

# Texting without borders: Ending roaming rip-offs for text messages abroad



**The EU Roaming Regulation, in force as of July 2007, has lowered charges by up to 60% for consumers using their mobile phones abroad. The Regulation applies for roaming voice calls only - ensuring that those prices are not unjustifiably more expensive than at home. Although consumers today are paying significantly less for roaming voice calls, prices for SMS and data roaming services still continue to cost too much. The Commission is therefore working on proposals to ensure that consumers also benefit from a single market for text messages and data roaming services.**

## Why regulate?

Excessive roaming charges affected at least 147 million EU citizens (37 million tourists and 110 million business travellers). As a key contributor to growth and jobs, mobile communications remain very high on the Commission's agenda. It was therefore important to take action for the benefit of consumers.

Repeated calls for operators to lower roaming voice call charges voluntarily were ignored and the Commission therefore proposed to regulate.

Despite the initiative on voice roaming calls, roaming text messages and data roaming services still remain very expensive. Once again, the Commission has asked operators to bring down prices voluntarily, giving them until 1 July 2008 to act. Today, the average cost of a roaming text message in the EU is €0.29 and they can be up to ten times more expensive than domestic text messages. Moreover, text message roaming tariffs range from €0.06 for some Estonian roamers to €0.80 for Belgian roamers. As for data services, prices can range from €0.25 per megabyte (MB) to over €16/MB. Needless to say, self regulation does not seem to be working.

## What needs to be done?

A serious problem for both sending text messages and using data services abroad

### What is roaming?

*Let's say you travel across the border into a foreign country. How come your mobile phone keeps working?*

Whenever you make or receive a mobile phone call, send a text message or access the internet while abroad, on holiday or on business, you are roaming. That means your calls are operated by a **foreign network** because your **home service provider** does not operate in that country. For providing this service, the foreign network operator will charge your service provider. This charge is passed on to you in addition to the usual cost of a national call.

You are using **roaming data services** when accessing the internet over a phone network with your Blackberry or a PDA; or surfing the internet over a laptop using a datacard connection.

within the EU are the high charges and the lack of price transparency. Consumers are often not properly informed about the cost of a text message sent while abroad or the price of one megabyte of data downloaded while abroad. A nasty surprise on their telephone bill, in some extreme cases even €40,000 for downloading a TV programme while travelling, might be waiting for them at home.

The Commission believes that the current charges for text message and data roaming are unjustifiably high and should be brought down.

### What has been done so far?

In May 2007 the European Parliament almost unanimously approved the Commission's proposal for a Regulation to reduce mobile roaming charges which entered into force at the beginning of July 2007.

	summer 2008	summer 2009
Maximum Eurotariff for calls made	€0.46	€0.43
Maximum Eurotariff for calls received	€0.22	€0.19
Maximum Inter-Operator tariff	€0.28	€0.26

All tariffs are per minute and exclude VAT

According to the Regulation, wholesale and retail roaming prices are not allowed to exceed a certain level, or price ceiling ("Eurotariff"). Below this level, competition takes place for the most attractive roaming packages. The current price caps will be further reduced in 2009 and will remain compulsory until the end of June 2010, when the Regulation is to expire.

### Further Information

**Commission Roaming Web site:** <http://ec.europa.eu/roaming/>

**Europe's Information Society: Thematic Portal:**  
[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society)

**Information Society and Media Directorate-General:** Av. de Beaulieu 25, B-1049 Brussels

**E-mail:** [info-desk@ec.europa.eu](mailto:info-desk@ec.europa.eu) **Web site:**  
[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/information\\_society](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/information_society)

The Regulation also ensures that price information is clearer and more accessible to consumers. It requires mobile service providers to give free, country-specific information on roaming charges to their customers when they enter another Member State (with a text message). Consumers can also ask for information on roaming charges free of charge by phone or text message.

EU national regulators confirmed in January 2008 that the Regulation has been introduced smoothly in all Member States.

Additionally, the Regulation requires that it will be reviewed by the Commission to decide whether it needs to be extended beyond July 2010 and whether text message and data roaming services needed to be included. Studies show that competition in the market for roaming voice calls is only developing slowly, which is why the Commission will aim to extend the regulation of roaming voice calls.

### Next steps

In order to ensure that consumers benefit from a truly single market, the Commission is likely to propose regulation of text messages and data roaming charges in the early autumn of 2008.

The Roaming Regulation has managed to remove one of the last borders of the internal market and has benefited holiday makers and business travellers alike. Now it is time to create a single market for text messages and data roaming.