

# NEW FORMS OF WORK AND PLATFORM WORK IN SEMED

Country profile: Palestine

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# Setting the scene

## Main economic indicators

The total population of Palestine<sup>1</sup> is 5.35 million, divided between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The population is predominantly urban (85% of people living in the cities), and young (38% under the age of 15).<sup>2</sup> Palestine is a lower-income country<sup>3</sup> with a GDP per capita of USD 3,789, which is more than three times lower than the global average, but comparable to other SEMED countries, apart from Israel.<sup>4</sup>

The Palestinian economy is highly dependent on the service sector which represented 77% of GDP in 2021.<sup>5</sup> The sector employs 62% of the Palestinian workforce spread among various economic activities such as trade, hospitality, banking, telecommunications and transport. The other main economic sectors are agriculture, industry, and construction.<sup>6</sup> According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics<sup>7</sup> in 2022, construction activity recorded a growth of 2.3%, industry activity grew by 6.3%, and service sector increased by 2.9%. Agriculture on the other hand experienced a drop in activity of 2.6%. Detailed breakdown of the employment per economic activity can be seen in the table below.

*Table 1. Employment by economic activity and region in 2022 (%)*

Economic Activity	Region		
	Palestine	the Gaza Strip	West Bank
Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry	6.8	8.9	6.0
Mining, Quarrying and Manufacturing	13.5	8.1	15.4
Construction	22.7	5.6	28.8
Commerce, Restaurants and Hotels	24.7	24.5	24.7
Transportation, Storage and Communication	6.6	10.4	5.2
Services and Other Branches	25.7	42.5	19.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes: Workers in Israel and Settlements are excluded.

<sup>1</sup> This designation must not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue – hereinafter ‘Palestine’.

<sup>2</sup> World Food Programme (2023). Executive Board, first regular session. Draft State of Palestine country strategic plan (2023-2028). Available at: [https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document\\_download/WFP-0000145194](https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000145194)

<sup>3</sup> Hamadeh, N., Van Rompaey, C., Metreau, E., Eapen, S.G., World Bank (2022). New World Bank country classifications by income level: 2022-2023. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-world-bank-country-classifications-income-level-2022-2023>

<sup>4</sup> World Bank data, GDP per capita (current US\$), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations (2022). United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Press Report. Labour Force Survey, 15/02/2023. Available at: [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdbex72d2\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdbex72d2_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Fanack Foundation (2020). Palestinian Economic Sectors. Available at: <https://fanack.com/palestine/economy-of-palestine/palestinian-economic-sectors/>

<sup>7</sup> State of Palestine (2023). Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Labour Force Survey (October-December, 2022). Round (Q4/2022). Press Report on Economic Forecasts for 2022. Available at: [https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_LFSQ42022E.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_LFSQ42022E.pdf)

Source: Labour Force Survey (October-December 2022) Round (Q4/2022). Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. 2022.<sup>8</sup>

The economy of Palestine is driven by the remittances of Palestinian migrants who work in many countries in the world, including Israel. The migration movement started as early as 1948, and most of it was a forced migration. The transfers of Palestinian migrants living in Israel and other countries were reported by the World Bank to contribute to 16.48% of the GDP in 2020.<sup>9</sup>

However, the 2.5 million refugees living in the territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is what represents a real challenge for the economy and employment. Refugees make up 67% of the population and unemployment of the refugees is 47%.<sup>10</sup> Adding to the complexity of their situation is the fact that they do not fall under the control of the Palestinian Authority but under UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East).

The economy in Palestine is negatively impacted by structural political factors, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in economic stagnation. The political factors include the Israeli restrictions on trade and movement, the ongoing hostilities and violence, the division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the decrease in aid inflows.<sup>11</sup> The decline in foreign aid was particularly detrimental as it fell to USD 317 million or 1.8% of GDP in 2021, from USD 2 billion or 27% of GDP in 2008.<sup>12</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic added to the turmoil after 2020 when the economy contracted by 11.3%,<sup>13</sup> although, inflation in this period was among the lowest in the region.<sup>14</sup>

## Labour market

The Palestinian labour market grapples with notably low rates of activity and employment. In 2021, only 46.7% of the population was active in the labour market, revealing a pronounced gender disparity. While 69% of men were active, the corresponding figure for women was a mere 20.8%. This gender divide also emerged in employment statistics, and while the total employment rate was 33%, the figure for women was only 10.6%. The overall unemployment rate was 29.2%, 22% for men and 49% for women.<sup>15</sup>

The labour market in Palestine cannot be dissociated from the prevailing conditions caused by the stalemate of the peace process, in addition to the separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since June 2007. What is somewhat controversial is the fact that despite the political turmoil, the Palestinian and the Israeli labour markets are interdependent.<sup>16</sup> The scarcity of jobs in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip leads Palestinians to seek jobs in Israel and the lack of workforce in Israel pushes Israelis to hire Palestinians.

<sup>8</sup> State of Palestine (2023). Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Labour Force Survey (October-December, 2022). Round (Q4/2022). Press Report on Economic Forecasts for 2022. Available at: [https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_LFSQ42022E.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_LFSQ42022E.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Trading Economics, Palestine – Remittance Inflows To GDP. [Palestine – Remittance Inflows To GDP – 2023 Data 2024 Forecast 1995-2020 Historical \(tradingeconomics.com\)](https://tradingeconomics.com/palestine/remittance-inflows-to-gdp)

<sup>10</sup> Citino, N., Martin Gil, A., & Norman, K.P. (2023) Migration Policy Institute. Generations of Palestinian Refugees Face Protracted Displacement and Dispossession. [Article: Generations of Palestinian Refugees Face ... | migrationpolicy.org](https://migrationpolicy.org/generations-of-palestinian-refugees-face-protracted-displacement-and-dispossession)

<sup>11</sup> World Bank (2022). Palestinian Territories' Economic Update. Available at:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/publication/economic-update-april-2022>

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2022). Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Available at: [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdbex72d2\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdbex72d2_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2022). Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Available at: [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdbex72d2\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdbex72d2_en.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> World Bank data, Inflation, consumer prices (annual%). <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG>

<sup>15</sup> ETF KIESE database.

