THIS WEEK IN PALESTINE

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Digital Horizons: Entrepreneurship and Economic Resilience

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

The war in Gaza is continuing unabated despite the so-called ceasefire, as tens of Gazans are killed on a daily basis. Yet the world has turned to other hotspots, emerging due to a resurgence of imperialist colonialism – or is it simply gaining greater visibility as it is not confined to more distant areas? And while many of us feel helpless in the wake of events and our inability to end the aggression against Gaza and the West Bank, there is one way in which we can make a difference: through the outsourcing of business services that include software development, business management, finance and accounting, and marketing. When internet and electricity are available, a skilled, resilient, and adaptable workforce of Palestinian young professionals and recent graduates can support businesses abroad. At the same time, their resilience can be strengthened as they are enabled to earn livelihoods for themselves and their families.

This issue of *TWiP* highlights organizations that support Palestinian professionals by facilitating online work opportunities. We hope that this exposure will not only create visibility but also encourage greater engagement from abroad in this invaluable resource for our people who, while persevering under great hardship – unimaginable in the case of Gaza – excel in ways that might be unanticipated for many.

This Week in Palestine thanks Tech Start/DAI, a World Bank–funded project, for acquiring the Bronze Sponsorship of the current February 2026 issue, themed "Digital Horizons: Entrepreneurship and Economic Resilience." We also thank the many institutions that chose *TWiP* as a communication tool to present their services (that simultaneously support others). Our gratitude goes also to the institutions and individual authors who have contributed content to this issue: H.E. Dr. Abdel-Razzaq Al-Natsheh, Minister of Telecom and Digital Economy; Farah Said, communication specialist at TechStart; Jawwal Telecommunications Company; Dr. Mona Nabil Demaidi, Vice President for Artificial Intelligence at Arab American University; Majd Khalifeh, managing director of Flow Accelerator and managing partner of Flow Ventures; Sari Taha, a co-founder and managing partner at Momentum Labs consultancy firm and startup studio; Palestinian Information Technology Association (PITA); American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA); Dr. Sharareh Noorbaloochi, a data scientist whose background in neuroscience, social psychology, and applied AI informs her work building structures that support underrepresented founders and emerging ecosystems; Palestine Innovation Initiative (PII), a coordination platform that brings together universities, practitioners, and philanthropic or investment-aligned partners to develop applied AI capability; Alan El-Kadhi, director of the economic development initiative Gaza Sky Geeks, created in 2011 by the International NGO Mercy Corps; Ruwa Jabr, CEO of the Palestine Trade Center (PalTrade); Feras Nasr, currently serving as program manager at TechStart; Majd Zghyer, an economist based in Jerusalem; Hazem Tirhi, a development and entrepreneurship specialist who co-founded Station J in Jerusalem; and UpScrolled alternative social media platform.

Our Personality of the Month is Mahmoud Zaiter. Our three Books of the Month are *All Our Kitchens: A Cookbook for a Free Palestine*; *Gaza: The Dream and the Nightmare*; and *Palestine, Painfully Beautiful*. Our Artist of the Month is Mohammad Jabr.

The entire team at *TWiP* wishes a blessed month of Ramadan to all who are celebrating, particularly our brothers and sisters in Gaza and among the persecuted communities and targeted neighborhoods not only in the West Bank but also in other war-torn countries.

Tina Basem



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Beyond Borders

Palestine as the Region's Premier Hub for R&D and Digital Innovation

By H.E. Dr. Abdel-Razzaq Al-Natsheh,
Minister of Telecom and Digital Economy



To enhance our digital sovereignty, the Palestinian Ministry of Telecom and Digital Economy is establishing five national research and development centers:

Palestine Data Foundry aims to make available localized AI models;

The Co-Development Model aims to export innovation;

The Deputyship of Digital Economy and Innovation center aligns our R&D output with regional needs;

The Skills Universe initiative enables our workforce to immerse itself in the regional ecosystem;

The Sovereign Infrastructure and Data Embassy project provides stability and continuity by hosting cloud infrastructures in secure locations abroad.

In January 2026, Palestine is facing a winter of unprecedented physical limitation. Yet it is precisely this pressure that is forging our greatest export. We are pivoting to the digital realm not merely as a survival tactic but as a strategic offensive. Our goal is bold: to transform Palestine into the region's primary engine for localized research and development (R&D) and high-value digital services. Moving beyond the traditional model of "outsourcing," we are building a nation of creators, localizers, and innovators. Here is how we will achieve this vision.

The engine driving our sovereignty is the establishment of national research and development centers. To truly lead, we cannot just consume technology; we must adapt and improve it. Thus, we are establishing five national R&D centers specifically designed to bridge the gap between global technology and regional needs.

The Palestine Data Foundry fosters localization: We are launching a specialized R&D facility that focuses on the "last mile" of artificial intelligence, namely data curation and localization. Global AI models tend to lack cultural and linguistic nuance for the Arab world. The Data Foundry will employ Palestinian linguists, engineers, and domain experts to perform reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF) and data labeling. We will take global models and "Arabize" them, exporting these refined, culturally intelligent algorithms to governments and enterprises across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and North Africa.

The Co-Development Model exports innovation: We are moving away from simple freelance contracts toward institutional R&D partnerships. Following the model of our proposed collaboration with global tech giants such as Microsoft, we are setting up dedicated R&D hubs where Palestinian teams function as extended engineering arms for regional companies. These centers don't just fix bugs, they build core products, allowing our neighbors to leverage Palestinian engineering talent to accelerate their own digital roadmaps.

The Deputyship of Digital Economy and Innovation model has been established within the ministry and tasked with aligning our national R&D output with the specific digital sovereignty needs of our neighboring countries, ensuring that what we build



in Ramallah or Gaza solves problems in Riyadh and Cairo.

The "Skills Universe" is an initiative that trains our workforce for regional impact and provides the necessary infrastructure. Our traditional economy is limited by physical checkpoints, but the digital economy is boundless. Through our Skills Universe initiative, we are fundamentally reorienting our workforce from local generalists to regional specialists. We are equipping 40,000 SMEs and freelancers with the specific toolsets required by the booming digital economies of the Middle East. Whether it is a developer in Jenin or a data scientist in Gaza, we are providing the infrastructure for them to integrate seamlessly into the workflows of regional companies without ever needing a travel permit.

Palestine thus offers high-value differentiation through an AI-enabled workforce. To be the "best," we must offer superior efficiency. We are targeting the creation of 25,000 AI-enabled jobs by embedding GovGPT-Pal and AI literacy into our national curriculum. We are not just training coders, we are training AI-augmented professionals. This means that a Palestinian hire will bring not just human ingenuity but also the exponential productivity of artificial intelligence. We are turning our human capital into an unblockable, high-value asset that delivers results faster and with higher complexity than competitors.

A major concern for international partners is stability. We answer this with the Sovereign Infrastructure and Data Embassy project. By hosting our critical digital foundations in trusted, immune cloud infrastructures abroad, we guarantee continuity. This infrastructure assures our R&D partners that Palestinian digital services are resilient. Even if physical connectivity is disrupted locally, our Data Embassy model ensures that the code, intellectual property, and operational history of our R&D centers remain secure and accessible 24/7.

In conclusion, we can assure investors and CEOs that the consideration to hire Palestinian employees is shifting from aid delivery to securing assets. "Vision 2028: Digital Palestine" is a shift in narrative. We are telling our neighbors: Do not look to Palestine for charity; look to us for capability. When you invest in a Palestinian R&D center, you are not just funding a startup; you are securing a partner that has mastered resilience. We are transforming a generation of survivors into a generation of innovators, building a digital horizon that no wall can obscure.

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Create Once. Sell Everywhere.
Built with resilience. Designed for the future.
SellEnvo was co-founded by Ahmed Al-Saidi and Abed Al-Zain, Palestinian entrepreneurs from Gaza, where building technology has never been separate from resilience.
What began as a small team working under extraordinary conditions has grown into a global, distributed company serving e-commerce sellers worldwide. Today, SellEnvo powers hundreds of sellers across multiple marketplaces, helping them manage product data, inventory, and orders through one AI-driven platform.
Recognized by Amazon and Walmart and many others as a trusted partner and used by sellers across the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East, SellEnvo enables businesses to grow, stay compliant, and remain visible in an increasingly automated digital economy.
Built by a team shaped by adaptation and perseverance, SellEnvo connects Palestinian innovation with global commerce — proving that impact can travel far beyond borders.
Technology is not just about scale — it's about survival, dignity, and being seen.
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Turning Potential into Jobs

How TechStart Is Delivering Results for the Palestinian IT Sector

By Farah Said



ITG staff in Nablus.

> **TechStart is a project for the benefit of the Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Economy (MTDE). It is funded by the World Bank, the European Union, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Government of the Kingdom of Netherlands, and implemented by DAI. TechStart is an 8-year, US$30 million project that aims to increase economic opportunities for IT service firms through four major focus areas that seek to improve IT services capabilities, develop the IT service ecosystem, improve market access, and increase demand and investments in the Palestinian IT sector.**

When the Technology for Youth and Jobs (TechStart) project was launched, it set out to address a clear challenge: A growing pool of skilled Palestinian youth and IT graduates faced limited job opportunities, while an undercapitalized sector struggled to expand, compete globally, and attract investment. The vision was ambitious and included upgrading firm capabilities, stimulating private investment, and creating high-quality jobs in a sector that is relatively more resilient to shocks and restrictions on movement.

Today, that vision is translating into tangible results.

Through TechStart programs, 1,236 new IT jobs have been created since the project launched, directly responding to the acute youth unemployment highlighted at the project's inception. These jobs are not only absorbing newly skilled graduates but are also providing sustainable employment opportunities in a sector well-suited to remote work and global service delivery, exactly as envisioned when the project was designed.

A standout example of this impact is ITG Software House, a leading provider of outsourced software development. As a beneficiary of the TechStart UpSkill program, ITG has successfully sustained 33 IT positions, proving that targeted support can help stabilize the sector even during economic fluctuations. Bara' Isbaih, Director of Talent and Culture at ITG explains, "The UpSkill program was instrumental in de-risking our hiring process at a time when market demand was more volatile than usual. By providing stipends to these trainees, TechStart provided us with the necessary cushion to invest in new talent without the typical financial risk, allowing us to grow our team." Zeina Zaben, a software engineer hired through the program, shares how this transition looked from the inside: "For me, the UpSkill program did much more than just secure a stable job. It bridged the gap between my academic foundation and the practical, hands-on skills required in the industry."

At the firm level, 143 Palestinian IT companies have so far benefited from TechStart interventions that aim to strengthen technical, managerial, and market-facing capabilities. These companies represent a growing and more competitive segment of the Palestinian private sector that is better equipped to meet international client demands and adapt to a fast-evolving global technology landscape.

TechStart has also played a catalytic role in entrepreneurship and firm creation. A total of 18 new IT companies have been established with project support, contributing to the expansion of the sector and reinforcing the broader IT Service ecosystem which was identified as essential for job creation and innovation. Among these 18 new

establishments is CrossRealms, a premier cybersecurity services firm headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. Recognizing the high caliber of Palestinian technical talent, CrossRealms utilized the Pioneer Program to navigate the complexities of international expansion and successfully launch its new branch in the West Bank. The program served as a vital bridge, turning a high-risk expansion into a sustainable business operation. Azza Arafat, Chief Operations Officer at CrossRealms, explains the strategic value of this support: "The Pioneer Program was instrumental in mitigating the risks inherent in establishing a new branch in the West Bank. By helping to reduce our initial setup and operating costs, the program enabled us to redirect vital resources toward training our new engineers and building deep internal capacity. This support didn't just help us launch, it propelled us into full operations and allowed us to scale at a significantly faster pace than we initially anticipated."



CrossRealms team.

Perhaps most telling of the project's impact on market access and demand generation is the international traction achieved by beneficiary firms. With TechStart support, companies have signed 236 new contracts with international buyers, opening doors to global markets that were previously difficult to reach. These partnerships have not only generated new revenues but have also exposed Palestinian firms to international standards, business practices, and technological know-how. Nabeeh, an automated maintenance platform, exemplifies this global reach. Through the project's market access support, Nabeeh participated in the COMEX Global Technology Show in Oman, marking a strategic pivot for the firm. The result: seven Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and a concrete entry into the Omani market. "Participating in COMEX with TechStart turned our expansion into the Omani market from a goal into a solid reality. It provided us with an unparalleled stage to showcase our innovation, learn from global peers, and build the networking foundations necessary for sustainable international growth," says Saber Samara, co-founder of Nabeeh.

This increased confidence and connectivity have been translated into investment. As of September 2025, TechStart-supported companies have leveraged such opportunities to attract more than US$13 million in additional private investment, validating the project's approach of using targeted public support to crowd in private capital, even in a fragile and conflict-affected context.

Overall, these results demonstrate how strategic investment in skills, firms, and market access can unlock the IT sector's potential as a driver of economic growth.



Fawaz Samara, Nabeeh co-founder and CEO, signing an MOU in the Palestinian Pavilion at COMEX.

TechStart is showing that, despite structural constraints, Palestinian youth and entrepreneurs can compete globally when provided with the right tools, partnerships, and opportunities, turning promise into measurable impact.

