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Addressing Brain Drain in Jordan's ICT Sector: An ESOP Employee Retention Blueprint

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1. Executive Summary

Jordan's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector stands at a critical juncture. While the sector has demonstrated remarkable growth, reaching a market size of $4.1 billion in 2025 and contributing significantly to the national economy, it faces an existential threat: a persistent and escalating brain drain that threatens to undermine its future competitiveness and growth potential.

This comprehensive position paper, published by the Information and Communications Technology Association of Jordan (int@j), in partnership with Eversheds Sutherland, presents a detailed analysis of the brain drain challenge and offers a roadmap for transforming this crisis into an opportunity. The analysis reveals that Jordan is fighting a two-front war for talent: the traditional migration of skilled professionals to higher-paying markets abroad, and the emerging "silent brain drain" where professionals remain in Jordan but work remotely for foreign companies, often outside the national tax and social security systems.

The scale of the challenge is significant. While Jordan graduates approximately 12,000 technology-related students annually, the sector employs approximate 48,000 professionals, and a substantial portion of experienced talent continues to migrate to the GCC countries and beyond. The average ICT salary in Jordan of $15,000 USD annually pales in comparison to Singapore's $75,000 or Ireland's $69,000, creating a competitive disadvantage that cannot be addressed through compensation alone.

Through comprehensive benchmarking against Singapore, Ireland, Egypt, and Romania, this paper identifies key success factors that Jordan can adapt to its context. The most successful countries employ holistic retention strategies that combine competitive compensation with comprehensive benefits packages, flexible work arrangements, structured career development programs, and notably, widespread adoption of Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs). Singapore's 70% ESOP adoption rate and Ireland's 60% rate contrast sharply with Jordan's estimated 15%, representing a significant opportunity for improvement.

The paper presents a comprehensive set of actionable recommendations organized around three key pillars: public-sector entities-led initiatives to create a conducive policy environment, company-level strategies to build a culture of retention, and collaborative ecosystem development. Key recommendations include introducing ESOP guidebooks, addressing the silent brain drain through fair regulation, enhancing investment in education and skills development, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth within companies.

The path forward requires unprecedented collaboration between the public-sector entities, industry, and academia. By implementing these recommendations, Jordan can transform its brain drain into a "brain gain" and secure its position as a leading technology hub in the region. The time for action is now—the future of Jordan's digital economy depends on the decisions made today.

2. Introduction: The Two-Front War for Jordan's Tech Talent

Jordan's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector stands as a critical pillar of the nation's economic modernization vision, a beacon of innovation, and a significant contributor to its export-oriented economy. However, this vital sector is facing an escalating crisis: a relentless brain drain that threatens to undermine its growth and competitiveness. The challenge is no longer a simple one-way street of talent leaving the country for better opportunities abroad. Instead, Jordan is fighting a two-front war for its most valuable asset: its people.

The first front is the traditional, physical migration of highly skilled professionals. Experienced software engineers, data scientists, cybersecurity experts, and project managers are being lured away by the higher salaries, superior benefits, and extensive growth opportunities offered in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Europe, and North America. A recent report by the Jordan Times highlights that the lack of large-scale projects and sufficient export potential within many local businesses limits job creation and exacerbates this brain drain of qualified professionals [1]. This exodus of senior talent leaves a void in leadership and expertise, weakening the local ecosystem and diminishing its capacity for innovation.

The second, and perhaps more insidious, front is the rise of the "silent brain drain." This phenomenon sees Jordanian professionals remaining in the country physically but working remotely for international companies. While this offers individuals unprecedented flexibility and access to global-level salaries, it creates a host of problems for the local economy. These professionals often operate outside the national labor, tax, and social security systems, reducing their contribution to public revenue and creating an uneven playing field for local companies that cannot compete with the compensation packages offered by foreign firms. The result is a hollowing out of the local talent pool, making it increasingly difficult for Jordanian ICT companies, especially Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), to attract and retain the skilled workforce they need to grow and innovate.

This position paper will provide a comprehensive analysis of the brain drain crisis in Jordan's ICT sector. It will present a detailed overview of the sector's current landscape, supported by the latest available data, and quantify the scale of the talent migration challenge. It will also benchmark Jordan against several key countries—Singapore, Ireland, Egypt, and Romania—that have successfully implemented strategies to retain and attract tech talent. Finally, it will offer a set of concrete, actionable recommendations for government, industry, and academia to collaboratively address this pressing issue, with a special focus on the role of Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) as a powerful tool for talent retention.

