



Over-The-Top services “OTTs” Policy, Regulation & Impact on ICT Ecosystems

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Economic impact of OTTs
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What are OTTs?



“Over-The-Top (OTT): Voice, text/messaging, audio, and visual communication services or applications that are delivered over the public Internet and accessed directly by end users and that may function as direct or indirect technical or functional substitutes for traditional international or electronic communication services, bypassing conventional network operators or service providers.”



OTT Ecosystem



- OTT Providers (e.g., messaging, streaming platforms)
- Telecom Operators (connectivity providers)
- Users (consumers & enterprises)
- Regulators / Governments
- Interconnection with cloud, IXPs, CDNs



Key OTT Service Categories



- Communication: VoIP, messaging apps
- Media: video/audio streaming
- Cloud & Digital Services
- Financial & Digital Platforms
- Emerging: AI-driven services, metaverse



Benefits of OTTs



- Increased consumer choice & affordability
- Innovation and rapid service deployment
- Digital inclusion and access to services
- Economic growth & digital transformation
- Support for SMEs and startups



Challenges for Telecom Operators



- Revenue decline (voice/SMS substitution)
- Network investment burden (traffic growth)
- Imbalance in value distribution (“fair share” debate)
- Increased CAPEX/OPEX without proportional returns



Regulatory & Policy Issues



- Level playing field between OTTs and telcos
- Licensing and jurisdiction challenges
- Data protection, privacy, cybersecurity
- Taxation of digital services
- Consumer protection obligations



Developing Countries Perspective



- Infrastructure investment gaps
- Dependence on international OTT platforms
- Limited local content and platforms
- Policy capacity constraints
- Opportunity for digital leapfrogging



ITU Role & Global Discussions



- ITU-T work on operational & economic aspects , interoperability, and QoS
- WTSA / PP discussions on OTT regulation
- Collaboration with other bodies (RTOs, OECD, WTO, and other regional orgs)
- Promoting balanced, innovation-friendly frameworks
- Capacity building for regulators



Policy Options & Way Forward



- Encourage infrastructure investment incentives
- Promote fair contribution models (carefully designed)
- Strengthen data governance frameworks
- Foster local digital ecosystems
- Multi-stakeholder approach (government–industry–ITU)
- Avoid over-regulation that stifles innovation



Thank you