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Farah Said is the communication specialist at TechStart.

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Connectivity as Resilience

Keeping Gaza Connected amid Crisis

Courtesy of Jawwal



A young Palestinian man in Gaza using his mobile phone amid destruction, March 2025.

In Gaza, connectivity is not just a technological service – it's a lifeline for survival and hope. Since the onset of the aggression on the Gaza Strip, widespread destruction has pushed the telecommunications sector to the brink of collapse, threatening near-total isolation for the population. With over 80 percent of networks damaged, communication blackouts have disrupted access to essential services, including healthcare, humanitarian aid, education, media, and emergency response.

These severe disruptions have deepened the humanitarian crisis, leaving families struggling to stay in contact with one another and with the outside world. Communication gaps have complicated medical coordination, relief delivery, and information sharing, reinforcing how critical connectivity is to survival, safety, and social resilience in times of aggression and destruction.

Amid these unprecedented circumstances, communications became a crucial factor for many sectors to continue providing their services. The health sector relied on them to facilitate its work, reach victims, transport them, and register their information. The media also depended on communications to convey the grim reality and amplify the voices of Gaza's residents.

In the field of education, despite all the challenges, many teachers rushed to deliver lessons to students via the internet, which contributed to graduating many students from the secondary level. Likewise, many university students were able to attend their universities remotely and obtain their degrees under the conditions of war.

International and humanitarian organizations worked to deliver essential and relief supplies by communicating with the people of Gaza. Most importantly, communication enabled members of the same family to stay in touch after forced displacement had separated them, becoming a ray of hope that allowed them to reassure one another.

Jawwal's response to the assault on Gaza has been to rebuild networks – and thereby rebuild lives. The company rehabilitated damaged networks to help families remain in contact and provided free internet access to local service

"Since its establishment in 1995 as the first Palestinian company to provide telecommunications services in Palestine, Jawwal has been committed to transcending barriers and leading Palestine into the future of connectivity and digitization by providing the latest mobile, home internet, and business services at the highest quality to empower Palestinians to thrive in an interconnected world. Built and driven by Palestinian talent and expertise, Jawwal stands as a testament to Palestinian resilience, continuously overcoming challenges to fulfil its mission of bringing Palestinians closer to each other and to the future."

Setting up a cellular station in the Gaza Strip during the aggression, May 2025.





A technician from "Jawwal" working on repairing a cellular station during the aggression on Gaza City. October 2025.

providers to expand Wi-Fi coverage. Jawwal also delivered billions of voice minutes, SMS messages, and unlimited internet packages, ensuring that schools, hospitals, media outlets, and humanitarian centers could continue operating and coordinating their work.

When conventional infrastructure failed, alternative solutions, such as Fixed Wireless Access (FWA), became critical in ensuring continued connectivity. Jawwal combined this with free prepaid credit and emergency service packages, helping to ensure that families, medical facilities, and relief organizations remained reachable even under the most extreme conditions.

These efforts came at great personal cost. Tragically, during their work to reconnect Gaza, two of Jawwal's technical team lost their lives while performing their duty in some of the most dangerous areas. Their sacrifice underscores the deep commitment and resilience that defined these efforts, not just a technical service, but an unwavering dedication to the people of Gaza.

In recognition of these extraordinary efforts, Jawwal was honored with the Crisis Response Award at the World Communication Awards in London in 2025, a testament not just to technical excellence, but to the unbreakable spirit of Gaza's people, who continue to survive, rebuild, and connect despite everything.

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A cell on wheels in Al-Mawasi, Gaza, in oder to strengthen network coverage in displacement areas. October 2025.





Setting up a cellular station at a newly established site in Khan Younis. April 2025.

Plugging Palestine into the AI Revolution

Entrepreneurship, Digital Economy, and Identity

By Mona Nabil Demaidi



> **AI serves as a catalyst for digital transformation, modernizing government services and assisting in the development of economic sectors. This requires a framework of ethical and legal safeguards, a shared digital public infrastructure, and access to international financial systems.**



AI Action Summit in Paris (February 2025), where Dr. Mona Demaidi supported the integration of a Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) lens into artificial intelligence.

Across Palestine, a rising generation of innovators is harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technology to transform adversity into opportunity. Through creativity, skill, and persistence, they are laying the foundations of a digital economy that can transcend physical barriers and open pathways to economic resilience and global participation.

Palestinians have recognized that AI can serve as a catalyst for economic growth, public sector reform, and more effective governance. In 2022, a national Artificial Intelligence Strategy was developed as part of Palestine's broader digital transformation agenda and formally launched by the Palestinian Authority in 2023.[1] This approach aligns with international discussions in AI governance, which emphasize the importance of nationally grounded strategies in shaping inclusive, context-aware, and development-oriented AI ecosystems.[2]

The Palestinian National AI Strategy sets out several interconnected objectives. First, it prioritizes the modernization of government services through the integration of AI systems that automate administrative processes, improve service delivery, and enhance transparency. Second, it promotes the use of AI for development by encouraging applications in priority sectors such as agriculture, water management, healthcare, education, and transportation, where AI-driven solutions can directly address local challenges. Particular emphasis is placed on Arabic language processing, ensuring that emerging technologies remain accessible, culturally relevant, and responsive to Palestinian society.

A third pillar of the strategy focuses on investing in human capital and innovation. Through public-private partnerships, academic collaboration, and research support, the strategy seeks to cultivate a strong AI talent pipeline and position Palestine as a regional contributor to AI education and specialized expertise. Finally, the strategy adopts an inclusive and responsible AI framework, calling for ethical and legal safeguards that protect human rights, ensure accountability, and actively include marginalized communities in the digital transformation process.

Taken together, these policy commitments articulate a forward-looking vision. Palestine is not positioned merely as a consumer of imported technologies, but as an active contributor to the global AI landscape. While implementation challenges remain, particularly in infrastructure, financing, and coordination, the strategic direction is clear. AI is not framed as a luxury reserved for stable economies; it is understood as a necessary instrument for Palestinian development, resilience, and self-determination.

At the same time, technology alone cannot sustain this transformation without the financial and legal foundations that allow innovation to move and scale. For Palestine to be fully plugged into the global digital



Launching artificial intelligence Educational Agents (Avatars) at Arab American University to be the first in Palestine and leader in the MENA region.

economy, access to international financial infrastructure must be treated as a core enabler rather than a peripheral concern. Palestinian startups, whether building AI tools, creative platforms, or e-commerce services, depend on the ability to receive payments, serve global customers, and attract external investment. Enabling access to widely used international payment gateways and online marketplaces would allow Palestinian entrepreneurs to operate on equal technical footing with peers worldwide, reducing friction and supporting early growth.

As a complement to financial access, a modern legal infrastructure for entrepreneurship is equally essential. Clear investor protection mechanisms, updated intellectual property frameworks, and startup-friendly corporate regulations create the trust on which innovation ecosystems depend. When founders can protect their ideas and investors can deploy capital within predictable legal environments, entrepreneurship shifts from survival-driven experimentation to long-term value creation. Strengthening these foundations would not only attract investment, but also encourage Palestinian startups to retain intellectual assets locally while competing globally.

A practical way to accelerate this transition is to invest in shared digital public infrastructure that entrepreneurs across sectors can immediately access. One proposal is a regulated online virtual business bank designed for Palestinian founders and freelancers. Such a platform could offer multi-currency accounts, compliant onboarding, API-based payments, and reliable links to international financial rails for invoicing, subscriptions, and cross-border payouts. In effect, it would function as a startup-ready financial layer, tailored to the realities of remote-first work and global markets, enabling businesses of all kinds to transact internationally without complex workarounds.

Alongside financial rails, Palestine also requires a resilient data infrastructure to support AI development and digital services. A complementary concept is that of a data embassy for critical digital systems. Under this model, essential datasets and AI workloads would be hosted within legally governed, high-assurance environments, potentially in partnership with trusted regional or international cloud providers. For startups, this would ensure dependable access to computing resources, secure data storage, and continuity of service. For public institutions, it would provide a protected space for sensitive data while maintaining operational reliability.

> **A cultural voice in AI preserves identity through technology.**

To make these systems credible and investable, a modern approach to data protection and privacy law becomes an economic necessity rather than a compliance afterthought. Clear rules governing consent, data processing, cross-border transfers, and accountability, paired with effective enforcement, can significantly lower perceived risks for investors and international partners. In the AI era, trust itself becomes a competitive advantage. Startups that demonstrate privacy by design, secure data practices, and responsible AI governance are better positioned to win clients, form partnerships, and scale beyond borders.

These ideas are not without precedent. Estonia's e-Residency program illustrates how a small country can provide entrepreneurs worldwide with a virtual gateway to company formation, digital identity, banking access, and cross-border operations entirely online.[3] Similarly, financial hubs such as the Dubai International Financial Centre and Singapore have built regulatory environments that enable fintech firms and startups to connect seamlessly with global payment systems through digital-first banking and open API frameworks.[4]

On the data side, Estonia's data embassy initiative offers a relevant example of how sovereign digital services can be safeguarded through legally defined hosting arrangements abroad.[5] Emerging economies have also pursued similar strategies. Rwanda's national data center program, for instance, has helped position the country as a regional hub for secure cloud services and digital innovation.[6] In parallel, comprehensive privacy legal frameworks such as the European Union's GDPR demonstrate how strong data protection laws can function as economic assets, enabling cross-border data flows while building trust among users, partners, and investors.[7]

Taken together, these global experiences suggest that Palestine does not need to reinvent the wheel. By adapting proven models of virtualized financial access, a resilient data infrastructure, and modern privacy governance, Palestine can establish itself as a digitally credible and globally connected innovation gateway, even in the absence of traditional physical advantages.

While policy, infrastructure, and finance form the structural backbone of a digital economy, culture and

language determine whether technology is truly adopted, trusted, and sustained. A crucial aspect of this AI revolution is ensuring that Palestine's culture and identity are not lost in translation. Today's most widely used AI models, largely developed in the Global North, often struggle to capture the nuances of Arabic dialects, local context, and Palestinian cultural references. Biases in generative AI outputs concerning Palestinians have also been documented, reflecting broader patterns of underrepresentation in training data. If reliance on externally developed AI systems continues unchecked, Palestinian narratives risk being distorted or erased altogether.

"Plugging Palestine into" large language models (LLMs)[8] is therefore both a technical and cultural imperative. Developing AI systems that understand Palestinian Arabic, recognize local idioms, and reflect lived realities from Gaza through Jerusalem to Jenin are essential for meaningful digital inclusion. Regional efforts to develop Arabic-first AI models demonstrate that technological sophistication and cultural rootedness are not mutually exclusive. By fine-tuning large models with authentic Palestinian data, voices, stories, and linguistic diversity, developers can create AI tools that are more accurate, human-centered, and socially relevant.

Beyond language, culturally aware AI also offers powerful tools for preserving heritage. AI-driven analysis of traditional art, tatreez embroidery, architecture, folklore, and music can support cultural documentation and creative innovation, ensuring that Palestinian identity endures in the digital age. In this sense, AI becomes a two-way bridge: presenting Palestinian culture authentically to the world while delivering global knowledge to local communities in forms that feel familiar and empowering.

At the same time, Palestine should begin to think strategically about plugging into the growing ecosystem of Arabic-first AI models that are emerging in the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia,[9] the United Arab Emirates,[10] and Qatar.[11] Significant investments in Arabic LLMs, sector-specific AI platforms, and sovereign cloud infrastructure in these countries are shaping a regional AI landscape that is linguistically aligned, culturally aware, and globally competitive. Rather than viewing these developments as external, Palestine can engage with them as complementary pathways.

Partnerships with Saudi, Emirati, and Qatari AI initiatives offer practical opportunities for Palestinian developers, startups, and researchers. These include contributing high-quality Palestinian Arabic data for fine-tuning models, building localized applications on top of Arabic AI platforms, and integrating Palestinian use cases into regional AI ecosystems that span education, healthcare, public services, and creative industries. Such collaboration will allow Palestine to benefit from scale, compute capacity, and market access that would be difficult to achieve independently, while retaining local relevance and ownership over data and applications.

Positioning Palestine within the Arabic AI ecosystem also reinforces a broader strategic logic: Connecting to the world through regional gateways that share language, culture, and economic vision. By aligning with Arabic AI models that have been developed in the Gulf, including initiatives in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, Palestinian innovators can access regional markets more easily, and ensure that Arabic, including Palestinian dialects, is represented in the next generation of AI systems. In doing so, Palestine entrepreneurs are its drivers. Across Palestine, startups are already leveraging AI and digital platforms to reach regional and global markets. With a fragmented domestic market, Palestinian entrepreneurs have adopted a "test local, scale regional" mindset, piloting solutions at home before expanding to larger markets across the Middle East and beyond.

Software and AI-enabled services are particularly well suited to this context. Digital products travel more easily than physical goods, allowing Palestinian firms to overcome mobility and trade restrictions. Combined with a highly educated, cost-competitive workforce and a strong remote-work culture, this has positioned Palestinian tech talent as an increasingly attractive partner for regional companies. The ICT sector already contributes a meaningful share of national GDP and produces thousands of new graduates each year, many trained in AI, data science, and related fields.

