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PRESS RELEASE BY THE MALTA COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY (MCA) AND THE FOUNDATION FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACCESSIBILITY (FITA)

Increased efforts to strengthen the monitoring of public sector websites and mobile apps for greater social inclusion and online accessibility, particularly for people with disabilities.

The Malta Communications Authority (MCA) and the Foundation for Information Technology Accessibility (FITA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to work cohesively towards ensuring that the public sector's electronic platforms, including mobile applications, are fully accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities as well as other disadvantaged groups.

In working together, these two entities will continue monitoring levels of accessibility for government websites, while also extending this practice to cover the monitoring of public sector mobile apps.

This joint effort will assist public entities in conforming to the European Union (EU)'s Website Accessibility Directive, which aims to provide people with disabilities with easier access to public sector services through the Internet. Apart from websites, as of June 2021, the obligations under the Directive have now extended to include mobile apps as well.

The MCA's CEO, Mr. Jesmond Bugeja, emphasised that the obligations charted under the Website Accessibility Directive compliment the MCA's own regulatory efforts, both in relation to the promotion of better digital services, as well as the ease of use of digital communication services across Malta.

On his part, FITA CEO, Carlo Stivala, stated that FITA will be solidifying its technical and administrative structures to better meet demands received from persons with disabilities, while intensifying supervision over websites and apps to work towards greater accessibility.

Minister for the Economy and Industry Silvio Schembri referred to the Government's ongoing efforts in making online government resources accessible to as many people as possible, making sure that each and every Maltese citizen is able to have an equal and active part in a digital economy and society.

He applauded the diligent monitoring carried out by the MCA, which was appointed as the designated entity to implement and enforce the EU's Website Accessibility Directive, thereby being responsible to oversee that all public sector websites conform to it.

Minister Schembri noted how this project has the potential of bringing about significant benefits to everyone, not only persons with disabilities. One practical example is that when a user is accessing a website on a mobile device in direct sunlight, it could be difficult to decipher the website content due to low contrast in the design of the website. In this case, the Directive stipulates that the contrast ratio in

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websites needs to be high enough so that content can be easily read, which would allow the user to better view the website content in such an environment.

Owen Bonnici, Minister for Equality, Research and Innovation, mentioned that as FITA is currently in the process of strengthening and enhancing its operations, it will be able to extend its range of services available to vulnerable individuals, allowing them to live a higher quality of life with the help of technology. He stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has proven what a difference technology can make for the lives of many, reiterating the Government's belief that everyone should have the right to access digital services within our country.

He praised the many efforts on FITA's part in monitoring public sector websites – now also mobile apps – to ascertain can they can be easily accessed by all persons, including those with disabilities.

Dr Bonnici said that this digital transformation opens up many doors for our country's continued progress, and by the means of this partnership we will continue to work towards making great opportunities available to all of society.

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