3. A Pillar of the National Economy: Jordan's ICT Sector

Jordan's ICT sector has emerged as a powerful engine of economic growth and a cornerstone of the nation's strategy for a diversified, knowledge-based economy. The sector's impressive growth trajectory and increasing contribution to the national GDP underscore its importance. However, to fully appreciate the gravity of the brain drain challenge, it is essential to first understand the scale and vitality of the sector it affects.

The Jordanian ICT market has demonstrated remarkable resilience and growth, even in the face of regional and global economic headwinds. Market size estimate is at USD 4.10 billion for 2025 and is projected to continue its upward trend. Forecasts are based on robust growth driven by increasing government investments in digital transformation and the burgeoning startup ecosystem. The Jordan Times reports an even more optimistic outlook, with the market size expected to reach $5.10 billion by 2030, growing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6.46% from 2025 to 2030 [2]. This sustained growth is a testament to the dynamism and potential of the sector.

The ICT sector's contribution to Jordan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been steadily increasing, reflecting its growing importance to the national economy. The Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship (MoDEE) has previously indicated that the sector's contribution is significant and growing with the ICT sector contributing 3.8% of GDP. As the digital economy expands, the ICT sector's role in driving economic growth and diversification will only become more critical.

The ICT sector is a vital source of high-skilled employment in Jordan. The sector provided 46,000+ direct jobs in 2024 with 67% held by males and 33% by females. While these figures may seem modest in the context of the entire labor market, they represent high-value jobs that are crucial for a knowledge-based economy. Under the Jordan Modernization Vison (JMV) the target is 101,000 direct jobs by 2033. The sector's ability to create and sustain these jobs is directly threatened by the ongoing brain drain.

The data paints a clear picture: Jordan's ICT sector is a dynamic and growing industry that is critical to the country's economic future. However, the very talent that fuels this growth is being systematically drained away. The following sections will delve deeper into the specific drivers of this brain drain and explore potential solutions to stanch the flow.

4. The Bleeding Edge: Quantifying the Brain Drain Challenge

The growth and dynamism of Jordan's ICT sector are being directly undermined by a persistent and multifaceted brain drain. This is not a new problem, but its scale and nature have evolved, posing a significant threat to the sector's long-term sustainability. To craft effective solutions, it is crucial to understand the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this challenge.

While precise, real-time statistics on talent migration are difficult to capture, a consistent picture of a significant outflow of skilled professionals emerges from various sources. A 2022 report from the Jordan Strategy Forum (JSF) highlighted that a significant number of Jordanian graduates, particularly in high-demand fields like engineering and IT, seek employment opportunities abroad [3]. While Jordan graduates around 12,000 students (2024/2025 academic year) in fields related to technology, a large portion of the experienced, senior talent is being lost to other countries.

A study on digital skills in Jordan by the Ministry of Labor pointed to "outward talent migration" as a key challenge for the ICT sector, with trained resources, especially those with 3-7 years of experience, leaving for the GCC countries in search of better financial packages and career progression opportunities [4]. This loss of mid-career professionals is particularly damaging, as they represent the next generation of leaders and innovators.

4.1 The "Why": Drivers of the Brain Drain

The decision to leave a job, and often a country, is a complex one, driven by a combination of economic, professional, and personal factors. In the case of Jordan's ICT sector, several key drivers consistently emerge:

1. **Compensation and Financial Incentives:** The most significant driver of brain drain is the substantial salary gap between Jordan and the GCC countries, Europe, and North America. A senior software engineer in Jordan might earn a fraction of what they could command in Dubai, Riyadh, or Berlin. This disparity is too large for many to ignore, especially those with families or financial obligations.

2. **Career Growth and Opportunities:** Beyond salary, the search for more challenging and impactful work is a major motivator. Many Jordanian ICT professionals feel that the local market, dominated by SMEs, offers limited opportunities for career progression and exposure to large-scale, cutting-edge projects. A survey by TalentLMS found that 41% of tech workers globally leave their jobs due to a lack of career progression opportunities, a sentiment that resonates strongly in the Jordanian context [5].

3. **Work Environment and Culture:** While many Jordanian ICT companies have a positive work culture, they often struggle to compete with the resources and prestige of multinational corporations. The allure of working for a global brand, with its structured environment, international exposure, and diverse teams, can be a powerful draw.

