



End-User Affairs: Half Yearly Report

January – June 2020

MCA-EXT/ms/20-3964

September 2020



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1 Introduction

One of the main objectives of the Malta Communications Authority (“MCA”) is to safeguard the interests of end-users in the electronic communications (“ECS”), postal and e-commerce sectors.

In order to fulfil this function, the MCA provides assistance to those end-users who encounter difficulties while using any of the services within its remit. In this respect, when an end-user is not satisfied with the redress or response provided by his/her service provider, he/she may file a complaint with the MCA. The extent of the action the MCA can take in relation to a complaint, depends on the particulars of the issues involved and on the MCA's powers at law. There are instances where although the complaints received relate to the provision of a service regulated by the MCA, the Authority is not empowered at law to intervene and would therefore have to refer end-users to other competent entities.

The Authority also receives a number of enquiries, as distinct from complaints, from end-users in relation to the services it regulates. The MCA makes every effort to provide end-users with the requested information in a timely manner. Alternatively, when such requests do not fall directly within MCA’s remit, it assists end-users by directing them to the appropriate body. More information on MCA’s complaint and enquiry procedure is available at <https://www.mca.org.mt/consumer/help>.

In addition to the above, the MCA monitors the sectors it regulates, and carries out various mystery shopping exercises to identify areas of concern and undertakes the necessary regulatory action to address such issues. In so doing, the Authority ensures that service providers comply with their obligations at law and that end-users are provided with up to date information on their rights and obligations when using any communications services regulated by the MCA.

This report provides a statistical analysis of the complaints and enquiries received by the Authority during the first half of 2020 and also provides information on enforcement actions and related monitoring activities undertaken by the MCA during this period.

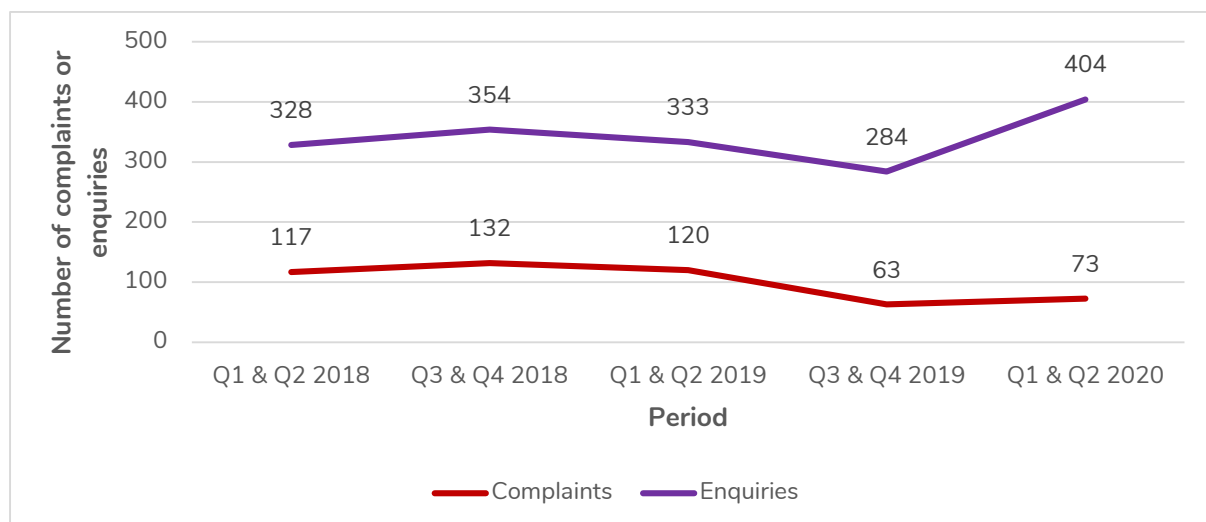
2 Statistical Overview of Complaints and Enquiries received

The global disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic instigated an increase in the use of telecoms and postal services. As more people were spending more time indoors and many businesses enabled their employees to work from home, service providers played an important role in meeting the higher demands for their services. Unsurprisingly, the increase in use of communications services resulted in an increase in the number of claims received by MCA during the period under review with the MCA recording 15% rise in complaints between January and June of 2020 when compared to July and December of 2019. The MCA also recorded a surge of 42% in the number of enquiries received when compared to the previous 6 months, with a total of 404 requests for information received. Figure 1 below provides further details on the trends of complaints and enquiries received between 2018 and 2020.

