

A ComReg guide to roaming

Using your phone abroad



An Coimisiún um
Rialáil Cumarsáide

Commission for
Communications Regulation

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Introduction:

using your mobile phone abroad (roaming)

Most people use their mobile phones to keep in touch when going on holiday or travelling abroad. Using your phone like this is known as ‘roaming’ and includes:

- using social media like Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat
- making calls
- sending texts
- sending emails.

It can be more expensive to use your mobile phone abroad, particularly outside the EU. This guide shows you how to:

- manage your roaming costs
- be aware of your rights as a consumer
- know what to do if there are any problems.

We deal with roaming:

- within the European Union (EU)
- outside the EU.

USING YOUR MOBILE WITHIN THE EU

Countries where you can 'Roam like at home'

Austria	Germany	Norway
Belgium	Greece	Poland
Bulgaria	Hungary	Portugal
Croatia	Iceland	Romania
Cyprus	Italy	Slovakia
Czech Republic	Latvia	Slovenia
Denmark	Liechtenstein	Spain
Estonia	Lithuania	Sweden
Finland	Luxembourg	The Netherlands
France	Malta	United Kingdom ¹

Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway are part of the European Economic Area although they are not members of the EU.

Since June 2017, Irish consumers travelling within any EU country (plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) have been able to use their mobile phone to 'Roam like at home'. This means that you can make and receive calls, and send and receive text messages in the same way you do when at home in the Republic of Ireland. It doesn't matter which mobile network that you are connected to.

Similarly, you can also use some **or** all of your data allowance while roaming in the countries listed above. In some cases, mobile providers will allow you to use your full data allowance while roaming. In other cases, providers are putting in place a 'fair-usage policy'². This limits the amount of data you can use from your domestic bundle. Your domestic bundle is the normal phone service package that is included in your phone contract when you are at home.

Mobile providers decide these limits based on your domestic bundle and the type of contract (bill pay or prepay) and data allowance it includes.

The amounts below are the most you can be charged when roaming in the EU and you have used up your domestic bundle:

¹ The uncertainty due to the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU may affect the conditions for roaming in the UK. ComReg will issue more guidance on this once the details are known.

² A 'fair usage policy' refers to the restrictions or limits put in place by a mobile provider to prevent what they consider to be abusive or out-of-the-ordinary usage of roaming services by their customers.

- 3.2 cents per minute of voice call made (plus VAT)
- 1 cent per text message (plus VAT)
- €4.50 per gigabyte (GB) of data (plus VAT)³.

You may be unsure what your roaming data allowance is, but your mobile provider will confirm this for you by text when you arrive at your EU destination. You can also check this allowance before you travel by contacting your mobile provider.

What alerts can I expect to receive when roaming in the EU?

There are a number of text messages or text alerts that you can expect to receive from your mobile provider when you roam within the EU.

Pay attention to these alerts as they will provide you with important information and help you to manage your roaming usage.

When you arrive

When you arrive at your EU destination, you will receive a text message from your mobile provider. This sets out the various costs that will apply while you are roaming. It will include any extra charges for using your phone outside your normal at-home plan allowances.

It will also specify the amount of data you can use from your at-home allowance and any charge that will apply if you use more than this.

This text message should also include:

- a free phone number for your mobile provider that you can use if you need to call for more information
- the number for the emergency services in the country you are visiting.

When you have used up your allowance

When you have used up your data allowance, you will automatically receive a text message telling you how much more you will have to pay if you continue to use data services. You will then be asked to confirm if you wish to continue data roaming.

³ The cap per gigabyte (GB) of data will decrease on 1 January each year:

- €3.50 (plus VAT) as of 1 January 2020
- €3 (plus VAT) as of 1 January 2021
- €2.50 as of 1 January 2022 (plus VAT).

The cap after 2019 may be revised following a review of the wholesale roaming markets in 2019. Source: https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/consumers/internet-telecoms/mobile-roaming-costs/index_en.htm

How much data am I likely to use?⁴

There are 1,000 megabytes (MB) in 1 gigabyte (GB).

Activity:	Duration:	Data Usage:
Browsing on Social Media	1 hour	About 90MB
Streaming TV	1 hour	A typical Standard Definition (SD) streaming television service can use up to 700MB. High Definition (HD) uses up to 3GB and Ultra HD uses up to 7GB
Live Streaming	1 hour	A typical hour of live TV streaming will use around 540MB of data for SD and 1.8GB for HD content

If you continue roaming when your allowance is used up

If you choose to continue roaming after using up your data roaming allowance, you will also receive alerts when you have reached 80% and 100% of a €50.00 plus VAT (or €61.50 including VAT) spend. This is based on a monthly billing period. You will automatically receive these alerts unless you have requested not to receive them. When you receive the 100% warning text message, you will have to opt-in by return text message to continue to use data services.

