



communications
& digital technologies

Department:
Communications & Digital Technologies
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

09 March 2022

STATEMENT ON THE MISINFORMATION AND FALSE CLAIMS THAT THERE IS A PENDING LOSS OF FREE-TO-AIR TELEVISION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Department of Communications and Digital Technologies has noted with concern the misinformation and false claims that there is a pending loss of free-to-air television in South Africa. The misinformation seeks to create unnecessary anxiety about the end of dual illumination period and the gazetted analogue switch-off date of 31 March 2022.

The claim that 14 million South Africans are going to lose free-to-air television on 31st March 2022 are preponderous at best and a figment of imagination at worst. Since 5th October 2021, the Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Ms Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, has been briefing South Africans about the process towards completing digital migration in South Africa. The facts that have been presented to South Africans before and remain applicable are:

(a) TV Watching Households and TV Transmission Networks

According to the latest StatsSA Report (2018), there are approximately 14 million TV-watching households in South Africa. Of these 14 million households, 11.5 million households watched TV through satellite transmission (approximately 8.5 million on DSTV subscription, approximately 2.8 million on OpenViewHD, and 400 thousand on StarSAT) and 2.5 million watched on analogue. As explained before, households watching TV through satellite have already migrated from analogue, in what is deemed self-migration. Therefore, the claim that 14 million South Africans will lose free-to-air TV is not based on fact and devoid of any truth.

(b) Government Assistance to migrate Poor Households

In March 2012, Cabinet decided to support a proposed model of assisting poor households to migrate from analogue to digital TV viewing through subsidising Set-Top Boxes for everyone within the Square Kilometer Array radius in the Northern Cape, in case of SA winning the SKA hosting and qualifying poor households in other provinces who apply for such assistance. Government determined an income per household threshold to qualify for assistance, which has been revised to R3500 in September 2021.

Since March 2012, just over 1.3 million households applied for assistance to date through their nearest Post Offices or the link: www.stbregistration.gov.za. Over 200 thousand of these applications were submitted in the last 6 months in response to an active public awareness campaign that is driven through the Department in partnership with the SABC (both radio and TV). Furthermore, government indicated that all South Africans who applied for support before or by 31st October 2021 (cut-off date) will be connected before the switch-off and

those who applied after the cut-off date will be connected within 3 – 6 months of the Analogue Switch-Off date.

It is important to reiterate, in line with the international treaty signed with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), South Africa should have completed its digital migration in June 2015. Over the years, various Ministers responsible for telecommunications communicated the programme to assist poor households to migrate and the need to complete the digital migration without further delays. Therefore, attempts to project the Department and Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies as truant and reckless in her driving the conclusion of digital migration is without basis. The conclusion of the digital migration is long overdue, and government has provided enough safeguards to protect the poor from being excluded from the digital migration. The responsibility remains with qualifying households to apply for government assistance and such assistance remains available.

(c) Digital TV sets and the pending Ban on importation of Analogue TV sets

Fully cognisant that all households will qualify for government assistance and may correctly not intend to migrate through satellite television, the government has put in measures to protect and support TV-viewing through free-to-air. Given that since 2016, digital TV sets were being imported into South Africa, the Department has published a list on its website, www.dcdt.gov.za, of digital TV sets with which households do not require SetTop Boxes to migrate and thus could self-migrate. Accompanying the published list of digital TV sets, the Department has also explained a process for households to configure their digital TVs for terrestrial TV-viewing.

In addition, the Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition has recently published a Notice, by way of Government Gazette, calling for public comments on the proposed ban of the importation of Analogue TV sets. When the ban on the importation of analogue TV sets is finally imposed, it will imply that households will not require Set Top Boxes to view terrestrial television.

Minister Ntshavheni reiterates government's call for households that earn not more than R3500 per month, who have not applied for government assistance to migrate to continue to do so at their nearest Post Offices or online through the link: www.stbregistration.gov.za. The applying households will be assisted to migrate within 3 – 6 months after the analogue switch-off as per earlier communication.

Furthermore, in the Provinces of Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and Western Cape where the provincial analogue switch-offs are still to take place, the Department, and its entities SAPO, USAASA and Sentech have deployed teams on the ground continuing to assist poor households to apply for assistance.

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