



FACTSHEET Extending the EU's roaming rules

What is roaming?

Roaming is when you are using a mobile device abroad. Consumers had to pay extortionate roaming charges for making or receiving calls, sending SMS, or using data in another country in the EU, but these were abolished by the EU in 2017 after sustained efforts from consumer

groups against them. The end to roaming charges was celebrated as one of the EU's greatest success stories for consumers. People can now use their mobile phones to make calls, send SMS and use data when travelling in the EU for the same price as at home.

How did consumers benefit from the roaming rules?

Consumers obviously benefited from the end of roaming charges. In the late 2000s, people travelling paid much

higher prices for their calls and SMS, and using 1 Gigabyte of data while roaming could cost up to €200.

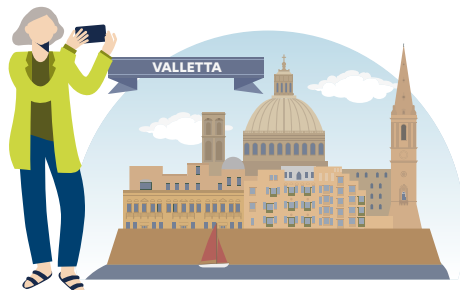
Diego from Spain, travelling in Latvia, could spend up to **€9.19** for a 4-minute call home



Nicos from Cyprus, travelling in Belgium, could spend up to **€12** for 4-minute a call home



Jane from Ireland, travelling in Malta, could spend up to **€13.16** for a 4-minute call home¹



The telecoms market also benefited. For example, according to BEREC, the European body of regulators for telecoms markets, average roaming consumption of data services increased from the third quarter of 2016 to the third quarter in 2019 by a staggering 800% - from 60MB per month to 540MB per month per roaming subscriber.²

¹ NL Parlementaire Monitor, [Frequently asked questions about roaming tariffs](#) (Nov 2006).

² BEREC, [Input On EC Request For The Preparation Of The Legislative Proposal For The New Roaming Regulations](#), (June 2020), page 5.



So why is the EU Roaming Regulation being reviewed?

Few people know that the EU's roaming rules have an expiry date of 30 June 2022 and therefore need to be renewed to continue. **Beyond renewing them, the review is an opportunity to solve certain shortcomings, including:**

NOT ALWAYS THE SAME QUALITY OF SERVICE WHEN ROAMING

Consumers in several countries have complained that they do not get the same quality of service when roaming, for example in terms of data speed. Some telecom operators have even admitted to lowering their services for roaming customers.³ Many offer a 3G roaming service even though a 4G one is available.⁴

WHOLESALE PRICE CAPS ARE TOO HIGH

At the moment, wholesale price caps – the maximum price telecom providers can charge each other when their customers use their phone abroad – are too high. Having high wholesale caps can affect the price of consumers' mobile phone subscriptions and squeeze smaller operators out of the market. This is particularly important for data roaming services, where the introduction of 5G technology is expected to bring down data costs for telecoms operators.

BILL SHOCKS ON PLANES OR BOATS

Consumers often do not know that the current EU roaming rules do not apply when travelling on boats or planes. The result can be a particularly hefty bill when getting home as

the consumer's phone may connect to a satellite or other network which can be very costly. A German consumer for example received an €11,000 bill after a holiday.⁵

PEOPLE LIVING OR TRAVELLING NEAR A BORDER

People who live or travel near a border of a non-EU or non-EEA country, where the roaming regulation does not apply, often roam inadvertently. For example, an Austrian who is travelling near the Swiss border can involuntarily connect frequently to a Swiss mobile network and end up paying high bills.

MOBILE PROVIDERS ARE STILL ALLOWED TO CHARGE CONSUMERS UNDER SOME CIRCUMSTANCES

Mobile operators can limit the roam-like-at-home experience under some circumstances if they believe consumers are abusing the roaming rules, even if consumers still have minutes or data available in their home country. This is because of the application of so-called 'fair use policies'.

BEUC KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE REVIEW OF ROAMING RULES

1. The rules which abolished roaming charges must be extended and not weakened under any circumstances.
2. The EU should guarantee the same quality of service for roaming as at home. Only when it is technically unfeasible, for example because of insufficient mobile network coverage in a rural area, should there be an exception to this rule.
3. The wholesale price caps should come down, particularly for data. Increasing the caps, and adding delays to when they would apply, is unnecessary and damages the market, especially with 5G soon being rolled out, which is expected to bring energy efficiencies and cut costs for telecoms operators.
4. There should be more effective protective measures, such as cut-off limits for consumers when travelling on boats and planes and when inadvertently roaming outside the EU, to reduce the risk of bill shocks.
5. The application of fair use policies should be limited to address actual abuse, and they should be progressively phased out in the near future.
6. The European Commission should enter into international agreements with non-EU countries to reduce roaming charges leading to a progressive abolition of charges in the near future.

³ The Register, 'O2 admits to throttling network bandwidth for EU data roamers', (July 2017).

⁴ BEREC, [Input On EC Request For The Preparation Of The Legislative Proposal For The New Roaming Regulations](#), (June 2020), page 16.

⁵ Vzbv, [Kostenfalle: Telefónica-Kunden gefährdet](#) (August 2018) <https://www.vzbv.de/pressemitteilungen/kostenfalle-telefonica-kunden-gefaehrdet>