<sup>16</sup> ILO (2021). The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories Report of the Director-General. International Labour Conference 109th Session, 2021. [The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/publications/2021/01/the-situation-of-workers-of-the-occupied-arab-territories)

## Youth statistics

Employment and unemployment rates among youth (aged 15-24) are particularly noticeable. In 2021 the youth employment rate reached 18% (only 3.4% for women) and the unemployment rate was 44.5%, with 37% of young men and a staggering 67% of young women being unemployed.<sup>17</sup>

The prevalence of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) was comparatively high, standing at 40.5%. This NEETs demographic exhibited an uneven distribution across genders and territories. As with unemployment, a higher percentage of women found themselves in the NEET category – 53.3% of women compared to 27% of men.<sup>18</sup> Regional differences were also pronounced, with the Gaza Strip experiencing around 24 percentage points more NEET individuals than the West Bank in 2020.<sup>19</sup>

Informal sector is widespread in Palestine – the percentage of youth employed in this sector represented 47% of the total employed youth in 2021. If, in addition, wage employees are considered, i.e. those who do not obtain any labour rights such as annual paid leave or paid sick leave, this figure reached 75% of the total employed youth; of whom 79% were males and 43% were females (73% in the West Bank and 84% in the Gaza Strip Strip).<sup>20</sup>

Palestine also scores low as regards quality of the VET system. According to an ETF study, the Palestinian VET system suffers from several major challenges. Firstly, its rigid structure makes it difficult to understand the market needs and adapt the training offer accordingly. Secondly, due to extremely high informality rates, tracking youth transitions from education to employment is almost impossible. Further, the overall legislation (Labour Law, Law of General Education, Higher Education Law) does not provide sufficient tools for the development of VET. All these factors lead to low quality of VET, in particular Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) and Lifelong Learning (LLL).<sup>21</sup> However, it is worth noting that VET graduates have more chances of finding a job than university graduates.<sup>22</sup> This might further facilitate the need for alternative employment options.

## Internet and digitalisation

One of the factors which hinders the development of digitalisation in Palestine is the absence of a relevant policy and regulatory environment for the telecom sector. The existing regulatory framework is tailored exclusively toward competition and does not include incentives for investment in infrastructure by the private sector.<sup>23</sup> The situation is made worse by Israeli restrictions on ICT equipment and spectrum allocation which is limited to 2G in the Gaza Strip and 3G in the West Bank.<sup>24</sup> The Israeli

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<sup>17</sup> ETF KIESE database.

<sup>18</sup> ETF KIESE database.

<sup>19</sup> State of Palestine (2021). Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). On the Eve of International Youth Day, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics issues a press release demonstrating the situation of the youth in the Palestinian society. Available at: <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=4046>

<sup>20</sup> State of Palestine (2021). Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). On the Eve of International Youth Day, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics issues a press release demonstrating the situation of the youth in the Palestinian society. <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=4046>

<sup>21</sup> ETF (2021). Policies for Human Capital Development Palestine. An ETF Torino Process Assessment. [03\\_trp\\_etf\\_assessment\\_2020\\_palestine.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://www.etf.europa.eu/03_trp_etf_assessment_2020_palestine.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> ETF (2021). Policies for Human Capital Development Palestine. An ETF Torino Process Assessment. [03\\_trp\\_etf\\_assessment\\_2020\\_palestine.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://www.etf.europa.eu/03_trp_etf_assessment_2020_palestine.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> World Bank Group (2021). Palestinian Digital Economy Assessment. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/472671640152521943/pdf/Palestinian-Digital-Economy-Assessment.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> World Bank (2022). Press Release. Unleashing the Benefits of Digital Transformation for Palestinian Economic Growth. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/02/03/unleashing-the-benefits-of-digital-transformation-for-palestinian-economic-growth>

government's denial of 4G network to the Palestinian Territories is a hurdle not only to the development of digital activities but to the whole economy.<sup>25</sup>

There were 3.65 million internet users in Palestine in January 2021, which amounted to 71% of the total population. The number of internet users in Palestine increased by 399,000 (+12%) between 2020 and 2021 while the internet penetration rate stood at 70.6% in January 2021.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, there were 4.35 million mobile connections in January 2021 (no significant change between 2020 and 2021) which was equivalent to 84% of the total population.

As regards digital skills, while in other countries the integration of IT graduates into the job market is at its highest, in Palestine the unemployment rate among IT graduates is higher than that of business, law, natural science, and health graduates. The World Bank report points to the issue of mismatch between the labour market needs and the skills of those graduates. In addition, in 2018 the ICT sector employed only around 9,000 people while there are over 3,000 computer sciences graduates each year.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lazaroff, T. The Jerusalem Post (2022). World Bank: Israel must give Palestinians 4G so economy can thrive. Available at: <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-695979>

<sup>26</sup> Datareportal (2021). Digital 2021: Palestine. Available at: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-palestine>

<sup>27</sup> World Bank Group (2021). Palestinian Digital Economy Assessment. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/472671640152521943/pdf/Palestinian-Digital-Economy-Assessment.pdf>

# Online work on and off digital labour platforms

Online work in Palestinian society is becoming more prevalent. The availability of the internet in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank has made it possible for many people to work remotely on online platforms. Many of them sell their services in international markets. This chapter overviews the available estimates on the prevalence of such work arrangements, attractiveness of platform work for Palestinians, online work occupations and worker profiles, as well as their working conditions.