Notwithstanding the above, the Authority remains very satisfied with the response provided by service providers to meet the unprecedented demands triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides this, it was particularly reassuring to note that telecommunications and postal service providers introduced several beneficial measures to support their customers. More information on measures implemented by providers during the COVID-19 pandemic is available [here](#).

Figure 1

Complaints and Enquiries (Q1 & Q2 2018 – Q1 & Q2 2020)

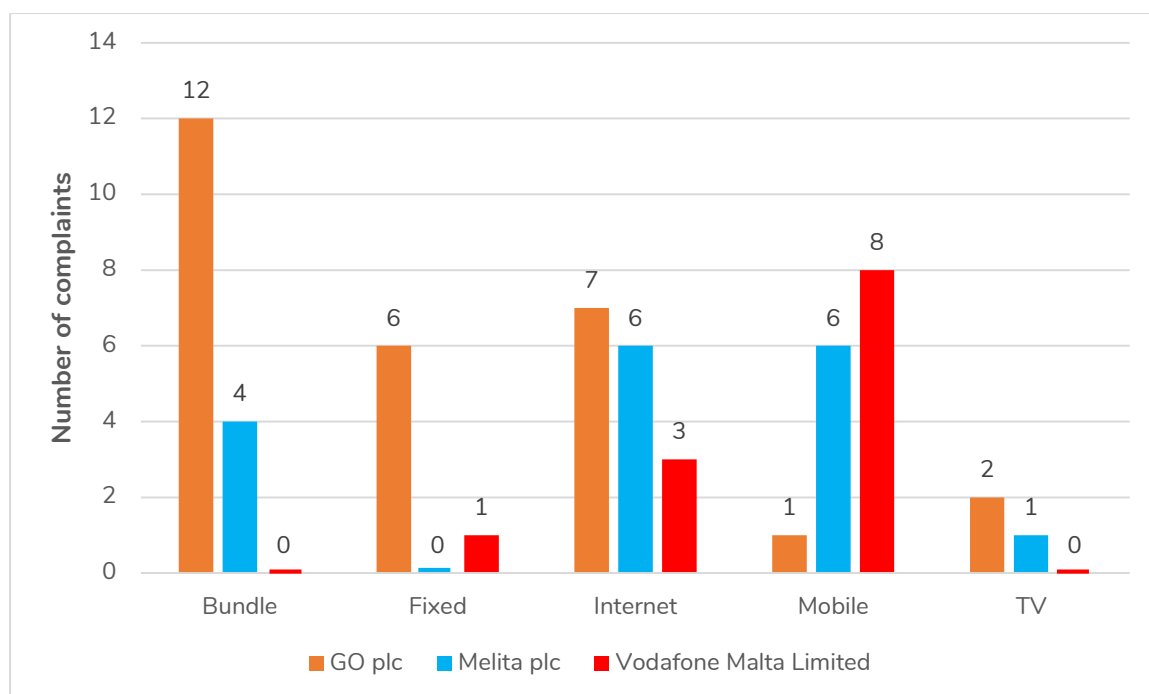


The MCA receives complaints from customers about their landline, mobile, internet, TV and postal services. These complaints tend to be more complex in nature due to the fact that the MCA requires that customers seek its intervention only after they have lodged a complaint with their service provider and should they still not be satisfied with the outcome of their claim.

Figure 2 below provides statistical information about the total number of electronic communication services complaints received by MCA during the first 6 months of 2020, classified in accordance to the complainant's ECS provider.

