



Guideline for the harmonization of the handling of complaints and claims from consumers of telecommunications services / West Africa zone

WATRA Working Group on Consumer
Access and Experience

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1 GENERAL CONDITIONS

1.1 Preamble

This document concerning guidelines on managing consumer complaints and claims aims to standardize the processes for handling complaints and claims across member states of West Africa.

Under the auspices of the West Africa Telecommunications Regulators Association (WATRA), these guidelines aim to effectively regulate relations between consumers, operators, and other actors in the telecommunications sector.

They are part of an approach to strengthening the protection of consumer interests, improving the quality of service, and increasing user confidence in telecom services.

1.2 Terminology

In this document, unless otherwise specified, the following terms have the following meanings:

"Complaint": a formal claim from a customer dissatisfied with the services of their provider (Internet, mobile/landline telephony, etc.) after the failure of an amicable approach with the latter.

"Complaint": any expression or manifestation of dissatisfaction by a customer, addressed to an entity concerning its products/services, and for which the customer requests that the non-recurrence not be addressed, and to which a solution is implicitly expected.

"Consumer": any natural person who acquires telecom goods and services for end use;

"Operator": any legal entity operating an electronic communications network open to the public or providing the public with an electronic communications service;

"NRA": refers to the National Regulatory Authority;

"Common Complaints Management Platform": a digital tool enabling the collection, monitoring, and processing of consumer complaints;

"Electronic fraud": any fraudulent activity involving telecommunications services;

"Processing time": defined period for handling and resolving a complaint.

1.3 Goals

a) Main objective

This document aims to establish a harmonized, effective, and transparent framework for handling consumer complaints and claims in the WATRA area.

b) Impacts

These guidelines aim to:

- Ensure prompt, fair, and efficient handling of complaints and claims.
- Strengthen the protection of consumer interests.
- Harmonize regulatory practices across Member States.
- Promote transparency and build trust in telecom services.
- Reduce recurring disputes between consumers and operators.
- Improve traceability and complaint tracking through harmonized systems.
- Enable regional comparison of operators' performance.
- Improve overall service quality through consumer feedback.
- Support data-driven regulatory decision-making based on complaints and claims.

1.4 Methodology

Based on the experience of Member States, this document presents a collection of best practices and trends in consumer protection of electronic communications services and the good manners expected of them for a healthy and fair business environment.

Therefore, these guidelines are developed based on:

- Experiences of Member States;
- Practices of National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs);
- Outputs of the Working Group on Consumer Access and Experience; and
- Findings from the reference meeting report (WATRA/WG/CAE/2024/001).

The discussions helped to identify common mechanisms already in place in several countries.

1.5 Provisions

National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) are tasked, among other things, with ensuring the application of legislation and regulations relating to the electronic communications and postal sectors. In this capacity, abouts complaints and claims, they are specifically responsible for:

- to ensure the handling of all matters relating to the protection of users' interests, including the establishment of an appropriate system for receiving user complaints and related investigations, and, where appropriate, submitting said complaints to the competent institutions;
- to take charge of the interests of users and to help strengthen the capacity for action of user associations;
- analyze, on its own initiative or at the request of users, and where appropriate, demand the modification of unfair terms in contracts concluded with users or in agreements governing interconnection or access to operators' networks;
- respect the principle of adversarial proceedings and the rights of the defense by enabling the parties to present their observations during a dispute resolution procedure;
- etc.

In view of the aforementioned elements, particular emphasis is then placed on the implementation of a structured process for collecting complaints and claims, the in-depth analysis of the cases of complaints received and recorded, as well as the primacy given to consumer protection.

