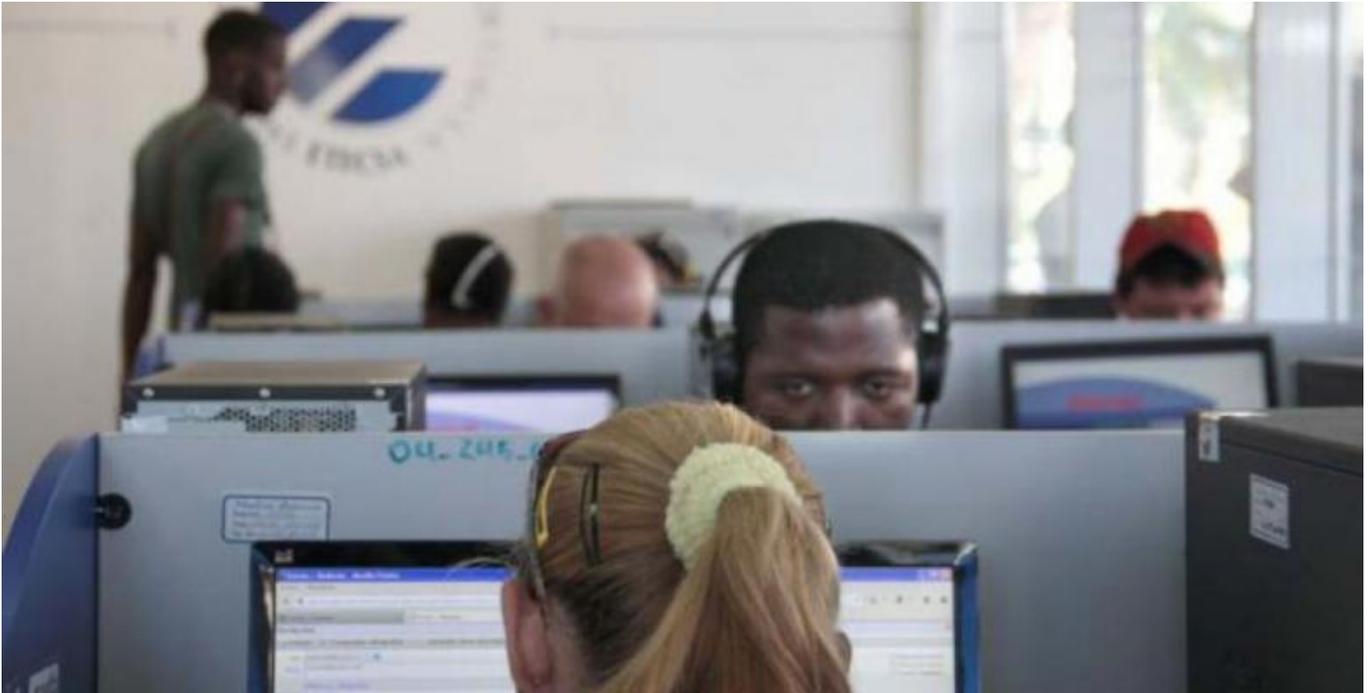


Cuba launches pilot program for home internet service

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Over 350 clients have signed contracts for home internet service in a government-sponsored pilot program in Cuba for the first time, state-owned telecommunication company ETECSA announced on Monday.

A two-month free home access pilot test under the program is conducted in the Old Town District of Havana, to evaluate the possibility of extending the service to other areas of the country, said Odalys Rodriguez, CEO of ETECSA's Havana branch.

The internet home access pilot test had a dedicated line for each customer with the ADSL technology.

A total of 2,000 users were chosen for the test in accordance with the technical availabilities created by ETECSA in the Old Town District.

The goal of the trial was to evaluate on the field the possibility to extend the service to other areas of the country.

Rodriguez said the official prices of the pilot program will be published by the Official Gazette of the Republic, but elaborated that "It (the average price) ranks

between 15-70 CUC per month, depending on the speed, but the program covers only 30 hours a month."

Surveys conducted by ETECSA among the participants at the trial disclosed their opinion that the company "must improve the connection speed".

Velasquez replied that the company is conducting studies to continue lowering the fee charge rates, "as soon as the national infrastructure allows it".

In an effort to boost the popular access to the web, the government-run company has already cut the price of using the internet to 1.50 CUC (equal to the U.S. dollar) an hour, but navigation through national sites has actually declined to 0.25 CUC per hour.

So far, the general public, except for doctors, journalists and people of some other professions, are not allowed to have internet service at home without government approval.

Cuban authorities said that information technology should be developed to boost the country's economy, but in a secure and orderly way.

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