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GUEST EDITORIAL

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE THE TRANSFORMATION OF HEALTHCARE THROUGH AI

The vast field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) knows its beginnings in 1956, at a conference at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire, where the term 'artificial intelligence' was coined. More than six decades later AI has emerged from the laboratory, as a science project, evolving into a more consumable, commercially viable and socially impactful technological innovation.

With numerous accomplishments in the disruptive technology sector under its belt, the Maltese Government proceeded to set its sight on this relatively new science, which complemented its vision for the country's digital future. In November 2018 the Parliamentary Secretary for Financial Services, Digital Economy and Innovation Silvio Schembri appointed the **Malta.AI Taskforce**, which includes a diverse set of some of the country's best minds, with the remit of advising the Government and developing a national strategy on AI.

Less than a year later the final 'Strategy and Vision for Artificial Intelligence in Malta 2030' has been launched,¹ which firmly sets the tone for Malta to become the ultimate AI launchpad – the ultimate testbed in which local and foreign companies and entrepreneurs can develop, prototype, test and scale AI. But beyond its economic benefits, AI will also tangibly transform on an individual level the way our country lives, plays and interacts.

The strategy itself is expansive, but also explores how AI can be deployed widely across the public administration to improve citizens' experiences, expand access to public services, and directly improve well-being. Six AI pilot projects will be undertaken which will gradually infuse AI into education, healthcare and a range of public services to deliver better services to Malta's citizens and businesses, enhance economic and social well-being, and drive operational excellence across the public administration.

In the healthcare sector extensive work is underway to start using AI to detect and diagnose various forms of cancer, monitor health and provide individuals with personalised treatment plans. Through AI technologies, healthcare professionals may be able to make better, quicker and more accurate decisions in the diagnosis, treatment and care with a view to improve patient health outcomes

and increase the efficiency and sustainability of healthcare systems. Malta has made significant investments to become a leader in the digital health space and is acknowledged as one of the best countries to undertake health-related AI pilot projects.

However, the intervention of AI in our daily lives raises several intricate questions, mostly of an ethical, legal and regulatory nature. It was therefore imperative that the strategy, besides cultivating the correct environment for a thriving ecosystem, also provides for a robust legal and ethical framework. This will unfailingly continue to position Malta as an AI Centre of Excellence in the near future, as well as establish the all-important trust and peace of mind amongst all stakeholders, including healthcare professionals. It is with this goal in mind that the Government has launched the world's first ever national AI certification programme. Malta has already taken a global lead in developing a regulatory and certification framework for innovative technology arrangements through the setting up of the *Malta* Digital Innovation Authority and the creation of the Innovative Technologies Arrangements and Services (ITAS) Act. This stance has borne very positive results in establishing confidence and certainty within these relatively new frontiers.

The AI certification programme aims to provide applicants with valuable recognition in the marketplace that their AI systems have been developed in an ethically aligned, transparent and socially responsible manner. Certification will be awarded following a thorough audit process undertaken by independent experts authorised by the *Malta* Digital Innovation Authority.

The Government of Malta is once again demonstrating its solid commitment in endorsing technological innovation, which in the case of AI will unfailingly position Malta as an AI Centre of Excellence and Technological Hub, ultimately paving the way for a better quality of life of all Maltese citizens – in each and every aspect of their daily lives. 🌐

1. https://malta.ai/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Malta_The_Ultimate_AI_Launchpad_vFinal.pdf

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