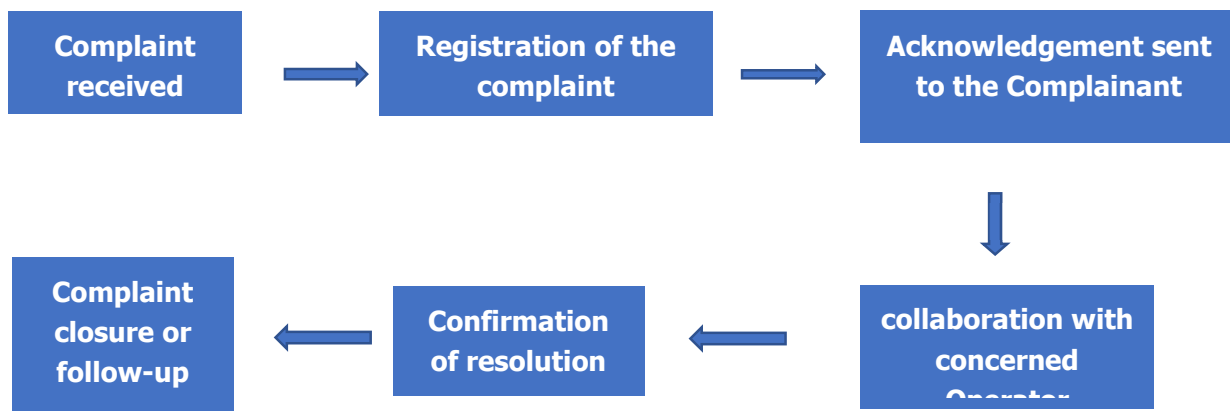
2 Complaint Handling Procedure and Mechanisms

Effective complaint handling is a central pillar of regulation and consumer protection. To ensure transparency, traceability, and rapid processing, the process implemented by the National Complaints Regulatory Authorities (NCARs) must be structured and standardized, involving various stakeholders and clearly defined steps.

The handling of complaints must follow these steps:

- receiving complaints via several channels;
- recording of each complaint on the dedicated management platform;
- assignment of a unique identification number to ensure traceability and personalized tracking;
- analysis and categorization of complaints according to their nature and typology;
- forwarding of complaints to the operator concerned;
- handling and processing by the operator within the required timeframes;
- reception and verification of the operator's response by the ARN (conformity check);
- consumer satisfaction assessment ;
- will be closed if the consumer is satisfied;
- reopening or redirection of the complaint in case of dissatisfaction (further processing or conciliation);
- holding arbitration meetings (if needed);
- closure after complete resolution and validation of satisfaction;
- archiving of all stages of the process to guarantee transparency and traceability.

SIMPLIFIED DIAGRAM OF THE PROCESSING CIRCUIT:



3 Recommendations

3.1 Recommendations to RNAs:

- set up a call system (call center, hotline) to receive user complaints;
- establish a framework for collaboration with telecommunications operators and service providers for the handling of complaints;
- set up a digital platform for collecting and reporting consumer complaints;
- encourage a standardized processing procedure, particularly for complaints and claims, including deadlines;
- adopt the processing times proposed by the Telecommunications and Postal Regulatory Authority of Senegal (ARTP), setting the time limit for handling commercial complaints by operators at **72 hours, and the time limit** applicable to the processing of technical complaints at **15 days**.

In addition, the harmonization of consumer complaint processing times will be on the agenda at the next working group meeting.

Following the technical work, the Working Group on Consumer Access and Experience also formulated the following recommendations:

- to implement the mechanisms defined within the framework of the group's work work to guarantee consumer rights;
- to put in place simplified and understandable procedures for handling consumer complaints and communicate them to the public;
- set up single points of contact, the "single short numbers" to contact the customer services of operators and service providers;
- monitor customer feedback by conducting surveys;
- ensure the protection and safety of consumers, in particular by setting up testing and conformity assessment laboratories for radio equipment before it is marketed;
- study reference cases and promote quality of experience (QoE).

"Reference: WATRA/WG/CAE/2024/001"

1. To improve the customer experience:

- authorities should include support for consumer advocacy in the drafting of their regulations/legislation;
- For the handling of complaints of electronic fraud, collaborations should be established with the Ministry of the Interior and other relevant bodies to facilitate the conduct of appropriate investigations and the amicable settlement of cases.
- centers should be created to facilitate the research work of associations;
- The regulator should put in place systems to verify the detailed invoices provided by service providers when the complainant disputes the usage statements provided by the latter.
- the need for a harmonized framework to guarantee transparency and fairness in telecommunications service contracts;
- to use standardization to reduce consumer exploitation and strengthen trust in cross-border telecommunications services;
- consideration of local legal frameworks, consumer rights, and operator obligations when drafting the contract.

4 Revision

These guidelines may be periodically revised by WATRA to adapt to developments in the sector.