Entrepreneurial resilience has also become a competitive advantage.



Launching Women in AI and Tech Business Network in partnership with Business Women Forum in Ramallah.

"Entrepreneurs are on the frontlines of the AI revolution. With policy direction set and cultural grounding established, the practical momentum of Palestine's AI journey is carried forward by its entrepreneurs."

Years of operating under uncertainty have fostered adaptability, reliability, and long-term commitment among Palestinian tech professionals, qualities highly valued in international collaborations. For global partners, engaging Palestinian startups is not only commercially viable but also socially impactful, contributing to job creation and economic stability in a high-unemployment context.

agency among the youth. Each line of code written under such conditions becomes an act of resilience and a foundation for long-term development.

Taken together, the policy vision, cultural grounding, regional integration, and entrepreneurial action outlined above converge most powerfully in their impact on the next generation.



AI senior-level training at Palestine Islamic Bank.

In Gaza, rebuilding through tech will become crucial. The role of technology in resilience becomes most visible in contexts of extreme constraint, where digital skills translate directly into livelihoods and recovery.

Nowhere is the transformative potential of the digital economy more evident than in Gaza. Before the 2023 war, organizations such as Gaza Sky Geeks served as the backbone of a vibrant tech ecosystem, training thousands of young people and enabling remote work opportunities that generated millions of dollars in income. Although much of Gaza's physical infrastructure has since been destroyed and many young professionals have fallen victim to the assault on Gaza, many others remain and are eager to work. The human capital exists.

Digital skills, unlike factories or ports, can be rebuilt with relatively modest physical resources. As reconstruction efforts continue, revitalizing Gaza's tech sector offers a practical pathway to economic recovery. Investment in connectivity, training, and startup support can enable Gazans to export skills digitally, reduce aid dependency, and restore a sense of

The story of Palestine's engagement with AI and entrepreneurship is ultimately a story about the future. It tells young Palestinians that they belong in the digital age not as passive users, but as creators, innovators, and leaders. By embedding AI development within a national strategy, nurturing culturally grounded technologies, and empowering entrepreneurs, Palestine is carving out a distinct role in the global AI ecosystem.

Embracing AI is about more than economic opportunity. It is about narrative power, cultural preservation, and self-determination in a rapidly changing world. From policy frameworks to startup labs, from universities to refugee camps, Palestinians are asserting their presence in the technologies that will shape tomorrow. The challenges are immense, but so is the potential. By continuing to invest in AI with. intention and integrity, Palestine can ensure that its digital future is not only connected, but its own.

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President for Artificial Intelligence and Director of International Relations at the Arab American University, and an AI expert who led the development of Palestine's Artificial Intelligence National Strategy and AI in Higher Education Policy, with a focus on ethical AI and digital transformation.

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From Emergence to Continuity

Designing the End-to-End Journey of Palestinian Ventures

By Majd Khalifeh



Flow Accelerator team and community.

For many years, entrepreneurship in Palestine has been framed through the language of emergence. The focus was on new startups, first-time founders, and early ideas, highlighting the courage required to innovate under profound political and economic constraints. This framing was necessary at a time when the ecosystem itself was still forming. Today, however, the reality we are engaging with requires a more evolved lens.

What we are witnessing now is not the birth of an ecosystem but its gradual maturation. Palestinian entrepreneurship has moved through multiple cycles of experimentation and learning, shifting from mere creation toward continuity, sustainability, and long-term economic participation. The central challenge is no longer whether startups can be launched, but whether ventures can be carried forward coherently across stages and allowed to grow into durable economic actors. Continuity, rather than novelty, is what transforms entrepreneurship from isolated success stories into functioning economic infrastructure.

The work of Flow Accelerator, for example, over the past years has been grounded in close engagement with founders who are navigating ideation, validation, and early market entry. A consistent pattern has emerged. While the ecosystem has become increasingly capable of producing promising startups, it continues to struggle with enabling those ventures to move smoothly from early validation into growth-oriented stages. Too many ventures lose momentum not because they lack potential, but because the surrounding system does not offer an integrated journey that aligns readiness, capital, and growth expectations.

This challenge is most visible in the transition from pre-seed to seed. It is often framed as a narrow funding gap, when in reality it is a multidimensional systemic issue. At the pre-seed stage, founders are still refining their commercial logic, governance practices, and financial narratives. At the seed stage, investors expect clarity and predictability that can only be achieved through structured preparation and time. When these stages are not intentionally connected, founders are pressured to leap rather than progress, and investors are asked to assume risks that could have been mitigated through better alignment.

A customer-centric approach to entrepreneurship must therefore extend beyond products and markets to include the entrepreneur's experience within the ecosystem itself. Founders are not only builders of solutions, they are also users of support systems. When those systems are fragmented, entrepreneurs compensate through resilience and adaptability, often at the cost of focus, efficiency, and growth velocity. True ecosystem maturity lies in designing support structures around the founder's actual journey rather than around institutional silos or disconnected programs.

This understanding has shaped the evolution of Flow Accelerator into a broader end-to-end model that intentionally bridges venture development with financial structuring and investment readiness. Flow Ventures was established as the investment and financial services arm of this model, designed to address persistent financial and growth gaps that constrain startups at the pre-seed stage and continue to affect them beyond it. It functions as a strategic extension of venture development, structuring deal flow, enabling access to capital, and aligning growth pathways with the realities of early-stage ventures operating under constraint.

Within this framework, Flow Angels represents the first track of Flow Ventures and a foundational component of the end-to-end journey. Angel investment plays a critical role in the earliest phases of venture growth, not only by providing capital but also by establishing early trust and alignment between founders and investors. Flow Angels engages ventures at the pre-seed stage with expectations that are calibrated to where those ventures are, supporting progression toward seed readiness through disciplined preparation rather than premature pressure.



Flow Accelerator team and community.

Positioned this way, early-stage capital functions as a bridge rather than a barrier.

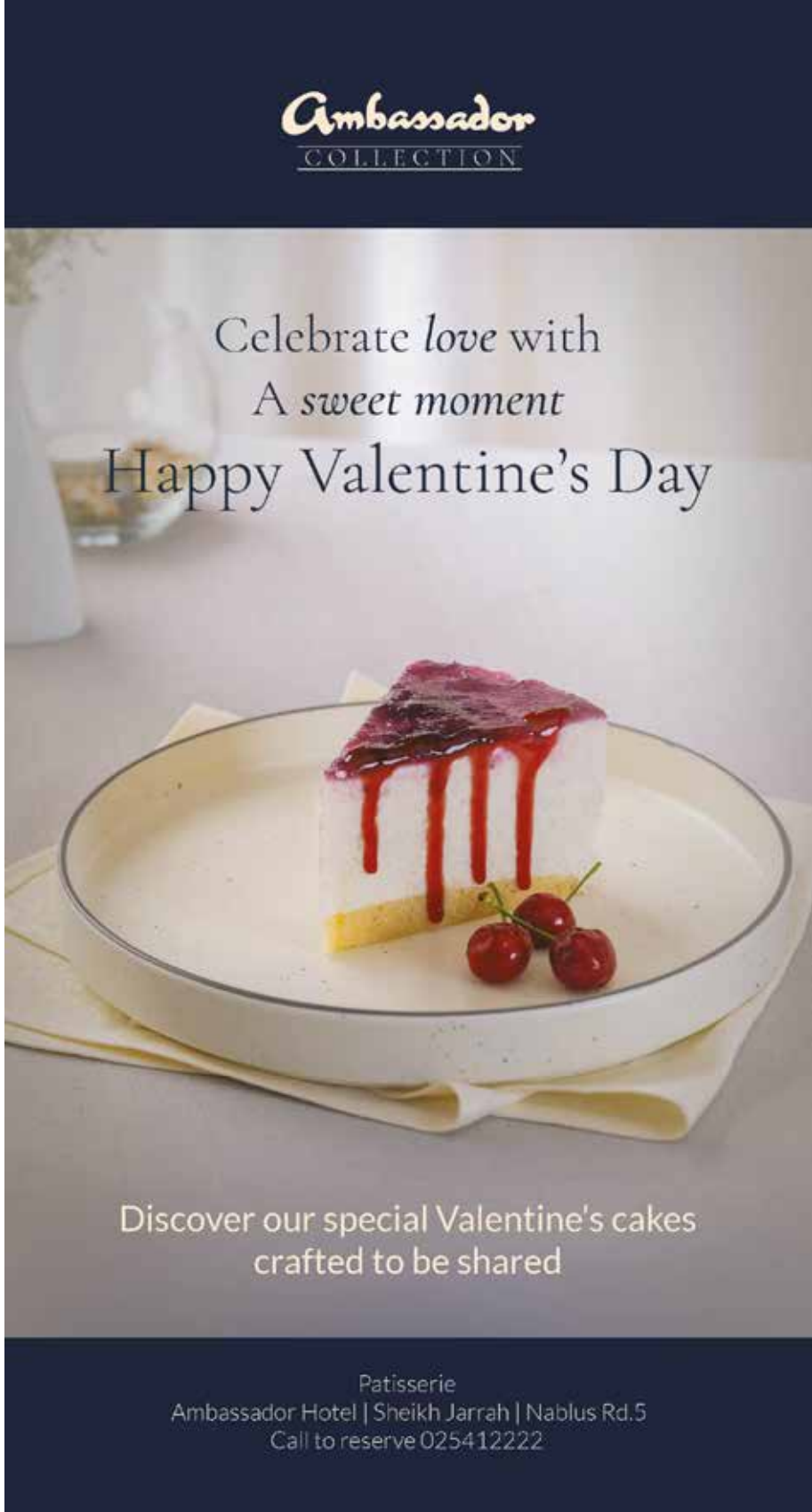
Together, Flow Accelerator, Flow Ventures, and Flow Angels form a continuous logic of support that follows entrepreneurs across critical phases, from early ideation through pre-seed and into growth-oriented stages. This continuity is essential if entrepreneurship is to fulfil its role as a vehicle for long-term economic participation rather than short-term survival.

Resilience remains a defining characteristic of Palestinian entrepreneurship, but resilience alone is not enough. Endurance keeps ventures alive, while participation allows them to contribute meaningfully to the economy over time. An end-to-end model is therefore not a philosophical preference but an economic necessity. From emergence to continuity, the work ahead is about designing pathways that allow ventures to carry their potential forward.

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Majd Khalifeh is the managing director of Flow Accelerator and managing partner of Flow Ventures. As a licensed financial and investment advisor with over 22 years of experience at the intersection of finance, innovation, and entrepreneurship, she designs and leads entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives with a strong focus on venture validation, investment readiness, and capital structuring. Her work spans advising startups, businesses, and ecosystem partners on translating innovation into scalable, investable businesses and connecting ventures to regional and global growth and investment pathways.



Beyond Brain Drain

Why Palestinian Engineers Choose Home

By Sari Taha



For decades, Palestine has watched its brightest minds board planes to Silicon Valley, London, and Dubai. The narrative has always been the same: Talented engineers must leave to succeed. But what if this story is changing? What if the path to economic resilience doesn't run through emigration but through a different kind of connection, one that allows Palestinian engineers to build world-class technology from Ramallah, Nablus, and Gaza, serving global clients while remaining rooted in their communities?

At the end of 2025, a team at Momentum Labs was commissioned by Palestine Techno Park to develop a structured, practical investment guide. This work was undertaken in support of Techno Park's strategic Palestine Diaspora Network for Technology, an initiative established two years ago to strengthen the bridge between Palestinian professionals abroad and the thriving tech sector at home. The comprehensive guide the team produced is designed to help diaspora businesses navigate investment opportunities in Palestine's technology sector, framing it not as an act of charity but as a sound strategic decision that is backed by proven track records and exceptional talent.

The guide will be made publicly available following its official launch by Palestine Techno Park.

Quality speaks for itself: When Husam Barqawi founded Infinite Tiers Group (ITG) in Ohio, he needed a software development team capable of serving Fortune 500 clients. He evaluated options across the globe: India, Eastern Europe, Latin America. But in 2006, he made a decision that would define his company's success: He established his core engineering team in Nablus, Palestine. "When we compared locations, Palestine stood out not for low costs but for unmatched quality," Barqawi explains. "A single Palestinian engineer often delivers what takes two or three elsewhere."[1] This isn't marketing rhetoric. Today, ITG employs over 250 engineers in Palestine, making a substantial multimillion dollar annual contribution to the local economy in the form of salaries and employee benefits.[2] Despite every external challenge imaginable, the Palestine team has maintained a perfect record of on-time delivery for the company's most demanding clients. This is the proof: Palestinian engineers don't just meet global standards, they often exceed them.

> **This is a call to the global Palestinian community: Diaspora-led investment in Palestinian tech talent can reverse brain drain and build economic resilience.**

The same pattern emerges across multiple success stories. When NVIDIA acquired Mellanox in 2020, they made a landmark decision: directly hire the 150 Palestinian engineers who had been supporting their projects.[3] Silicon Valley's most demanding chip company chose to establish its first direct employment footprint in Palestine. Why? Because the talent was undeniable.

