

COVID-19 and Mexican telecoms sector

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When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Mexico in Spring 2020, the Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFT) issued a decree to:

- order the maintenance of telecoms and broadcasting network operations;
- enhance information and communication technologies to counteract the effects of the contingency measures; and
- encourage preventive measures and avoid the spread of misleading information.

Further, the federal government determined that the provision of telecoms services was an essential activity.

In addition, the IFT and the Ministry of Communications and Transportation requested that municipal and state authorities facilitate telecoms and broadcasting companies with regard to installing, operating and maintaining their infrastructure.

Mobile companies have offered COVID-19 emergency plans primarily to prepaid phone users. Certain users received at least 100 minutes of calls and 150 SMS messages for no extra cost. Likewise, users receive COVID-19 updates via calls and SMS free of charge in order to minimise possible risks. Special packages have also been made available to healthcare workers.

Similarly, some pay TV and fixed internet companies issued 'stay at home' plans, which included unlimited calls and SMS as well as 10GB of mobile internet access for \$4.

In terms of procedures, the IFT has issued various emergency guidelines to perform its activities through electronic means. At present, 84% of the IFT's procedures can be performed electronically. It is unclear when the IFT will adjust to the new normality.

There has certainly been an increase in demand for telecoms services and ancillary services derived from the necessity to stay at home. However, there will also be drawbacks (eg, a greater number of and more sophisticated cybersecurity risks that could affect individuals and companies during this difficult time). Further, due to the network capacity originally forecasted due to a lower demand in services, network quality may decrease overall.

Telecoms companies should adjust to the new changes accordingly, but it remains unclear how the regulator will react to these amendments and issue policies that could mitigate any negative effects on companies and consumers. It is unclear what regulations will be proposed and enacted in the short and medium term, which could be important for the recovery of other sectors affected by the uncertainty generated by the COVID-19 crisis.

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