
Digital Terrestrial TV – roll-out in Tunisia

By Sofian-Mohamed Jelili



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By African standards Tunisia was an early adopter of Digital Terrestrial TV (DTT). Trials started in 2001 and commercial roll-out took place eight years later in 2009, just two years before the dramatic events that sparked a revolution at home and political upheaval throughout the Arab world.

Tunisia's move to DTT therefore anticipated a sharp increase in demand for local TV content that came with the advent of democracy in the country.

[...] Tunisia's state broadcaster to reach roughly **98%** of the Tunisian population.

Initially digital signals were transmitted using 17 transmitters. Some 40 more were added in 2015, which allowed Tunisia's state broadcaster to reach roughly 98% of the Tunisian population.

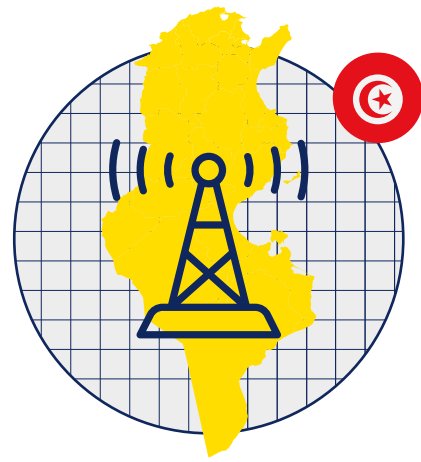
Initially signals were transmitted using MPEG2 video coding but the country switched to the more advanced MPEG4 format at the time of the commercial roll-out, and in 2010 the government passed a law calling on all TV sets to be sold with an MPEG4 receiver built in.

As a result today Tunisia has three public channels – one broadcasting in standard definition (SD) and another in both SD and separately in high definition (HD). And there are now 7 private channels. This compares with four channels in total that existed in Tunisia before the commercial roll-out of DTT in 2009.

All 10 TV channels in Tunisia air local content, there are also 5 radios broadcast over DTT. The move to digital has therefore generated a lot of jobs.

Also, Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) was rolled out in Tunisia last year. There are 18 radio stations that currently reach 25% of the population. That is due to rise to 75% this year, and to 100% by 2022.

DTT infrastructure is based on the DVB-T standard – the precursor to DVB-T2. There are currently no plans to upgrade.



The move to the newer standard would only permit the creation of two additional channels, and although there would be an improvement in the strength of the signal and therefore lead to better image quality, the government has no plans presently to switch to DVB-T2.

As in other countries, part of Tunisia's aim when switching to DTT was to free up bandwidth for other services such as mobile

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telephony as well as applications including Internet of Things (IoT) and Big Data.

This is commonly termed the digital dividend. In 2016 the government used some of the money paid by telecoms providers for a share of the 690-860 MHz bandwidth to purchase 60,000 decoders, which were then given away to families without access to TV.

Unlike larger countries in Africa, Tunisia with a population of just 11.5 million people only has one broadcast signal distributor – the national broadcaster. The public channels are also available via international operators such as the Saudi-based Arabsat network.

But domestically there is a perceived need for more and better quality TV content. That's why the public broadcaster plans to launch a new television channel devoted to providing viewers with national and international news.

[...] need for more and **better quality TV content**

Director of the public TV channel Watania 1, Fathi Chroudi said in January that the move should respond to the "will and need of the Tunisian citizens for rapid and accurate information."

There is also a plan to introduce a parliamentary TV channel devoted to airing political debate from the Assembly of People's Representatives. One idea under discussion is to use the second existing public channel for this – Watania 2.