

Consumers with disabilities

The universal service obligation includes a duty to meet the needs of consumers with disabilities. As part of its USO, eircom should:

- have a code of practice about the services it provides for people with disabilities,
- provide a dedicated section on its website about its services for people with disabilities, and
- provide the following services:
 - phones with amplifiers,
 - phones with tele-flash visual alerts for incoming calls,
 - phones that allow consumers to plug in hearing aid units,
 - a text relay service for receiving and converting voice to text,
 - a scheme that repays some of the costs of calls using the text relay service (these phone calls tend to be longer),
 - speed dialling and hands-free or loudspeaker options on phone sets for customers who have difficulty using their hands,
 - telephones with large buttons or other options for users with low vision,
 - bills in Braille free of charge, and
 - special free directory enquiries.

ComReg has set up a forum to make sure all telecoms operators understand the needs of disabled users and encourage them to provide suitable services.

Affordability and control of spending

As part of its universal service obligation, eircom should:

- provide a minimum level of itemised billing, free of charge,
- offer free call barring for outgoing calls, including those to premium rate numbers,
- publish its system for allowing customers pay connection fees in stages, and
- publish its rules on disconnecting customers for not paying their bills.

What is the telephone allowance?

Telephone Allowance is a payment from the Department of Social and Family Affairs towards your telephone bill. It covers:

- charges for line rental and equipment (if relevant), and
- call charges of up to €40.82 (plus VAT) if you are billed every two months, or
- call charges of up to €20.41 (plus VAT) if you are billed every month.

Telephone Allowance covers the cost of renting a special telephone, if available. You must meet certain conditions and have the telephone registered in your name to receive the Allowance.

The Telephone Allowance scheme is not limited to eircom customers. If you are not an eircom customer, contact your service provider to find out if it is taking part in the scheme.

Words used in this guide

Call barring = blocking certain types of calls from being made from your telephone

Itemised billing = a telephone bill that gives details of all the calls you made during your billing period

Where can I find out more?

You can read the consultation and decision documents on the ComReg website www.askcomreg.ie. If you would like a printed copy of any of these documents, please contact us.

How can I contact ComReg?

By phone (LoCall): **1890 229 668**
(9.00am to 5.30pm) Monday to Friday

By fax: **(01) 804 9671**

By email: consumerline@comreg.ie

Our websites are:

www.comreg.ie / www.askcomreg.ie / www.callcosts.ie

By post: **ComReg Consumer Team, Irish Life Centre Block DEF, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1**

Universal Service Obligation



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Universal Service Obligation - what it means for your phone service

By law, ComReg is responsible for regulating the Irish electronic communications sector. One of ComReg's responsibilities is to select a universal service provider (USP), to set requirements and to monitor performance.

In July 2003, ComReg chose eircom as the universal service provider for three years. When this period came to an end in July 2006, eircom was again designated as USP for a further four years.

In this guide, we:

- outline what we mean by universal service, and
- describe the obligations of the universal service provider in relation to phone services.

What is universal service?

Universal service means the basic services that should be available to all people and organisations. Together these are known as the universal service obligation (USO). In the case of telecommunications, this includes:

- providing access (phone lines) at a fixed location,
- providing printed phone directories,
- providing public payphones,
- providing services to disabled users, and
- introducing methods to control spending and keep costs affordable.

What is not covered by the universal service obligation (USO)?

The USO does not cover:

- ISDN and broadband internet connections,
- mobile phone services, or
- directory enquiry services.

Which company provides universal service?

'Universal service provider' is eircom, which ComReg has chosen to provide the universal service until the end of June 2010.

As the universal service provider, what should eircom do?

Eircom should

- meet all reasonable requests for connecting customers to the public telephone network and offer publicly available telephone services*,
- tell you how it intends to provide the connection and avoid using carrier systems where possible,
- make sure it deals with your request for connection promptly, inform you when a survey will be carried out and keep you up to date on the progress of your request,
- publish details of its connection record every three months,
- use all reasonable efforts to make sure that connections to the publicly available telephone network can send and receive data at a rate of at least 28.8 kbit/s, if necessary by removing carrier systems equipment and increasing the data speed on certain lines,
- inform all people applying for a phone line about its code of practice for handling complaints,
- provide a printed telephone directory that is updated every year,
- maintain the National Directory Database (NDD),

- make sure that public payphones are provided to meet the reasonable needs of customers,
- apply geographically averaged prices throughout the country, and
- provide means where customers can control spending.

*If the estimated cost of meeting the request is less than or equal to €7,000, the person or organisation applying for the connection will pay the standard connection charge. If it is greater than €7,000, eircom will pay the first €7,000 and the applicant will pay anything over this if they want to go ahead with the connection.

How quickly should eircom connect customers to the network?

Once eircom receives a request for a connection, it should:

- meet 60% of requests within 4 weeks,
- meet 80% of requests within 8 weeks,
- meet 90% of requests within 13 weeks,
- meet 95% of requests within 26 weeks, and
- meet all requests within 52 weeks.

These guideline targets are part of eircom's universal service obligation. At the time of going to print, these guideline targets were under review.

Directory enquiries

ComReg's Guide to Directory Enquiry Services will give you information on the companies that provide this service and how much they charge. There is a special arrangement for eircom to provide this service to disabled customers, but it is not obliged to provide a general directory inquiry service under its universal service obligation.

National Directory Database

All telephone numbers contained in public phone books or available through directory enquiries are held in a central record known as the National Directory Database (NDD). It is eircom's and the operator's duty to keep this up to date.

This database also records whether you want to receive direct marketing calls. For more information on this, read ComReg's Guide to Cold Calls.

Public payphones

As part of its USO, eircom must make sure that its public payphones meet the reasonable demands of customers. This means it should:

- provide enough public payphones,
- spread them fairly around the country,
- where possible, make sure they are accessible to disabled users, and
- make sure they offer a good quality service.

It also must make sure that, when using a public pay telephone, customers can:

- make an emergency call,
- use a directory enquiry service, and
- pay in a number of ways – coins, phone cards, credit cards, and so on.

If eircom decides to take away or move any public payphones, it must consult the local community first.