



A Strategic Framework for Action 2018 - 2022

Empowering Society through ICT

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Foreword

The proliferation of digital technologies and the Internet are associated with a digitally enabled society, with evolving cultural, economic and technical constructs that have characterised amazing change in recent decades.

We are in the midst of a continued digital revolution in the way we interact with each other, conduct business, manufacture goods, deliver services, the way we live, work, and spend our spare time.

Embracing this process of ongoing change, has played a significant part in Malta's modern and competitive society. Our progress towards an information driven digital society has enabled us to excel in aspects of a broad digital economy, forging a leading position in various sectors.

Building on this success will require us to continue to embrace this change through investment in technologies and human resources to lead to value added economic opportunities, and improvements to social wellbeing.

In the Digital Malta Strategy¹ the Government set out a vision through which the Island can prosper as a digital society. However, in a rapidly changing environment, one cannot rest on past achievements without looking ahead to future prospects.

As more of our daily interactions and activities migrate online, digital technologies bring a growing range of important benefits – from the convenience of online banking, to accessing vital services, finding information, and staying in touch with friends and family. However, these benefits may not be shared equitably as some groups and individuals still face genuine barriers to beneficial participation. In recent years the 'digital divide' has narrowed, but it has also deepened.

Increasingly, there is a social expectation that everyone is online. People who are not online may feel stigmatised or disadvantaged when those around them are using and discussing the Internet, whilst they lack an active participation. As technology continues to develop, we risk the potential that these divides continuing to escalate.

The necessity of universal access to information services is stated in several declarations, which stress the need to broaden access to and use of ICTs; declaring that everyone, everywhere should be enabled to participate in the global information society.

Enabling this universal access, will have a direct bearing on various digital divides which are still present in our society today.

In this respect, the MCA's agenda remains firmly prioritised on the need to raise digital literacy, increase the frequency of effective use of the Internet, boost awareness of the benefits and pitfalls of the Internet and promote areas of practical day-to-day use of electronic applications.

¹ <https://digitalmalta.org.mt>

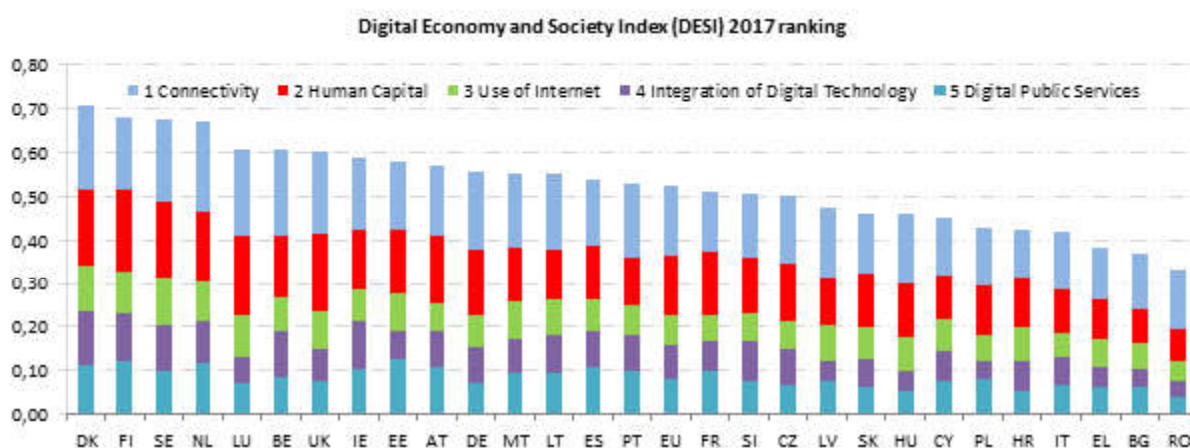
The MCA has a strong legacy of successful programmes aimed at reaching out to encourage the first steps in digital accessibility. In recent years, the MCA has started to evolve this focus to introduce digital facilitation in areas such as eCommerce, Coding, Cloud Computing and areas of digital innovation amongst others.

A clear priority of Digital Inclusion is fundamental to ensure that the benefits associated with this ongoing digital revolution, in combination with the ensuing transformations, impacts every sector of modern society.

The evolving mission reaffirms Malta's drive to be at the forefront of digital economies, not merely in terms of technology, or industry, but also in the ability to ensure the benefits reach and enrich society.

