

# Draft National Telecom Policy 2025:

Potential to unlock the gateway to the future

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The Department of Telecommunications, Government of India (DoT) has released a draft of the National Telecom Policy 2025 (Draft Policy) for public consultation. The Draft Policy embodies the Government's vision in the realm of telecommunications and emerging technologies for the next few years. With the enactment of the Telecommunications Act, 2023 (Telecom Act) last year, the Draft Policy has been introduced at a timely juncture to enable the implementation of a new-age regulatory framework.

In particular, the Draft Policy seeks to address challenges and opportunities posed by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), 5G/6G, quantum communications, internet of things (IoT), blockchain and satellite networks with a goal to project India as a "global digital powerhouse".

## Snapshot

To do so, the Draft Policy identifies six strategic missions: (1) universal and meaningful connectivity, (2) fostering innovation, (3) promoting domestic manufacturing, (4) ensuring secure and trusted network, (5) enhancing ease of living and doing business, and (6) advancing sustainable development.

Such missions will be bolstered by certain strategic objectives for the telecom sector that need to be achieved over the course of the next half a decade, by 2030. Some of these objectives are based on empirical and quantifiable outcomes, e.g., achieving an annual investment of INR 1 trillion (approx. USD 11 billion); doubling the sector's contribution to India's GDP, exports of telecom products and services, number of telecom start-ups and sectoral R&D spending on emerging technologies; creating 1 million new jobs and upskilling / reskilling workers to meet future demands; and so on. On the other hand, there are certain qualitative objectives like ensuring universal and meaningful connectivity for all, strengthening security by adopting quantum resistant cryptography, etc.

## Specifics of the strategic missions

1. **Universal and meaningful connectivity:** The crux of this mission is to ensure universal, meaningful and affordable connectivity by expanding telecom networks, improving quality of services and embracing the convergence of technology with different business models. By 2030, it is expected that the 100% of the population will be covered by 4G and 90% of the population by 5G, fiberization of towers will increase to 80%, all Government institutions will be connected by fibre at village level, stringer quality of service (QoS) parameters will be devised for various telecom services, national long distance (NLD) network will be made more resilient by use of submarine cable and so on. To support these initiatives, incentives and simplification of processes / procedures have been envisaged. In particular, measures such as the use of the Digital Bharat Nidhi (which has replaced the erstwhile Universal Service Obligation Fund), leveraging of the National Broadband Mission, utilization of Optical Ground Wire from the sector in remote / hilly areas, light touch-authorisation for establishment of submarine cable infrastructure for domestic connectivity, etc. have been proposed.
2. **Innovation:** This mission seeks to promote pioneering research, telecom startups and fostering collaboration between multiple stakeholders to position India as a global leader. This will be achieved by promoting cutting edge research, streamlining the R&D ecosystem, setting up of regulatory sandboxes, proliferation of machine to machine (M2M) communication), opening greenfield spectrum

bands for emerging technologies, providing funding and mentorship to start-ups, introducing new financing models, government supported events and competitions, developing new standards, establishing tech incubation hubs and so on.

3. Domestic manufacturing: The objective of this mission is to accelerate economic growth and job creation, for projecting India as a hub for telecom equipment manufacturing at a global scale. As a corollary, it can be expected that there will be emphasis on localization and design-led manufacturing, import substitution, establishment of telecom manufacturing zones (TMZ), strengthening of supply chain, setting up of research labs and job creation. Incentives, funding and maximization of resources will lead the way for fulfilment of this mission.
4. Secure and trusted network: This mission is designed towards building a secure and trusted ecosystem, which will be complimented by enhancing cybersecurity measures, promoting cyber hygiene, etc. The Government aims to achieve this by rolling out quantum secured products, supporting cryptographic agility, promoting 100% IPv6 adoption, use of AI / machine learning for threat detection and reporting, blocking of rogue websites, detection of spam and unsolicited commercial communication, introducing service to validate mobile numbers, and regular cross-stakeholder collaboration.
5. Ease of living and doing business: The aim here is to empower both citizens and businesses, by fostering an inclusive digital ecosystem. Importantly, this lays emphasis on reducing consumer grievances, compliance burden on businesses, timelines for grant of authorisations and approvals. Access to telecom services will be enhanced by implementation of in-building solutions and adoption of rating systems for buildings in relation to telecom connectivity. There may also be a possibility of segregation and rationalization of compliances for retail and enterprise businesses, which has been a long-standing concern among industry players. To give wings to evolving industry needs, a dynamic National Spectrum Roadmap may be developed and updated periodically.
6. Sustainable development: The Draft Policy aims to transition to a sustainable future, with an ultimate objective of reducing carbon footprints. This will be done, essentially, by measures such as encouraging use of AI-enabled managed systems, dictat for using green and renewable technologies, providing incentives and promoting use of refurbished products. Capability building in education institutions, setting up centres of excellence and awareness programs will also be necessary for this purpose.

## Next steps

The Draft Policy is currently open for public consultation, and stakeholders have time till mid-August to furnish their comments. Hence, revisions to the Draft Policy will be made by the Government based on the feedback received.

## Comments

The Draft Policy, much like the preceding policies of a similar nature issued by the Government, lays down the foundation of the legal and regulatory framework for the years to come. It indicates the Government's focus areas, which will dictate the way in which other policies, incentives and programs will flow. The emphasis on capacity building, in a sustainable manner, will be instrumental in India taking centerstage in the information communication technology revolution.

The Draft Policy presents a balanced mix of quantitative and qualitative goals, and will allow all stakeholders to closely monitor the progress over the next few years.

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