



## Economic Update

### **Jordan: ICT jobs and training mismatch**

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Despite the advanced integration of technology into Jordan's educational system and a high level of computer penetration in homes, employers often find it difficult to fill positions for skilled workers in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector.

According to the results of a study released by the Department of Statistics and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology in mid-July, almost 60% of Jordanian homes have a personal computer or laptop, with 47% having an internet connection as of the end of 2012. While the computer penetration rate is down from the 2011 level of 61%, the report said this was due to a sharp rise in the number of internet-enabled smartphones and tablets. Just over 98% of households have a mobile phone, while 40% have smartphones, with 56% of individuals having access to mobile broadband and 26% connecting to the internet via WIMAX.

**Another report, prepared by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Jordan-based professional services group the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organisation, showed that Jordan has one of the highest rates of student access to ICT in the region. The study, released in April, assessed the impact of ICT on pre-tertiary education in Qatar, Egypt, Palestine and Oman, as well as Jordan, finding that the kingdom's schools had the lowest average learner-to-computer ratio (LCR) of all five countries covered in the report.**

Qatar, the country with the highest per capita income in the world, had an LCR ratio at the primary education level of 14:1, compared to Jordan's 12:1, while this figure stood at 7:1 and 4:1 for the lower and upper secondary school levels, respectively, all equal to or better than Qatar's results and superior to any of the other markets assessed.

This high level of access to ICT is indicative of Jordan's commitment to utilising technology. The report said that the country is recognised "both in the Arab states and internationally as a leader in developing its ICT infrastructure and promoting ICT as a tool to improve human capital, foster economic development and reduce poverty".

Growing connectivity in the home and extensive use of ICT at schools may well be contributing factors in the strong interest among young Jordanians to continue technology-related courses at the post-secondary level. However, while almost 6000 students will graduate from universities in 2013 having taken courses in the ICT area, nearly half of these will have degrees in fields with relatively low prospects of employment, according to a report by the ICT Association of Jordan (int@j).

The study, entitled the ICT Sector Competencies, Skills and Needs Assessment Report and released in late June, said there was a need to re-examine ICT education at the tertiary level with the aim of better matching training with the requirements of the workplace. The survey showed 75% of employers in the ICT sector have difficulties finding well-educated staff.

According to int@j, areas with few job opportunities are accounting information systems, electronic engineering and telecoms engineering, while degrees with strong demand include computer information systems and computer science.

The report also found that the rapid advances of ICT meant some universities would face challenges in keeping abreast of latest developments. This could create a risk of gaps in the skills transfer process, which in turn would reduce the value of graduates in the private sector. It was notable that int@j found the majority of ICT operators sent their staff to post-graduate external courses to reinforce their skills base, indicating this could be a potential growth area in the industry.

Upgrading technology and skills at the university level is a costly process, while int@j's suggestion that fewer places be offered in some courses to allow for a greater focus on studies in areas more in demand may not be welcomed by all. However, these modifications as well as greater collaboration between higher education and prospective employers may well be necessary to ensure that Jordan keeps its ICT edge sharp.

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