5 Annexes

- Meeting: Banjul, Gambia, June 10–13, 2024
- Reference: WATRA/WG/CAE/2024/001
- Décision portant sur le traitement des plaintes
- Complaint processing times

DECISION PORTANT SUR LE TRAITEMENT DES PLAINTES DES CONSOMMATEURS

LE CONSEIL

EXPOSE PREALABLE

Par la loi n°....., le législateur a placé le consommateur au centre de ses préoccupations.

En effet, aux termes de l'article dudit texte l'ARN est chargée d'assurer le traitement de toutes les questions touchant à la protection des intérêts des consommateurs, notamment :

- Etablir un système approprié pour la réception des plaintes des consommateurs,
- Mener les enquêtes y afférentes,

- Et le cas échéant, soumettre lesdites plaintes aux institutions compétentes.

C'est en application du Code des Télécommunications et dans un souci de raccourcir les délais, que l'ARN a mis a en place une plateforme dématérialisée, afin de prendre en charge, de façon plus efficace, le traitement des réclamations des consommateurs de services de télécommunications.

Par ailleurs, la prise en charge des réclamations des consommateurs par cette plateforme, implique la définition, par l'autorité de régulation, d'une procédure appropriée qui s'impose à toutes les parties prenantes, notamment les opérateurs de télécommunications.

De ce qui précède,

LE CONSEIL,

Vu la loi n°;

Vu le décret n°..... portant nomination du Président et des membres du Collège de l'Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications et des Postes (ARTP) ;

Vu le décret n°..... portant nomination du Directeur général de l'ARN

Sur le rapport du Directeur général;

DECIDE:

CHAPITRE PREMIER : DISPOSITIONS GENERALES

Article premier :

On entend par :

- **Réclamation:** Toute expression ou manifestation d'une insatisfaction d'un client, adressée à une entité concernant ses produits/services, et dont il demande la non récurrence et à laquelle une solution est implicitement attendue.
- **Consommateur :** Toute personne physique qui utilise ou demande un service de télécommunications accessible au public à des fins autres que professionnels
- **Dématérialisation du processus de traitement des réclamations :** Procédé instantané qui permet d'accéder à la plateforme par voie électronique quel que soit le profil la date la zone. Ce système permet une traçabilité des données produites, une transparence et une égalité des chances pour tout requérant.
- **Autres termes utilisés:** les définitions des autres termes utilisés dans la présente décision sont conformes à celles données à l'article de la loi portant code des télécommunications et, à défaut, par les textes fondamentaux et les règlements de l'Union Internationale des Télécommunications.

Article 2 :

En application du Code des Télécommunications, la présente décision définit les modalités de traitement des réclamations par voie électronique.

CHAPITRE II : MODALITES DE TRAITEMENT

Article 3 :

L'ARN met en place un outil de saisine en ligne qui est une plateforme dématérialisée accessible à tout consommateur ou utilisateur de service de télécommunications.

Article 4 :

La procédure de traitement ainsi que les délais sont décrits en annexe qui fait partie intégrante de la présente décision.

Article 5 :

La réclamation doit notamment :

- Indiquer la qualité et les coordonnées du requérant ;

- Enoncer, de façon claire et concise, l'objet et les motifs de la saisine ;
- Comporter l'adresse de la personne concernée et la date du constat des faits ;
- Tenir en annexe tout document à l'appui de la réclamation notamment les pièces justificatives, si nécessaire.

CHAPITRE III : DISPOSITIONS FINALES

Article 6 :

Les annexes à la présente décision font partie intégrante de celle-ci.

Article 7 :

En cas de non-respect, par les opérateurs, des délais prescrits dans le dit annexe, l'article du code des télécommunications s'applique dans toute sa rigueur

Article 8 :

La présente décision entre en vigueur à la date de sa signature et sera communiquée et publiée partout où besoin sera.

