

São Tomé and Príncipe

The arrival of a submarine cable has transformed the twin island archipelago ICT sector, now with abundant Internet capacity to leverage ICTs for achieving national development goals.

Mobile services: There are two mobile operators: the incumbent São Tomé Company for Telecommunications (CST), which launched in 2002; and UNITEL, subsidiary of the Angolan mobile operator, which ended the monopoly when it entered the market in 2014. In 2014, 82 per cent of households had mobile phones, with only a small difference between urban (84 per cent) and rural areas (78 per cent).⁴⁰¹ Mobile-broadband was introduced relatively late, when CST introduced 3G in 2012 while UNITEL deployed 3G at launch.

Fixed services: CST was partly privatized in 1989, when 51 per cent of its shares were sold to Portugal Telecom. Although UNITEL has a full-service license, CST currently is the sole provider of fixed-telephone services in the country. CST offers fixed-broadband over ADSL, with speeds up to 2 Mbit/s, and has a fibre-optic offering with speeds up to 200 Mbit/s, the fastest in sub-Saharan Africa. A high-capacity microwave connection was deployed between the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe in 2015. The transmission link covers 176 km, one of the longest microwave routes in the world, and provides 300 Mbit/s of capacity, more than nine times the previous link. São Tomé and Príncipe relied on satellite for international Internet connectivity until the arrival of the ACE undersea fibre-optic cable in 2012. STP Cable was established as a public-private partnership to manage the country's holdings in ACE with the goal of open access and cost-based wholesale costs. Members of STP Cable are the Government and the two telecommunication operators. Connection to ACE increased speeds by a factor of 100 and significantly lowered prices. Phase 4 of ACE began in 2017, which will result in a new link from São Tomé and Príncipe to South Africa, providing redundancy through an additional route to other submarine cables.

Government policy: The country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper calls for promoting access to information with policy measures, including increasing accessibility, using ICTs for government services and developing entrepreneurial initiatives. The Ministry of

Key indicators for São Tomé and Príncipe (2017)	Africa	World
Fixed-telephone sub. per 100 inhab.	2.7	0.9 13.0
Mobile-cellular sub. per 100 inhab.	85.0	74.4 103.6
Active mobile-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	33.9	24.8 61.9
3G coverage (% of population)	93.0	62.7 87.9
LTE/WiMAX coverage (% of population)	0.0	28.4 76.3
Individuals using the Internet (%)	29.9	22.1 48.6
Households with a computer (%)	16.7	8.9 47.1
Households with Internet access (%)	19.6	19.4 54.7
International bandwidth per Internet user (kbit/s)	63.4	11.2 76.6
Fixed-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	0.7	0.6 13.6
Fixed-broadband sub. by speed tiers, % distribution		
-256 kbit/s to 2 Mbit/s	8.0	38.7 4.2
-2 to 10 Mbit/s	62.9	37.2 13.2
-equal to or above 10 Mbit/s	29.1	24.1 82.6

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

Public Works, Infrastructure, Transport and Communications is responsible for implementing ICT policy. With the support from the World Bank through the Central African Backbone project a strategic plan for ICT was developed, which has not been approved by the government yet. The General Authority for Regulation is the multi-sector regulator responsible for telecommunications, posts, water and electricity, established by the 14/2005 decree. The 3/2004 Base Law of Telecommunications guides the Authority's activities for that sector. The Authority is also responsible for managing the universal service fund and providing technical assistance for the transition to digital broadcasting.

Conclusion: A relatively high level of basic access to ICTs has been achieved thanks to the arrival of the ACE submarine cable and introduction of competition provide a platform to leverage high-speed digital technologies to diversify the economy and enhance delivery of government services.