



April 2026

## **Draft Telecom Consumers Protection (Thirteenth Amendment) Regulations, 2026**

On April 7, 2026, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (“**TRAI**”) issued draft notification proposing the Telecom Consumers Protection (Thirteenth Amendment) Regulations, 2026 (“**TCPR Draft Regulations**”), inviting stakeholder comments until April 28, 2026. The proposed amendment seeks to strengthen consumer choice, affordability, and pricing transparency in relation to Special Tariff Vouchers (“**STVs**”), with particular focus on consumers who primarily rely on voice and Short Message Service (“**SMS**”) and do not require data services. Through the TCPR Draft Regulations, TRAI has reiterated its consumer centric regulatory approach, especially for low income, rural, and non-data users.

### **What the TCPR Draft Regulation proposes?**

The TCPR Draft Regulations are aimed at addressing structural and pricing disparities in the availability of voice and SMS-only STVs offered by Telecom Service Providers (“**TSPs**”). Key elements of the proposed amendment include:

1. **Substitution of existing proviso:** The TCPR Draft Regulations propose substituting the existing fourth proviso to Regulation 4(2)(c)(iii), which currently requires the TSPs to offer at least one voice and SMS-only STV with validity not exceeding 365 (three hundred and sixty-five) days. The proposed proviso mandates that TSPs offer STVs exclusively for voice and SMS for each validity period corresponding to bundled STVs offering voice, SMS and data, whether with or without value-added services. It further requires that such voice and SMS-only STVs be priced with a largely proportional reduction in tariff compared to bundled STVs of corresponding validity. TRAI has also indicated that the impact of this amendment may be reviewed after 6 (six) months based on implementation experience and consumer outcomes.
2. **Limited availability and high upfront costs:** TRAI observed that TSPs currently offer only a limited number of voice and SMS-only STVs, predominantly with longer validity periods such as approximately 80/84 days or 336/365 days. These limited options effectively excluded shorter-duration choices and required higher upfront payments, which undermined the objective of providing affordable and flexible options to low income and rural consumers.
3. **Inadequate pricing differentials:** TRAI noted that the initial pricing of voice and SMS-only STVs was not reduced proportionately when compared to bundled STVs offering voice, SMS, and data. Despite the exclusion of data benefits, the price difference did not adequately reflect this reduction in service scope, thereby diluting the intended consumer benefit. While subsequent pricing moderation was undertaken following consumer feedback, TRAI has determined that regulatory safeguards are necessary to prevent recurrence.
4. **Lack of parity in validity options:** A key concern highlighted in the TCPR Draft Regulations is the absence of parity between validity periods available for bundled STVs (voice, SMS and data) and those available exclusively

for voice and SMS. The bundled STVs are offered across multiple validity periods, whereas voice and SMS-only STVs are restricted to a few validity categories. This disparity places non-data users at a comparative disadvantage and restricts meaningful consumer choice.

5. **Reinforcement of consumer protection objectives and fair pricing:** The TCPR Draft Regulations seeks to reinforce the core objective of consumer protection by ensuring that tariff offerings are fair, equitable, and non-discriminatory. TRAI has emphasised that consumers who do not require data services should not be compelled to purchase bundled packs or incur avoidable expenditure due to lack of suitable alternatives. TSPs will be mandatorily required to offer STVs exclusively for voice and SMS for every validity period. These must correspond to bundled STVs offering voice, SMS and data, whether or not such bundled STVs include value-added services. Further, such voice and SMS-only STVs must be priced with a largely proportional reduction in tariff, fairly reflecting the exclusion of data benefits and ensuring reasonable, transparent, and affordable options for the relevant consumer segments.
6. **Publication and disclosure requirements:** TRAI has proposed that voice and SMS-only STVs be published and made easily accessible in accordance with existing tariff publication directions. TSPs will be required to ensure clear and prominent disclosure across all consumer touchpoints, including customer care centres, retail outlets, websites, and mobile applications, to facilitate informed consumer choice.

## Conclusion

The proposed amendment under the TCPR Draft Regulations highlights TRAI's intention to correct market imbalances and disadvantages to the non-data users and to ensure that tariff structures remain aligned with principles of consumer choice, affordability, and transparency. By mandating parity in validity periods, proportional pricing, and enhanced disclosure for voice and SMS-only STVs, TRAI seeks to prevent indirect discrimination against consumers who do not require data services. Stakeholder comments on the TCPR Draft Regulations will play a critical role in shaping the final regulatory framework and its practical impact on both, consumers and TSPs.

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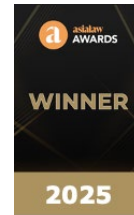
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