Be careful to watch your roaming

However, be warned, if you do continue to use the service, the mobile provider does **not** have to send you any more alerts about how much you are spending.

Please remember to take the necessary precautions to limit or control your roaming usage.

TEXT 1: Welcome message telling you how much data you can use when roaming without paying anything extra.

TEXT 2: Message telling you when you used up your data allowance.

TEXT 3: A message telling you when you have spent €49.20 (including VAT) on data - 80% of €61.50.

TEXT 4: A message telling you when you have spent €61.50 (including VAT) on data.

⁴ See ComReg's report on 'Meeting Consumers' Connectivity Needs' Ref. no. 18/103b

Alternative roaming tariffs

Some mobile providers offer discounted roaming rates when travelling to certain countries. These are known as 'alternative roaming tariffs'. Your mobile provider will automatically charge you the 'Roam like at home' prices unless you choose to opt for one of their alternative roaming tariffs.

Depending on your individual contract or mobile plan these alternative roaming tariffs may be cheaper **or** more expensive. You can choose the roaming tariff plan that best suits your roaming needs. If you are unsure which one is the most suitable, your mobile provider should be able to help you with this.

Inadvertent roaming

Inadvertent roaming is when the signal from a mobile phone is picked up by a different mobile network with a better signal. This can happen inadvertently (without you being aware that this is happening). There are some areas in the EU where you can roam onto a non-EU mobile network that is not under the 'Roam like at home' rates. For example, if you are travelling in border areas, it is possible that you can connect to another non-EU country's network and run up roaming charges inadvertently.

Another example is if you are travelling in the Greek Islands you might automatically connect to a mobile network in Turkey. To stop this from happening, you can disable the automatic network selection setting on your phone handset so that you only connect to the mobile network you choose.

Roaming on a ferry or plane

You can 'Roam like at home' on a ferry or plane as long as you are directly connected to a land-based mobile network. For example, if you are on a ship that is travelling away from the coast and you are no longer connected to a mobile network in an EU country, the 'Roam like at home' rates will not apply.

Some ferries and planes offer a satellite service to provide coverage throughout your journey. Again, the 'Roam like at home' rates will not apply in this case. You should make sure you know the rates for these services before you use them.

Using your phone while still at home to contact abroad

The EU 'Roam like at home' rules do not apply when calling or sending a text message to another EU country when you're at home in the Republic of Ireland. This is not roaming but is instead an 'intra-EU' communication. The cost to Irish consumers for making a call or sending a text from Ireland to a fixed or mobile number in another EU Member State is capped. This means that the cost will be no more than 19 cent (plus VAT) per minute for a call and 6 cent (plus VAT) per text message.

International rates apply when you make a call or send a text message to a non-EU country. You should be aware that the prices for these calls and text messages are not regulated and so they can be expensive. They can also vary depending on the country you are contacting.

Some common mobile phone scenarios

We have put together four examples of some common mobile phone scenarios and the charges associated with each of these. These examples can be used as a reference point to help you to understand some of the ways you might use your phone and what the charges will be, if not included in your bundle:

Example 1: phoning a local restaurant while on holiday

Where are you?

I am on holiday in France and call a local restaurant to make a dinner reservation.

The charge you will have to pay

You will be on the 'Roam like at home' tariff.

Example 2: phoning home from abroad

Where are you?

I am on holiday in France and call back home to Ireland.

The charge you will have to pay

You will be on the 'Roam like at home' tariff.

Example 3: you are at home and phoning an EU country

Where are you?

I am at home in Ireland and make a call to France.

The charge you will have to pay

This is an intra-EU call and you will be charged the intra-EU call rate.

Example 4: you are at home and phoning a non-EU country

Where are you?

I am at home in Ireland and make a call to the USA.

The charge you will have to pay

This is an international call and you will be charged an international call rate.

USING YOUR MOBILE OUTSIDE THE EU

It can be significantly more expensive to use your phone outside the EU. However, you can minimise your costs by choosing the best options before you leave home.

Roaming costs vary for different countries. Before you travel, check the roaming costs for the country you are visiting with your mobile provider. These rates can be expensive, but you can

reduce costs by making only essential calls and using data (for example social media and the internet) in free Wi-Fi zones.

Ask your mobile provider at home which mobile network will give you the cheapest roaming rates in each country outside the EU that you are visiting. You can then manually choose this one when your phone gives you a list of available networks.

What alerts will I receive when roaming outside the EU?