The examples above are archetype incidents that have changed everything. But there's something more profound happening here than just technical excellence. Palestinian engineers possess a unique characteristic that distinguishes them in the global marketplace: When given genuine opportunity, they choose to stay. Mohammad Asseedeh, offshore operations manager at Xngage, oversees a team of 70 engineers in Nablus who form the core of the company's delivery engine for enterprise e-commerce solutions. "Palestinian teams deliver US-level expertise at a fraction of the cost, not as low-cost labor, but as high-value partners," he notes.[4] But the real value isn't just the work they deliver. It's their commitment to staying.

This is the archetype that other markets cannot replicate: engineers who possess world-class skills but are deeply rooted in place, family, and community. They're not looking for the next opportunity to relocate to San Francisco. They want to build their careers, raise their families, and contribute to their society, from home. This changes the entire equation. While companies in Bangalore and Bucharest struggle with 30–40 percent annual turnover as engineers jump to better opportunities, Palestinian teams demonstrate remarkable stability. They're invested, literally and emotionally, in the success of their partnerships because these partnerships represent something larger: the ability to thrive without leaving.

Here's where the conversation needs to shift. For too long, offshoring has been framed around cost arbitrage: finding cheaper alternatives to Western talent. This framework is not only condescending, it fundamentally misunderstands what Palestinian engineers offer. The Palestinian diaspora, 7.8 million strong globally, has a choice to make.[5] You can view Palestinian engineers as a way to cut costs, or you can recognize them for what they truly are: strategic assets with global-caliber skills and an unparalleled commitment to excellence.

When ITG's Barqawi chose Palestine, he wasn't looking for the cheapest option. He was looking for the best. When Xngage built their core team in Nablus, it wasn't to save money on junior developers. It was because Palestinian engineers could handle their most complex challenges. This distinction matters because it transforms the relationship from transactional to transformational. When you hire Palestinian engineers for their quality, you're not doing charity. You're making a sound business decision that happens to have profound economic and social impact. You're creating jobs that allow talented people to stay in their homeland. You're building teams that will remain loyal and committed because they're exactly where they want to be.

The global Palestinian community, particularly those who have succeeded in tech hubs from Boston to Berlin, has a duty to strengthen the linkage between the Palestinian technology sector and the global economy. Not because Palestinian engineers need help, but because they deserve the opportunities that their skills warrant.

Every diaspora professional who has built a career at Google, Microsoft, Amazon, or any tech company has benefited from opportunities that were available to them. Those same opportunities should be available to their equally talented cousins, classmates, and community members in Palestine, not through relocation, but through remote collaboration that leverages Palestine's strategic time zone (UTC+2/+3), robust infrastructure, and proven delivery record.

> **Moving from cost-cutting to strategic partnership, firms have begun to consider Palestinian employees as strategic assets with global-caliber skills and an unparalleled commitment to excellence.**



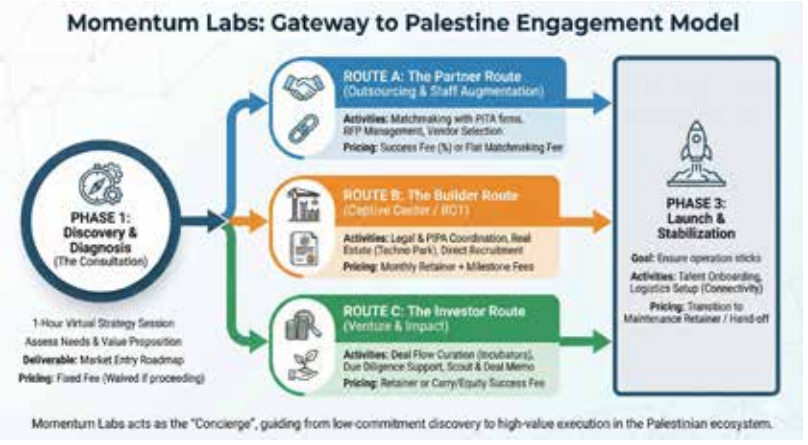
The foundation for online employment is ready and the infrastructure is firmly in place. State-of-the-art facilities exist not only at Palestine Techno Park next to Birzeit University but also at locations such as Rawabi Tech Hub and within modern commercial buildings across Ramallah and other major Palestinian cities.[6] The ecosystem is supported by the Palestinian Information Technology Association (PITA), which represents over 200 major ICT companies and serves as the primary advocacy body for the sector.[7] Innovation hubs across Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, and other cities, including Gaza Sky Geeks, Intersect Innovation Hub, and Flow Accelerator, offer coworking spaces, training programs, and startup incubation. Annually, Palestinian universities produce over 8,000 STEM graduates,[8] while fiber-optic broadband reaches speeds up to 300 Mbps in urban centers.[9] Supportive legal frameworks protect foreign investment, and tax incentives reward job creation.

The ground is fertile. What's needed now is the water: the diaspora capital, connections, and commitment that can transform potential into prosperity. This constitutes a different kind of return. For Palestinian diaspora professionals, there are many ways to "return" to Palestine. Physical relocation isn't the only option, and for many, it isn't realistic. But there's another kind of return, one that might be even more powerful: bringing opportunities back. When you hire a team in Ramallah to build your company's next product, you're returning. When you invest in a Palestinian startup, you're returning. When you connect a Palestinian firm to clients in your network, you're returning. When you mentor engineers in Nablus via video call, you're returning. This is the return that builds economic resilience. This is the return that creates jobs at scale. This is the return that allows the next generation of Palestinian talent to choose home.

For those ready to take action, navigating the Palestinian tech ecosystem doesn't have to be complex. Whether you're a diaspora professional exploring your first investment, a tech company considering offshoring, or an entrepreneur seeking strategic partnerships, there are clear pathways to engagement. Working in partnership with Palestine Techno Park, organizations such as Momentum Labs provide strategic guidance to help international investors and

> **Let's be clear: This is not a call for charity. It's a call for recognition and strategic action. Recognizing the opportunities from which they benefitted, successful Palestinian diaspora professionals should consider it their duty to provide, through remote collaboration, similar opportunities to their equally talented cousins, classmates, and community members back home.**

diaspora professionals connect with Palestine's technology sector through structured engagement models (see graphic).



The journey typically begins with a discovery consultation to assess goals and determine the best fit, whether that's partnering with established Palestinian IT firms for outsourcing, building one's own development center, or investing in promising startups. From there, tailored support helps navigate everything from legal registration and PIPA incentives to talent recruitment and ecosystem integration.

For anyone interested in exploring these opportunities, resources and guidance are available. The goal is simple: to make it as straightforward as possible for those who want to invest in Palestinian talent to do so successfully. This isn't about convincing anyone; the track record speaks for itself. It's about ensuring that those who are ready to engage have the support they need to succeed.

Thus, we call on the Palestinian diaspora in tech: You have the power to change the equation. Your companies are hiring engineers. Your networks are vast. Your credibility opens doors. The question is: Will you look to Bangalore and Bucharest first, or will you look home?

To international tech leaders, we call: Palestinian engineers are not a charitable cause; they're a competitive advantage. Proven. Reliable. Exceptional. Ready to partner.

While the practical pathways forward are surprisingly simple, the impact of such a shift would be transformative:

- 13,500+ ICT professionals currently in Palestine could triple their earning potential without leaving home;[10]
- 2,260+ ICT graduates annually could enter a thriving market instead of joining emigration queues;[11]
- $500+ million in annual tech sector value-added could multiply several times over;[12]

Families stay together. Communities remain intact. Brain drain becomes brain retention.

To Palestinian engineers, we call: Your choice to stay is not a limitation; it's your strength. The world is learning what diaspora leaders already know: You're among the best in the world. And now, increasingly, the world is coming to you.

The digital horizon is vast, and Palestine's position within it is strengthening. The infrastructure is built. The talent is proven. The ecosystem is maturing. What we need now is the bridge: diaspora-led partnerships that recognize Palestinian engineers not as beneficiaries of support, but as strategic partners in building the future.

Brain drain is not inevitable. It's a choice. And increasingly, when given the right opportunities, Palestinian engineers are making a different choice: to build the future from home.

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Sari Taha is a co-founder and managing partner at Momentum Labs, a boutique consultancy firm and a startup studio operating at the intersection of business, technology, and social impact. He is an entrepreneurship and technology sector expert who has been working toward the development of the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the private sector in Palestine for the past 10+ years in multiple roles and capacities with the private and public sectors and international organizations. Sari holds a BSc in mechanical engineering from Birzeit University and an MBA with a focus on technology management from Technion – Israel Institute of Technology.

This article draws from research conducted for the "Building Global Teams from Palestine" guide, developed by Palestine Techno Park's Diaspora Network for Technology as a comprehensive resource for investors and diaspora professionals who are exploring partnerships with Palestine's ICT sector. For more information, visit Palestine Techno Park at www.technopark.ps or contact Momentum Labs at info@momentumlabs.me.

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The ICT Sector in Palestine

Structure, Subsectors, and Recent Trend

Courtesy of PITA
(Palestinian Information Technology Association)



SehhaTech, organized by PITA, brought together over 16 ICT companies and youth innovators to showcase digital health solutions and mark the launch of two national Ministry of Health digital platforms.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector is among the most dynamic and opportunity-driven sectors in the Palestinian economy. Built on a strong base of skilled human capital, entrepreneurial culture, and international market integration, the sector has demonstrated a high degree of adaptability under complex operating conditions. ICT continues to play a strategic role in enabling digital transformation across economic sectors, expanding exports of knowledge-based services and creating high-value employment opportunities for youth and women.

Historically, according to the Palestinian Information Technology Association (PITA), the ICT sector has contributed between 5 percent and 7 percent of Palestine's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with an annual value added exceeding US$500 million prior to the 2023–2024 war escalation. While official data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) shows a contraction in sectoral value added in 2024, the West Bank ICT market maintained operational continuity, export capacity, and international service delivery. This resilience reflects the sector's reliance on remote delivery models, digital exports, and cross-border outsourcing, which reduce dependence on physical infrastructure and enhance business continuity. These structural characteristics position ICT as one of the most scalable and recovery-oriented sectors in the Palestinian economy.

> **Key ICT subsectors in Palestine include software development and digital solutions, complemented by a strong outsourcing and remote services segment for international clients in Europe, the Gulf, and North America, covering both traditional and emerging technology domains.**

The Palestinian ICT ecosystem encompasses a broad and increasingly sophisticated range of subsectors. Software development and digital solutions remain the backbone of the sector, covering enterprise systems, web and mobile applications, health and education platforms, and financial technologies. Complementing this is a strong outsourcing and remote services segment, through which Palestinian firms deliver software engineering, quality assurance, customer support, digital marketing, and business process services to international clients across Europe, the Gulf, and North America. Clients have included Cisco, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, and Volvo. The Palestine Outsourcing Destination Guide 2023 by the German Outsourcing Association highlights that this international orientation has



Organized by PITA, Digi4Industry convened 20 ICT companies, industry stakeholders, and over 500 participants to advance Industry 4.0 and digital transformation.



COMEX Global Technology Show enabled 18 Palestinian ICT companies to access regional markets through dedicated B2B matchmaking and pitching opportunities.

positioned Palestine as a trusted outsourcing destination, combining competitive costs with high technical skills and multilingual capabilities.

Beyond traditional IT services, the sector is expanding rapidly into emerging and applied technology domains, including fintech, edu-tech, agri-tech, e-Tourism, green and eco-friendly technologies, e-commerce platforms, content development, and speech-recognition and language technologies. This diversification reflects a gradual shift from service-based delivery toward product-based and IP-driven solutions, aligned with global digital-market trends and national ICT strategy priorities.

Rather than focusing on telecommunications infrastructure, recent sector strategies emphasize digital applications, platforms, and services that enable digital transformation across government, health, education, finance, and commerce. These include e-government solutions, cloud-based services, cybersecurity applications, digital payment systems, and data-driven platforms, which support both public- and private-sector modernization.

Palestine's ICT sector presents a compelling value proposition for international partners and investors, driven by a favorable business environment, strong human capital, and proven integration into global digital markets. The sector comprises a critical mass of ICT enterprises operating within a flexible regulatory framework that supports digital trade, service exports, and cross-border collaboration. ICT contributes an estimated 7 percent to national GDP, reflecting its growing economic significance, while the information technology and the business process services (IT and BPS) segments have recorded an output growth rate of approximately 6 percent, underscoring sustained demand for Palestinian digital services.

From an enterprise and employment perspective, the ICT sector employs an estimated 20,000 direct and indirect workers, supported by a solid base of more than 250 ICT-related companies, most of which are small and medium-sized enterprises. According to national sector databases, approximately 1,750 ICT establishments are active across Palestine, collectively employing around 13,500 professionals, with women representing about 27 percent of the workforce. This structure enables flexibility, specialization, and rapid scaling, particularly in export-oriented digital services.