4.2 The Silent Brain Drain: A Hidden Threat

The spread of remote work after the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced a new and complex dimension to the issue of brain drain. While it offers the potential to bring global opportunities to Jordanian talent, it has also created a "silent brain drain" that poses a significant threat to the local economy. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has noted that while data on the platform economy in Jordan is scarce, remote work poses several risks [6].

When Jordanian professionals work remotely for foreign companies, their salaries are often paid into foreign bank accounts, and they may not be subject to Jordanian income tax or social security contributions. This not only reduces public revenue but also creates an unfair competitive advantage for foreign companies that do not have to bear the same social costs as local businesses. Furthermore, it exacerbates the talent shortage for local companies, who find themselves unable to compete with the salaries offered by their international rivals.

This two-front war for talent—the physical migration of skilled professionals and the silent drain of remote work—requires a comprehensive and multi-pronged response. The following sections will explore how other countries have tackled similar challenges and what lessons Jordan can learn from their experiences.

5. Learning from the Best: International Benchmarks and Best Practices

To develop effective strategies for addressing Jordan's brain drain challenge, it is essential to examine how other countries have successfully tackled similar issues. This section provides a comprehensive analysis of talent retention strategies employed by Singapore, Ireland, Egypt, and Romania—countries that offer valuable lessons for Jordan's ICT sector.

5.1 Singapore: The Gold Standard for Talent Attraction and Retention

Singapore stands as a global leader in talent management within the ICT sector, having transformed itself from a developing nation into a major technology hub. The city-state's approach to talent retention is multifaceted and highly strategic.

- **Market Context and Compensation:** Singapore's ICT market is valued at approximately $45 billion, making it one of the largest in Southeast Asia relative to its size [7]. The average ICT salary in Singapore is around $75,000 USD annually, significantly higher than Jordan's $15,000 average. This substantial compensation differential is supported by the country's high GDP per capita and strong economic fundamentals.

- **Key Retention Strategies:** Singapore's success in talent retention stems from several key strategies. The government has implemented comprehensive policies to attract and retain international IT talent, including streamlined visa processes and attractive tax incentives [8]. A study by Osman-Gani and Paik found that Singapore's three-pronged strategy focusing on attraction, development, and retention of international IT talent has been particularly effective [9].

The adoption of Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) in Singapore is notably high, with approximately 70% of ICT companies offering some form of equity participation to employees [10]. The regulatory framework for ESOPs is well-established, with clear tax implications and legal protections for both employers and employees. Singapore's ESOP framework allows employees to purchase company shares at predetermined prices, often with favorable tax treatment that makes these schemes attractive [11].

- **Work Environment and Culture:** Singapore has embraced flexible work arrangements as a core retention strategy. The Singapore Technology Talent Report 2024 highlights that 90% of tech companies now offer flexible work arrangements, recognizing this as crucial for talent retention [12]. The country's emphasis on continuous learning and development, supported by government initiatives like SkillsFuture, ensures that professionals can continuously upgrade their skills.

5.2 Ireland: The European Tech Hub Model

Ireland has successfully positioned itself as a major European technology hub, attracting global tech giants while developing a robust domestic ICT sector. The country's approach offers valuable insights for Jordan.

Market Context and Compensation: Ireland's ICT market is valued at approximately $25 billion, with the sector contributing significantly to the country's GDP [13]. The average ICT salary in Ireland reached €69,050 ($75,000 USD) in 2024, making it the highest-paid sector in the country [14]. This represents a substantial premium over other sectors and reflects the high value placed on tech talent.

Retention Strategies and Best Practices: Ireland's talent retention strategy is built on several pillars. The country offers comprehensive employee benefits packages that go beyond salary. According to industry surveys, 85% of Irish tech companies offer flexible work arrangements, 80% provide structured career development programs, and 60% offer some form of equity participation [15].

The Irish government has been proactive in supporting the tech sector through favorable tax policies, including the famous 12.5% corporate tax rate that has attracted numerous multinational corporations. This has created a virtuous cycle where the presence of global companies raises the bar for compensation and benefits across the entire sector.

Professional Development Focus: Ireland places significant emphasis on continuous learning and professional development. Enterprise Ireland's "Excel at Growth - Attracting and Retaining Talent Programme" specifically targets founders, CEOs, and HR managers to develop effective talent management strategies [16]. The focus on upskilling and reskilling has helped Irish companies retain talent by providing clear career progression paths.

5.3 Egypt: Emerging Market Strategies and Challenges

Egypt represents an interesting case study as a developing economy with a growing ICT sector that faces similar challenges to Jordan, albeit at a different scale.