If you travel outside the EU you should receive a 'data usage alert' on your phone while travelling. However, sometimes your home mobile provider cannot send this alert to the country you are visiting. In these circumstances, you should receive a text message advising you that the data usage alert cannot be sent while you are roaming in that country. You should be careful to manage how you use your phone as you will be responsible for the resulting bill.

If you are unsure, turn off the data roaming option in your settings (see the section on ComReg's top tips on page 8).

When your mobile provider can send you an alert, you can expect to receive two text messages:

TEXT 1: Message telling you when you have spent €49.20 - 80% of €61.50 (including VAT).

TEXT 2: Message telling you when you have spent €61.50 (including VAT).

Once you have received the alerts at 80% and 100% of this limit, you must opt-in to continue using data services.

Warning

You should be aware that there may be a time delay before you receive the data usage alert. So you may have already spent €61.50 before you receive the alert. Your mobile provider does not have to continue to alert you about how much you are spending.

Also, be aware that these alerts relate to data usage only and do not include any other roaming usage such as calls or text messages.

How else can I manage my roaming costs?

Some mobile providers offer roaming packages that are tailored for travel outside the EU. They are usually charged on a per-day basis and provide a set allowance for calls, texts and data services. Contact your mobile provider to discuss the best available roaming options.

Alternatively, you might consider buying and using a local phone SIM card when you arrive at your destination. You can only do this if your phone is unlocked and you can only unlock your phone if you own it outright or if you are out of contract. You can get your unlock code by contacting your mobile provider. You should do this at least a month before you travel as this process takes time.

When you replace your at-home SIM card with this local one, it means you are paying local rates as opposed to roaming rates.

ComReg's top tips for using your mobile abroad

1. Get to know your phone

Be familiar with the settings on your phone. You can turn off the data roaming function on your handset or ask if your mobile provider can do this for you. This will make sure you can only access data services when connected to a Wi-Fi zone.

You will know you are connected to Wi-Fi when this symbol  appears on your home screen. Many cafés, bars and restaurants offer free Wi-Fi services to their customers.

2. Background data use

Remember that smartphone apps use data in the background even when you are not actively doing anything on your phone. For example, apps on your phone may update to the latest version. You can turn-off automatic app updates in your handset settings.

3. Check when you turn your phone on again

If you switch your handset off and back on again, be careful to check your roaming settings as they may default back to the original setting.

4. Talk to your mobile provider

Ask your mobile provider how you can best monitor your real time usage when you're abroad. You may be able to monitor your usage by downloading your mobile provider's app or texting a key word to a particular number. But remember to check if the usage information is provided to you in real time - especially if you are travelling outside the EU.

5. Read information texts

Pay attention to the texts that you receive from your provider and read them. Don't ignore what these say!

6. Know your MBs and GBs

Know the difference of being charged per MB and per GB - there are 1,000MBs in 1GB. Pay special attention not to confuse the two, so you are fully aware of your data roaming allowance.



7. Avoid using large files

Avoid streaming things like music or films and avoid using mobile maps for directions because these can run up very large bills.

8. Use a PIN or passcode

Take the time to properly secure your mobile handset with a PIN or passcode. Update your emergency contact on your home screen. Make a note of your mobile handset serial number (IMEI number) by pressing `*#06#` on your handset.

9. Use an app that can find your phone

Download an app that can trace your phone and delete its data if it is lost or stolen.

10. Contact your provider immediately if your phone is lost or stolen

Contact your mobile provider immediately with your IMEI number if your handset is lost or stolen. Thieves can quickly run up huge bills which you may be responsible for if you do not take swift action.

11. Take note of emergency numbers

Know the number for emergency services: 112 in the EU and 911 in the USA and Canada. If you are travelling elsewhere, check locally for the relevant number.

About ComReg

ComReg regulates electronic communications services including:

- home phones
- mobile phones
- broadband
- premium rate services.

It also regulates the postal markets.

If you need any more information on roaming or you need to clarify any of the information in this guide, please visit www.comreg.ie or contact our Consumer Care team:

Our Consumer Care contact details are:

Phone: (01) 804 9668

Email: [consumerline@comreg.ie/](mailto:consumerline@comreg.ie)
businessconsumers@comreg.ie

Online Form: www.comreg.ie/contact/

Web Chat

SMS to receive a call back: Send a text with the word **COMREG** to **51500***

SMS to receive a text back: Send a text with the word **ASKCOMREG** to **51500***

Irish Sign Language facility available on request

8.00am to 8.00pm Mon. to Fri. and 9.00am to 1.00pm Sat.

*Standard SMS rates apply



General Data Protection Rules (GDPR) information

We have updated our Privacy Notice. It explains what personal information we collect and use about individuals, what we do with it and why. Here is a link to our updated Privacy Notice: www.comreg.ie/privacy/

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