Where We Stand

The EU Commission's latest Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) has put Malta in 12th place overall, from among the EU-28, with a 'front runner' designation, signifying ongoing progress. Malta performs above EU average in broadband connectivity, Internet use by citizens, the use of digital technology by businesses and the provision of digital public services. The Island is a European leader in fast broadband (NGA) coverage and in the quality of eGovernment services. Malta's main challenge, in fact, is to increase the digital skills of its population.



Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/scoreboard/malta>

Connectivity:

Malta is the only Member State with full coverage of NGA broadband. Fixed and fast broadband take-up are also high. On the mobile side, however, Malta is well below the average, in particular on spectrum assignment.

Human Capital:

There was a small increase in Internet users and in ICT specialists, but Malta scores slightly below EU average. 49% of the population have at least basic digital skills compared with 56% in the EU.

Use of Internet:

Maltese Internet users are active online, especially in social networks. As for online banking and shopping, Malta is close to the European average.

Integration of Digital Technology: Maltese businesses are strong in using social media and RFID technology, but few of them send electronic invoices. Malta has progressed in eCommerce, and scores particularly well on cross-border sales.

Digital Public Services:

Malta is Europe's leader in the provision of digital public services. Nevertheless, Malta has a relatively low use of eGovernment and lags behind in open data.

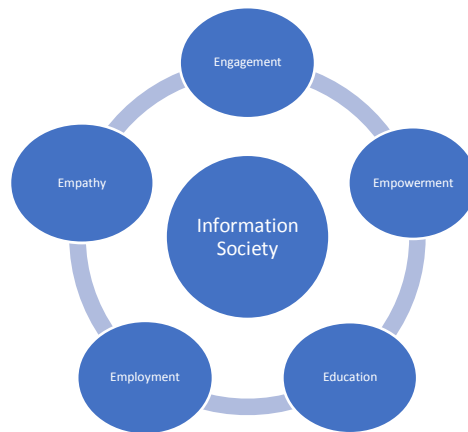
Information Society Value Drivers

The Information Society is characterised by large volumes of ICTs that continue to grow and change. These changes present opportunities and challenges to elements of our social organisation. Society's response to these changes has enabled benefits for those who have the means and ability to use these changes effectively. The pace of change is likely to continue as new developments impact different areas of our daily lives.

The MCA is aware that a variety of circumstances result in a broad spectrum of digital capability, and a necessity to provide a sensitive range of initiatives to remove barriers and act to promote the means and abilities necessary for all of us to reap the benefits of the information society.

Across the spectrum of digital initiatives, we have set five fundamental values to guide us in our choices and set out broad underpinning expectations that make a difference to our stakeholders and the public. They are reflected in the priorities for actions and deliverables.

Engagement	Ensuring relevant digital engagement across society, maintaining a clear presumption of society's obligation to provide first step facilitation and a basis of universally accessible digital infrastructure information and service. Facilitates accessibility and encouragement of technology use.
Empowerment	Providing the essential skills and access to technology with the understanding and awareness, effectively and securely addressing the barriers to participating in a digital world and the broader context of informed digital citizenship.
Education	Recognising that wider digital literacy needs to involve a process of lifelong learning to reflect the changes gathering pace across various digital technologies.
Employment	Preparing the skills and competences for the changing nature of work where the majority of new jobs require digital skills and a growing number of jobs require some form of skills.
Empathy	Clearly reaching beyond digital accessibility to facilitate online communities and how we share social strengths in a digital world, ranging from informal cohesion and inclusion to include services and general wellbeing.



How We Deliver

The MCA has a solid track-record of successful services and projects that support digital inclusion. This strategy sets out a framework of strategic priorities that focus on realising outcomes that matter, are relevant and provide benefit to individual members of society.

The Authority will align its activities and capability to deliver programmes and projects with specified results and benefits, planning and allocating limited resources across the programmes, adapting these according to circumstances and opportunities; and reviewing allocations as necessary.

The approach to each area of strategic programme delivery will include different levels of engagement, strategic outcomes and actions.

1. **A programme vision that engages with the information society.**

This broad and ongoing engagement needs to identify challenges and opportunities, giving a clear structure and focus to our actions by identifying clarity of outcomes, reach, frequency and impact.

2. **A strong element of stakeholder inclusivity, partnering and sharing in the delivery of actions.**

Digital technologies touch the breadth and depth of a diversity of sectors. The MCA will seek to partner and support other entities in civil society that may be positioned to better reach groups with specific social contexts, interests, or other factors that could leverage broad engagement and greater impact, promoting successful programme outcomes.

3. **A clear MCA focus in ensuring the continued universality of access and inclusion.**

4. **Demand is an essential catalyst for growth for mobile telecommunications services.**

The MCA will continue to promote demand side ICT initiatives in a variety of areas including those related to health care, transport, retail and utilities.