Market Context: Egypt's ICT sector is valued at approximately $12 billion and is the fastest-growing sector in the country, with a projected CAGR of 17.61% between 2024-2027 [17]. However, the average ICT salary in Egypt is around $8,000 USD annually, significantly lower than Jordan's levels.

Talent Retention Challenges and Strategies: Egypt faces significant brain drain challenges, with many of its 125,000 engineers seeking opportunities abroad [18]. The country has the second-largest tech talent market in Africa, but struggles with retention due to compensation gaps with international markets.

Egyptian companies have focused on non-monetary benefits to retain talent. A study on best practices for talent acquisition and retention in Egypt found that companies should tailor their retention strategies to align with organizational cultures and employee expectations [19]. The adoption of ESOPs in Egypt is limited, with only about 10% of companies offering equity participation programs.

Government Initiatives: The Egyptian government has launched several initiatives to support the ICT sector, including investment in digital infrastructure and education. However, the regulatory framework for employee equity schemes remains underdeveloped compared to more mature markets.

5.4 Romania: The Eastern European Success Story

Romania has emerged as a significant player in the European ICT landscape, offering valuable lessons for countries seeking to develop their tech sectors while managing talent retention.

Market Context and Growth: Romania's ICT sector is projected to generate approximately €1.2 billion in turnover by 2025, with the software engineering industry driving 10% of the country's economic growth [20]. The average net salary in the IT industry in Romania has more than doubled in recent years, reaching approximately $25,000 USD annually [21].

Retention Strategies and Innovations: Romanian companies have developed sophisticated talent retention strategies. A comprehensive study of Romanian IT companies found that competitive salary packages are the most critical factor for retention, but companies are increasingly focusing on comprehensive benefits packages [22]. Approximately 45% of Romanian ICT companies now offer some form of equity participation to employees.

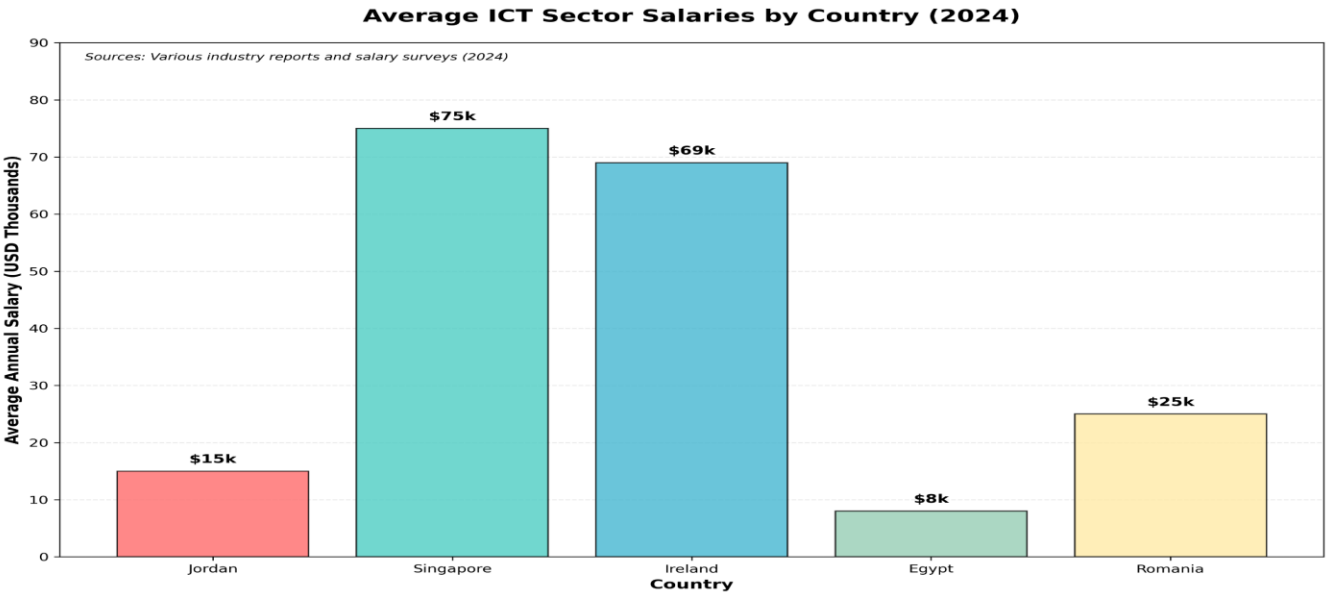
Romania has also embraced flexible work arrangements, with 75% of tech companies offering remote or hybrid work options. The country's focus on creating inclusive workplace cultures has been particularly effective in retaining diverse talent [23].

