

EU's border dwellers cheer loudest as roaming charges end

June 11 2017, by Benjamin Massot



Border residents, who often faced high bills when their phones connected to foreign networks, are among the happiest to see the end of roaming charges in the EU as of June 15

The end of roaming fees in the EU is drawing loud cheers from mobile phone users, and nowhere more so than in borderlands where residents are always just a step away from involuntarily incurring hefty surcharges.

"The end of roaming is really great," said Kevin, who lives in the Belgian town of Mouscron, just 20 metres (yards) from the French border.

"My inlaws live nearby in France and when I go to see them I always switch my mobile phone off to avoid surcharges," the 21-year old told AFP.

Such radical measures will soon no longer be necessary, after the EU decided that, starting on June 15, telecom operators can no longer charge travelling phone users in the bloc more than they would in their home markets.

Ludovic, who sells mobile phones in a nearby outlet run by the Orange operator, says worried clients often come to him with questions on the topic, "especially teenagers who are glued to their smartphones and use up a lot of data".

Amine, an electrician who lives in Mouscron, regularly gets jobs across the border in the region of Lille, France's northern metropolis hugging the Belgian border.

Commuting between both countries inflated his [phone](#) bill to 280 euros (\$312) in April. "If the end of roaming charges means I get to pay less, then that's really super," he said.

When roaming is mentioned, tempers fray in Tourcoing, on the French side, as the failure of operators to exactly match up their networks' scope with the political border demands constant vigilance from users, driving them to distraction.

"When you're at the (local) Dron hospital, a few hundred metres from the border, you're already in the Belgian network," fumed Malika, a city employee.

"Here you often get caught up in the Belgian network, they have strong antennae. And what's more, you can't get out again," said Nicole, who works for online travel agency Booking.com.

"So you always check that you're on the French network before making a call or sending a text," she says.

Many others try to lock into their operator's [network](#) manually, but juggling between two country's networks is always a struggle.

"In [border](#) regions like ours you won't find anyone who thinks that this development is a bad thing," said Herve Ghyselen, owner of a small local transport company.

The EU Commission has pushed operators to reduce roaming charges for the past decade and won approval from the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament two years ago to abolish them altogether.

Starting on June 15, EU-based [mobile phone](#) subscribers will be able to use their phones in other bloc countries as if they were at home.

"This means the end of roaming charges as travellers have experienced them so far," the Commission said in the run-up to the change.

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