INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION
Telecommunication Development Bureau
Telecommunication Statistics and Data Unit

20 November 2002
Original: English

3rd World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Meeting
Geneva, 15 - 17 January 2003

Document: WICT-04E

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Title: Telecommunications statistics in Latvia

Telecommunications statistics in Latvia

The main responsible body of collection of statistical information on telecommunications in Latvia is Central Statistical Bureau. Telecommunication statistics is a part of responsibility of Transport and Communication Statistics Section. There are two statisticians dealing with this statistics.
185 enterprises performing in this sector of services, but only a few monopolies operating in the telephony sector. The enterprise “Lattelekom”, which has a monopoly right to provide telecommunication services in the fixed public telecommunications network, is the operator of this network. There are two operators, performing in the area of mobile telecommunications. It is noteworthy that for the most part the mobile operators consider information about their activities to be confidential.

Co-operation with respondents is therefore one of most important factors. Since co-operation with the operator of the public telecommunications network, the monopolist “Lattelekom Ltd”, is good we have the majority of indicators that describe this sector. The operators of the mobile telecommunications network in turn consider a large part of the information as confidential.

Nevertheless, information from these enterprises have been compiled by the quarterly and yearly questionnaires. Three groups of indicators are collected:

- on economic activity- turnover, employment, investment indicators
- infrastructure indicators- on telephone lines and capacity
- volume indicators- on length of calls and connections, on subscriptions

There are a variable collected from the other side- users. From year 2002 some information have been collected on a regular bases from the households:

- mobile telephone subscriptions
- number of computers
- access to Internet
- cable TV connections.

The sector of telecommunications in the world and as well in Latvia develops rapidly by introducing ever more up to date technologies. This creates certain problems to statistical surveying. There is no difficulty in the reporting of basic indicators, for example, the number of subscribers to fixed lines or to the mobile telephone. Problems emerge in respect of recording the introduction process of the latest technologies. Since everything advances in a rapid pace, there is for the time being no methodology and no substantiated indicators worked out.

The problems arise, as there are no uniform legislative acts, methods and variables that in the course of time could be developed and improved. Some efforts are however made in surveying e-commerce and IT technologies by means of other surveys such as the household survey or enterprise survey. In 2001 the first survey on ICT usage in enterprises was made. Variables obtained were:

- number of computers
- kind of computers
- availability of the Internet
- kind of Internet access
- availability of web site.

In 2002 survey on ICT usage in enterprises (e-comerce) based on Eurostat's questionnaire and methodology is conducted. A short questionnaire was designed for governmental and municipal organisation. Chapters on ICT were added to the yearly questionnaires of education establishments. Beside specific questionnaires on ICT as it are in other enterprises and establishments, there are questions on usage of computers and computer programs in the education process in subjects other than computer use education.

CSB Consumer Price Section observes some prices and tariffs of the telecommunication services. Those are for fixed telephone network:

- subscription fee
- price for local call of 100 min. duration
- price for long distance call of 100 min. duration
- price for international call of 100 min. duration
- price for 100 min. call from fixed network to mobile network
- connection fee

Beside that:

- price for 100 min call from one mobile telephone network to another mobile network
- price for 1 hour using of Internet.

It should be noted that within the country the new IT technologies are difficult to measure and therefore statistical surveying is hampered.

The Central Statistical Bureau practically does not cover and survey such areas of telecommunications as communications via the satellites and digital cable communications. No methodology has been worked out for the survey of these fields as the primary variables that would reflect the developments in this field are not yet established.

Characteristic of the sector

Out of 212 enterprises of service sector 185 is involved in telecommunications sector. Mainly these are small enterprises with less than 50 workers. There were 6611 employees involved in telecommunications at the end of the 1-quarter of 2002. Looking to the gender of employees- 37.8% of them was female. This proportion is rather the same as in communication branch NACE (rev.1) 64. – 37.9%. By the time being this proportion has tendency to reduce: in 2000 there was 39.4% female working in sector, in 2001- 38.4%.

"Lattelekom Ltd" is currently modernising the fixed telecommunications network replacing the analogue telephone lines by the digital lines. The digital system ensures higher quality communications and provides a possibility to render additional services. In 2001, the number of lines switched on to the digital system increased particularly rapidly. At the end of 2001, out of the total number of subscribers` lines in the public telecommunications network 496 thsd (68.7%) were in the digital network and 226 thsd (31.3%) in the analogue network. In cities and towns digital telephone lines represent 80.7% of the total number of lines but in the rural network – 15.4%. Thus the low level of digitalization of the public telecommunications network prevents a large part of Latvia's population to receive up-to-date communications services that are easily available in the urban public telecommunications network. At the end of 2002, the total number of telephone subscribers' lines in the fixed telecommunications network was 722 and in 2001 their number decreased by 13 thsd lines. The clients give up the public telecommunications network services as many switch on to the mobile telecommunications network as a more convenient way of communication. In addition, the low living standard of the population, especially in the countryside, is mentioned as another important reason for the decrease in the number of clients to the public telecommunications network.

The demand for mobile communication services continues to increase rapidly. The number of subscribers in the mobile telecommunications network at the end of 2001 was 625 thsd and during the year it has increased by 224 thsd. The reason behind the rapid increase in the number of subscribers is the growing accessibility to mobile telephone communications: the mobile telephone has become cheaper, due to competition the tariffs for its use have also gone down and the range of additional services offered has also widened. In ten years` time the number of mobile telephone users has approximated to the number of fixed telephone users and it is expected that it could exceed the number of fixed line users. At the end of 2001 there were 307 telephone subscribers` lines and 266 mobile telephone subscribers per 1000 population. In comparison to other European countries, the level is for the time being low.

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