Regulatory Environment: Romania has developed a supportive regulatory environment for employee benefits, including clear frameworks for stock option plans and favorable tax treatment for certain employee benefits [24]. The European Union's 2025 Digital Decade Country Report noted that while Romania has a high number of ICT graduates, it struggles to retain talent within the country, leading to increased focus on retention strategies [25].

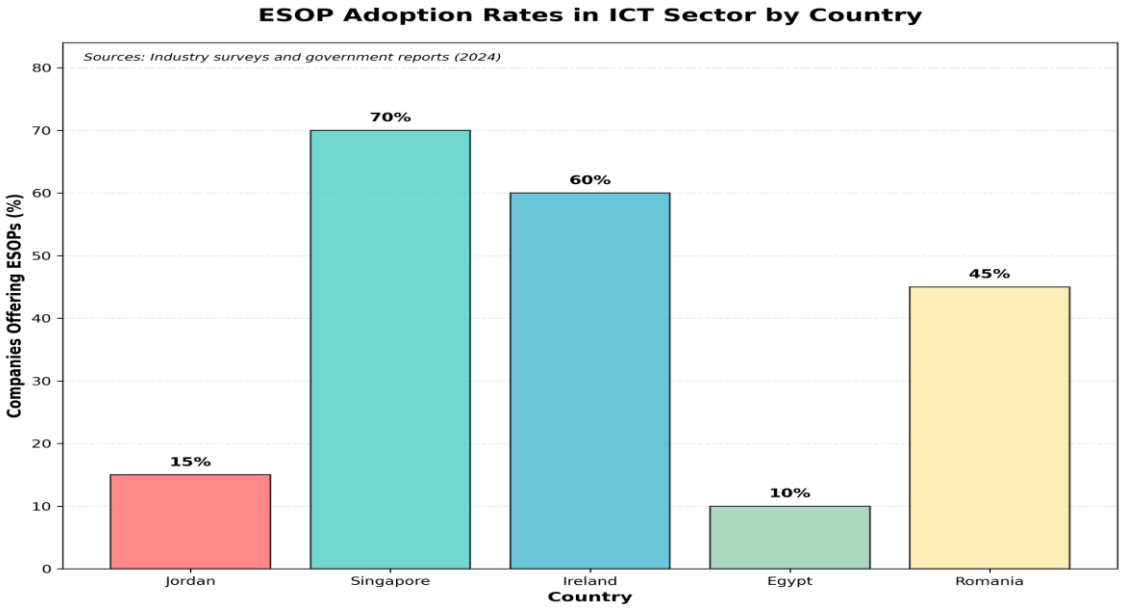
5.5 Comparative Analysis: Key Insights for Jordan

The analysis of these four countries reveals several critical insights that Jordan can apply to address its brain drain challenge.

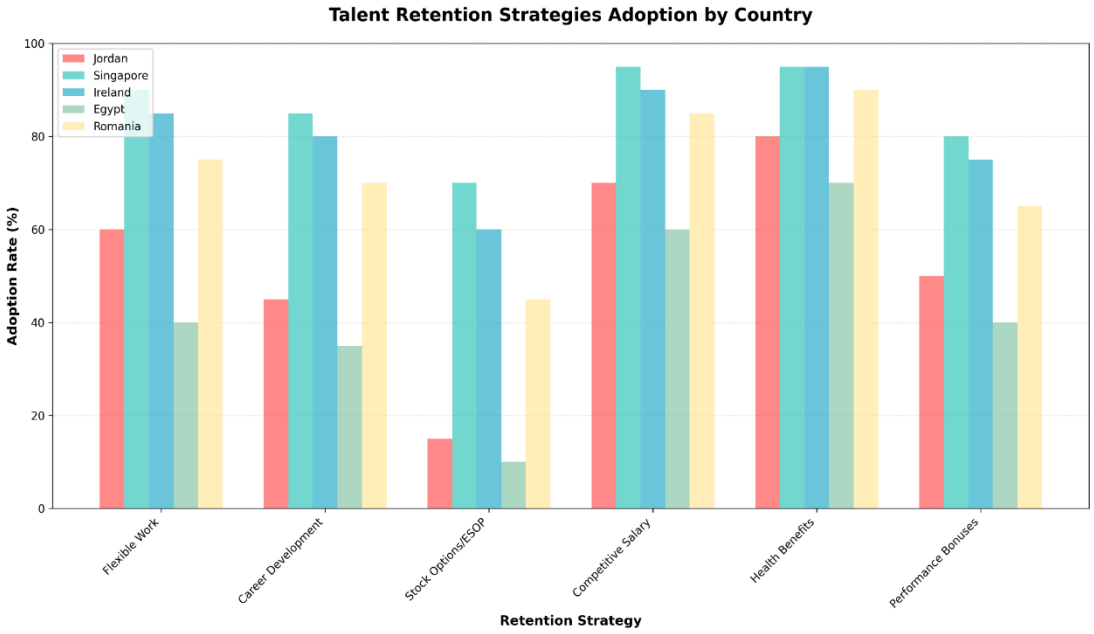
1. **Compensation Competitiveness:** The data clearly shows a strong correlation between average salary levels and talent retention. Singapore and Ireland, with the highest average salaries ($75,000 and $69,000 respectively), have the most successful retention rates. Jordan's average of $15,000 places it at a significant disadvantage, but the gap with Romania ($25,000) and Egypt ($8,000) suggests that strategic improvements are possible.



