

Liberia

This West African country became a virtually wireless nation after the civil war devastated the fixed network. The arrival of submarine cable has created opportunities to transform the ICT landscape.

Mobile services: There are three mobile operators: LONESTAR is a subsidiary of the South African MTN group and the first operator to launch a GSM network in the country in 2001; Orange is a subsidiary of the French telecom group, which entered the market in 2016 through the purchase of CELLCOM (which had launched the country's second GSM network in 2004); and NOVAFONE, whose predecessor company launched in 2015, was purchased by MTN when an attempt to sell it to the incumbent Liberia Telecommunications Corporation (LIBTELCO) fell through. In 2013, 65 per cent of households in the country had mobile telephones, with a large divide between 82 per cent in urban (82 per cent) and 42 per cent in rural (42 per cent) areas.²⁸⁸ The operators have launched the latest 3G technologies and Orange introduced LTE in 2016 on the 1 800 MHz band.

Fixed services: The incumbent fixed line operator LIBTELCO is State-owned. The fixed-telephone network in Monrovia was badly damaged during the civil war and destroyed in rural areas. LIBTELCO is the sole fixed-telephone provider using CDMA wireless local loop. Internet access is provided by a number of fixed wireless broadband providers. Fibre-optic connections are available for businesses in Monrovia. The Government is deploying a national fibre-optic backbone as part of the West Africa Regional Communications Infrastructure Programme (WARCIP). It calls for deploying fibre from the West to the East of the country as well as to key border crossings. The arrival of ACE in 2012 not only increased international Internet bandwidth more than sevenfold, it also lowered wholesale prices by 75 per cent, as the country was no longer solely reliant on satellite. The Cable Consortium of Liberia was established as a public–private venture between the Government and telecommunication operators to manage access to ACE in an open and cost-effective manner. The Liberia IXP was launched in Monrovia in 2015.

Government policy: The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications provides ICT sector oversight

Key indicators for Liberia (2017)	Africa	World
Fixed-telephone sub. per 100 inhab.	...	0.9 13.0
Mobile-cellular sub. per 100 inhab.	56.2	74.4 103.6
Active mobile-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	11.6	24.8 61.9
3G coverage (% of population)	63.0	62.7 87.9
LTE/WiMAX coverage (% of population)	29.9	28.4 76.3
Individuals using the Internet (%)	8.0	22.1 48.6
Households with a computer (%)	2.6	8.9 47.1
Households with Internet access (%)	3.0	19.4 54.7
International bandwidth per Internet user (kbit/s)	3.0	11.2 76.6
Fixed-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	0.2	0.6 13.6
Fixed-broadband sub. by speed tiers, % distribution		
<i>-256 kbit/s to 2 Mbit/s</i>	69.9	38.7 4.2
<i>-2 to 10 Mbit/s</i>	5.5	37.2 13.2
<i>-equal to or above 10 Mbit/s</i>	24.6	24.1 82.6

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

as well as responsibility for operating postal services. The latest National Telecommunications and ICT Policy covered the period 2010–2015, with the goal of people-centred, universally accessible and cost-effective ICT systems and services. The policy has 15 objectives for telecommunications, 26 for ICTs, and identifies 9 priority projects. The Liberia Telecommunication Authority is the statutory regulatory body established by the Telecommunications Act of 2007. The Authority enforces sector regulations and is responsible for universal access as well as input for the broadcasting digital migration strategy, and transitioning laws and regulations to harmonize with ECOWAS guidelines.

Conclusion: The ICT sector in Liberia was scarcely developed before the outbreak of the civil war in 1989. The war resulted in much of the country's infrastructure being destroyed or vandalized. ICT access in the West African nation is practically entirely wireless. The arrival of a submarine cable has transformed the landscape, and creates opportunities to extend coverage and services nationwide.