> **The Palestinian ICT sector comprises 1,750 ICT establishments (more than 250 small and medium-sized ICT-related enterprises) that employ around 13,500 professionals (in total an estimated 20,000 direct and indirect workers), contributing an estimated 7 percent to the national GDP. Moreover, the output growth of the information technology and business process services segments is growing at approximately 6 percent, indicating a growing demand that can be accommodated by a skilled workforce and a mature digital ecosystem.**

Human capital remains the sector's strongest asset. Palestinian universities and technical institutions produce more than 3,000 ICT graduates annually, creating a surplus of skilled talent relative to local market absorption. High employee retention rates, combined with multilingual proficiency in English and Arabic, enhance service quality and long-term client relationships. These factors position Palestine as a competitive and reliable digital services hub, particularly for international companies seeking skilled teams aligned with European time zones, given Palestine's two-hour difference with the UK and short flight distance from Europe.

The sector also benefits from a mature digital ecosystem, including high-speed internet connectivity, dedicated technology parks, and a

LEAP Riyadh brought together 22 Palestinian ICT companies, resulting in 30–50 qualified leads per company and strategic engagements across high-growth technology sectors.





TechEX Europe brought together 19 Palestinian ICT companies for high-level engagement with the European ICT ecosystem, resulting in 50–60 B2B meetings and 25–30 qualified leads.

fully private digital telecommunications infrastructure, which collectively support business continuity, data security, and scalable digital operations. Competitive labor costs and low commercial real estate expenses further strengthen Palestine's cost advantage compared to Central and Eastern Europe.

Looking ahead, the national ICT strategy places increasing emphasis on product-based technology development, access to new digital and regional networks, and the accelerated adoption of emerging technologies. Palestinian ICT firms are increasingly engaged in solutions related to cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, blockchain applications, cloud computing, and advanced digital platforms, serving sectors such as finance, health, education, commerce, and public administration. These technologies are central to the country's broader digital transformation agenda, positioning ICT not only as a service-export sector but as a key driver of innovation, resilience, and long-term economic modernization.

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The Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies (PITA) is the umbrella and representative body of the Palestinian ICT sector, bringing together more than 180 member companies across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. PITA works to strengthen the competitiveness of the sector, promote innovation and exports, support digital transformation, and advocate for enabling policies that position ICT as a key driver of economic resilience and sustainable development.

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From Aid to Agency

Building an Investment Ecosystem for Palestinian Innovation

Sharareh Noorbaloochi



Humanitarian aid remains indispensable. In moments of acute crisis, it saves lives and preserves dignity. But aid alone cannot rebuild economies, restore agency, or create long-term self-reliance. For that, investment is also essential. Not symbolic investment, and not charity framed as capital, but structured, accountable investment that treats Palestinian founders as builders on equal terms.

The highest form of solidarity is not donation. It is investment on equal terms, with shared risk, shared upside, and shared accountability. For impact-focused investors and ecosystem enablers, this approach shifts engagement from supporting activity to building durable systems grounded in ownership, incentives, and long-term alignment.

> **Why Success Stories Matter**
>
> Venture capital follows a power-law dynamic: A small number of successful companies generate the majority of returns. For emerging ecosystems, building even a handful of investable success stories can unlock follow-on capital, talent retention, and long-term economic momentum.

Innovation does not thrive in isolation. It scales when talent, capital, and markets are connected through a functioning investment ecosystem. In deeply fragmented contexts, entrepreneurship can also serve as a unifying force. It creates shared incentives where politics often divides, and measurable value where rhetoric alone cannot. When paired with the right capital structures, innovation becomes a practical tool for rebuilding systems, restoring livelihoods, and creating durable pathways to growth.

Every successful startup ecosystem follows a familiar arc. Early-stage capital is pooled and deployed professionally. A small number of companies are supported intensively. A few clear success stories emerge. These outcomes recycle confidence, talent, and capital back into the system. This flywheel is what transforms resilience into scale.

For Palestine, one of the most effective levers today is the development of focused micro funds operating at the pre-seed and seed stages. Micro funds are small, professionally managed vehicles designed to concentrate capital, time, and support on a limited portfolio of high-potential companies. Their goal is not volume, but outcomes. Beyond writing checks, micro funds

> **Structure Unlocks Capital**
>
> In many emerging markets, the primary barrier to investment is not talent but structure. Clear governance, standardized reporting, and early market access can significantly reduce perceived risk and attract international capital – particularly as MENA's innovation ecosystem continues to mature.

Investor 101: How to Participate Beyond Donation

What is a micro fund?

A micro fund is a small venture capital fund, often $1–10 million in size, focused on very early-stage companies. These funds typically invest at the pre-seed or seed stage and work closely with founders to help them become investable for larger follow-on capital.

Who can be a Limited Partner (LP)?

LPs are investors in a fund. Many micro funds allow participation starting at relatively accessible levels, sometimes as low as $10,000, making them an entry point for professionals who want exposure without sourcing or managing individual deals.

What do LPs receive?

LPs gain diversified exposure across a portfolio of startups, professional management, defined governance, and clear return expectations. Venture investing is long-term and illiquid, typically over a 7–10-year horizon, with outcomes driven by a small number of successful companies. The objective is disciplined participation in asymmetric upside, not guaranteed returns.

What matters beyond capital?

Market access. Early customers, pilot programs, partnerships, mentorship, and reference accounts often reduce risk more than money alone and help startups grow faster and attract follow-on investment.

Why this matters now!

Building a small number of visible, successful Palestinian companies is one of the fastest ways to unlock confidence, capital, and momentum for the broader ecosystem.

help make companies investable for global capital. This includes strengthening governance, clarifying cap tables, establishing reporting discipline, and aligning products with international market expectations. Many Palestinian startups struggle to attract foreign investment not because of weak ideas or teams, but because they are not yet structured in ways international investors can underwrite. Making companies investable is deliberate, hands-on work.

One emerging illustration comes from a Palestinian-founded digital mental health platform that has already supported users in Gaza while building for regional markets. By pairing strong technical execution with early structured capital, diaspora engagement, and access to MENA-based partners, the company has attracted regional interest and funding without being confined to a local market narrative. Its trajectory reflects a broader pattern among Palestinian founders who design for scale beyond immediate constraints, underscoring why ecosystem investment at the earliest stages matters.

Coordination across the ecosystem remains one of the largest gaps. Funds, accelerators, incubators, and regional partners often operate in silos. A network of micro funds that collaborate rather than compete can dramatically increase impact. Co-investment, shared diligence, and open pipelines across geographies and sectors allow capital to compound rather than fragment. Openness to international investors is central to this model.

Transparent, welcoming ecosystems signal confidence, maturity, and readiness to engage at scale. Encouragingly, there is growing appetite among international investors to participate, provided there is a clear, credible engagement model through micro funds with defined governance, transparency, and pathways for limited partner involvement.

Diaspora professionals and early believers play an outsized role in this system. Their contribution extends beyond capital to credibility, access, and translation. They help bridge local innovation to global customers, partners, and institutions. At later stages, they can help mid-stage companies scale into regional leaders or globally competitive businesses by unlocking distribution, talent, and growth capital. This is how ecosystems mature.

Short-term residency programs for seed-stage founders are another underused tool. Temporary placements in regional or global hubs allow teams to meet customers, build partnerships, and establish investor relationships without permanent relocation. These programs are not about extraction or brain drain. They are about proximity to markets and the ability to return stronger.

Charity sustains life, especially in moments of urgent need. Investment sustains possibility. The two are not in opposition, and both are necessary. But only investment builds durable systems that allow people to create, own, and grow over time.

This is an invitation to move from sympathy to partnership, and from short-term relief to long-term rebuilding. By investing in people and systems together, we can help create the conditions for Palestinian innovation to thrive as part of a connected regional and global economy.

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Dr. Sharareh Noorbaloochi works across technology and capital formation, focusing on how innovation reaches global markets. Her background in neuroscience, social psychology, and applied AI informs her work building structures that support underrepresented founders and emerging ecosystems.

Building an Applied AI Workforce Pathway in Palestine

Courtesy of Palestine Innovation Initiative





A new effort led by the Palestine Innovation Initiative (PII) aims to strengthen how advanced technology talent is developed in Palestine by focusing not only on tools and credentials, but on applied capability, decision-making, and job-relevant experience. The initiative is designed to complement existing academic and professional pathways while aligning advanced training with real workforce demand.

Founded and led by Anan Anabtawi, PII was created in response to a structural reality facing the Palestinian economy. Palestine has no meaningful natural resources, its agricultural capacity is severely constrained, and decades of occupation have limited access to land and water, restricting many traditional forms of economic development. As a result, one of the few scalable opportunities available is the development and export of knowledge, skills, and human capital. Remote, digitally delivered work – particularly in advanced technology fields – has emerged as a practical pathway for economic participation beyond physical and political constraints. This is especially true in areas such as artificial intelligence, data, and applied systems, where demand is growing rapidly across the Gulf and internationally, and where work can increasingly be performed across borders.

Palestine already has a well-educated population and strong academic foundations in science and engineering. However, fewer opportunities exist for graduates and working professionals to gain structured, applied experience in designing, evaluating, and operating real-world AI systems under realistic organizational constraints.

As demand for applied AI talent accelerates across the Gulf and global markets – often through remote or hybrid roles – this mismatch between foundational education and applied readiness represents both a challenge and an opportunity. PII's response is a focused, practice-driven Applied AI & Decision Systems program, designed to align advanced training with real employer needs while supporting sustainable workforce development.

A core objective of the highly selective three-month program is to develop Berkeley-certified applied AI practitioners who are ready to contribute immediately within complex organizational environments, including government, finance, healthcare, infrastructure, and enterprise technology teams across the Gulf and international markets. The program is explicitly designed to align applied training with actual employer demand.

Applied projects and casework are localized to real market needs, reflecting the types of systems, constraints, and decision environments encountered in regional digital transformation initiatives, regulated industries, and large-scale operational settings. This ensures that participants graduate with experience that translates directly into employability and on-the-job impact, particularly in remote and cross-border roles.

In parallel, the program develops Berkeley-certified professionals trained in advanced applied teaching and mentoring methods, enabling graduates not only to perform individually, but also to train others and multiply impact within their organizations. This approach supports sustainable skills diffusion across the Palestinian technology ecosystem without requiring large-scale or permanent external staffing.

meaningfully in regional and global technology markets – particularly in environments where remote, knowledge-based work represents one of the few scalable economic pathways available.

"This is not about teaching tools," Anabtawi explains. "It's about building applied capability in artificial intelligence that aligns with real demand, supports professional growth, and



UC Berkeley provides academic leadership through program design, assessment standards, and direct remote instructional delivery, ensuring that applied training meets globally recognized benchmarks while remaining grounded in practical, market-relevant application.

Launching in the 2027 academic year, the program is designed to create a durable pipeline of Palestinian applied AI talent capable of participating enables sustainable participation in the global technology economy."

More information about PII, its partners, and Berkeley University is available at the website of Palestine Innovation Initiative.

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Palestine Innovation Initiative (PII) is a coordination platform that brings together universities, practitioners, and philanthropic or investment-aligned partners to develop applied AI capability consistent with global practice. Its work centers on coordinated training, applied engagement, and the development and export of AI-enabled skills.

Afif Bulos

Do you remember Afif Bulos (1914-1982)



...the great Palestinian musician, scholar, and impresario? Your memories are important for the historical record of pre-Nakba cultural life in Palestine!

Independent filmmaker Josh Peterson is developing a documentary about the life and times of Afif Bulos. Peterson knew him in Beirut in the late 1970s but is also doing original research on Afif's youth in Akka and Jerusalem.

The eldest son of Daud Bulos, MD, Afif was very active in Jerusalem between 1935 and 1947, performing as a classical pianist and singer at the YMCA, British Council, and other venues, and in broadcasts on the Palestine Broadcasting Service. In 1946 he created the Jerusalem Orpheus Choir, which held several concerts, including a 1947 production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*.

We are seeking more information and details about Afif's early years in Palestine. Anyone with memories of Afif, the Jerusalem Orpheus Choir, and/or any performances is kindly requested to contact us at bulosfilm@gmail.com.







A Phoenix Rising from the Ashes

The Palestinian Tech Sector

By Alan El-Kadhi



Alsalam female coworking space in Gaza.

> **Despite the destruction caused by the decades-long blockade and the ongoing assaults on the Palestinian territories, we see signs of revival and hope rising like a Phoenix from ashes (and literally so in Gaza).**



Qusai, 30, a freelance computer engineer in Gaza.

Online digital work has long been one of the few sectors that can thrive in Palestine. It overcomes the severe restrictions on physical movement of people and goods to allow Palestinians to work remotely online for clients around the world. The tech sector is now even more critical than before October 2023. In Gaza, tech will be the fastest sector to revive. Agriculture and manufacturing will require considerable time and investment to rebuild. Conversely, a tech talent just needs a laptop and access to the internet.

In 2021, when I moved from my home in Australia to take on the role of Director of Gaza Sky Geeks in Palestine, I discovered a tech sector that was becoming internationally recognized as a location where superb tech talent could be found at an attractive price. This is understandable because Palestine has an abundance of "human capital" relative to its size. The Palestinian population is young (50 percent are under 25), educated (Palestine ranks high in world literacy and university level education), Arabic speaking with a good command of the English language, and in a time zone that is convenient for remote work to clients in Europe, the USA and the Middle East. Before October 2023, Gaza was thus home to thousands of Palestinian freelancers, and dozens of specialist tech companies. Working online for clients outside of Gaza was embedded into their DNA, because the blockade that had been imposed for more than a decade had destroyed any local market for their tech services. The West Bank housed hundreds of successful tech companies, many of whom generated a reasonable portion of their revenue servicing the Israeli market.