2. **ESOP Adoption as a Differentiator:** The countries with higher ESOP adoption rates—Singapore (70%) and Ireland (60%)—demonstrate better talent retention outcomes. Jordan's current adoption rate of approximately 15% represents a significant opportunity for improvement. Note that the Jordan employee shares are not strictly under an ESOP legal structure but through the current legal framework & company share setup whether LLC, Private shareholding company or others. Companies have also setup holding companies in other jurisdictions to manage ESOP for their employees and team members.



3. **Holistic Retention Strategies:** The most successful countries employ comprehensive retention strategies that go beyond compensation. The adoption of flexible work arrangements, structured career development programs, and comprehensive benefits packages are common themes across Singapore, Ireland, and Romania.



4. **Government Role and Policy Support:** In all successful cases, government policy has played a crucial role in supporting the ICT sector. This includes favorable tax policies, investment in education and infrastructure, and the development of supportive regulatory frameworks for employee equity schemes.

The benchmarking analysis reveals that Jordan has significant room for improvement across multiple dimensions. However, it also demonstrates that with the right strategies and policy support, substantial progress is achievable. The following section will translate these insights into specific, actionable recommendations for Jordan's ICT sector.

6. A Roadmap for Action: Comprehensive Recommendations for Jordan

Based on the detailed analysis of Jordan's ICT sector, the international benchmarking, and the identified best practices, this section presents a comprehensive set of actionable recommendations. These recommendations are designed to be implemented collaboratively by the Jordanian government, ICT companies, and educational institutions to create a sustainable and thriving talent ecosystem.

6.1 Public Sector Entities Led Initiatives: Creating a Conducive Environment

Jordanian public sector entities have a critical role to play in creating a policy and regulatory environment that fosters talent retention and attracts new investment. The following recommendations are designed to achieve this objective:

a. Modernize and Streamline ESOP Framework:

The What:
Implement a clear and comprehensive framework for Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) that is specifically tailored to the needs of the ICT sector. This framework could provide best-practice recommendations for designing and implementing ESOPs, clarify their role in employee retention and productivity, and encourage companies to adopt them.

The How:

- **Form a National ESOP Task Force:** This task force should include representatives from the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship (MoDEE), the Ministry of Finance, the Companies Control Department, Ministry of Labor, int@j, and legal and financial experts to develop clear guidelines, standard frameworks, and best practices for implementing (ESOP) within the existing legal framework. This includes providing practical guidance on ESOP structuring, tax treatment, and governance, tailored to the needs of the ICT sector.
- **ESOP Guidance Handbook:** Establish an ESOP Guidance Handbook that cover the details of ESOP taking in mind the different legal forms, size and internal policies as the ESOP details are inherently discretionary and varies significantly from one entity to the other. Guidebook to provide sample templates, flows, calculations, etc. that are also in line with regional and international standards.
- **ESOP Benefits and Incentives:** To encourage and promote the adoption of ESOP in the ICT sector, companies can be offered a variety of practical incentives. These may include regulatory facilitation or fast-track approvals, reduced administrative fees for issuing shares, and access to government-supported programs such as mentorship networks, and innovation grants. Additionally, companies implementing ESOPs could receive public recognition and enhanced

brand reputation, such measures provide financial and competitive advantages, supporting broader ESOP adoption within the existing legal framework...

b. Address the "Silent Brain Drain" through Fair Strategies:

The What: Implement a clear and equitable regulatory framework for remote work and freelancing that ensures a level playing field for local and international companies and brings remote workers into the national economic system.

