

Lao People's Democratic Republic

A distinctive model of private and state ownership is used to extend telecommunication access in the only landlocked nation in South-East Asia.

Mobile services: There are four mobile operators, all with a mix of private ownership and government shareholding. They also have full service licences and are involved in the fixed telephone and broadband market. Star Telecom (UNITEL) is a joint venture between a government-owned company and Vietnam's VITETTEL group. Lao Telecom is 51 per cent owned by the Government and 49 per cent by Thai investors. Entreprise Telecom du Lao (ETL), the state-owned incumbent, was partially privatized in 2016 when 51 per cent was sold to a Chinese group. Vimpelcom Lao is 78 per cent owned by Veon, a group that includes one of the largest telecom operators in Russia. 2G is widely available with 86 per cent of Laotian households having a mobile phone in 2015 (95 per cent in urban areas, 83 per cent in rural areas with roads, and 69 per cent in rural areas without roads).²⁸² Mobile broadband was launched in 2008 with the deployment of the first 3G network. UNITEL, and Lao Telecom launched LTE in 2015.

Fixed services: The mobile operators also participate in the fixed-line telephone market via copper wire connections or wireless local loops. Fixed broadband is limited mainly to urban areas, and in 2015 ADSL accounted for 58 per cent of subscriptions while FTTP accounted for 36 per cent (at speeds of up to 60 Mbps).

The national fibre-optic backbone is over 60 000 kilometres long and runs along main highways, with cross-border links to surrounding countries. There is also a metropolitan ring in Vientiane. For Laos PDR, as the only landlocked country in South-East Asia, connections to neighbouring countries with a coastline is critical, and Laos accesses submarine cables via cross-border links to Cambodia, China, Thailand and Viet Nam. The Lao National Internet Center was established as an IXP in 2010.

Government policy: The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) oversees and regulates the sector on the basis of the 2011 *Telecommunications Law*. ICT is recognized as an important cross-cutting sector in the *8th Five-*

Key indicators for Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017)	Asia & Pacific	World	
Fixed-telephone sub. per 100 inhab.	16.4	9.5	13.0
Mobile-cellular sub. per 100 inhab.	54.1	104.0	103.6
Active mobile-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	40.0	60.3	61.9
3G coverage (% of population)	78.0	91.3	87.9
LTE/WiMAX coverage (% of population)	9.0	86.9	76.3
Individuals using the Internet (%)	25.5	44.3	48.6
Households with a computer (%)	13.2	38.9	47.1
Households with Internet access (%)	24.5	49.0	54.7
International bandwidth per Internet user (kbit/s)	18.4	61.7	76.6
Fixed-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	0.4	13.0	13.6
Fixed-broadband sub. by speed tiers, % distribution			
<i>-256 kbit/s to 2 Mbit/s</i>	44.9	2.4	4.2
<i>-2 to 10 Mbit/s</i>	52.2	7.6	13.2
<i>-equal to or above 10 Mbit/s</i>	2.9	90.0	82.6

Note: Data in italics are ITU estimates. Source: ITU (as of June 2018).

Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016–2020). Priority activities include ensuring 100 per cent Internet coverage across the country and establishing the national policy on broadband services to determine an expansion plan and ensure access to broadband services for people across the country.

Conclusion: The strategy of competition between government-private sector joint ventures has resulted in a relatively high level of mobile access for a least developed country. ICT has taken on a new urgency in the country's development plan, particularly ensuring the widespread availability of broadband Internet.