

SA joins list of losers on digital migration

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18 Jun 2015

South Africa is part of a small list of countries that have failed to even get out of the starting blocks regarding digital migration, according to an international body.

In 2006, South Africa and other countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa committed to meeting an International Telecommunication Union (ITU) deadline to switch over to digital terrestrial television (DTT) broadcasting on 17 June 2015. The ITU is a specialised agency tasked by the United Nations to focus on information and communication technologies.

Digital migration involves shifting broadcasters from analogue to digital signals, and the process is key for opening up more frequencies and faster mobile broadband services.

South Africa's digital migration process has however been stalled by disagreements among broadcasters. Also, President Jacob Zuma's splitting of the former Department of Communications last year reportedly resulted in a turf war among ministries over the control of the digital migration process.



Image via [123RF](#)

Subsequently, the ITU lists South Africa among nations that have failed to even start a digital migration process. South Africa then joins non-starter digital migration countries which include Armenia, Bangladesh, Belize, the Central African Republic, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone and Turkey.

Namibia and Turkey are reported to have started their digital migration processes in the meantime. However, Sanjay Acharya - who is the chief of media relations and public information at the ITU - told Fin24 that the ITU's data on non-starters is based on regular updates from administrators in each country.

Consequences for countries that have missed the ITU digital migration deadline include having to deal with signal clashes between analogue and digital, Acharya said.

"They will have an obligation to immediately resolve any harmful interference that may occur, either affecting neighbouring countries that have implemented the transition or emanating from other sources," he told Fin24.

"And they will have abrogated their right to international protection," Acharya said.

The risk of signal interference in South Africa is highest along the country's borders. ITU data already indicates that Mozambique has completed its digital migration process, while the process is ongoing in Zimbabwe and Botswana.

The ITU data further states that Tanzania, Mozambique and Malawi are the only African countries to have confirmed that they have completed their digital migration projects. These countries have joined the likes of Western Europe, the US and Australia in achieving digital migration success.

Meanwhile, other African countries where the ITU says the digital migration process is still ongoing include: Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Congo, Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Government speaks up

Minister of Communications Faith Muthambi released a statement this week regarding the ITU deadline.

News24 reported that Muthambi conceded that South Africa will miss the ITU's digital migration deadline, and that there is a risk of signal disruptions along South Africa's borders.

However, in a bid to reduce the risk of signal interference, Muthambi said she had signed agreements of cooperation with Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique. The minister added that Namibia and Zimbabwe are finalising their agreements with South Africa.

Muthambi further said that there would be no "major negative impact" on South Africa's analogue television services near the country's borders.

"The digital migration project management office is hard at work to ensure that set-top boxes are manufactured and delivered to complete the migration process," said Muthambi.

Set-top boxes are the devices needed to decode digital signals for analogue television sets.

Earlier this year, Fin24 reported that 26 bidding organisations have each won a piece of South Africa's R4.3bn set-top box tender.

State agency the Universal Services and Access Agency of South Africa is tasked with ensuring that 5 million poorer households receive the subsidised set-top boxes.

Source: [Fin24](#)

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