Since October 2023, the situation has been catastrophic for the Palestinian people and the economy, with massive devastation and death tolls in Gaza and the collapse of an already weak economy in the West Bank. The tech sector has been similarly impacted, with the physical destruction of infrastructure and a devastating loss of talent in Gaza, and tech companies in the West Bank struggling to survive. Many companies have lost contracts with long-standing customers outside of Palestine, and many reported non-payment by Israeli clients for work already delivered.

A recent research report by Dr. Mohammed Alshurafa, a professor at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, outlining the impact of the blockade and assault on Gaza provides harrowing insights on the compounded impact on Gazans and the Gaza tech sector: an infrastructure in ruins, the excessive surveillance of online activity, the termination of client contracts and relationships, the free fall of the economy, and an acceleration of brain drain.*

Especially in Gaza, there is a critical need for more coworking spaces. A US$100 donation will pay for one Gazan to access a coworking space for one month. Please join the movement and help connect Palestinian talent to international opportunities!



Alsalam coworking space in Gaza.

In Gaza, coworking spaces are being created by the local tech community. These spaces are foundational to revive the tech sector because they enable Gazans to return to learning and earning online. Many spaces are being created in large tents or in damaged buildings, furnished with desks and access to electricity and Wi-Fi, powered by solar panels. Amid despairing shortages and surging prices, access to the internet is a lifeline in Gaza, offering a way to earn the money to buy critical items for survival. Colleagues also tell us that learning and working online can bring a form of mental therapy by allowing people to focus on something positive even while immersed in such desperate and miserable conditions. This desire, resilience, and the need to go online is reflected by the large volume of participants in Gaza who continue to join Gaza Sky Geeks' tech training courses. Of the more than 2,000 participants who completed a Gaza Sky Geeks training course in 2025, 32 percent joined online from Gaza, despite their horrendous and dangerous conditions. (The other 68 percent joined from the West Bank and East Jerusalem).

To most young adults, online work is the only opportunity to make a respectable income. Surveys of West Bank participants indicate that 6 months after graduating from a Gaza Sky Geeks training course, more than 40 percent of them secured incomes above $900 per month. (Due to security challenges, Gaza Sky Geeks has delayed surveying the Gaza participants of 2025.) As the Palestinian tech sector is facing huge challenges, collaboration across all supporting stakeholders is essential, and connecting to international markets is critical. The tech sector, the economy, and livelihoods of Palestinian people are dependent on tech talent being able to access international customers because the local market is effectively nonexistent.

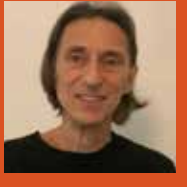
Tens of thousands of people around the world are contributing practical assistance to the Palestinian tech sector. NGOs, employees, volunteers, tech gurus, business experts, and university academics are helping to provide world class skills training, mentoring, business and legal advice, internships, and connections to jobs and income.

Please join this movement by helping connect Palestinian talent to international opportunities.

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Please donate here:

https://europe.mercycorps.org/donate/gazaskygeeks.



Since 2021, Alan El-Kadhi has been director of Gaza Sky Geeks, an economic development initiative created in 2011 by the International NGO Mercy Corps to help Palestine build a high quality tech sector that services international markets. Please visit the Gaza Sky Geeks website to sign up for the newsletter, join the Gaza Sky Geeks mentorship network, and offer remote internships or employment.

*Mohammed Alshurafa, "The Impact of the Gaza Blockade and the Destruction of Telecommunications on the Digital Economy Amidst Genocide," 7amleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, December 2025.

Private Sector Partnerships

The Transformation of Export Promotion in Palestine

By Ruwa Jabr



London Tech Week - June 2024.



Pavilion at the London Tech Week, June 2024.



Participants at the Expand North Star (an annual technology startup event) in Dubai.

The role of export promotion in Palestine has been undergoing a substantive and deliberate transformation. Operating within an economy shaped by fragmentation, restricted mobility, and recurrent shocks, Palestine Trade Center (PalTrade) has moved beyond a narrow focus on trade facilitation toward an integrated export development model, one that systematically links market intelligence, physical market presence, digitalization, human capital, and private sector partnerships. Central to this shift has been the recognition that sustainable export growth requires institutional adaptability, proximity to markets, and collaboration with private actors as co-builders rather than passive stakeholders.

Private sector partnerships now sit at the core of PalTrade's approach. Rather than acting solely as an intermediary, PalTrade increasingly positions itself as a connector between Palestinian enterprises and international buyers, service providers, financial institutions, and ecosystem actors. These partnerships enable firms to integrate into value chains, test market demand, and move beyond episodic export transactions toward longer-term commercial relationships. In a context where uncertainty is structural, partnerships have become a primary mechanism for sharing risk, validating competitiveness, and sustaining access to external markets.

This transformation also reflects an expanded understanding of what constitutes an export. While agriculture, manufacturing, and agro-processing remain central to Palestine's productive base, PalTrade has broadened its scope to explicitly include ICT, digital services, and technology-enabled business models. Software development, digital platforms, creative services, and data-driven solutions are increasingly recognized as viable export pathways, less constrained by geography and closely aligned with global demand. Importantly, ICT is not treated as a stand-alone sector, but as a crosscutting enabler embedded across PalTrade's export support architecture, strengthening competitiveness in both traditional and emerging industries.

A cornerstone of this evolution is the Market Intelligence Hub, established as a centralized and continuously updated function providing exporters with structured market insights, regulatory and standards guidance, buyer intelligence, and sector-specific analysis. By shifting from ad hoc advisory services toward a systematic intelligence function, PalTrade has reduced information asymmetries that often prevent firms from making informed export decisions. The hub also serves as a shared interface between exporters and private market actors, translating demand



signals into actionable guidance and supporting more strategic positioning across goods and services exports.

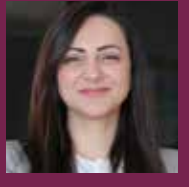
This digital backbone is complemented by investment in shared physical export infrastructure. The establishment of a warehouse and logistics hub in Rotterdam represents a shift from short-term promotion toward sustained operational engagement in European markets. By offering a physical consolidation point for exports, the warehouse reduces logistics friction, lowers trade costs, and improves delivery predictability, particularly for small and medium-sized exporters facing scale constraints. Together, the Market Intelligence Hub and the Rotterdam warehouse demonstrate how digital intelligence and physical execution can be combined to address structural barriers to trade.

This integrated model is now being extended through PalTrade's representative office in Saudi Arabia, designed to translate centralized market intelligence into on-the-ground engagement in one of the region's most strategically important markets. Functioning as an operational extension of the Market Intelligence Hub, the Saudi office connects Palestinian exporters directly with buyers, chambers of commerce, and private sector partners, enabling real-time validation of market demand and faster conversion of intelligence into commercial opportunities. By combining data-driven insights with permanent market presence, the office strengthens credibility, shortens pathways to partnership, and reinforces PalTrade's shift toward sustained, relationship-based export promotion.

Human capital development further reinforces this model. Export competitiveness, particularly in ICT and service-driven sectors, depends as much on skills as on access. PalTrade has increasingly worked at the intersection of trade and employment, linking exporters with demand-driven training and talent development aligned with international market requirements.

Taken together, these shifts illustrate PalTrade's repositioning as a modern export promotion institution, one that integrates goods and services, digital intelligence and physical presence, and private sector partnerships as core infrastructure for resilience. As Palestine navigates its digital horizons, this partnership-led, systems-based approach underscores the role of adaptive institutions in enabling sustainable, private sector-driven export growth under constraint.

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Ruwa Jabr is the CEO of the Palestine Trade Center (PalTrade) and one of its youngest leaders, with over 20 years of experience in trade and export development. She has led major strategies to strengthen Palestinian SMEs, promote exports, and enhance market intelligence. Her career includes senior roles at PalTrade and leadership positions with international NGOs such as Oxfam. Ruwa is also an entrepreneur and a strong advocate for youth and women's economic empowerment. She holds a master's degree in business management, combining strategic leadership with hands-on expertise.

The Palestinian Diaspora

A Strategic Asset for the Tech Sector

By Feras Nasr



Know Thy Heritage Diaspora Conference 2025.

The Palestinian diaspora refers to the large community of Palestinians living outside historic Palestine, forming transnational networks connected to their homeland. Currently, nearly 8 million Palestinians live outside historic Palestine, with the majority residing in the Middle East and around 1 million living in North and South America and the Far East. Despite decades of displacement, the Palestinian diaspora continues to maintain close ties to its homeland and plays a significant role in preserving Palestinian national identity while providing social, cultural, and economic support.

Members of the Palestinian diaspora have achieved notable successes across various fields and have been advocates of the Palestinian cause around the world. Names include Edward Said in academia, Rashida Tlaib in politics, Amer Zaher and Mo Amer in arts and culture, and the Hadid family in fashion. As entrepreneurs and business executives, Palestinians have created enormous value with well-known leaders such as Talal Abu Ghazaleh, Elia Nuqul, Farouk Shami, Samer Khoury, Ibrahim Dabdoub, and others who have founded and led multinational enterprises.

In addition to these well-known figures, the Palestinian diaspora includes countless individuals who provide vital support and solidarity to their homeland. This support takes many forms, including donations that provide food and shelter for Palestinians in need through organizations such as Anera, Palestine Children's Relief Fund, HEAL Palestine, and more. Others provide support with educational scholarships for students pursuing university studies through organizations such as Arab Student Aid International, Palestinian Students and Scholars at Risk, and the Canadian Palestinian Professional Foundation. Together, these efforts empower Palestinians at home and strengthen the bonds that unite Palestinians worldwide.

The question that many members of the Palestinian diaspora commonly ask is: What more can be done to support our homeland? Indeed, the Palestinian diaspora can play an important role in promoting and empowering the technology sector. Practical steps can be taken to support a sector with enormous potential that can be expanded to create opportunities for all stakeholders. While there are already many successful examples of diaspora engagement in this vibrant and promising sector, much more can still be done.

Although still young, the Palestinian tech sector is dynamic and resilient.[1] It has overcome significant challenges during difficult periods, including the prolonged blockade and repeated violent assaults on Gaza, incursions in the West Bank, the COVID-19 pandemic, and, more recently, the war on Gaza. Despite these conditions, Palestinians have continued to innovate and create. With a laptop and an internet connection, they have built companies, developed products, and distributed them globally. They continue to do so every day.

Returning to the central question: How can members of the Palestinian diaspora support, and benefit from,

> **"How can we help?" is a question commonly asked by members of the Palestinian diaspora. While financial and food contributions are all very much needed and appreciated, especially in the challenging times we live in, there are other effective, more sustainable, and mutually beneficial ways that Palestinians abroad can support their country.**



A Diaspora Networking reception during London Tech Week 2023.

the tech sector in Palestine? Below are several possible approaches, recognizing that additional options may exist depending on individual preferences and available resources.

One of the most effective ways for business executives and technology leaders to engage is by assembling a team of Palestinian professionals. Companies benefit from access to qualified and dedicated talent and in many cases can enjoy cost efficiencies, as the typical monthly salary of a Palestinian IT expert or developer ranges between $900 and $2,400,[2] depending on experience and specialization. At the same time, building such teams creates job opportunities and provides valuable professional experience for Palestinian developers.

There are two main options for building a team. The first is to register a company in Palestine and hire a local team. This entity can be a branch of an international company or an independent company that operates through a service contract with an international partner. Company registration can be completed online through the Ministry of National Economy's Automated Business Registry System. In addition, the World Bank–funded Technology for Youth and Jobs (TechStart) project provides incentives and grants to support the establishment of new technology companies and the hiring of talent in Palestine. Talent can be sourced through local or regional job boards or recruiting agencies such as Business Alliance and Synergia, which also provide Employer of Record services.

The second option is to contract an existing Palestinian tech company. Outsourcing models such as staff augmentation allow international companies to extend their teams with minimal administrative overhead. Many Palestinian firms have operated under this model for nearly two decades. Outsourcing services gained momentum following a visit by Cisco's then chairman and CEO, John Chambers.[3] Companies such as ASAL Technologies, Exalt, Jaffa.NET, Radix Technologies, and others operate successfully under this model, working with a wide range of international and multinational clients. A longer list of Palestinian tech companies can be found at the directory page of Tech 194.[4]

Another option is to invest in Palestinian tech companies and startups. As in many countries worldwide, the startup ecosystem in Palestine is active, energetic, and continuously evolving. New startups regularly emerge, building minimum viable products, acquiring clients, and increasingly seeking investment. Although the ecosystem remains nascent and faces significant challenges, it also presents meaningful opportunities for investors and high-net-worth individuals to both support and benefit from its growth.

At present, Ibtikar Fund[5] is the only active venture capital firm operating in Palestine. It raised its second fund in 2022 and continues to invest in Palestinian startups.

