

ICDL calls on GCC governments to create citizen friendly e-government portals backed by extensive digital awareness campaign for all

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The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) has released its 2008 e-Government Survey showing all GCC member states significantly improving their e-Government Readiness since the 2005 survey. In this year's global e-government readiness rankings, **UAE** came in 32nd, improving from its previous rank of 42nd; **Bahrain** moved up from 53rd to 42nd; **Qatar** moved up from 62nd to 53rd; **Kuwait** moved up from 75th to 57th; **Saudi Arabia** moved up from 80th to 70th; and **Oman** moved up from 112th to 84th. The strong performance by the GCC countries has been attributed to heavy investments in deploying broadband infrastructure, coupled with increased implementation of e-government applications for their citizens.



The UAE also topped the ranking in the region in Web Measurement coming in 12th place worldwide, surpassing fellow GCC countries and many developed countries. This measurement rates the online presence of national websites and selected ministries, which include health, education, welfare, labour, and finance.

Countries like UAE and Kuwait have upgraded their government portals, with the UAE Ministry of Labour (<http://www.mol.gov.ae/>) being an excellent example of a one-stop shop facility offering

transactional features such as payment by credit card, online submission of forms and permits, and creation of personal accounts. It is also one of the few sites that have an electronic signature. The Kuwait Ministry of Social Welfare (<http://www.mosal.gov.kw>) is another example of a progressive website which offers email notification to citizens' requests, allows online submission of forms and payment, and allows online creation of personal accounts.

“The UNDESA Survey reaffirms that information and communications technology (ICT) is radically transforming public service delivery. We strongly support the notion that the potential of e-government as a tool for economic development can be realised upon the achievement of certain prerequisites which include a high-level of technological infrastructure, e-connectivity for all, and a strategy for e-government readiness that will make all members of the society become digitally competent with the use of computer and Internet. We commend the GCC governments for their efforts thus far and call on them to invest in more programs that will improve the people's ability to utilise electronic services,” said Jamil Ezzo, Director General, ICDL GCC Foundation.

The e-Government Readiness and Web Measurement assessments are intended to guide governments in gauging their progress and continually improving their e-government development programs. Several e-readiness initiatives have already been launched including the e-Citizen program, a basic computer skills program developed by the European Computer Driving License in collaboration with experts from across Europe. The urgent and growing need for the implementation of the e-Citizen digital literacy program for all has been recognised by forward thinking leaders and governments in many developed countries around the world, including UAE, Kuwait , Qatar and the rest of the GCC region.

e-Citizen is specifically designed to increase acceptance and participation in computer and Internet usage by the general public. It provides basic orientation to use a computer and participate online across a broad range of environments, from using email to dealing with e-government, searching for information, and buying products and services online. By equipping citizens with online skills, they will have access to the life-enhancing aspects of the Information Society, whatever their individual circumstance, job, age or gender.

“Although we are elated by the gains made by the GCC countries in improving governmental electronic services, citizens must still be afforded the necessary skills to use the online services being offered, which will ultimately build trust and confidence between citizens and the online service

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provider. This can only be achieved through concerted efforts from the stakeholders in the public and private sectors to support national digital literacy programs that aim to improve ICT skills of the general public,” concluded Ezzo.

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