

Maldives

The Maldives is a good example of effective transition to liberalization of the ICT sector that has generated impressive levels of mobile-broadband coverage.

Mobile services: The first GSM mobile network was launched in 1999, and the Maldives introduced mobile competition in 2005. By 2016, all inhabitants were covered by a 3G signal, and over half by LTE. The market leader is the incumbent operator Dhivehi Raajjeyge Gulhun Public Limited Company (DHIRAAGU). Six per cent of government shares in the company were offered to the public in 2011, leaving the government with 42 per cent shares, and in 2013 Cable & Wireless's 52 per cent stake in the company was purchased by the Bahrain Telecommunications Company. The second mobile operator is OOREDOO Maldives Public Limited Company, a subsidiary of the Qatari mobile group. Mobile penetration passed 100 per cent in 2007, two years after the introduction of competition. In 2014, 97 per cent of households had a mobile phone, with virtually no difference between the capital Male (97 per cent) and other atolls (96 per cent) (NBS Maldives, 2014). Mobile broadband has been popular since the introduction of 3G in 2005 and the whole population was covered by the end of 2015. LTE was launched in 2014 with rapid deployment reaching nationwide coverage by early 2017.

Fixed services: DHIRAAGU is the main fixed telephone service provider. The incumbent also offers ADSL with speeds of up to 15 Mbps, and in 2015 launched fibre-optic broadband with speeds of up to 100 Mbps. Focus Infocom and Ooredoo Maldives, the two other Fixed broadband providers, also offer fiber broadband with speeds up to 100 Mbps. Interestingly there are more fixed broadband subscriptions than fixed landlines in the country. The Maldives is well endowed with fibre-optic backbone connectivity, with two national networks and two international submarine cables. In 2007, an 850-kilometre undersea fibre-optic cable was deployed to Sri Lanka and another cable deployed both to India and Sri Lanka. In 2012, a national fibre-optic submarine backbone was completed. Spanning over 1 000 kilometres, it links all the main islands. A second national undersea fibre backbone was deployed in 2017.

Key indicators for Maldives (2017)		Asia & Pacific	World
Fixed-telephone sub. per 100 inhab.	4.7	9.5	13.0
Mobile-cellular sub. per 100 inhab.	206.3	104.0	103.6
Active mobile-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	63.5	60.3	61.9
3G coverage (% of population)	100.0	91.3	87.9
LTE/WiMAX coverage (% of population)	100.0	86.9	76.3
Individuals using the Internet (%)	63.2	44.3	48.6
Households with a computer (%)	73.6	38.9	47.1
Households with Internet access (%)	60.3	49.0	54.7
International bandwidth per Internet user (kbit/s)	114.3	61.7	76.6
Fixed-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	8.3	13.0	13.6
Fixed-broadband sub. by speed tiers, % distribution			
<i>-256 kbit/s to 2 Mbit/s</i>	<i>34.8</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>4.2</i>
<i>-2 to 10 Mbit/s</i>	<i>27.7</i>	<i>7.6</i>	<i>13.2</i>
<i>-equal to or above 10 Mbit/s</i>	<i>37.5</i>	<i>90.0</i>	<i>82.6</i>

Note: Data in italics are ITU estimates. Source: ITU (as of June 2018).

Government policy: The 2001 *Telecommunication Policy* initiated the process of liberalization. A regulator, the Communications Authority of Maldives, was established in 2003, followed by the introduction of competition in Internet and mobile services. The *Maldives Telecommunication Bill* was ratified in 2015. The Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for ICT sector oversight. A second *Telecommunications Policy* was introduced in 2006 and the *National Broadband Policy* in 2014. The broadband policy covers the period 2014-2018 and calls for broadband to be made available on all inhabited islands, for ISPs to offer an entry-level broadband plan not exceeding 4 per cent of GDP per capita, and for 100 Mbps to be made available for all commercial and industrial centres.

Conclusion: Despite a challenging geography of some 200 inhabited islands, the Maldives has witnessed impressive ICT growth. The introduction of mobile competition in 2005 triggered a surge in subscriptions and virtually all households have a mobile phone. The country's ICT infrastructure is one of the strongest in South Asia, with nationwide LTE coverage, availability of fibre-optic broadband and fibre-optic national and international backbones.