## Prevalence of online work

According to data provided by the OLI, online work engagement in Palestine exhibited a generally upward trend from 2017 to 2023, with major fluctuations. The volume of work was the highest from 2019 to the end of 2021, when it dropped sharply. Another notable surge in volume of work occurred in the middle of 2022. As of the most recent measurement in May 2023, worker engagement was around 400% higher compared to the initial measurement in June 2017. Palestinian worker activity accounted for around 0.18% of the global share of platform work across the measured platforms in this six-year period.

*Figure 1. Change in engagement of Palestinian online platform workers over time relative to June 2017*



Source: Online labour index.<sup>28</sup>

Note: The graph presents the percentage change between the number of active workers from Palestine on a specific day compared to the number of active workers at the start of data collection in 2017, which is used as a reference date. This graph was based on OLI data which calculated a weighted estimate of currently active workers by periodically sampling workers on

<sup>28</sup> Online Labour Observatory, available at: <http://onlinelabourobservatory.org/oli-supply/>



five of the largest online platforms once every 24 hours. These platforms include Upwork, Freelancer, Fiverr, PeoplePerHour and MTurk.<sup>29</sup>

In 2018, the UNDP reported around 3,000 Palestinians registered in Freelancer.com, and around 2,000 Palestinians registered in Upwork.com, while the Arabic language platform Mostaqi.com accounted for more than 7,000 Palestinians.<sup>30</sup> The research in 2023 conducted for this study confirmed the trend of growth, and registered over 5,000 workers on Freelancer.com alone.

However, the figures for registered users do not provide a proper reflection of the prevalence of online freelancing as a source of income. Among the 5,830 registered online workers from Palestine across three platforms analysed in the study – Freelancer, PeoplePerHour and Guru – only 10% could be considered active. Nevertheless, this is the highest proportion in the SEMED region. Active workers are those who have at least one task completed on the platform. In our sample, 90% of the workers were registered on the Freelancer platform, while PeoplePerHour accounts for the remaining 10%. It is important to note that this is only a fraction of online platform workers in Palestine and that they are also working on other global and local online labour platforms such as Upwork, Fiverr and Mostaqi.<sup>31</sup>

Although there is no available data, the context in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip implies that more Palestinians being prone to work online rather than in regular employment due to poor conditions in the local labour market.

## Attractiveness of online work

There are several important factors that contribute to the high rate of online platform workers per capita in Palestine compared to other countries in the SEMED region. The most important facilitators of online platform work in Palestine are the push factors which include the restriction of mobility and lack of employment opportunities locally. In the context of pull factors, these include higher income opportunities, as well as flexibility, independence and skill development.

The main factor which helps to understand the popularity of online work, on and off-digital platforms is the Israeli movement restrictions. According to conducted interviews, the restrictions placed on physical movement and access in Palestine due to the Israeli military occupation have inspired more attention to online work. This includes the desire of Palestinians to cooperate with other Palestinians from around the world who are unable to enter Palestine. In a sense, online work is seen as a salvation, and the restrictions on movement have become a powerful driver of online work.

Further, platform work provides work in a context of very scarce employment opportunities, particularly for youth. From the standpoint of the youth who have opted to work online off or on digital platforms, it serves as a means of career redeployment for those graduates whose majors could not secure them a place in the traditional job market. Others are motivated by the conditions which are offered by freelance work, as indicated by the interviewees.

Platform work also provides a rare work opportunity for young women. Earlier research confirms the potential of platform work for female inclusion in the labour market. While the share of females in traditional jobs is 19.1%, it is estimated that in the freelancing and online businesses, they constitute 37.2% of workers.<sup>32</sup>

Not only are there not sufficient jobs available for Palestinian youth, but they are also usually poorly paid. Thus, platform work provides opportunities to earn higher income. Earning more than in traditional

<sup>29</sup> The findings are limited to the five globally popular online labour platforms and exclude other popular platforms in the region, primarily Arabic language ones such as Mostaqi or Ureed.

<sup>30</sup> UNDP (2018). Programme to Assistance to the Palestinian People. Freelancing in the State of Palestine: A New Avenue for Youth Economic Empowerment. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/papp/news/freelancing-state-palestine>

<sup>31</sup> These platforms were selected for the analysis because they were the most popular English language platforms that we could apply web scraping techniques to.

<sup>32</sup> Matar, Y.B. The Islamic University – Gaza (2017). Research and Postgraduate Affairs. Faculty of Commerce. MBA Thesis. The Role of Freelancing in Job Creation in Gaza Strip.

jobs has been cited as a number one motivation to start working on platforms by Palestinian freelancers.<sup>33</sup> Other factors cited as important for choosing a freelance career in Palestine are skill development, flexibility, independence and better work-life balance.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the role played by private companies, international donors and NGOs is essential in fostering online work. These initiatives emerged as a form of international support for fostering employment among young Palestinians. Several of them are worth mentioning:

- A centre called the Gaza Sky Geeks,<sup>35</sup> an initiative supported by Mercy Corps, has become a reference when it comes to training people to become digital professionals. It offers a variety of programmes, from one-day workshops to six-month training sessions; it also supports start-ups. The centre has venues in the Gaza Strip and Khanyounis, as well as partner venues in Jerusalem and cities in the West Bank from Nablus to Al Khalil. The director of this centre, Alan El-Kadhi, in an interview for this report said that Gaza Sky Geeks the Gaza Strip has helped 5,000 participants complete training courses in 2022 (of these around 2,500 participants completed a long training programme). The centre also has a tracking system by means of which they are able to know what skills are most in demand and what the gender pay gap is. According to the centre's director, although their ambition at the Gaza Strip Sky Geeks is full employment, not all the graduates of the programme manage that as it takes time for the participants to gain experience and become fully employed. When they do so, they achieve full employment by working for local Palestinian and overseas companies.
- Another important initiative is the Palestine Launchpad programme<sup>36</sup> which is an initiative of Google, Udacity, and Spark. It offers more than 6,000 scholarships to Palestinian youth, focusing on fields which are in high demand such as: web developer, data analyst, AI programming with Python, etc. The Palestine Launchpad programme also offers soft skills courses such as their 'career workshops' where the participants learn about writing a CV or succeeding in a job interview.
- Another initiative worth mentioning in this context is the Taqat Telework which is sponsored by Qatar Charity. The project aims to train young Palestinians in digital skills in order to be able to work remotely with Qatari and international companies. So far 50,000 young people have been trained and hired thanks to its support.<sup>37</sup>

