1601 Calling Series: A Wider Channel for Service Calls

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▼ **In this article**

1. Why in the news
2. What the series is for
3. Two eligibility tests
4. Phases and implementation
5. Prelims practice question
6. Frequently asked questions
7. Sources

Why in the news

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) issued a direction on **27 November 2026** extending Phase-II of the **1601 numbering series**. It is for **service and transactional voice calls** by eligible entities outside banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) and government. It is not an unconditional allocation to every business.

What the series is for

Service calls provide information connected with an existing service; transactional calls concern a transaction. **Promotional voice calls are prohibited** on this series. Allocating a distinct series to verified entities aims to help customers identify legitimate business calls and reduce impersonation through ordinary ten-digit numbers.

A displayed number is not automatic permission to disclose private information or make a payment. Consumers should independently check the purpose of a call and any request made during it.

Two eligibility tests

Turnover-based eligibility: The listed sectors include retail chains, e-commerce, hospitals, diagnostic laboratories, telecom and internet service providers, automobile sales/repair/servicing, travel agencies, commercial airlines, food and ride-hailing aggregators, and lending service providers. Annual turnover must be **₹500 crore or more in at least one of the preceding three financial years**.

Subscriber-based eligibility: Distribution platform operators such as DTH, HITS, IPTV providers and multi-system operators must have **one million or more subscribers in any month during the preceding twelve months**. The direction specifies the one-year period counted back from the application date.

KYC verification by the access provider and registration on the DLT (distributed ledger technology) platform are also required before assignment.

Numbers may be assigned only to companies registered in India under applicable law. Both the sector and its eligibility threshold matter.

Phases and implementation

The Phase-I direction of **10 August 2026** covered utilities, logistics and courier services. Under the new direction, access providers must complete onboarding and migration of eligible entities **within 180 days of its issue**.

Providers must report progress to TRAI every fifteen days and submit a final compliance report within fifteen days after the 180-day implementation period expires. Migration means moving the relevant calls of eligible businesses to the designated series.

Prelims practice question

Consider the following statements about the 1601 series:

Statement 1: Phase-II covers service and transactional voice calls by eligible entities.

Statement 2: Promotional voice calls are permitted on the series.

Statement 3: Every small business is eligible under Phase-II without a threshold.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

▼ **Answer and explanation**

Correct answer: (a)

Statement 1 is correct: The series is for service and transactional voice calls.

Statement 2 is incorrect: Promotional voice calls are prohibited.

Statement 3 is incorrect: Sector-specific turnover or subscriber thresholds apply.

Frequently asked questions

Does the ₹500 crore threshold apply to every category?

No. Specified business sectors have a turnover threshold, while distribution platform operators have a separate subscriber threshold.

Is the 180-day deadline for consumers?

No. It concerns access providers onboarding and migrating eligible entities.

Can promotional calls use the series?

No. Promotional voice calls are prohibited on this series.

Sources

https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2342597&lang=2&reg=48

https://www.trai.gov.in/sites/default/files/2026-11/Direction_27112026.pdf

For telecom innovation and commercialisation, read: **Indigenous telecom innovation**

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