Figure 2

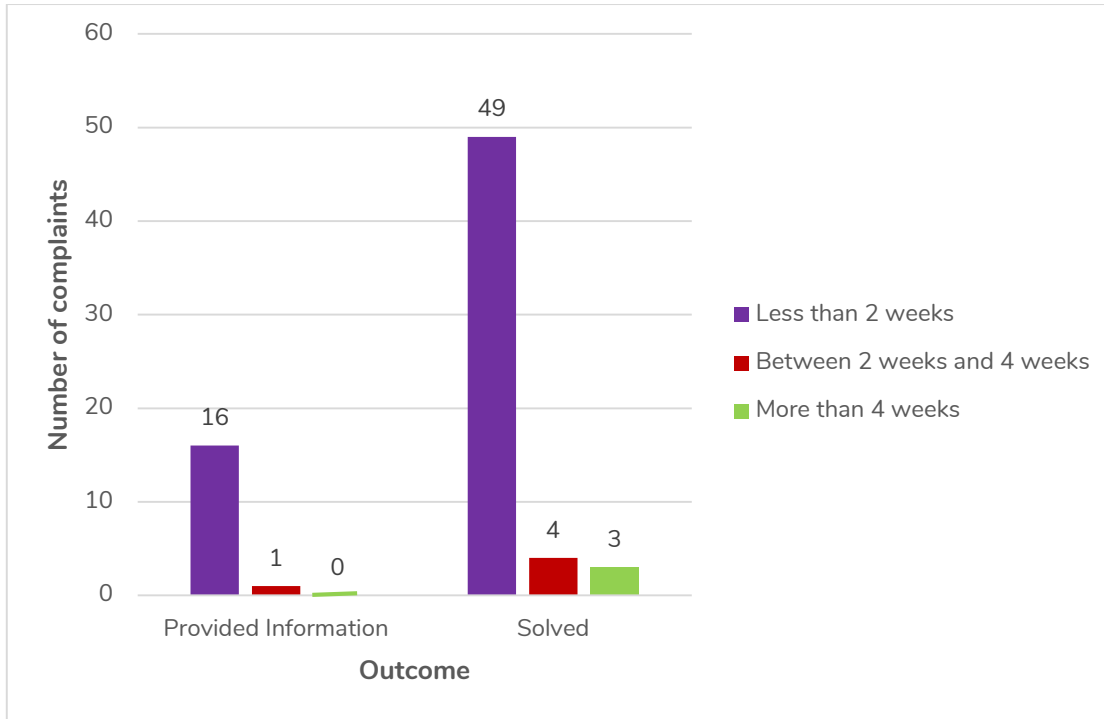
Complaints received by MCA (January - June 2020), classified by service and ECS Provider



The time required to address a complaint may vary from one instance to another depending on the nature of the particular case. The MCA commits to close complaints within the shortest timeframe possible. During the period under review 89% of all complaints received were addressed within 2 weeks. 96% were closed within 20 working days. There were no pending cases of complaints received during the first 6 months of 2020 by the time of the publication of this report.

Figure 3

Time taken by MCA to Handle Complaints (from receipt to closure), January - June 2020

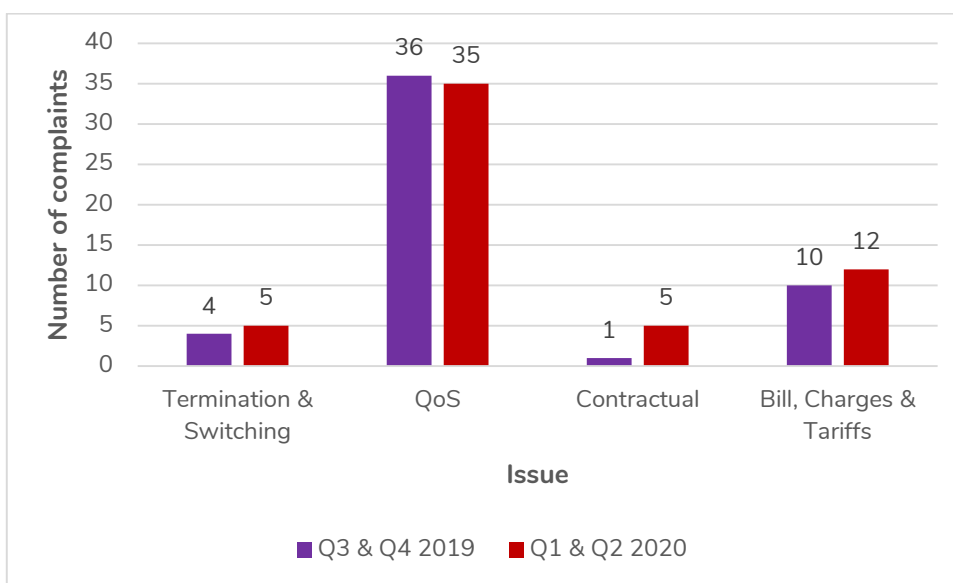


3 Electronic Communications

61% of the ECS complaints received during the first half of 2020, related to quality of service (QoS) followed by billing issues (21%). Other complaints received by the Authority related to termination and switching of services (9%) and contractual issues (9%). This report provides information on the main findings for the period covering January to June 2020.