Additional investment is needed to help startups scale, enter new markets, and further develop their products. Investments can be made directly as an angel investor or through venture capital firms, either international or local, including Ibtikar Fund. The World Bank–funded IPSD II program also provides co-investment grants to Palestinian startups that successfully secure external investment.

Yet another option is to provide internships or job opportunities to Palestinian students and graduates. Gaining global professional experience can have a transformative impact on young Palestinian tech professionals. Such experiences can significantly shape career paths and provide critical guidance at the start of their professional journeys. Due to restrictions on mobility, exposure to international markets remains limited and out-of-reach for most university graduates. Thus, offering internships or job opportunities, whether remote or in person, can deliver substantial

A Diaspora Networking reception during London Tech Week 2023.





Know Thy Heritage Diaspora Conference 2025.

Actions that Palestinian diaspora members can take to support families and communities and help them not only survive but grow and flourish include: building a team or founding a company, investing in Palestinian startups, providing internship opportunities for students and recent graduates, mentoring aspiring young professionals and entrepreneurs, and visiting Palestine. Consider this a call to action!

benefits. In addition to technical skills, participants are exposed to international business practices and workplace culture, which are best learned through experience rather than instruction.

Palestinian universities graduate approximately 3,000 students annually in technology-related fields. Numerous initiatives and programs further train graduates and help facilitate internships and employment opportunities. Programs supported by Spark International, TAP, AXSOS, Apricot, Gaza Sky Geeks, and others provide motivated, qualified candidates ready to contribute.

Likewise, mentoring aspiring Palestinian professionals and entrepreneurs is a great option to support the Palestinian tech ecosystem. Many young Palestinian tech professionals and aspiring entrepreneurs lack exposure to international business environments. Becoming a mentor is an effective way to strengthen the ecosystem, whether on an individual basis or through programs such as Palestine Techno Park's Tech Circles that connect diaspora mentors with groups of Palestinian university graduates for structured discussions over multiple sessions. Topics range from technical subjects to soft skills development, interview preparation, and understanding how to work within a global team.

As one mentor, Hatem Sahouri, noted: "By being a mentor in the Tech Circles program,[6] I benefited more than I ever could have imagined. The experience was far more beneficial for me than it was for the mentees."

Moreover, consider a visit to Palestine. While travel may be challenging for some, visiting Palestine can be a powerful experience for those who are able. Despite uncertainty and difficulty, visitors often leave with a deep sense of pride, connection, and belonging. Such visits can transform perceptions of Palestine – from an occupied land to a place that is welcoming, resilient, and capable of growth despite enduring severe, human-made obstacles.

Organizations such as Know Thy Heritage[7] regularly organize trips to Palestine. Its conference in Washington, DC, in September 2025 helped connect members of the Palestinian diaspora with opportunities to better understand both the challenges and the potential within Palestine.

One thing is certain: The Palestinian diaspora takes great pride in its roots. Diaspora members wear the Palestinian flag and keffiyeh proudly and have contributed to a global movement that has fostered solidarity and identification with the Palestinian cause worldwide. I urge each reader to implement one action from the suggestions above or find another way to support. Finally, connect with others and spread the word.

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Feras Nasr, a technology professional with a diverse background, has worked in various industries in the United States, Canada, and the Middle East. With experience in IT management, system and network administration, security, software development, and more, he is passionate about startups with interests in AI, fintech, and cybersecurity. He's currently program manager at TechStart and responsible for improving market access for Palestinian tech companies.

[1] Feras Nasr, "Palestine's Vibrant IT Sector," *This Week in Palestine*, September 2023.

[2] Palestine Outsourcing Destination Guide: ICT Sector Insights, Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies (PITA) and German Outsourcing Association (GIZ), 2023.

[3] The Palestinian Tech Story, "Our Timeline," Tech 194, available at https://tech194.com/history.

[4] The Palestinian Tech Story, "Palestine's Tech Ecosystem Directory," Tech194.

5 "Investing in Innovative Palestinian Startups," Ibtikar Fund.

[6] Diaspora News, "The Palestine Diaspora Technology Network," Palestine Techno Park.

[7] "KTH, Leadership Initiative: Explore and Serve Palestine," Know Thy Heritage, Palestine.

Palestine's Growth Potential Lies in Its Human Capital

By Majd Zghyer



> **In Palestine, human capital serves as a strategic asset and a solid pillar of a knowledge-based economy.**

No one can overlook the economic, social, and physical damages that have been inflicted on the Palestinian people over the past two years, not only in Gaza, where the situation is dire and grave, but also in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. According to latest estimates,[1] Gaza's total recovery and reconstruction needs are projected to reach US$67 billion. Of course, the figures increase even more when we take into account the social and economic needs of the West Bank, where unemployment rates reached a historic high of 35 percent in Q1 2024 (before decreasing to 28.6 percent by Q3 2025).[2] It is also worth highlighting that the economic crisis has been severely exacerbated by the continuation of Israel's punitive measures of illegally withholding Palestinian tax revenues and imposing increasingly tighter movement and access restrictions. The combination of all these factors has led to a sharp contraction of Palestinian real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to levels not seen since 2009 – effectively wiping out 15 years of progress and growth.[3]

The staggering costs for Gaza's rebuilding and the resources required to transform the Palestinian economy constitute enormous funding gaps that cannot be filled by governments or traditional donors alone. Hence, there is an unprecedented opportunity to tap into different forms of capital, including development finance institutions, sovereign wealth funds, impact investors, private equity, venture capital, and diaspora-linked financing instruments. Such financial resources could provide the needed funds and technical expertise not only to help rebuild Gaza but also to enable a process of economic transformation in the entirety of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

While the top priority for Palestinians is to reclaim their agency during the recovery and reconstruction process in Gaza, it is equally important to link this process with the long-term vision for a Palestinian economy that is independent (i.e., less reliant on the Israeli side or on donors), competitive, sustainable, and inclusive. For this vision to materialize, however, a fresh narrative must be adopted that highlights Palestine's growth potential and presents investments in its economy not only through the lens of global solidarity but as strategic, commercially rewarding opportunities that have the capacity to overcome physical restrictions, transcend borders, and deliver impact at home and abroad.

Although Palestine's development potential has been largely constrained by long years of occupation and the associated restrictions on the movement of people, goods, and capital, our history and past experience provide lessons on how Palestinian human capital has become the most strategic asset that can unlock the country's growth potential and pave the way for a future of opportunity, dignity, and prosperity. Despite all obstacles, Palestine's young, talented population, where almost 65 percent are under the age of 30, with a literacy rate of approximately 98 percent (among the highest in the MENA region[4]) can provide the key input for a high-performing, knowledge-based economy.

Moreover, when considering some of the key metrics that assess the performance of the digital economy, the figures for Palestine are encouraging as well. For example, it is estimated that more than 1.65 million people use the internet, while 98 percent of the population owns a smart phone, and more than 2,500 ICT talents graduate from Palestinian universities every year.[5] In addition, a versatile diaspora community

(across Europe, the Americas, and the Arab world) is perfectly positioned to provide a much-needed support system to nurture innovation and investment in high-added-value industries that have the potential to transform the structure of the Palestinian economy and pave the way for greater productivity and sustainability.

Amid all the destruction we have seen since October 2023, the successful participation of the Palestinian National Football Team (Al Fiday'e) in the Qatar-hosted Arab Cup 2025 brought a glimpse of hope for the Palestinian people and reiterated to the world their willingness to show up and compete despite all odds. This mentality of *sumud* (resilience) that prevailed in all Fiday'e matches can be found across the various spheres of Palestinian life, including in business and economic activities, where Palestinians have managed to succeed because of the challenges they face, not in spite of them.

In other words, Palestinian business founders and entrepreneurs have managed to build resilient businesses that can operate in tough working environments. Such successful businesses operate across a range of sectors (including banking, technology, manufacturing, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, and agribusiness) and can either be privately held companies or public companies listed on the Palestine Stock Exchange (PEX). Despite the differences in their domain or size, these companies share a common characteristic: They deploy human capital as a strategic asset and enabler of growth. In other words, they are all run by highly professional management teams, employ talented workforces, and demonstrate credibility by attracting investment and financial support from institutional investors and key development finance institutions (such as the EBRD, IFC, EIB, and others).



Some of the sectors that can serve as engines of economic growth include financial services, information and communication technology (ICT), healthcare and pharmaceutical, renewable energy, and agri-tech and smart farming sectors.

To ensure the competitiveness and viability of the Palestinian economy in the years ahead, the focus of any economic recovery strategy should target supporting industries and sectors that rely more on the involvement of highly skilled tech-enabled human resources. While investments in physical infrastructure (mainly in Gaza) will be necessary in the coming years – as Palestinian cities require an advanced network of urban areas, roads, transportation, energy, and water systems etc., – the backbone of a forward-looking economy is ultimately based on investments in competitive industries, where Palestinians have a clear comparative advantage to scale domestically, regionally, and globally.

Given that economic growth is a function of capital, labor, and technology (as theoretically envisaged in the Solow-Swan Growth Model[6]), finding the perfect combination of human capital and technology is key to unlocking untapped opportunities for economic growth, with positive spillover effects on job creation, export competitiveness, foreign direct investment, and private sector dynamism. In today's age of automation and advanced technologies, such transformative opportunities are driven by mostly service-based sectors that harness human capital and leverage its productivity with the use of digital technology. This enables countries to bypass several phases of economic development and leapfrog into a resilient knowledge-based economy fit for the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

Taking into account the specificity of the Palestinian economy, and the structure of its various established and emerging sectors, there are several sectors where a similar dynamic interplay between human capital and technology can be unlocked. The impact of these sectors will not only be realized by their direct contribution to GDP, but more importantly, by their potential to serve as engines of economic growth that shape new opportunities in other sectors and industries.

The first sector where such opportunities can be harnessed is financial services. The Palestinian banking sector has demonstrated its resilience by showcasing steady growth despite the (almost never-ending) political and economic shocks, as clearly reflected in the increase in the sector's total assets from around US$2 billion in 1996 to approximately US$25 billion by the end of 2024.[7] It is worth noting that the financial services sector is not limited to banking but also includes several essential subsectors such as insurance, financial intermediaries, microfinance, investment advisory, fintech, and digital payment processors. The existence of credible Palestinian companies, the robust regulatory oversight framework (by the Palestine Monetary Authority and the Palestine Capital Markets Authority), and the talented workforce can all provide the key ingredients for



With a national ambition of producing 30 percent of electricity from domestic renewable energy sources by 2030, the opportunities in the renewable energy sector are immense and can offer various pathways to advance energy security and transition targets and promote high-quality job creation.

this sector to expand and enable Palestine to become a regional hub for financial services and a provider of competitive fintech solutions.

Secondly, the information and communication technology (ICT) sector has seen remarkable growth in the last decade, as the sector currently contributes around 5–7 percent of GDP and employs approximately 14,000 talented individuals in more than 500 ICT-related companies that provide competitive software and tech-enabled services to a wide variety of regional and international clients.[8] Amid the most challenging circumstances, the recent launch of Orion, the first Palestinian semiconductor design firm, demonstrates the role of the ICT sector as a beacon of hope and enabler of growth.[9] Similarly, the Palestinian entrepreneurial ecosystem has been producing innovative tech startups that managed to receive the backing of institutional investors and scale their operations to new regional and international markets. While the ecosystem is still characterized as being in the early activation phase,[10] it represents an enormous opportunity to become a real engine for high-quality job creation and a recipient of significant sums of direct investment from the region and beyond.

Thirdly, while health remains an integral part that supports Palestinian resilience, the healthcare and pharmaceutical sector also represents one of the main drivers of growth, given the urgent need to localize and upgrade healthcare services by reducing medical referrals to neighboring countries and relying more on a domestic web of public medical facilities and private suppliers of specialized healthcare services, medicines, and medical supplies. In fact, the remarkable success achieved in the pharmaceutical sector in recent years – where six Palestinian pharmaceutical manufacturers that adhere to the highest global standards currently produce around 55 percent of the local market's demand for medicine – provides practical lessons that could be replicated throughout the healthcare national ecosystem.[11] In a nutshell, increased private sector investments in the sector can leverage the existing talented medical workforce and combine it with the introduction of digital technology to increase the output and quality of the provided services and products, ultimately reducing the need for outside medical services and enhancing the sector's overall competitiveness.

Fourthly, while increasing domestic generation of renewable energy is a top policy priority for Palestine, efforts to reduce dependence on imported electricity and investment in the sector provide another strategic opportunity to generate added value and create jobs. This is evidenced by the latest launch of TAQA that was established by joint investment from the Palestine Investment Fund, Bank of Palestine, and Arab Palestinian Investment Company (APIC).[12] Whereas TAQA's focus will be on medium- to large-scale solar energy projects, the opportunities in the renewable energy sector are immense and can offer various pathways not only to advance energy security and transition targets but also to promote job creation by harnessing the existing pool of talented Palestinian engineers, environmental specialists, technical experts, and project managers.

