 10/40 Window, oral-preference statistics, and progress-scale classification. Includes a free REST API and downloadable datasets by country, language, and religion.

Update cadence / access: Continuously updated; ministry of the U.S. Center for World Mission.

Finishing the Task (FTT)

<https://finishingthetask.com>

What it provides: An independent unreached/unengaged people group list, useful as a second source since it does not always agree with Joshua Project — triangulating between lists reduces reliance on any single methodology. Referenced earlier regarding the Deaf population in Nepal.

Update cadence / access: Coalition of mission agencies; periodically updated list.

IMB People Groups INTERNATIONAL MISSION BOARD

<https://peoplegroups.org>

What it provides: A third independent people-group database, maintained by the IMB's global research team. Useful as an additional cross-check alongside Joshua Project and FTT, since the three lists use different definitions and field sourcing.

Update cadence / access: Updated by IMB regional and national field staff on an ongoing basis.

The 10/40 Window Resource Hub JOSHUA PROJECT / PRAY1040

https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/10_40_window and <https://pray1040.com>

What it provides: Country lists, maps, and statistics for the 10/40 Window band, already the geographic backbone of this research's zone framework.

Update cadence / access: Periodically revised country list; static reference with periodic updates.

3. Persecution & Religious Freedom

Open Doors World Watch List

<https://www.opendoors.org/en-us/persecution/world-watch-list/>

What it provides: Already in use in this research — the annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christian persecution is most severe. The primary prioritization tool for the "restricted access" half of the framework.

Update cadence / access: Published annually, typically in January.

World Watch Monitor

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org>

What it provides: News and country-level reporting specifically on Christian persecution, complementing Open Doors' annual ranking with ongoing incident-level detail.

Update cadence / access: Continuously updated news reporting.

Release International

<https://releaseinternational.org>

What it provides: UK-based persecution-monitoring and support organization; useful secondary source for cross-checking Open Doors' country assessments.

Update cadence / access: Ongoing country updates and annual reporting.

Freedom House — Freedom in the World / Freedom on the Net

<https://freedomhouse.org>

What it provides: Independent (non-faith-based) annual assessments of political freedom and internet freedom by country. Useful for a secular cross-check on which "closed" countries are closed for general political reasons vs. specifically religious ones, and for internet censorship severity by country — directly relevant to the "will an app work here" question.

Update cadence / access: Two annual reports: Freedom in the World and Freedom on the Net.

4. Connectivity & Technology

ITU — Facts and Figures INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION

<https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/>

What it provides: The authoritative UN source for global and country-level internet penetration, more current and more granular than the CIA World Factbook for this specific data. Provides the urban/rural and income-level breakdowns cited in the Updated Figures section above.

Update cadence / access: Annual flagship report ("Facts and Figures"), published each fall.

GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index / State of Mobile Internet Connectivity

<https://www.mobileconnectivityindex.com> and <https://www.gsma.com/somic>

What it provides: Covers 170 countries across 32 indicators; the key value-add beyond ITU is the coverage-gap vs. usage-gap distinction (whether people lack a signal at all, or have signal but don't use it) — directly informs whether a region needs infrastructure (satellite) or adoption/content work (apps, training, affordability).

Update cadence / access: Annual report series (State of Mobile Internet Connectivity), published each fall.

OpenNet Initiative / Freedom on the Net SEE ALSO FREEDOM HOUSE

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net>

What it provides: Country-by-country internet censorship and restriction severity — the specific data point needed to judge whether an app-based approach is viable versus likely to be blocked or monitored in a given restricted country.

Update cadence / access: Annual report.

5. Deaf & Sign Language Ministry

World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)

<https://wfdeaf.org>

What it provides: The source organization behind most global Deaf population and sign-language figures cited in this research (the ~70 million estimate, 200–300+ sign languages). Primary source rather than secondary aggregation.

Update cadence / access: Ongoing; periodic position papers and statistics updates.

Deaf Bible Society

<https://www.deafbiblesociety.com>

What it provides: Publisher of the Deaf Bible App and tracker of sign-language Scripture translation status specifically — more granular than general Bible-translation sources for this population.

Update cadence / access: Ongoing; app and translation-status updates.

DOOR International

<https://doorinternational.org>

What it provides: Deaf-led Bible translation and church-planting ministry; publishes its own Deaf-specific unreached statistics and translation progress, and was the primary source for the Deaf figures used earlier in this research.

Update cadence / access: Ongoing ministry updates and annual reporting.

6. General Demographics

CIA World Factbook

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>

What it provides: Best for population age structure, literacy rate, internet/mobile penetration (though ITU/GSMA are more current for connectivity specifically), government type, and religious composition by country. Not a source for mission-specific or Deaf-specific data.

Update cadence / access: Updated on a rolling basis, country by country.

UN Population Division — World Population Prospects

<https://population.un.org/wpp/>

What it provides: Authoritative source for population totals, age-structure projections, and urban/rural splits by country — more rigorous than the Factbook for demographic modeling and projections (e.g., aging populations relevant to Deaf age-distribution estimates).

Update cadence / access: Major revision approximately every two years.

World Health Organization (WHO) — Deafness and Hearing Loss Fact Sheet

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss>

What it provides: Primary source for the global hearing-loss and Deaf population figures used in this research (430 million with disabling hearing loss, 34 million children, age-distribution data).

Update cadence / access: Periodically updated fact sheet, most recently March 2026.

7. Nonprofit & Organizational Accountability

ECFA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability)

<https://www.ecfa.org>

What it provides: Already in use for org-level financial data (e.g., TWR's member profile). Confirms an organization meets defined financial-accountability standards — useful as a basic trust filter before deeper partnership evaluation.

Update cadence / access: Member profiles updated on each organization's fiscal-year cycle.

MinistryWatch

<https://ministrywatch.com>

What it provides: Already in use throughout this research for org profiles, financials, and staffing data. Independent evaluator with its own donor-confidence scoring, useful as a secondary check alongside ECFA.

Update cadence / access: Profiles updated periodically; donor-confidence scores recalculated regularly.

Candid / GuideStar NOW PART OF CANDID

<https://www.guidestar.org>

What it provides: The largest U.S. nonprofit database, useful for Form 990 financial detail on any US-registered mission organization not already profiled in this research.

Update cadence / access: Updated as organizations file annual Form 990s with the IRS.

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