Fait à, le

LE CONSEIL

MISE EN PLACE D'UNE PLATEFORME DEMATERIALISEE DE TRAITEMENT DES RECLAMATIONS DELAIS DE TRAITEMENT DE LA RECLAMATION

POUR L'INTERNET

SUPPORT TELECOM	OBJET RECLAMATION	TYPE DE RECLAMATIONS	CATEGORIE DE RECLAMATION	Délais traitement Responsable consommateur 1	Délais traitement Respons technique 2
• INTERNET	• Clé Internet • Internet M 2G • Internet M 3G • Internet M 4G • Fixe bas débit • Fixe Haut débit	• Echec de connexion	• Qualité connexion Internet		24h
		• Impossibilité de navigation			24h
		• Lenteur dans la connexion			24h
		• Absence de signal et images			24h

POUR LE FIXE

SUPPORT TELECOM	OBJET RECLAMATION	TYPE DE RECLAMATIONS	CATEGORIE DE RECLAMATION	Délais traitement Responsable consommateur 1	Délais traitement Responsable technique 2
• FIXE	• VOIX	• Ne s'entend pas avec le correspondant : Communication blanche	• Qualité de communication		24h
		• Ne s'entend pas avec son interlocuteur, voix inaudibles			24h
		• En communiquant avec son correspondant entend une autre voix : Communication croisée			24h
		• Echos durant la communication			24h
		• Grésillement durant la communication			24h
		• Absence de tonalité			24h
		• Coupures de communication	• Coupure communication		24h

SI MOBILE					
SUPPORT TELECOM	OBJET RECLAMATION	TYPE DE RECLAMATIONS	CATEGORIE DE RECLAMATION	Délais traitement Resp. consommateur 1	Délais traitement Resp. technique 2
• MOBILE	• SMS	• Non réception SMS	• Acheminement SMS		24h
		• Echec Envoi SMS			24h
		• Retard transmission SMS			24h
		• SMS Reçu à moitié du fait de la longueur des messages			24h
	• VOIX	• Ne s'entend pas avec le correspondant : Communication blanche	• Qualité communication		24h
		• Ne s'entend pas avec son interlocuteur, voix inaudibles			24h
		• En communiquant avec son correspondant entend une autre voix : Communication croisée			24h
		• Echos durant la communication			24h
		• Grésillement durant la communication			24h
		• Appels routés vers boîte vocale	• Couverture du réseau		24h
		• Ne capte le signal qu'à certains endroits			24h
		• Perte de signal dans un bâtiment (maison), en voiture			24h
		• Les barres de réseau oscillent du minimum au maximum ou inversement			24h
		• Coupures de communication	• Coupure communication		24h
		• Bip à l'appel, notification : échec réseau, réseau occupé, pas de connexion	• Congestion		24h

SUPPORT TELECOM	OBJET RECLAMATION	TYPE DE RECLAMATIONS	CATEGORIE DE RECLAMATION	Délais traitement Resp. Consommateur
FIXE MOBILE INTERNET		• Recharge de crédit	Réclamations commerciales	2h
		• Problème de transfert de crédit		2h
		• Bonus et offres		2h
		• Roaming		2h
		• Code PIN/PUK		2h
		• Achat des cartes de recharge		2h
		• Carte recharge illisible		2h
		• Service rechargement non fonctionnel		2h
		• Partage crédit non fonctionnel		2h
		• Offres et Forfaits		2h
		• Non réception factures		2h
		• Impossibilité d'enregistrer une adhésion		2h
	MOBILE		Réclamations commerciales	2h
	FIXE	• Recharge et paiement des factures		2h
	VOIX	• Consultation et paiement Factures		2h
	SMS	• Adhésion refusée		2h
	INTERNET	• Non réception B		2h
		• Illisibilité tarifaire		2h
		• Cumul erroné au moment du cumul des points		2h
		• Solde erroné au moment de la conversion des points		2h
		• Points transférés non parvenus		2h
		• Nombre de points transférés erroné		2h
		• Impossibilité d'enregistrer un achat de point		2h

6 General Conditions

6.1 Preamble

Protecting the interests of telecommunications service users and strengthening their capacity to act are priorities for National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs). To this end, the West Africa Telecommunications Regulators Association (WATRA) has developed these guidelines to harmonize approaches to education, awareness-raising, and public information within member states.

These guidelines aim to promote a better understanding of telecommunications services, strengthen consumer protection, and establish a lasting relationship of trust between users, operators, and regulators.

6.2 Terminology

In this document, unless otherwise specified, the following terms have the following meanings:

"Awareness-raising": all actions aimed at informing, educating, and empowering users ;

"Consumer education ": the process of acquiring knowledge that enables informed use of telecommunications services;

"Consumer": any natural person who acquires telecom goods and services for end use;

"NRA ": refers to the National Regulatory Authority;

"Consumer association": an organization representing and protecting/defending the interests of users;

"Continuing education platform": a mechanism designed to strengthen the capacities of stakeholders.