The other tools used by young Palestinians to learn about job opportunities are personal networks, word of mouth, referrals from other freelancers, direct outreach to current and/or prospective customers/clients/former employers, online freelancing marketplaces, social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs).<sup>38</sup>

However, there are factors that hinder online work. For example, some banks have a procedure which requires a bank account applicant to provide a certificate of employment with a salary certificate signed by the employer, which is difficult to obtain by youth who are going for a freelance work pathway. Regarding payment systems, Palestinians cannot use PayPal, the biggest digital platform in international payments, because of its refusal to operate inside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Matar, Y.B. The Islamic University – Gaza (2017). Research and Postgraduate Affairs. Faculty of Commerce. MBA Thesis. The Role of Freelancing in Job Creation in Gaza Strip.

<sup>34</sup> Matar, Y.B. The Islamic University – Gaza (2017). Research and Postgraduate Affairs. Faculty of Commerce. MBA Thesis. The Role of Freelancing in Job Creation in Gaza Strip.

<sup>35</sup> Gaza Sky Geeks: <https://gazaskygeeks.com/>

<sup>36</sup> The Palestine Launchpad programme: <https://spark.ngo/apply-now-palestine-launchpad-with-google/>

<sup>37</sup> Qatar News Agency (2021). Qatar Charity Trains and Employs Over 50,000 Young People in Palestine. <https://www.qna.org.qa/en/News-Area/News/2021-07/06/0068-qatar-charity-trains-and-employs-over-50-thousand-young-people-in-palestine>

<sup>38</sup> Matar, Y.B. The Islamic University – Gaza (2017). Research and Postgraduate Affairs. Faculty of Commerce. MBA Thesis. The Role of Freelancing in Job Creation in Gaza Strip.

<sup>39</sup> 7amleh - The Arab Centre for the Advancement of Social Media (2020). Access Denied – E-Commerce in Palestine – A new research by 7amleh Center about Palestinian Access to E-Commerce. Available at: ["Access Denied - E-Commerce in Palestine" - A new research b... \(7amleh.org\)](https://7amleh.org/Access-Denied-E-Commerce-in-Palestine)

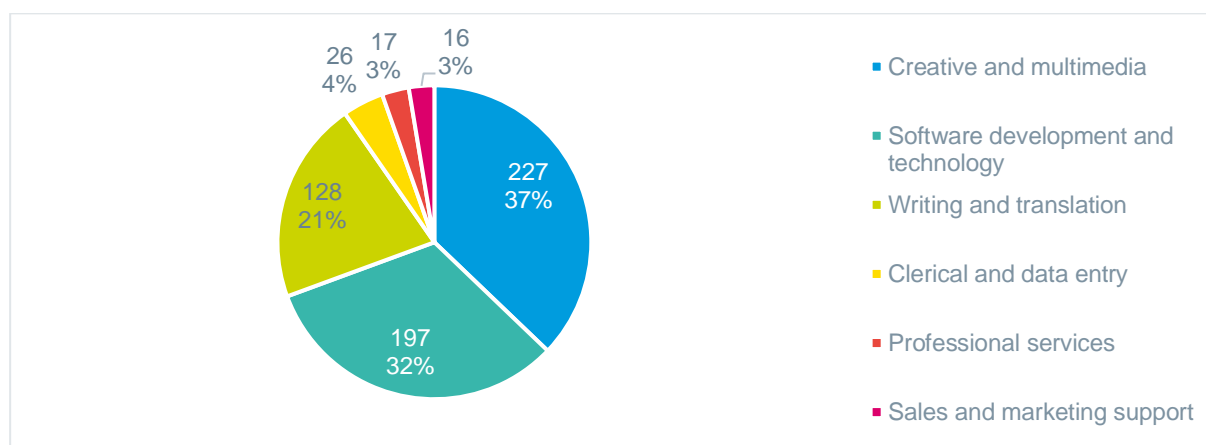
## Online work occupations and worker profiles

Palestinian freelancers engage in various types of work and hold varied occupations. Feras Nasr, Innovation Manager at UK Palestinian Tech Hub interviewed for this report stated that: ‘While freelance was initially mostly about coding, it is interesting to see many other tasks being performed online’. While this includes sophisticated tasks, it also includes tasks for lower-skilled individuals, such as data entry and annotation. This has opened opportunities for individuals without technical training or skills but who still want to work and generate income.”

The most popular services that Palestinians offer on digital platforms are graphic design, back-office accounting, data entry, web development, social media design, voiceover, translation, language lessons, transcription, research and summaries, social content creation, market research, surveys and research analytics, logo design, proofreading texts.<sup>40</sup>

However, there is wide disparity on the distribution of occupations. According to the data collected for this study, Palestinian platform workers are predominantly concentrated in three occupations which account for 90% of all workers. ‘Creative and multimedia’ accounts for 37%, ‘software development and technology’ for 32% and ‘writing and translation’ – for 21%. The remaining 10% of the workers are distributed among ‘clerical and data entry’, ‘professional services’ and ‘sales and marketing support’.

