

Morocco has done well in the digital revolution

Morocco's impressive telecommunication breakthrough is an excellent example of today's worldwide liberalization and transformation process. Morocco decided to make the telecommunication sector one of its national priorities under the aegis of His Late Majesty King Hassan II. Since the Post Office and Telecommunication Act (Law 24-96) was adopted in 1997 the restructuring of its sector has been highly successful. The National Post Office and Telecommunication Agency (Office National des Postes et des Telecommunications, ONPT) was split into two separate entities: a telecommunication entity called Maroc Télécom and a postal-services entity called Postes Maroc.

The government also established an independent regulatory agency, the National Telecommunication Regulatory Agency (Agence nationale de réglementation des telecommunications, ANRT). These reforms, backed by the political will that has been evident in the implementation and monitoring at the government level, have created a stable environment, with clear rules and a high level of confidence. At the economic level, this has manifested itself in the form of major investments by foreign companies in Morocco's telecommunication market. Vivendi Universal paid Dirhams 23 billion (US\$ 2.3 billion) for a 35% equity stake in Maroc Télécom. The privatization of the country's incumbent telecom operator is regarded as one of the most successful ones in a developing country to date. Recently, there are more cellular than fixed telephone subscribers in Morocco. Both mobile service providers have done extremely well and substantially increased their subscriber numbers. Whereas the telephone density was barely five per cent prior to liberalization, Morocco swiftly progressed to eight per cent teledensity for fixed telephone service and 15 per cent teledensity for mobile telephone service. The mobile telephone network now reaches more than 95 per cent of the population. Liberalization and privatization of telecommunication services in Morocco have contributed and continue to contribute to GDP growth and have had a major impact on investment levels, job creation and productivity. And the string of success seems to be continuing. The developments in Morocco are especially impressive from a regional perspective. Despite the fact that Morocco has the region's lowest GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita, its liberalized telecom environment has allowed it to take the region's lead in the mobile sector. In only a few years it has gone from the region's lowest telephone access levels to its highest. It has also been a very encouraging example to its neighbours, Algeria and Tunisia. Morocco's Internet penetration has been increasing steadily. The vast majority of users access the Internet either at one of the almost 2000 Internet cafés or at work since most people cannot afford the relatively high costs of a personal computer and the ISP (internet service provider) subscription rates. Several initiatives have been launched by the government to spread the availability and use of the Internet. The government-driven 'Maroc Wide Area Network' project, a non-profit project to set up a sophisticated national network for the educational and research sector, is a great example of the government's commitment to promote the Internet. To further increase the use and the benefits of the Internet, it will be important to lower the country's relatively high ISP charges. Morocco has done well in the digital revolution. Its rapid mobile growth serves as an example of how quickly access to communications can be transformed. This success will need to be emulated in other ICT sectors. The country's young population (that speaks Arabic, French, and often English) and its entrepreneurial culture provides it with a good head start.