The How:

- **Introduce a "Digital Nomad" Visa:** Create a special visa category for foreign remote workers as founders or professionals for Jordanian professionals (freelancers) working for foreign companies. This would encourage them to formalize their status and contribute to the national economy, or by optional Social Security Participation. Link contributions to Jordan's Social Security system by allowing these professionals to voluntarily enroll under a "**Digital Nomad / Dual Engagement**" category, enabling them to accumulate pension, disability, and survivor benefits for their engagement activities. Registration would require proof of visa/employment and participation in mentorship or teaching programs by using a digital platform to log hours and verify participation, ensuring transparency and ease of administration.
- **Foster Social Security coverage for All Income Earners in Jordan:** Noting the current voluntary subscription to Social Security for certain categories, on a later stage we propose standardizing participation to ensure comprehensive coverage. All individuals residing in Jordan and earning an income, regardless of the source, whether from local employment, remote work for foreign companies, or self-employment, should be required to contribute to the Social Security system.

Promote Dual-Engagement Models: Encourage experienced professionals working remotely for foreign companies to dedicate a portion of their time to mentoring local startups, teaching at universities, knowledge transfer, and other activities towards engagement with the local ecosystem. This could be incentivized through benefits such as national talent registry, visiting lecturers and recognition programs.

c. Enhance Investment in Education and Skills Development:

The What: Align the education system with the needs of the ICT sector and provide continuous learning opportunities for professionals to keep their skills up-to-date.

The How:

- **Establish a National ICT Skills Committee:** Bring together representatives from industry, academia, and government, to collaboratively identify current and future skills gaps and developing strategies to address them.
- **Subsidize Professional Certifications:** Provide financial support for ICT professionals to obtain globally recognized certifications in high-demand areas such as cybersecurity, data science, and artificial intelligence.
- **Integrate Practical Experience into University Curricula:** Encourage that all ICT-related university programs include a significant practical component, such as internships, co-op programs, or capstone projects developed in partnership with local companies.

6.2 Company-Level Strategies: Building a Culture of Retention

ICT companies in Jordan need to move beyond competing on salary alone and adopt a more holistic approach to talent retention. The following recommendations are designed to help them create a work environment where employees feel valued, engaged, and motivated to stay.

a. Embrace Equity and Ownership through ESOPs:

The What: Proactively incorporate Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) as a key part of the compensation and retention strategy.

The How:

- **Educate Founders and Employees:** Many founders and employees in Jordan are unfamiliar with ESOPs. Companies should invest in educating their teams about the benefits of employee ownership and how ESOPs work.
- **Start Small and Simple:** Companies can start with a small ESOP pool and a simple vesting schedule (e.g., a four-year vesting period with a one-year cliff). As the company grows, the ESOP can be expanded.
- **Seek Expert Advice:** While the relevant authorities can provide ESOP guidebooks as a start point, companies should still seek legal and financial advice to ensure that their ESOP is structured correctly and complies with all applicable regulations.

b. Foster a Culture of Continuous Learning and Growth:

The What: Create a work environment that prioritizes professional development and provides clear career paths for employees.

The How:

- **Implement Individual Development Plans (IDPs):** Work with each employee to create a personalized development plan that outlines their career goals and the steps they need to take to achieve them.
- **Establish Mentorship Programs:** Pair junior employees with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, support, and advice.
- **Encourage Knowledge Sharing:** Create opportunities for employees to share their knowledge and expertise with their colleagues, such as through internal tech talks, workshops, and informal gatherings and sessions.

c. Offer Competitive and Flexible Benefits Packages:

The What: Design a benefits package that meets the diverse needs of the workforce and goes beyond the statutory minimums.

The How:

- **Provide Comprehensive Health Insurance:** Offer a high-quality health insurance plan that covers employees and their families.
- **Embrace Flexible Work Arrangements:** Allow employees to work from home or have flexible hours, where possible. This has become a key expectation for many tech professionals.
- **Offer Non-Monetary Perks:** Consider offering other perks that can improve employee well-being, such as gym memberships, childcare support, or wellness programs.

6.3 A Collaborative Ecosystem: The Path Forward

Addressing Jordan's brain drain challenge requires a concerted and coordinated effort from all stakeholders. The relevant authorities, ICT companies, and educational institutions must work together to create a virtuous cycle of talent development, retention, and attraction. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this position paper, Jordan can transform its brain drain into a "brain gain" and secure its position as a leading technology hub in the region.

