

Tunisia

Instance Nationale des Télécommunications

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**Reply to the ITU-D survey
for the eighth Global Symposium for Regulators**

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Innovative infrastructure sharing strategies to promote universal access

As far as the telecommunication sector is concerned, at the present time competition is clearly playing a fundamental part in the chain of universal service provision, and it is becoming necessary to have more than one operator contributing to the liberalization efforts. The problem lies in the difficulties of investing in the access portion, because of the prohibitive costs that generally cannot be borne by a single operator, especially when that operator is a newcomer.

Infrastructure sharing would seem to offer the best solution for lowering entry barriers, and is therefore attractive in economical and competitive terms.

Tunisia's *Instance Nationale des Télécommunications* (INT) recognizes that the process of sharing infrastructures holds promise for the rapid development of the networks and greater universal service availability, and therefore pays close attention to this topic. INT has adopted a clear strategy that supports infrastructure sharing, subject to respect of property rights, economic viability and technical feasibility. New legislation (the telecommunications code has been amended by law 2008-01 of 8 January 2008) has been introduced with provisions for the sharing of infrastructure to promote universal access. Those provisions cover two main aspects, as outlined below.

1 Network infrastructure sharing

Following the new regulatory framework, INT considers that the effective development of universal service could be achieved by means of the following.

- Obliging incumbents and their competitors to put at each other's disposal the entire passive infrastructure (poles, conduits, high-elevation points, trenches, pipelines, access hatches, masts, ducts etc.) on a commercial basis, while monitoring the elaboration of framework agreements between operators to facilitate and accelerate the effective implementation of infrastructure sharing procedures.
- Assigning a special status to passive infrastructures that are to be shared so as to ensure that sharing takes place under conditions of transparency, non-discrimination and cost-oriented prices.
- Enshrining the principle of separate accounting for operators affected by infrastructure sharing.
- For the purposes of sharing, providing clear, relevant information on sites and technical specifications for equipment that is available and ready to be shared, for the benefit of those looking for infrastructure to share.
- Encouraging all operators to put their offers on the market for the provision of collection networks; in the case of the incumbent operator, offers for interconnection to its exchanges.
- Having a regulatory obligation for the incumbent to offer high-speed collection or unbundling in line with the economic market conditions.
- Providing new entrants and competitors with adequate premises for collocation, and the necessary information relating to those premises (what power sources are available, climate control, etc.).

- A strong regulator role in the entire process, in particular for dispute resolution.

2 Opening the access market to competition

The ability to provide as much of the population as possible with telecommunication services is considered to be a factor in the dissemination of universal service. Hence, the promotion of universal service could take the form of specific approaches that include the following:

- Encouraging investment in the access network by assigning licences for the coverage of specific zones by means of innovative technologies (wireless or wire-based).
- Finding mechanisms for funding capital investment projects at the access network level in areas that lack telecommunication service.
- Deploying geographic information systems to identify areas that lack service and monitor progress in furnishing them with universal service.