Figure 4

Electronic Communications Complaints by Issue



3.1 Quality of Service and Service Provision

- Complaints received which are classified in this category include complaints regarding faults (12), Internet speed (7) Customer care (7), Installation (6), Compensation (2), Non-access to service/s (1).
- Whilst fault complaints remain the most common type of quality of service issues reported to the MCA, the number of fault reports decreased by 1% from previous 6 months. The faults reported were related to fixed telephony and internet services.
- Faults are generally caused by either damages to the operator's external network, damages to subscribers' equipment (e.g. Internet modem or TV set-top box), or damages to the subscribers' in-house wiring. A number of factors could cause faults including weather conditions, damages caused by third parties and/or by end-users. In the cases reported to the Authority, the MCA monitored the actions undertaken by the service providers to ensure that faults were repaired within the shortest time

possible and where necessary impacted end-users were provided with compensation in line with their service provider's compensation scheme. In cases where the faults could not be repaired within a short timeframe, end-users were also provided with a temporary solution until the services were fully restored.

- The MCA also received 7 complaints from end-users who were unable to reach their service provider customer support through telephone. In these cases, subscribers' details were forwarded to the respective service provider in order to be contacted and assisted accordingly.
- Earlier this year the MCA published an information sheet with the different customer care support channels offered by local service providers. This information can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.mca.org.mt/articles/telecoms-customer-care-support>.
- The Authority received 7 complaints regarding internet performance. In such cases, subscribers were invited to provide suitable evidence to enable investigation, such as screenshots of speed tests carried out through a wired connection. In 5 of the cases received, after the end-users provided the MCA with screenshots of speed tests showing lower speeds than that listed in their contract, the MCA contacted the respective service provider in order to ensure that the necessary actions are taken to address these issues. In the remaining 2 cases, the end-users were provided with tips and other information on how to improve the internet coverage range over Wi-Fi connections.
- The installation complaints received by MCA related to reports from end-users regarding delays in having their services connected when subscribing to a service/s. In the majority of these cases, service providers could not complete the installations by the date committed to with end-users, due to difficulties experienced in accessing third party properties. The MCA monitored the progress made in these cases and ensured that all possible measures were taken by service providers to complete installations within the shortest timeframes possible.

3.2 Billing, Charges and Tariffs

- This category of complaints includes claims received regarding incorrect billing or overcharging (10), and refund (2).
- Most of the complaints received related to incorrect billing or overcharging with a total of 10 complaints received. In 5 of these cases the MCA monitored the actions undertaken by the service providers to ensure that any incorrect charges are waived from the end-user's bill and where necessary the MCA ensured that any credit which was entitled to the end-users was refunded.
- In the other 5 cases the MCA provided the end-users with the necessary information and the necessary clarifications regarding disputed charges.

3.3 Other complaints

- The MCA received 5 complaints regarding issues encountered by subscribers when porting their number from one service provider to another or when terminating their service/s. The MCA ensured that the service providers intervened to address any shortcomings or to provide clarifications where necessary.
- During this period the MCA received 5 complaints regarding contract terms and conditions. 2 of these complaints related to changes implemented by service providers to subscriber contracts; 2 other complaints related to a request for a change of the ownership of the subscription service and another complaint related to a claim regarding the provision of a customer's contract. In 2 of the cases the MCA's intervention was required in order to ensure that the applicable redress and clarifications were provided as necessary.

4 Postal Services and E-Commerce

- The MCA registered 16 postal complaints relating to MaltaPost during the first six months of 2020.
- The complaints received by the Authority were related to customer care (7), mis-delivered mail (4), undelivered mail (3), redirection of mail (1) and compensation (1).
- 7 of these complaints, related to difficulties experienced by customers when trying to get in touch with a customer care agent. In these cases, the MCA referred the matter to MaltaPost and ensured that a customer care agent provided the necessary assistance to its customers.
- The other complaints received related to the quality of the delivery of postal items. Whilst different cases require different redress, in general, when investigating complaints which relate to mis-delivered or undelivered mail, the Authority refers the details of the cases to MaltaPost for it to monitor more closely the provision of the services provided in the affected areas being reported to ensure that any identified issues are addressed.
- More information on postal services and the type of redress applicable in cases of lost or undelivered mail is available in the end-users section on [MCA's website](#).
- During the first six months of 2020, the MCA did not receive any complaints regarding e-Commerce services.



