International computer literacy programs to help address 10.5 per cent unemployment rate within KSA

Information & communication technologies have potential to benefit societies and economies, while helping bridge digital divide, says ICDL Saudi Arabia

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Computer literacy programs are being eyed to help curb the unemployment rate among the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's population which currently stands at around 10.5 per cent, according to a study by the Statistics & Information Centre in the Kingdom. The country's Shura Council itself has been holding intense dialogues to identify more effective employment strategies for Saudi's estimated 500,000 unemployed citizens in order to avoid serious economic and social consequences.

Moreover, in a bid to cut the dependence on expatriate workers, a statement by the Saudi Ministry of Labor recently highlighted plans to reduce the number of work visas issued every year to non-Saudis, while training Saudi nationals thoroughly for jobs in various sectors, and also rewarding private companies hiring locals.

The Kingdom is the Gulf's largest information and communications technology (ICT) market and is expected to account for up to 50 per cent of ICT investments in the region through 2012, according to the recently released "GCC ICT Infrastructure Report" from Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz). An estimated USD 90 billion is expected to be allocated for ICT-related infrastructure projects within the next three years, thus making it a major employment generator. ICDL Saudi Arabia, the governing body and the certification authority of the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) program in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, has announced that it will be developing more specialized courses to help Saudis improve their employment opportunities, particularly in the thriving ICT sector.

"KSA is a regional ICT hub, so we aim to introduce programs that will help integrate Saudis into the field. But our focus will not be on ICT employment only; nowadays all kinds of industries and businesses require essential IT skills from its potential employees. Our goal is to provide unemployed

Saudi people more and better options by giving them IT competencies that will make them more competitive as they search for jobs," said Dr. Jamal A. AlHefdhi, General Manager, ICDL Saudi Arabia.

Dr. AlHefdhi also pointed out that ICT today is playing an increasingly important role in bridging the digital divide, fostering socio-economic growth and ensuring that cities become more eco-friendly and economically viable. "ICT provides innovative and efficient ways for improving the quality of urban life. Be it smart buildings, intelligent traffic management, efficiencies in energy consumption and waste management, communication on the move, or even the exchange of information and knowledge, they are all given a whole new meaning with internet and other technologies," he said.

"The key however lies in ensuring that technology is not just accessible but inclusive as well," highlighted Dr. AlHefdhi. "Inclusive urban societies will be determined by the levels of digital literacy and we need to invest equally in both technology and digital skills to make them inclusive."

ICDL Saudi Arabia's ICT literacy programmes are based on international standards established by the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) Foundation, the certifying authority of the world's leading international computer skills certification programme. ICDL courses teach basic computers skills and practical use of popular desktop applications. They are endorsed by education ministries, universities and government organizations, accredited by more than 168 countries, and available in over 40 languages.