*Figure 2. Distribution of occupations among active online platform workers*

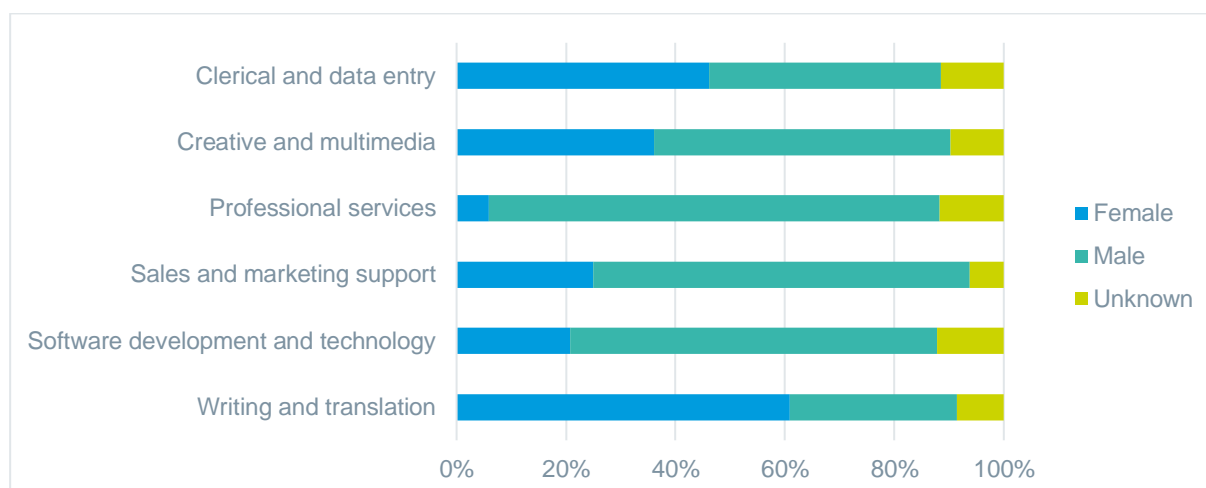


Source: PPMI, based on data from Freelancer, Guru and PeoplePerHour collected in March 2023.

More men than women in Palestine work on online labour platforms. However, Palestinian women have the highest representation on online platforms in the entire SEMED region. Based on automatically collected data, men are around one and a half times more likely to work on online labour platforms than women. Women make up the majority of Palestinian workers in writing and translation and clerical and data entry occupations, while men dominate in the other four occupations. Of the remaining occupations, women have the highest representation in creative and multimedia and the lowest in professional services.

<sup>40</sup> Information extracted from the online platforms mentioned in the section (Upwork, Fiverr, etc.) and from interviews.

Figure 3. Gender distribution of active online platform workers by occupation



Source: PPMI, based on data from Freelancer, Guru and PeoplePerHour collected in March 2023.

Note: 'Unknown' category shows worker profiles for which gender could not be identified.

Regarding the worker age profiles, one existing study concluded that a majority of online workers are young with 53% between the age of 25 and 30, and 24% were less than 25 years old.<sup>41</sup>

The same study showed that most Palestinian freelancers had a university degree or diploma: 53.3% of freelancers held a bachelor's degree, and 13.1% a master's degree and above.<sup>42</sup> Some of them were overqualified for the work they did: for instance, they were originally trained in other fields but had to make a career conversion into the IT sector due a lack of opportunities in their university majors.

## Working conditions

Most of the freelancers in Palestine work informally.<sup>43</sup> Desk research revealed that there is no specific legal framework for contracting a freelancer and the only way for formalisation of their work is to register as entrepreneurs. Online freelancers find it difficult to enter the formal market due to many administrative complexities related to entrepreneurship status such as complying with the regulatory requirements for business registration, licensing, taxation as well and the obligation to practice in a residential area to do their business.<sup>44</sup> Such conditions discourage many workers to formalise their work.

As regards earnings, there are notable differences between requested hourly rates of Palestinian online platform workers across occupations (see figure below). The highest average hourly rates are in software development and technology (USD 18.09) and sales and marketing support (USD 17.44). The lowest rates are in writing and translation (USD 14.41) and clerical and data entry (USD 14.85). In addition to occupational differences, there are also gender differences in earnings, with men requesting higher hourly rates than women. On average, men are requesting USD 17.69 per hour, while women are requesting USD 15.16.

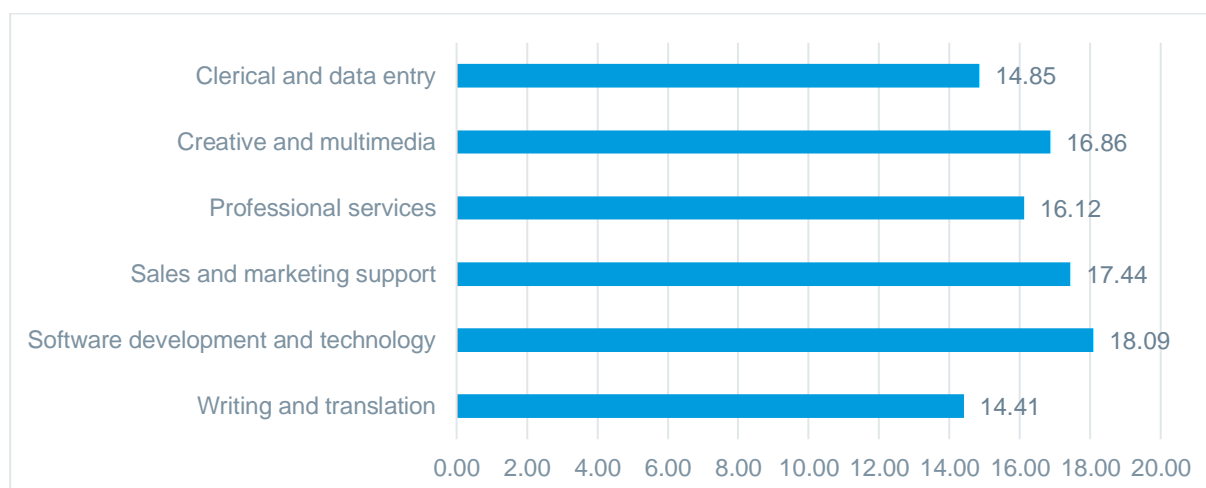
<sup>41</sup> Matar, Y.B. The Islamic University – Gaza (2017). Research and Postgraduate Affairs. Faculty of Commerce. MBA Thesis. The Role of Freelancing in Job Creation in Gaza Strip.