7. Conclusion: From Brain Drain to Brain Gain

Jordan's ICT sector has reached a pivotal moment in its evolution. The sector's impressive growth trajectory, from a nascent industry to a $4.10 billion market contributing significantly to the national economy, demonstrates the tremendous potential that exists within the Kingdom. However, this potential is being systematically undermined by a brain drain that threatens to hollow out the very talent base that drives innovation and growth.

The analysis presented in this position paper reveals that the brain drain challenge is more complex and multifaceted than previously understood. It is not simply a matter of professionals leaving Jordan for better opportunities abroad—though that remains a significant concern. The emergence of the "silent brain drain," where talented individuals remain in Jordan but work remotely for foreign companies, represents a new and equally threatening dimension to the challenge. This phenomenon not only deprives local companies of talent but also reduces the contribution of these professionals to the national economy through reduced tax and social security contributions.

The international benchmarking exercise provides both sobering context and reason for optimism. Countries like Singapore and Ireland have successfully transformed themselves into global technology hubs through strategic investments in talent development and retention. Their success is not solely attributable to higher salaries—though competitive compensation remains important—but rather to comprehensive, holistic approaches that address the full spectrum of employee needs and aspirations.

The widespread adoption of Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) in successful markets represents a particularly compelling opportunity for Jordan. With only 15% of Jordanian ICT companies currently offering ESOPs compared to 70% in Singapore and 60% in Ireland, there is substantial room for improvement. ESOPs offer a unique solution to the compensation gap challenge by allowing employees to share in the long-term success of their companies, creating alignment between individual and organizational goals while fostering a culture of ownership and commitment.

The recommendations presented in this paper are designed to be practical, actionable, and achievable within Jordan's current economic and regulatory context. They recognize that addressing brain drain requires coordinated action across multiple fronts: government policy and regulation, company-level strategies and culture, and educational system alignment. No single intervention will solve the challenge, but a comprehensive approach that addresses all dimensions simultaneously can create a virtuous cycle of talent development, retention, and attraction.

The public sector entities role is particularly crucial in creating the enabling environment for success. Modernizing ESOP Guidebooks, addressing the regulatory gaps around remote work, and investing in skills development are foundational steps that will benefit the entire sector.

Companies, meanwhile, must move beyond competing solely on salary and embrace a more sophisticated approach to talent management that includes equity participation, professional development, and flexible work arrangements.

The stakes could not be higher. Jordan's Economic Modernization Vision and its aspirations to become a regional technology hub depend fundamentally on the ability to develop, attract, and retain world-class talent. The countries that succeed in the global knowledge economy will be those that can create environments where talented individuals want to live, work, and build their careers.

Jordan has many inherent advantages in this competition: a well-educated population, a strategic location, political stability, and a growing reputation for innovation and entrepreneurship. However, these advantages will only translate into success if they are supported by the right policies, practices, and culture. The brain drain challenge, while serious, is not insurmountable. With the right approach, Jordan can transform its current challenge into a competitive advantage, creating a talent ecosystem that not only retains its best and brightest but attracts talent from around the region and beyond.

The time for action is now. The global competition for talent is intensifying, and the window of opportunity for Jordan to establish itself as a preferred destination for ICT professionals is narrowing. The recommendations in this paper provide a roadmap for action, but their implementation requires commitment, coordination, and sustained effort from all stakeholders.

Jordan's ICT sector has the potential to be a crown jewel of the national economy, a driver of innovation and growth, and a source of high-quality employment for generations of Jordanians. Realizing this potential requires addressing the brain drain challenge head-on, with the urgency and comprehensiveness that the situation demands. The future of Jordan's digital economy—and its broader economic transformation—depends on the actions taken today.

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9. Biography

The Information and Communications Technology Association of Jordan (int@j), founded in 2000, is a membership-based association that advocates, supports, and networks the ICT and IT-enabled services (ITES) industry. int@j serves as the collective voice of the industry, advocating on behalf of our stakeholders and seeking to maximize the ICT sector's contribution to the national economy. We aim to provide our members with the tools required to ensure continued growth and expansion.

Our Vision

Jordan to become a major regional ICT and ITES leader and an internationally recognized exporter of ICT and ITES products & services, capitalizing on its core human capital advantage.

Our Mission

To provide members with a platform of products & services that support their continuous growth, expansion, and prosperity toward a mature sector that substantially contributes to the national economy and provides quality jobs for Jordanians

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