"Digital inclusion": equitable access to télécommunications services and information for all;

"NCC": refers to the Nigerian Communications Commission.

" PURA ": refers to the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, from Gambia.

6.3 Goals

a) Main objective

These guidelines aim to establish a harmonized framework for raising awareness and educating consumers of telecommunications services in West Africa, to strengthen their information levels, capacity to act, and active participation in the digital ecosystem.

b) Other objectives:

National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs), through the implementation of these guidelines, also aim to:

- Clarify and define the regulator's mandate in relation to consumer protection.
- Enhance public understanding of regulatory roles, actions, and approaches.
- Strengthen consumer engagement and responsiveness to consumer concerns.
- Improve identification, monitoring, and analysis of consumer challenges.
- Support the development of targeted, consumer-centric solutions.
- Inform and support evidence-based decision-making by Public Authorities.
- Promote responsible digital usage by reinforcing consumer rights and obligations.
- Enhance consumer autonomy, empowerment, and willingness to report complaints.
- Establish robust monitoring frameworks for effective oversight of regulated sectors.
- Promote proactive and anticipatory regulatory practices.
- Foster community-based engagement and proximity to consumers.
- Promote awareness of ethical standards and best practices in digital usage.

6.4 Methodology

Drawing on the experiences of Member States, this document outlines key best practices and emerging trends in consumer awareness and education for electronic communications services.

Accordingly, the guidelines are developed based on:

- Experiences of Member States.
- Established practices within National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs);
- Output of the Working Group on Consumer Access and Experience; and
- Findings from the reference meeting report (WATRA/WG/CAE/2024/001).

These contributions have enabled the identification of common approaches, effective tools, and innovative mechanisms to enhance consumer awareness across the sub-region.

6.5 Provisions

National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) are mandated to ensure compliance with legislation governing the electronic communications sector and, in this regard, play a key role in consumer education and awareness.

- Specifically, they are responsible for safeguarding consumer interests, strengthening the capacity of user associations,
- Monitoring as well as disseminating relevant information to government and stakeholders on operators' performance, service quality, and consumer satisfaction in line with international standards, among other functions.

7 Education and Awareness Mechanisms

7.1 Online continuing education platform

Awareness-raising activities implemented by National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) must be based on structured mechanisms adapted to the realities of the populations they serve. To this end, they rely in particular on establishing continuing education platforms that promote inclusive, participatory, and interactive approaches.

7.2 Field actions

These educational actions should also prioritize organizing awareness campaigns on the ground, taking into account local specificities, particularly by using national languages to ensure better understanding of the messages disseminated.

Furthermore, the use of information and outreach caravans is an essential lever for strengthening ties with communities and ensuring widespread dissemination of information.

7.3 Access to the regulator

Furthermore, particular attention must be paid to communicating information about complaint mechanisms to facilitate users' access to available recourse mechanisms. These actions also help protect users against fraudulent practices, malicious intent, and misinformation by equipping them with the knowledge necessary to identify and prevent these risks. On-site support for users or user associations is recommended.

7.4 Correspondence management and user information

Managing correspondence and informing users are essential elements of the awareness and outreach system within the ARNs.

a) Correspondence management

The ARNs are committed to ensuring the efficient and diligent processing of consumer correspondence. As such, they undertake to acknowledge receipt of letters and contributions, and to diligently follow up on all requests related to complaints or other user concerns.

b) Information for applicants

- The NRAs also play an informational role by responding to requests from users, researchers, or students. They provide relevant data on regulated sectors, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the telecommunications environment.
- The ARNs must exploit these requests for information through surveys aimed at measuring the level of satisfaction of applicants and continuously improving the quality of services.
- The NRAs must initiate a partnership with national statistical agencies and conduct surveys on sector data to assess the dynamics.

8 Consumer Protection Framework

Overall Objective :

- To prevent potential abuses and build consumer confidence.

Specific objectives

- Strengthening collaboration with consumers (Education and awareness)
- Ensuring consumer well-being (Protecting consumer interests)

RNAs are encouraged to adopt multi-channel engagement models inspired by international best practices, including those of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and PURA of The Gambia.