<sup>42</sup> Matar, Y.B. The Islamic University – Gaza (2017). Research and Postgraduate Affairs. Faculty of Commerce. MBA Thesis. The Role of Freelancing in Job Creation in Gaza Strip.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Mr Sam Bahour.

<sup>44</sup> World Bank Group (2021). Palestinian Digital Economy Assessment. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/472671640152521943/pdf/Palestinian-Digital-Economy-Assessment.pdf>

Figure 4. Hourly rates of active online platform workers by occupation



Source: PPMI, based on data from Freelancer, Guru and PeoplePerHour collected in March 2023.

The hourly wages offered by Palestinian workers on online labour platforms are significantly higher than the national average hourly wage. According to Numbeo,<sup>45</sup> the average net hourly pay in Palestine in March 2023 was USD 4.16. This amount is around four times lower than the average hourly wage on online labour platforms (USD 16.65). However, it is important to note that these figures are not directly comparable, as requested hourly rates can differ from what workers ultimately get, platform earnings are irregular and may include a substantial amount of unpaid work. Nevertheless, this data indicates that online platform work can present an important income-generating opportunity for Palestinians.

Interviews conducted for this research indicate that online work can be a substitute for a ‘classic’ career. The reason is that online workers do not have the opportunity to develop other skill sets, especially soft skills, a factor which can be an obstacle to developing large-scale online work.

<sup>45</sup> Numbeo (2023). Rankings by Country of Average Monthly Net Salary (After Tax) (Salaries And Financing), available at: [https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country\\_price\\_rankings?itemId=105](https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country_price_rankings?itemId=105)

# On-location platform work

This chapter overviews the insights on the prevalence of on-location platform work arrangements, attractiveness of on-location platform work for Palestinians, types of work and worker profiles, as well as their working conditions.

## Prevalence of on-location platform work

The only available data on the prevalence of on-location platform work in Palestine comes from the overview of platform companies operating in the Palestinian Territories. There are no ride-hailing companies operating in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The ride-hailing and delivery app Careem operated for a time in the West Bank, but the taxi union exerted pressure on the government leading to its eventual ban.

Delivery platforms on the other hand are proliferating in the Palestinian Territories. The popularity of delivery jobs is explained by the low skills requirements and the flexible working hours. In society, delivery workers have a very positive image. People see them as a service which solves many problems, especially related to congestion of traffic.<sup>46</sup>

Most delivery applications active in Palestine are local Palestinian start-ups founded by local entrepreneurs. The most popular platforms for on-location work in Palestine are:

- HAAT: A delivery platform operating in the West Bank that is specifically designed for regions with poor infrastructure. Payment is made in cash on this app and there is no need to have a classic address.
- Wheels Delivery: A food delivery app that operates in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It collaborates with a large number of restaurants.
- Ways Delivery: A mobile app that allows customers to order products from different suppliers. It operates in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
- Mughtharib Food App: A food delivery app that is specifically designed for healthy and affordable meals.
- Yummy: A food ordering app and website that allows ordering food from more than 200 restaurants in Palestine.

## Attractiveness of on-location platform work

There are several factors influencing the popularity of digital delivery platforms in the Palestinian Territories. In addition to the main motivation of on-location platform workers, which is the lack of other employment opportunities, there are other important factors at play, including the desire to supplement income from their primary job, low skills requirements, and flexible working hours. One interviewee stated that while Careem was operating in Palestine, people worked there to obtain a second income in addition to the one from their primary job, as they could improve their standards of living.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, some people who used to work in the sector confirm that the primary motivation for them was the work time flexibility.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Interview with a representative of Applied Information Management company.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with a representative of Spark company.

<sup>48</sup> Zaben, S., (2021). Delivery service attracts young people. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_aG-NrfFkU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_aG-NrfFkU)

## On-location platform worker profiles and working conditions

The people who work for on-location platforms are mostly males under the age of 30. Even though most of the on-location platform jobs are not demanding in terms of skills or education, there are various profiles of workers, including those who have no degree and those with university education.<sup>49</sup>

There is insufficient data on working conditions on the on-location platforms, apart from the agreement among the interviewees that most of the platform work falls under the informal employment. There is usually no contract for platform jobs as those interested in a job only have to fill out an online form, after which they are hired. According to interviews, the workers on delivery platforms usually receive training on customer service and the use of the application. However, none of these companies provide more advanced training nor are any more advanced skills needed for the delivery jobs. In this context, a career in the on-location platforms does not offer any prospect of upskilling or career advancement.

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with a representative of Spark company.



# Current regulation, policies and strategic approaches

In the context of a population which lives under constraints of movement and outbreaks of armed conflicts, especially in the Gaza Strip, as well as a permanent economic crisis, new forms of work provide important job opportunities. Although these jobs provide important source of income for those with lack of other employment opportunities, new forms of work are also mired with informality, precarity and lack of career advancement opportunities. There are very few regulatory approaches in place in Palestine that would maximise the benefits and mitigate the risks of these new forms of work.

