

New research: Huge ICT entry-level job demand for 2021

Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator recently released research called the [Harambee Mapping of Digital and ICT Roles and Demand for South Africa Survey](#), which identifies what roles, functions and competencies are in demand for digital and ICT work, and which certifications are most needed by businesses and employers.



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A significant takeout from the findings is that growth in digitised services has the potential to unlock jobs for youth at scale.

Evan Jones, group strategy director of Harambee, says: “Our research forecasts demand for 66,000 jobs in digital and ICT roles in the next year, two-thirds of which are entry-level roles.”

“The advent of technological innovation has for many years been the single biggest driver reshaping how we think about work, what constitutes work, and the skills we will need to be productive contributors in the future.”

More recently the required skill-sets that meet the criteria of digital workplace demands, many of which do not currently exist, is expected to accelerate as the country is further catapulted into the 4IR,” adds Juanita Clark, CEO of Digital Council Africa and partner in the research project.

The research also shows that 69% of respondents outsource digital work and expertise to other countries. This equates to R150m paid annually to service providers in other countries, which translates into an estimated lost export revenue for South Africa of about R8,5bn every year.

However, South Africa is already uniquely qualified on some of the factors that matter the most to respondents, with more than half (55%) indicating they have the capability to service international markets from South Africa.

“Reshoring and bringing back this digital work present significant high-earning job opportunities for unemployed youth in South Africa. The country must prepare its skilling pathways and training programmes to meet this demand and ensure that young people who need those jobs the most are brought into the digital economy,” says Jones.

The jobs that are most in-demand

The report also provides a detailed understanding of the job roles that can unlock employment for youth now and in the future. Desktop support technicians, junior software developers, and data analysts top the list as the most in-demand entry-level roles. Over the next five years, machine learning and data management skills will grow in importance, with data analysts viewed as the most in-demand.

The imperative now is to generate skills for these jobs. Pathways into digital roles need to be cheaper, quicker and more inclusive because traditional training programmes that require many years of formal training, degrees and extensive work experience exclude many young people who can do the work.

The most favoured solution by survey respondents to cross this hurdle are micro-credentials which offer subject-specific certifications for those who cannot access a full-length university degree. Ranked second is ongoing life-long learning.

Vendor-specific certifications are a form of micro-credentialing that is readily available to young people. The research found that the most in-demand vendor-specific certifications included Microsoft Azure data scientist and developer, Google cloud developer and Amazon Web Services cloud practitioner.

The research makes it clear that despite the current global recession, the digital economy continues to grow, and requires digital and ICT skills to fuel its requirements.

But Jones says employers are going to have to be realistic and open-minded to look for young talent to fill these roles which will require them to place more focus on the attributes, aptitude, cognitive abilities and emotional intelligence of young people, as opposed to degrees, diplomas and unrealistic functions or expectations for job roles.

Public-private partnerships are required to build digital simulation academies that provide focused experiential learning for high demand roles and address unemployment with sustainable skills pipelines. Using this evidence base, government and other stakeholder partners can and should realign much-needed digital and ICT skills to be more demand-led across the skills ecosystem.

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