Strategic Priority 1 - Digital Advocacy and Evidence-Based Actions

The future of the information society, the explosive growth in access to knowledge and the resultant broad benefits have brought a focus on:

- the impacts of the digital economy on the evolution of individual rights;
- access to information;
- affordable and non-discriminatory access; as well as
- the broader elements of social capital that we seek to nurture to achieve prosperity.

Key and innovative technologies will continue to challenge the manner in which we extend, apply and reach out to benefit from engaging with the online world. Maintaining an ongoing engagement with society's stakeholders will enable us to identify and address the barriers to the adoption of technologies in a manner that preserves our freedom of expression, protects our privacy, and ensures we have the confidence and trust in online transactions and the skills to make the most of this access.

The MCA will extend the qualitative reach and societal engagement with broad stakeholder groups in discussing technologies and impacts that promise significant change in areas that are closely associated with the 5E value drivers of the Information Society.

MCA understands that formulating programmes and actions targeted at societal impact requires evidence-based decisions and metrics which reflect a clear agenda for a broad prosperity enabled by ICT.

The MCA will identify a series of digital information society metrics to identify areas for policy actions and support.

Special focus will be applied to three focused clusters:

- Identifying and minimising any barriers for individuals and sectors that are digitally challenged
- Society's approach to the safe use of ICTs and the realisation of their benefits.
- The elements of the 5E values that need to be nurtured as the digital information society evolves.

Strategic Priority 2- Digital Inclusion and Assisted Access

Across society there remain diverse digital divides, differences between those who feel that access to online information and services is part of their daily lives, and those who for various reasons do not have a regular online experience whether through lack of motivation and appreciation to its utility, the right basic digital skills, or connectivity.

As more public facing services and opportunities become available online, individuals without regular online access face the prospect of falling behind and failing to reap the benefits of the broader engagement with society.

On the other hand, even some of those notionally online may lack the basic digital skills to make the most of their Internet access.

We need to continue to maintain and improve opportunities to facilitate access as the first step to participating in the digital society.

The main factors limiting digital inclusion are:

Relevance and utility: “I don’t see why I need it, for the cost I would be likely to incur”;

Skill: “I don’t know how to use it or justify the effort to develop the skills required”.

These factors frequently occur together in different socio-economic groups experiencing disadvantage or marginalisation.

The MCA will reach into society to provide ongoing community-based activities that facilitate access, collaborating with local centres to ensure that everyone is presented with an opportunity to develop the basic skills to interact on line.

Strategic Priority 3- Mobile Channels Reach More Users

Smart mobile phones and tablets which are able to connect to the Internet are emerging as the primary devices for online access. Where desktop access is also available, multi-networking is increasingly the norm.

The lower entry costs for Internet capable mobile devices, and the increasing availability of free WIFI and low cost cellular connectivity are reflected in the dominant use of mobile devices.

Indeed, for a large proportion of the population, mobiles are the primary social device, with frequent multiple accesses through different platforms throughout their day. Indeed, mobile penetration now exceeds 100% of the population.

The age group that remains offline, those aged 65 or over, is the group that, despite the numerous efforts addressing the cohort, has the slowest rate of Internet adoption. This suggests that it may be becoming harder to reduce the numbers of those offline. Mobile access can provide a more social experience for those 'digitally reluctant' users.

These factors, as well as the intuitive user interfaces, address the major barriers of those who do not access the Internet.

The MCA will encourage and pursue programmes to support individuals moving online need to be adapted to reflect the trend for increasing access through mobile devices.

Government is committed to offering services that are adapted to access from mobile devices. In the Mobile Government Strategy 2017-2018, the Government has set out the principles for 24x7 access and simplification of the online experience for Government services.

The MCA will support the promotion of mGovernment initiatives to popularise the engagement with Government using mobile devices, particularly tablets and mobile phones.

Strategic Priority 4 - Enhancing Digital Engagement and Lifelong-learning

Acquiring skills and competences to reap the benefit of digital technologies is one of the fundamental steps to digital inclusion. A lack of basic ICT competences often leads to a sense of exclusion and vulnerability in areas where ICT is now part of our daily lives. In the information age, digital technologies have a strong bearing on our roles within society, they provide an essential basis for many aspects of personal fulfilment, employment and active citizenship.

The changing nature of technology in turn drives the need for ongoing learning as a lifelong process, with new competences being acquired as we respond to changing needs and opportunities. Indeed, they are fundamental to driving digital transformation and ensuring our society is prepared for the changing nature of work.