## Labour market, employment and skills development

The labour market governance in Palestine, despite the efforts of the Palestinian Authority, suffers from issues related to the labour regulation. Apart from the labour law, the following documents set a vision for labour market governance: the National Policy Agenda 2017–2022, the Labour Sector Strategy 2021–2023, the National Employment Strategy 2021–2025, and the Decent Work Programme 2018–2022.<sup>50</sup>

The Palestinian Labour Law No. 7 from 2000, though it has succeeded in harmonising workers' rights with international standards, has a number of drawbacks contributing to poor employment figures in Palestine, as pointed out in a report by ETF. It has imposed more restrictions on employers leading to large unemployment and poor school-to-work transition.<sup>51</sup>

The National Employment Strategy 2021–2025 aims to increase the low employment rate, particularly when it comes to youth and women. In particular, this strategy relates to encouraging youth to engage in self-employment and entrepreneurship by removing bureaucratic and administrative obstacles.<sup>52</sup> Thus, this strategy could contribute to the further proliferation of online freelance work.

## Digitalisation

The Palestinian government has introduced several policies to boost digitalisation of the economy, although the existing government actions are constrained by the tense geopolitical situation, poor governance and the lack of resources.<sup>53</sup> In addition to the dysfunctional governance, policymakers in the country are dealing with issues related to the lack of infrastructure and advanced technology. The Israeli occupation and its influence on the telecommunication and digital sector have resulted in a situation in which 2G and 3G remained the standard of mobile internet for many years. Israel has finally vowed to allow 4G to be rolled out in the Palestinian Territories by the end of 2023.<sup>54</sup>

The Palestinian ICT Strategy 2021–2023<sup>55</sup> proposed by the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology focuses mainly on reducing the dependence of the ICT sector on the Israeli

<sup>50</sup> ILO (2022). The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories Report of the Director-General. International Labour Conference 110th Session. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_845252.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_845252.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> ETF (2014). Labour market and employment policies in Palestine. Available at: [https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/49583C88B3C1AD0DC1257CD1003DA5FC\\_Employment%20policies\\_Palestine.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/49583C88B3C1AD0DC1257CD1003DA5FC_Employment%20policies_Palestine.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Labour. National Employment Strategy 2021–2025. [الاستراتيجية الوطنية للتشغيل en.pdf \(pna.ps\)](#)

<sup>53</sup> World Bank Group (2021). Palestinian Digital Economy Assessment. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/472671640152521943/pdf/Palestinian-Digital-Economy-Assessment.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Boxerman, A. The Times of Israel (2021). Israel pledges to finally permit long-restricted Palestinian 4G cell service. [Israel pledges to finally permit long-restricted Palestinian 4G cell service | The Times of Israel](#)

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of Technology and Information. Palestine (2021). ICT Sector Strategy 2021–2023. [الاستراتيجية القطاعية 2023–2021 للتكنولوجيا والمعلومات \(palgov.ps\)](#)



dominance, improving the economy, and providing digital services which can improve the daily life of citizens. It also identifies the lack of qualified workers in the ICT sector as a challenge and mentions the organisation of events and workshops on entrepreneurship in the digital sector. However, this strategy falls short of providing a roadmap for the development of digital skills and labour market needs.

Further, a government is also working on extending e-government services to the citizens and businesses. A project supported by the World Bank, 'The Digital West Bank & the Gaza Strip Project', aims at increasing access to high-speed broadband services in some Palestinian areas and promises also to 'finance the strengthening of the enabling legal and regulatory environment necessary to deliver government-to-citizen and government-to-business e-services.'<sup>56</sup>

Finally, the government is also engaged in improving the digital skills of the Palestinians. In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in partnership with the Ministry of Labour developed a technical strategy for Palestine, with the purpose of developing Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) at all levels of education with a particular focus on ICT skill development.<sup>57</sup> With support of the Belgian foundation Enabel, a pioneer project of introducing ICT in schools was launched in 2011. The project targeted 288 schools in the West Bank. More than 1,200 teachers were trained in student-centred learning through the use of ICT.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> World Bank (2021). Press Release. US\$20 Million to Boost Digital Development in the Palestinian Territories. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/03/26/us-20-million-to-boost-digital-development-in-the-palestinian-territories>

<sup>57</sup> Malaka Samara. TVET Asia (2021). [Towards E-learning in TVET: Designing and developing an E-Competence Framework \(E-CF\) for TVET teachers in Palestine | TVET@Asia \(tvnet-online.asia\)](#)

<sup>58</sup> Medium.com (2016). E-learning in Palestine. Palestinian primary and secondary schools move towards student-centred learning with the use of ICT tools in education. [E-learning in Palestine. Palestinian primary and secondary... | by Enabel | Medium](#)

# Policy implications

## Challenges and opportunities of the current situation

Online work presents an opportunity for the Palestinian territories. In a territory which endures restrictions and recurrent violence, being able to work online can serve as a lifeline, providing relief from the clutches of exclusion and poverty. However, these opportunities encounter obstacles related to poor digital infrastructure and issues related to payments to freelancers who perform work for overseas companies. The banking system in the country, which is an important enabler of these types of work, remains underdeveloped.

The informality prevalent in the online work sector raises concerns about the sustainability of this mode of work as a stable and secure career choice. Much hope is put on laws that would create a legal and regulated framework for the sector.

Currently, however, the new forms of work are not being adequately addressed from a regulatory perspective. Although online work is sometimes seen as a solution to unemployment and a boosting factor to youth entrepreneurship, on-location platform work is not offered any place on the decision-making agenda. The fact that a ride-hailing business was completely banned is an example of lost employment opportunities, income generation, and entrepreneurship for many Palestinians.

Though the measures taken by the public authorities have been criticised for a lack of coherence and coordination, they were somehow successful in being a reliable and trustworthy partner to donors and NGOs who were able to implement successful projects in building the capacity of jobseekers related to, especially, online work. Mercy Corps, Qatar Charity, and The United Nations Development Programme/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) have been instrumental in providing tailored programmes for youth. Among these initiatives, there is a Palestinian success story of MENA Alliances, a for profit organisation with social impact. It boasts of having 'trained more than 3,000 women and young people and created 700+ job opportunities for disadvantaged people by connecting them with jobs from Europe, the USA (such as Silicon Valley), and the Gulf region'.<sup>59</sup>

## Gaps in the existing strategic and policy approaches

The main gap that needs to be addressed includes the lack of a specific agenda to accompany the structuring and the support of the new forms of work. The National Employment Strategy includes freelancing and online work as a mere component of entrepreneurship and self-employment, which may also encompass unrelated activities such as craftsmanship or agriculture. This same strategy does not seem to include on-location platform work. At the regulatory level, these types of workers are not covered by any legislation or regulations that provide them with social protections or any employment benefits.