5 Customer Care Telephone Response Time

The MCA conducts an ongoing mystery shopping exercises aimed at measuring the time taken for a telephone call to be answered by a customer care agent of the main communications service providers.

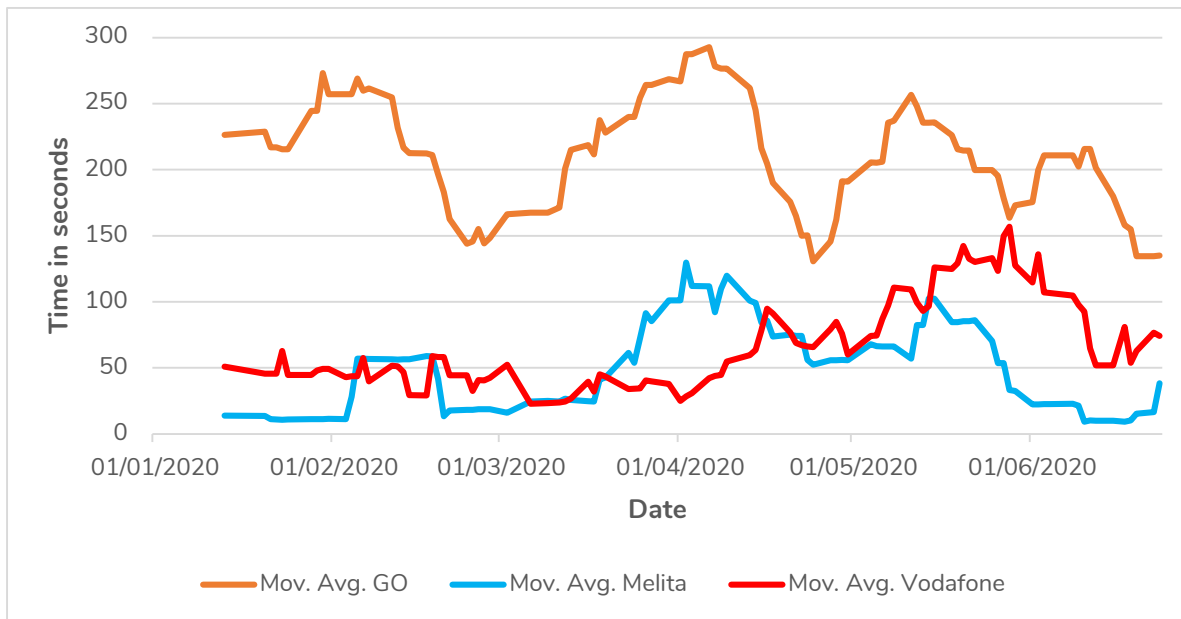
Figure 5 ('Electronic Communication Services') and Figure 6 ('MaltaPost') below present a moving average trend line based on measurements recorded for each operator. Ongoing analysis of such metrics and relative trends, helps the MCA in carrying out its compliance monitoring function, especially when sudden shift in trends are recorded. The test calls made by MCA are terminated after a lapse of 5 minutes if no customer care agent attends to the call.

Electronic Communications Service Providers ('GO plc', 'Melita Ltd', 'Vodafone Malta Ltd')

From the information gathered, the average time taken for a call to be answered by a telecoms operator support agent was 127 seconds. There was an increase when compared to the average time taken of 45 seconds as recorded by MCA during the last 6 months of 2019. This increase is most likely attributable to the unprecedented increase in demand for services triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in an increase in demand for services which added a lot of pressures on the customer care support channels of communication providers. The information gathered is based on 405 measurements taken at various times of the day between January and June 2020. 72% of the calls made were answered within 5 minutes.

Figure 5 (Electronic Communications Services)

Average Call Waiting Time (in seconds) to be answered by a Customer Care Agent



Postal Universal Service Provider ('MaltaPost')

On the basis of 405 measurements taken at various times of the day between January and June 2020, only 10% of the calls made to MaltaPost's customer care telephony service were answered within 5 minutes. Figure 6 provides details of these measurements. As previously stated, maximum call waiting time for the purpose of this exercise is capped at 300 seconds.

The Authority is aware of initiatives being taken by the Service Provider to improve its customer care service and shall keep closely monitoring the situation.

Figure 6 (MaltaPost)

Call Waiting Time (in seconds) to be answered by a Customer Care Agent