The MCA will take a competence driven approach to promoting digital skills and lifelong learning using structured competences we need to interact successfully and safely in the digital world.

Digital Skills and Competences

The development of digital skills and competences requires the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders. Key areas where the MCA is already active include:

- Partnering with others to provide learning opportunities that promote foundation competences and the basic elements of digital literacy as a fundamental obligation within our educational framework.
- Raising the profile of Computational Thinking and other competences with a particular focus on employability and the skills required for digital transformation and the changing nature of work.
- Promoting the development of ICT competences that enable the growth of ICT and ICT enabled industries and jobs across various sectors.

The MCA will collaborate with stakeholders in promoting digital competences across various sectors of society.

Citizen Engagement in Government

Malta has an advanced portfolio of eGovernment solutions. Nonetheless, the take-up of advanced services remains an area where Malta is behind the leading European states.

The MCA will encourage the use of eGovernment services across all sectors of society.

Engagement and Transformation

There is a wide acknowledgement that digital technologies are driving fundamental changes in the future of work. Many sectors of Maltese industry lag behind in reaping the benefits and transformation opportunities offered by new digital technologies. In order for Malta to continue to prosper, industry needs to engage in an ongoing process of transformation that embraces opportunities offered by ICTs.

The MCA will reach out to micro and SMEs who may not have realised the benefits of ICTs.

Strategic Priority 5 -Gigabit Connectivity across the Nation

Malta has a mature broadband and mobile network. Notwithstanding the penetration of broadband, high speed connectivity and access remains largely limited to low and midrange broadband speeds.

Across Europe and the developed world, there is a drive to promote Gigabit Internet connectivity and futuristic 5G enabled mobile networks.

This drive is predicated on a future where there will be billions of objects, sensors or machines that communicate with each other. The consumer Internet will extend to include Industrial and intelligent interconnections. These will present different challenges in terms of network connectivity, capacity and service quality to those of today's digital consumer communication.

The MCA will work to communicate cases that define and demonstrate the application of true broadband to enable new societal and economic opportunities.

The MCA will highlight particular societal and economic sectors where converged broadband presents a significant enabler of change. The MCA will serve as a focal point of information and regular public awareness including the support for pilot actions that boost the demand and realisation of benefits.

The MCA will continue to promote WiFi access with a growing number of free access points.

Strategic Priority 6 - Digital Social Innovation

Across the digital landscape, individuals are employing multiple sources of information often participating in diverse, sparsely-knit and specialized interest groups.

This pervasive consumerisation of technology and access is empowering citizens to use collective skills and knowledge, reorient technology to address social challenges, and harness it to improve lives and benefit the many rather than the few.

Many emerging applications can be considered as '*digital social innovations*' providing examples of how society can find new ways to collaborate, overcoming geographical, cultural and social barriers, and reinventing the way society can thrive in the world.

This massive connectivity and knowledge sharing is possibly the only natural resource that is now available in larger amounts than in the past; the connection of people and things, in novel, widespread and affordable means, is perhaps the largest enabler of new services addressing societal change.

The MCA will encourage and support digital social innovations, foster and promote alternatives to the dominant technological and business models — alternatives, which are open and collaborative rather than closed and competitive such as, the use of technology to create a more environmentally sustainable society.

Strategic Priority 7- Social Media

For the majority of Internet users, access to social media is a major component of daily online activity. Social media has emerged as a major platform for public participation processes. The reach and popularity of leading platforms contribute to a new form of a social capital— digital social capital which is developed on elements of trust, information and cooperation associated with social networks. These networks are not without their challenges. Indeed many detrimental social traits are also frequently mirrored online.

As social networks have evolved into multi-media platforms, digital consumers are now almost as likely to use them for keeping up with the news as to stay in touch with friends or for general leisure.

The MCA will promote the safe and effective use of social media and relevant communities that reflect the values of a digital information society and the broad expectations of a better Internet.

Strategic Priority 8 – Maltese Digital Citizens

The collective identity of a people is shaped by its history. Malta's particularities as an Island state, pervade every aspect of our history.

In today's world, the network presents a new geography that has shrunk distances and removed barriers.

The MCA will valorise our history and its journey through digital technology as a connected island, continuing to build a digital identity that provides an inclusive framework for Maltese communities across the globe.

Equally, non-Maltese residents continue to become part of the fabric of Malta's cosmopolitan society. These, in fact, now exceed 10% of the local population.

The MCA will engage in initiatives with the aim of preserving and promoting the local cultural heritage and traditions reflected in online environments that provide a sustainable continuity for Malta's culture.