

# Cost of using your mobile phone abroad – new Commission website

**Commissioner Viviane Reding has launched a new website which aims to help consumers get a better deal when using their mobile phones abroad. The new website provides consumers with sample tariffs as well as advice on how to get the best deal.**

## Why is the Commission launching this website?

International roaming allows you to use your mobile phone when abroad on holiday or business, to make or receive calls as though you were still in your home country.

On 4 October 2005 Commissioner Viviane Reding launched a website which aims to increase transparency of international roaming charges and to help the consumer to get a better deal.

[http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/roaming](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/roaming)

The web site uses tables of sample tariffs and direct links to the sites of EU mobile operators, to give you a concrete idea of the level of roaming prices you are likely to face when going abroad. It also gives you guidance and tips on how to manage your international roaming bills and how to get the best roaming deal. In addition, the site answers frequently asked questions, explains some of the jargon used in connection with roaming, and provides contact points in case of difficulty.

## What can consumers do? Getting a better deal

The European Regulators Group, which unites the heads of the national telecom regulators of all 25 EU Member States and is tasked with ensuring consistency of regulation across Europe, has pointed out that the costs of providing an international roaming service often do not clearly justify the level of retail charges. There are also concerns that the retail charges are not sufficiently transparent for the consumer.

The Commission believes that, while charges for international roaming are high, the consumer can get a better deal by taking action. The website gives examples of the prices offered by different operators in their home countries and differences in the prices charged according to the network used in the visited country (situation as of September 2005), and in addition provides 'deep links' to the home operators' sites so that consumers can check out the deals on offer.

The website also provides guidance on how to manage international roaming bills. For example,

### How international roaming works

Let's say you drive from your "**home country**" across the border into a "**destination country**". How is it your mobile phone keeps working? After all, you have a mobile phone Operator at home (your "**home operator**"), but it doesn't have a presence in the destination country. **So how come you can still make or receive calls?**

The answer:

- when you crossed the border, you started 'roaming' on a mobile phone network in the destination country. This "**host operator**" will now handle at least part of every call you make and receive;
- rather than sending you a separate bill, the host operator charges your home operator, using a wholesale rate they arranged between themselves; your home operator then passes this expense on to you in your next bill, together with any other applicable charges.
- **You can choose your Host Operator** - it's just a question of pushing the right buttons on your mobile phone!

check with your mobile operator (and other operators) the current rates applying to your destination country.

- Consider switching from your current operator to a competitor if they have a better deal.
- Remember you may be able to influence the level of roaming charges by selecting the proper network upon which you are roaming.
- Remember that as a general rule you'll be charged more expensive rates if you are a pre-pay customer rather than a regular subscriber.
- Ask your [mobile phone operator](#) about any special deals it might offer. Let your close friends and family know you will be travelling.
- Always try to use off-peak rates which can be considerably cheaper. Off-peak rates apply on weekends and on working days in the evening, typically after 7 p.m.
- Remember that mobile phone companies often charge by the minute, rather than by second.
- Consider buying a local SIM card. Your number will change while you are away but you will only pay local rates for your outgoing calls.

For all information relating to international roaming rates you should always start by contacting your own operator. If you have a complaint relating to international roaming charges or any other aspect of mobile telephony services you should also contact your operator's customer care line in the first instance. See all [European mobile network operators](#).

- In cases where problems are not satisfactorily resolved by an operator, Member States are required to ensure that out-of-court dispute resolution procedures are available to consumers. For details of who to contact in such cases you should first get in touch with the national regulatory authority in your country (see [Contacts](#)).

### What is being done about roaming charges?

Mobile telecommunications markets including international roaming – as all other electronic communications markets – are covered by national and EU-wide regulation.

The Commission is also actively using its investigative and enforcement powers to combat anti-competitive behaviour by specific network operators. These proceedings (based on Article 82

of the EC Treaty) are still in progress.

[National regulatory authorities](#) (NRAs) cooperate closely with the Commission services on roaming prices and are currently analysing their national markets to see if wholesale roaming charges incurred among operators are unfair. These charges have a direct impact on the level of retail charges paid by the consumer. The NRAs will notify the Commission of their planned decisions in due course.

Finally, the NRAs have recently announced additional action on tariff transparency for international roaming under the auspices of the European Regulators Group (ERG), which is tasked with ensuring consistency of regulation across Europe.

### What has been the impact of the Commission initiatives on international mobile roaming charges?

There are some signs that the market is beginning to become more competitive. A few large European operators have recently introduced simplified tariff packages which appear to offer the consumer a better deal.

However, it is still too early to judge the effects of these initiatives on roaming tariffs. The Commission believes that substantially more progress from all mobile operators in Europe is both necessary and possible. This is why the Commission has started its initiative and why the Commission will update the new website every six months.

#### See Also:

- Factsheets 13 & 14 on the eCommunications Regulatory Framework
- Factsheet 23: Mobile Communications

All Fact sheets and more can be downloaded from "Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal", below.

#### Further Information

- **Roaming website:**  
[http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/roaming](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/roaming)
- **Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal**  
[http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/)
- **Information Society and Media Directorate-General:**  
Av. de Beaulieu 24, 1160 Brussels  
[infso-desk@cec.eu.int](mailto:infso-desk@cec.eu.int)  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information\\_society/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information_society/index_en.htm)