## Implications / possible measures for regulation

Policymakers in the Palestinian Territories acknowledge, according to the strategy documents cited earlier, the importance of freelancing and online work. In order to support these strengths and boost skills and human capital development, Palestinian policymakers might consider the following:

- The authorities should introduce regulations governing the employment status of online platform workers and adopt a tax system which considers the income of platform workers. This

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<sup>59</sup> Mena Alliances (2021). Palestine: An Untapped Opportunity to Access Rich Tech Talent Pool & Make An Impact. [Palestine: An Untapped Opportunity to Access Rich Tech Talent Pool & Make An Impact - Mena Alliances](#)

would not only safeguard the basic rights of workers, but also help suppress prevalent tax evasion.

- Efforts should be made to simplify procedures for platform workers to register as a one-person company or as a SME.
- Online workers suffer from the lack of financial services which would allow them to receive transfers from outside the country. The decision of PayPal not to operate in the Palestinian territories is detrimental not only to online workers, but also to broader economy. Further efforts should be made to enable functioning of international e-payment systems.<sup>60</sup>
- The authorities should strengthen their efforts to minimise the mismatch between labour market needs and the skills of Palestinian graduates. Public Employment Services should be strengthened to facilitate job matching by connecting individuals with emerging job opportunities, offering targeted training programmes to equip graduates and non-graduates with the skills in demand and providing professional career guidance services.
- Online and on-location platform work could potentially help alleviate issues associated with migration movements in Palestine. While online work opportunities may be a leverage to keep young people in the country, on-location platform work might provide work opportunities for those most vulnerable, particularly refugees. For this, the facilitation of different promotion and upskilling programmes is necessary.
- Large networks of the Palestinian diaspora could be an asset in developing the platform economy. Palestinians living abroad could facilitate online work in their country by not only hiring Palestinian freelancers, but also as investors in local platform businesses. This potential could be realised with targeted government programmes for the diaspora.
- Finally, online work has significant potential to empower women in Palestine by offering them flexible work which is adjustable for their domestic responsibilities. However, the government in Palestine should put efforts into promoting new forms of work among women and equipping them with the skills needed for these jobs.

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<sup>60</sup> The Guardian (2023). US Congress members demand that PayPal end ban on Palestinian business. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/may/24/paypal-palestine-ban-us-congress->

## Summary

The Palestinian labour market has been performing poorly for decades. Weighed down by the occupation and its myriad restrictions on access to resources, mobility and trade, it is characterised by low labour force participation, high unemployment and widespread labour underutilisation. Women and young people are particularly disadvantaged. There is a high level of jobs informality: jobs are precarious and tracking youth transition from education to employment is almost impossible. The development of VET is also significantly lagging.

Palestinians have embraced the new forms of employment and managed to acquire the needed skills to work as online freelancers. Many have seized the opportunities offered by NGOs and donors to develop digital and professional skills needed for this type of work. This research shows a stable growth of Palestinians engaging in online work. The main motivation to engage in this type of work is the lack of other employment opportunities, the ability to earn more than they would in traditional jobs, the opportunity to develop new skills, but also the desire for temporal and spatial flexibility in work. Online platform workers in Palestine are predominantly concentrated in three occupations which account for 90% of all workers: creative and multimedia, software development and technology and writing and translation. Men are overrepresented compared to women on online platforms in Palestine, although the share of women on online platforms is the highest among all SEMED countries. There are more women working in writing and translation, as well as clerical roles, while men prevail in other fields. The majority of online platform workers are young, with almost 80% being up to 30 years old. Education-wise, most workers are highly educated, but only a few of them work in their professional domains. Most of the online workers in Palestine work informally, which leads to lack of work benefits and social protections. Importantly, online platform work cannot fulfil its full potential for Palestinians due to poor internet infrastructure, lack of international payment systems and lack of skill development opportunities.

On-location platform work has yet to achieve its full potential in Palestine. Ride-hailing companies have been banned, and while the delivery sector thrives, it is mired in informality. Most delivery applications active in Palestine are local Palestinian start-ups such as HAAT, Wheels Delivery, Ways Delivery, Mughtharib Food App and Yummy. Most workers on these platforms are males under 30, driven by limited job opportunities or the desire to earn extra income. The education profiles of on-location platform workers are mixed, including both those with low and high levels of education. On-location platforms lack substantial upskilling opportunities or clear labour law abidance. Contractual arrangements are often ambiguous and interviews suggest that informality prevails.

The report has outlined the opportunities which the new forms of work offer to the labour market for the Palestinian Territories. Policymakers in the Palestinian Territories should set regulations and provide support across the board by defining a clear legal status of these workers. This would provide workers with certain labour benefits and social protections, but also hamper further tax avoidance in the sector. Policy-makers should also put effort in improving digital infrastructure and enabling international payment systems, although these factors are tightly related to the condition of the Israeli occupation.

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## List of interviewees

Name	Organisation	Title	Date of the interview
Sam Bahour	Applied Information Management (AIM) in Ramallah	Managing Partner	26 May, 2023
Alan El-Kadhi	The Gaza Sky Geeks	Director	30 May, 2023
Feras Nasr	UK Palestinian Tech Hub	Innovation Manager	22 June, 2023
Nisreen Musleh	Ritaj Managerial Solutions	Managing Director	23 June, 2023
Mohannad Hijawai	Spark	CEO	26 June, 2023