

Press Release

**European Union Commission President receives 9 millionth ICDL
signifying digital literacy for economic development**

Arab countries account for over 1 million participants in the programme

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José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Union Commission, has recently received the 9 millionth ECDL Skills Card at a ceremony highlighting both the success of the ECDL programme and the necessity of keeping investment in digital skills high on the public policy agendas of all Member States in order to increase employability and build a competitive European economy.

The ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) programme, known outside Europe as ICDL (International Computer Driving Licence) to reflect its international unified standard, is a global certification that recognizes the competence of an individual in essential computer skills required in our personal and professional everyday life. Being not-for-profit and vendor neutral earned the ICDL programme a prominent reputation and a special status that made it the international benchmark for computer literacy. ICDL quickly became a prerequisite for employment in the public sector particularly for teachers, and was integrated in educational systems worldwide.

The milestone of the 9 millionth enrolments in the ECDL/ICDL program also reflects the success of the programme in the Arab region, including the ICDL GCC Foundation (www.icdlgcc.org) and UNESCO Cairo Office (www.unescoicdl.org) that jointly account for over 1 million of the 9 million enrolments in the programme. ICDL GCC Foundation is the governing body and certification authority of the ICDL programme in the Gulf region, while UNESCO Cairo Office carries the same mandate in all the other Arab countries.

Accepting the ECDL Skills Card, President Barroso emphasised the importance of digital literacy and stated that the European Union Commission is proud to have been the origin of the "great work of the ECDL programme" and its progress in reaching 9 million participants. President Barroso noted that "digital literacy is part of basic competences such as reading and writing and that this is the message the Commission is conveying to all European citizens; in this difficult economic situation many workers will need to be re-trained and the digital competences they can gain will help them find new opportunities for a better life."

To help address the economic situation, the European Commission has launched the European Economic Recovery plan which calls for 'smart investment' to yield higher growth and sustainable prosperity in the longer-term. It calls on Member States to invest more in education and re-training to protect Europe's citizens from the worst of the economic crisis. As part of this plan, the European Union Commission has proposed a 1 billion euro investment to bring broadband to rural areas. However, unless this investment is supplemented with IT training, Europe risks an additional widening of the digital divide in areas where digital literacy levels already lag behind the European average according to a 2008 Eurostat report indicating that in 2007, 49 per cent of citizens in sparsely populated areas never used the Internet.

Damien O'Sullivan, Chief Executive Officer of ECDL Foundation, noted that ECDL Foundation is proud to present the 9 millionth skills card to President Barroso to highlight the organisation's success in delivering digital literacy to Europe. Yet with 40 per cent of Europeans still without the basic skills needed to use the Internet, much remains to be done. Mr. O'Sullivan underlined the commitment of ECDL Foundation to the objectives of the i2010 Strategy as digital literacy is a key enabler for building an inclusive information society and a knowledge-based economy.

In these difficult times, cutting back on education and training for digital skills might impede any country's capability to fully recover from the economic crisis. Instead, ICDL GCC Foundation calls upon governments to increase and accelerate investments in training and education as the current conditions present an opportunity to emerge as a more dynamic and competitive economy at the end of the economic recession. Furthermore, ICDL urges governments, businesses and civil societies to work together to address the current challenges and remain focused on the objectives of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

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About ECDL Foundation

ECDL Foundation is the global standards and certification body for the ECDL and ICDL end-user computer skills certification programmes. It's a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to raising the level of computer skills in society and providing access for all to the Information Society. With over 9 million candidates participating in a range of programmes, ECDL Foundation has set the global benchmark in end-user skills certification.

What is an ECDL Skills Card?

The ECDL Skills Cards is the first step in the obtaining the internationally-recognised ECDL / ICDL certification. It denotes the candidate's registration and is used to record progress through the various modules that make up the programme, the successful completion of which leads to ECDL / ICDL certification.