

Freelancing in the State of Palestine

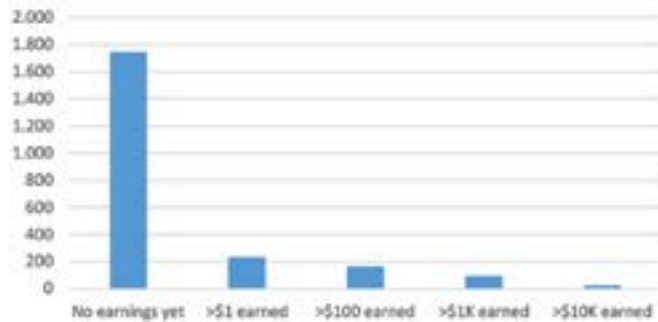
A New Avenue for Youth Economic Empowerment



By Mohammed Abu Mezyad

In spite of enormous challenges, the entrepreneurial spirit in Gaza is high, and some youth are finding alternative ways to challenge the situation.

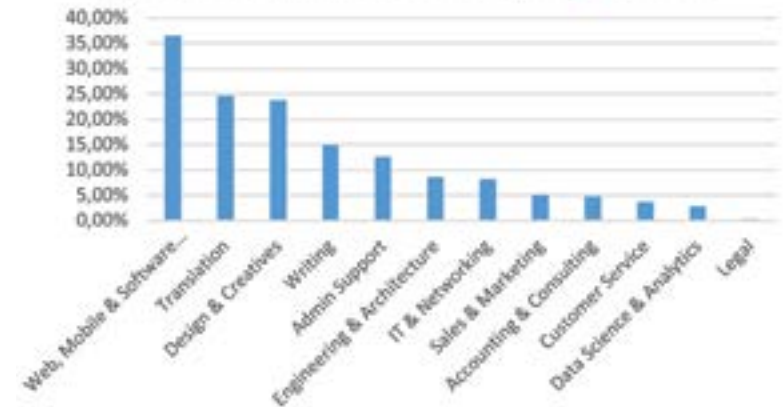
Earnings of Palestinian Freelancers in Upwork May 28,2018



Earnings of Palestinian Freelancers on Upwork.com

Freelancing and online jobs are considered to be among the best temporary solutions to the unemployment problem in Gaza. The importance of investing in this field has been validated through initiatives such as Mostaq, Freelancer, and Upwork. Although it is hard to estimate the exact number of Palestinian freelancers due to the nature of their work and to the fact that some of them work outside these platforms and engage directly with international clients, remote work is becoming more popular for both clients and service providers, as it is cost efficient and productive.

Upwork Palestinian Freelancers (May 28,2018)



Earnings of Palestinian Freelancers on Upwork.com

The number of freelancers varies among the diverse portals. For example, there are some 3,000 Palestinian freelancers to be found at freelancer.com, and around 2,000 more are registered in Upwork.com. Approximately 7,000 Palestinian freelancers are registered in the Arab-world-based portal Mostaq.com. The profiles of freelancers vary from programmers to designers, accountants, engineers, and others. Chart 2 demonstrates the distribution of Palestinian freelancers among the various job categories in the Upwork.com platform.





Creating alternative and inclusive labor markets for Palestinian graduates in Gaza, beyond the stagnated local economy, provides new avenues for youth to access innovative forms of work at the regional and global levels. This has positive economic and social implications for them and for their community. Therefore, it is important to invest in the capacities of youth to strengthen their employability by teaching them more globalized skills in online freelancing.

The United Nations Development Programme/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) is investing in freelancing and e-work, considering it a window of opportunity for new graduates in the State of Palestine. In September 2017, UNDP launched an e-work project as part of its Right to Education Programme in Gaza, funded by Qatar Fund for Development through Al Fakhoora, a

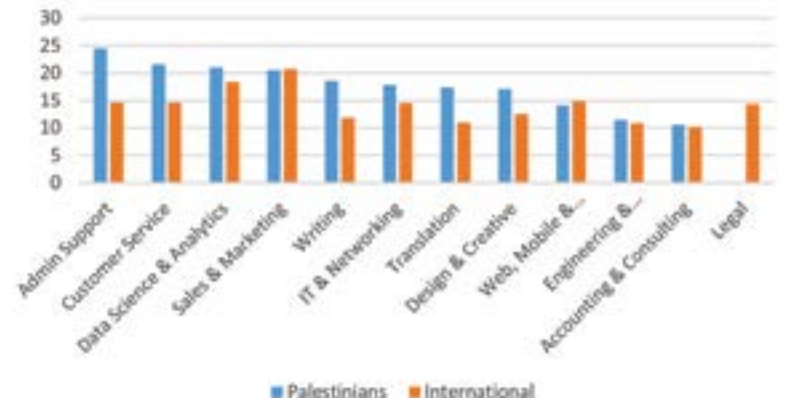
Freelance e-work can provide a source of income for Gaza's youth.

Programme of Education Above All. The project was innovatively designed to tackle the issues of Palestinian freelancers in Gaza. It was implemented through two local partners – the University College of Applied Sciences (UCAS) and Mercy Corps/Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG) – and it targeted 10 different information-technology-related fields, including mobile development, design, game development, and web development.

The project was implemented in two phases. Phase I included an awareness-building and advertising campaign, with online registration for the project. A total of 208 fresh graduates (104 male, 104 female) were selected based on the written exams and interviews of more than 2,784 online applicants. The selected 208 graduates received 60 hours of technical training as well as financial incentives.

The first phase ended with the “Freelancing Hackathon,” where the 208 graduates competed to solve real-world challenges related to their technical fields. The hackathon provided an opportunity for the freelancers to prove their technical abilities and potentials as well as their ability to manage time and work under pressure and while competing. In addition, advanced technical training courses were provided, and the top 88 trainees were selected to take part in one-to-one and group mentoring and coaching sessions in addition to soft-skills training, including English language, communication, and freelancing, under the supervision of experienced freelancers to prepare them to effectively compete in online freelancing platforms.

Percent of those who gained income



Earnings of Palestinian Freelancers on Upwork.com

During their first month of engagement, the targeted youth successfully embarked on the freelancing track of the various online platforms. They secured 511 jobs with a total income value of US\$ 74,587 in a number of areas that include mostly iOS, android development, graphic design, infographics, motion graphic, PHP frameworks, ASP.NET MVC, web design, and CMS and WordPress. Such an outstanding result marked the start of youth economic empowerment through linking the young people to external markets, which is usually a challenge for new graduates who are looking for their first job.

The e-work project in particular, and freelancing in general, are considered important interventions for Gaza. The opportunity for continuing job creation, not only for the individual freelancers but for extended groups and teams, can be established based on proven e-work success. The technical level of the graduates in Gaza is

acceptable and can be enhanced with a few training courses and guidance, which is an indication of the importance of such programmes.

The State of Palestine, and specifically Gaza, can be a future hub for service outsourcing. This can be achieved by implementing successful initiatives that are similar to the e-work project, and by having more programmes and initiatives that support the culture of freelancing in the State of Palestine. Such efforts and investments in Palestinian human capital are investments in sustainable development and in advancing the level of ICT and connectivity, and consequently, they constitute investment in future generations.

Article diagrams courtesy of Upwork.com.

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*Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, The Labour Force Survey Results, Fourth Quarter (January– March, 2018): main results available at <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3135>.