Indeed, the aforementioned NRAs have implemented various consumer engagement models to ensure that telecom users are informed, protected, and empowered. Here are the main models:

8.1 Consumer awareness programs (COPs)

During these campaigns, consumers are informed through the free distribution of telecommunications manuals, fact sheets, and other consumer education materials. The main points are:

- **Orientation Camp Sensitization of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC):** targets fresh young graduates mostly under the age of 30 on consumer-centric issues and Commission initiatives.
- **Telecom Campus Conversations (TCC):** a dynamic platform to engage undergraduate students, one of the most digitally active groups.
- **Village Square Dialogue on (VSD):** focuses on grassroots engagement in rural and semi-urban areas to ensure inclusion for all.

8.2 Telecommunications Consumers' Parliament (TCP)

- a high-level quarterly forum between ecosystem players to address major consumer concerns;
- a space for deliberation to foster collaboration and improve the overall user experience.

8.3 General Assembly of Radio Telecom Consumers (TCTHR)

- a model of radio engagement to reach a wide audience;
- includes live discussions, listener calls, and question-and-answer sessions in English and local languages.

8.4 Digital/Online Engagement

- The NRAs use social media (X: **@consumersncc**), the Consumer Portal, and email (**consumer@ncc.gov.ng**) to interact with the public. Now Zoho CRM and Hootsuites

This dynamic of proximity is also found at the Gambian regulator, PURA, which conducts sustained communication through its users; notably, the following codes :

- **Toll-free (Short code)**: allows customers to escalate unresolved complaints or request compensation;
- **Do-Not-Disturb (DND code)**: helps consumers block unsolicited messages.
- **Mobile Number Portability (MNP code)**

Ultimately, this engagement model between the NCC and PURA is multi-channel (physical, radio, digital, and community-based) to ensure accessibility and efficiency in resolving consumer issues while maximizing awareness and education. This approach facilitates the reporting of complaints.

9 Recommendations

The working group recommends the following actions:

- Facilitating access to legal action to guarantee consumer rights
- Communicating about the referral mechanisms
- Establish a single, accessible customer service for all users of digital services, modeled after The Gambia's system, using code 148. This code records all complaints and requests from operators and service providers, including:
 - Operators
 - ISP
 - SVA

10 Revision

WATRA may periodically revise these guidelines to adapt to developments in the sector.

11 ANNEXES

Strengthening collaboration with the consumers.

PROGRAMS	PROJECTS	RESULTS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Education and awareness	Consumer training and awareness projects	Several training and awareness campaigns for consumers are carried out	- Number of training sessions and awareness campaigns conducted - Consumer satisfaction index rates for training courses
	Implementation of communication materials for consumer associations and consumers	Several resources are being developed for consumer associations and consumers.	- Number of media/radio enlightenment campaigns carried out for consumers - Consumer satisfaction index rates on the media campaigns
	Creation of a platform for engagement between regulators and consumers.	The platform for engagement between the regulator and consumer is created and operational	Number of engagement platforms between the regulator and consumers
	Establish a functional consumer feedback framework	measured by its operational effectiveness	utilization rate of the consumer satisfaction index
	Facilitate capacity building and	Multiple training programs	Number of training programs

	collaborative engagement with licensees on regulatory tools and emerging technologies.	are provided for regulated sectors	delivered to licensees and citizens. • Completion rate of scheduled training programs.
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Ensuring well-being

PROGRAMS	PROJECTS	RESULTS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Protection of consumer interests	Strengthening the protection of consumer interests	• Initiatives to strengthen consumer protection are being carried out	• Number of initiatives to strengthen consumer protection
	Responsible and sustainable environment	• Demonstrations on the meaning of green digital technology	• Awareness session completion rates
	Promoting ethics and integrity in practices	• Introductory sessions on the meaning of responsibility were conducted.	• Awareness session completion rates
	Protection of personal and critical data	• Activities related to the protection of personal data are carried out.	• Completion rate of activities related to the protection of personal data
	Establish a platform to detect, prevent, and combat fraud within the	• An initiative platform aimed at combating telecom fraud has been successfully implemented	• Implementation rate of the anti-theft and anti-smuggling platform • Equipment and terminal approval rates

	telecom sector.	Targeted awareness to address and prevent digital fraud.	
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