

Principles in U.S. Regulatory Regime Considered Essential to Promoting Universal Access to Telecommunications and Information and Communications Technologies

These principles are distilled from the U.S. approach to universal access and we hope that they will be useful in the discussion in an international context.

1. Explicit and predictable obligation: The amounts collected from carriers to pay for universal service access are explicit to those carriers and to their customers. The amounts paid from such universal access funds to beneficiaries (consumers, carriers, and other beneficiaries such as schools and libraries) are explicit. The support reaches the beneficiaries who need it the most, and the amounts paid are specific and predictable.
2. Sufficient: The support provided through a universal access program is sufficient to provide consumers in all regions of the country with access to telecommunications and information services at affordable and reasonably comparable rates.
3. Safeguards: There are measures in place to ensure that consumers are the ultimate beneficiaries of the access program, even where carriers or government entities such as schools and libraries are the direct recipient.
4. Portability among carriers: Beneficiary consumers who receive direct universal access support are able to use the support to pay for the carrier of their choice.
5. Competitively neutral, equitable and non-discriminatory: The criteria for selection of carriers to provide service eligible for universal service support is competitively neutral, equitable and non-discriminatory. The support is divided on a fair basis according to universal service goals.