Finally, despite the severe constraints imposed on access to land, water resources, and movement of goods, the emergence of the agri-tech and smart farming sector in recent years can revive the role of agriculture as an indispensable anchor for Palestinian resilience and sustainability. In essence, modern agri-tech solutions (such as vertical farming, hydroponics, smart greenhouses, and AI-powered crop planning) can contribute to a total transformation of how agriculture works by maximizing the use of limited resources and significantly reducing production costs.[13] These solutions offer Palestinian agribusinesses an unprecedented opportunity to move into high-added-value crops (beyond the proven success of the Medjool dates and olives export-oriented sectors), reinforcing the role of agriculture as a food security buffer, growth engine, and source of job creation.

Critics might dismiss these opportunities as too abstract (or even utopian), given the immense destruction and the loss of hope the Palestinian



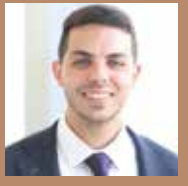
Modern and smart agri-tech solutions can offer Palestinian agribusinesses an unprecedented opportunity to move into high-added-value crops, reinforcing the role of agriculture as a food security buffer, growth engine, and source of job creation.

people have so far experienced. Yet, despite the grim reality of living under a cruel occupation that kills every prospect for any thriving economy, the DNA of resilience remains the unique selling point for Palestinian businesses. More importantly, the sectors demonstrated above are based on a realistic understanding of the structure of the Palestinian economy; an understanding that aims to build on previous successes, capitalize on resilience, and harness the role of human capital as the key strategic asset to unlock untapped potential and transform the national economy.

Although the reconstruction of Gaza will be the key task ahead for the Palestinian people and leadership, it is critical to avoid repeating the mistakes of past reconstruction efforts.[14] Indeed, investing in physical infrastructure, including housing, roads, energy, water, etc., will be necessary to achieve a minimum level of economic viability and the envisioned integration of the West Bank and Gaza, but it is equally important to link this process with the long-term vision of a Palestinian economy that capitalizes on its intangible strengths and meets the aspirations of the Palestinian people, especially the tech-empowered youth who will form the basis for a future knowledge-based economy.

Ultimately, a key issue that needs to be addressed, taking into account the past record, is the role of government in the economy. While the Palestinian government has recently made concrete efforts in updating the business-enabling environment, government officials should acknowledge that they do not possess all answers to every question and that creating a level playing field for business and private capital is a precondition to unlocking the genuine potential of the Palestinian economy and attracting investors who view investment in emerging Palestinian industries as strategic win-win partnerships that reward talent, hard work, and determination to succeed despite all odds.

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Majd Zghyer is an economist based in Jerusalem. A former Palestinian diplomat, he has also worked as a consultant with the World Bank on macroeconomics and public finance and recently provided analytical advisory services to the Palestinian government. He holds an MA in political economy from King's College London and a BA in economics from Birzeit University. More details are available in his LinkedIn profile.

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Entrepreneurship amid Fragmented Markets

Reflections from Jerusalem

By Hazem Tirhi



> **I learned from working in fragmented markets that entrepreneurship support must shift from symbolic ecosystem-building to deliberate gap-filling. This means that we must invest less in stand-alone programs and more in connective tissue; we must provide shared workspaces that facilitate access to clients and investors, and financing instruments should be designed for continuity rather than scale alone.**

Entrepreneurship in Jerusalem does not begin with a business plan. It begins with a calculation: how to operate when markets are fragmented, movement is restricted, policy is incoherent, and the future is uncertain by design. Before diving into more detail, let me clarify fragmentation. In short, it means that support exists, but rarely in sequence or in synergy. Accelerators without follow-on funding, training without market access, and innovation without pathways to scale. The result is an ecosystem that produces activity but struggles to produce sustainable businesses.

Between 2019 and 2022, I co-founded and led an innovation and MSME support hub in Jerusalem. The intention was familiar: Support entrepreneurs, strengthen businesses, and contribute to economic resilience through skills, networks, and access. The hub was established as COVID-19 was unfolding, in a city that exists economically on the margins, disconnected from Palestinian markets, constrained by political and regulatory barriers, and largely absent from national economic planning. In this environment, entrepreneurship is often framed as hope. In practice, it is closer to coping.

The hub was created to respond to absence. Donors spoke of ecosystems, innovation pipelines, scalability, and success stories, of course! Entrepreneurs spoke of decent places to work, like-minded people to connect with, and access to potential clients or investors. The gap between these conversations was not ideological, it was structural. We were attempting to build entrepreneurial momentum in a place where the basic conditions for market continuity were fragile at best. In 2022, Palestine's tech startup ecosystem remained in an early activation phase, with fewer than 300 active tech startups and very limited early-stage funding.* According to the Startup Genome data on the Palestinian ecosystem, the total ecosystem value for the period H2 2022–2024 is US$72 million, compared to a global average of US$20.4 billion. During the same period, total early-stage funding amounted to US$8 million, versus a global average of US$514.8 million.

Like many entrepreneurship programs, we began with a familiar toolkit: technical training, mentoring, business modeling, and investment-readiness activities. These interventions are not wrong. I learned quickly, however, that they are simply incomplete. They assume a functioning market where access to clients, payments, logistics, and legal clarity can be taken for granted. Jerusalem offers none of these consistently.

Before and during the establishment of the hub, I had the opportunity to visit and study other entrepreneurship ecosystems. These experiences both sharpened my vision and, at times, deepened my frustration because they made Jerusalem's fragmentation more visible, and more intractable.

In 2019, I visited Gaza for the first time. Despite near-total infrastructural collapse, I encountered an astonishing density of entrepreneurial



energy expressed through what felt like beehives of young people working relentlessly to push ideas, products, and voices beyond imposed boundaries. The lesson was stark: When infrastructure is absent, education, skills, and resilience become the primary compensating assets. In Gaza, innovation was supported by determination rather than by systems.

In Jordan, I met with Oasis500 as one of the few seed-stage investment actors in the ecosystem, before the entry of players such as Flat6Labs. The lesson was different: Being alone gives flexibility but limits scale. Ecosystems cannot mature without collaboration among aligned institutions.

Visiting Denmark offered yet another contrast. What appeared initially as a low-profile ecosystem revealed itself as highly effective within specific domains such as fintech and clean and agri-tech. Strong universities, applied research labs, and private-public partnerships formed a powerful engine. The lesson was clear: When the recipe is right, success becomes a matter of time.

Finally, Silicon Valley, the place many entrepreneurs aspire to visit and learn from, remains a powerful reference point. Its infrastructure, capital, and institutional depth remain unmatched. Striking, however, was not what limits innovation there, but what increasingly shapes its future, namely geopolitical anxiety. Among conversations with people in leading universities, research labs, and innovation hubs, a quiet but pervasive concern about China was evident. This "China anxiety" now functions as a perceived boundary; not funding, not talent, and not infrastructure.

These comparisons clarified the meaning and nature of constraints. They also reinforced the reality that entrepreneurship in Jerusalem operates without the institutional, infrastructural, and policy scaffolding that other ecosystems take for granted. In our ecosystem, external constraint is ever-present, but it often becomes a convenient explanation for every failure. Israel as a political and structural reality is sometimes used as a hook on which all shortcomings are hung. While the constraints are real and severe, treating them as total explanations can obscure internal weaknesses that also demand accountability. Thus, in both local and international contexts, fear shapes innovation, but in very different ways and with very different consequences.

Entrepreneurship ecosystems are frequently described as networks of complementary actors that include accelerators, incubators, investment managers, research labs, private-public sector engagement, and universities. In functional contexts, these actors operate with a degree of harmony, each playing a distinct role in reducing risk and expanding opportunity for entrepreneurs. Government, in particular, provides the connective tissue, policy coherence, infrastructure, and strategic direction.

In Jerusalem, most of this architecture is either absent, fragmented, or inaccessible. Rather than an ecosystem, there exist isolated interventions that attempt to compensate for systemic gaps. Incubation substitutes for market access, training replaces policy, and donor-funded programs fill roles normally played by public institutions. Fragmentation is not abstract; it is visible and felt in every attempt to scale, collaborate, or plan beyond the short term.

The role of donors within this landscape remains complex.



Without external funding, many support structures would not exist at all. Yet donor timelines, reporting requirements, and success metrics often sit uneasily with entrepreneurial reality. Measuring numbers of workshops that have been delivered or startups that have been "incubated" is far easier than

measuring whether a business can survive six months of disruption. The language of innovation sometimes hides the harder truth that no amount of training can compensate for blocked markets.

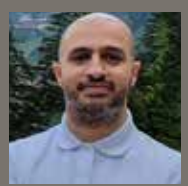
Still, not everything is failing. What works is quieter and less visible. Long-term mentoring matters more than short programs; exposure to real markets can be achieved through various engagements; trust between like-minded entrepreneurs and mentors has proven to be an economic asset. Treating businesses as economic actors rather than "beneficiaries" has fundamentally changed the relationship.

Universities can play a crucial role – not as isolated knowledge producers, but as anchors for applied research, talent pipelines, and early market validation. Donors, in turn, must prioritize predictability, working with longer funding horizons, fewer parallel initiatives, and clearer pathways between training, capital, and demand. In constrained environments, coordination is not a luxury; it is infrastructure.

Most importantly, success must be redefined. Not every venture will scale regionally or globally, and not every entrepreneur seeks exit or IPO. In places like Jerusalem, resilience is built through firms that endure, employ, and circulate income locally. Supporting these outcomes requires that ecosystem actors value survival, linkage, and legitimacy as much as growth.

Entrepreneurship in fragmented markets will never look like Silicon Valley, and it should not be judged by its metrics. But with intentional design, honest diagnostics, and coordinated action, it can move from a coping mechanism to a credible economic strategy. That shift is where real resilience begins.

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Hazem Tirhi is a development and entrepreneurship specialist who co-founded Station J in Jerusalem, supporting startups and MSMEs to build resilience in fragmented markets.

*Anera "The Tech Ecosystem in Palestine," Anera Report vol. 10, Summer 2022; unfortunately, there are no more recent reports or data available.

JINNOVATE
Jerusalem . HealthTech . Innovation . Technology

The Jerusalem Innovation Center for Health-Tech is Building a Global Health-Tech Bridge in East Jerusalem

Launched in June 2024, JINNOVATE has rapidly emerged as a vital catalyst for the MENA region's digital economy. In under two years, it has planted 13 startup companies, trained over 800 health professionals and entrepreneurs—including 190 women—and placed 27 software engineers into high-value roles.

The hub's impact is rooted in high-level integration. JINNOVATE provides startups with direct pathways to top-tier hospitals, VCs, and academic labs. This local synergy is bolstered by a strategic partnership with the University of Connecticut (UConn), where joint research initiatives help Arab founders model their businesses for global markets.

The results are tangible: seven new Arab-founded health-tech startups have been established, with two already securing seed investment and clinical pilots. Supported by 80+ tier-1 mentors, JINNOVATE's specialized programs—like Innovation Leadership in Health-Tech—transform local expertise into scalable ventures.

14 Salah-Eddin st., Jerusalem
Email: startups@jinnovate.tech
Website: https://jinnovate.tech/

UpScrolled

Born from Resistance, Built for Digital Sovereignty

Courtesy of UpScrolled



Founder of UpScrolled, Issam Hijazi, at Web Summit Qatar 2026.

We're living in a world where mainstream social media platforms are actively suppressing voices that aren't toeing the line. Freedom of speech has become monetized, colonized, and villainized. When an expression of solidarity or critical thinking results in users being shadowbanned, marginalized, or cancelled, the premise of real connection and human engagement turns into empty slogans and hollow promises.

The throttling of Palestinian voices and the online deletion of the Palestinian struggle has made this undeniable. For over a year, independent journalists documenting Gaza have watched their reach collapse overnight. Accounts that built audiences over years suddenly couldn't reach their own followers. Posts with verified footage were buried while misinformation circulated freely. They simply made it invisible.

UpScrolled was launched in 2024 by Issam Hijazi, a Palestinian-Jordanian-Australian technologist, with support from Tech for Palestine. The creation of UpScrolled was an act of resistance and solidarity. If a platform cannot advocate for everyone, then it becomes a mouthpiece for its billionaire founders' agendas and just another place to gatekeep truth and determine what discourse does or does not have value.

UpScrolled is the antithesis of Big Tech. It doesn't answer to venture capitalists demanding exponential growth. It doesn't optimize for addiction to sell advertising. It doesn't suppress content because it threatens corporate partnerships or government relationships. It exists because when your people are being erased and the platforms won't let you speak, you build your own infrastructure. It exists because protecting free speech shouldn't be performative, it should be real and undeniable.

The biggest feature of UpScrolled is what they refuse to do.

No shadowbans. No algorithmic punishment. No addiction design. The feed is chronological, not calculated by an algorithm designed to keep you hooked. Moderation is transparent and human-led, with clear community guidelines and the right to appeal. No pay-to-play boosting. Just an authentic space for users to communicate and engage.

The simplicity of returning to what social media was supposed to be, human connection, feels both fresh and overdue. When you post, your followers see it. In order. As it happens. This sounds basic because it is basic. It's what every platform promised before they realized your attention was more valuable than your connection. Your data had value, your thoughts and opinions didn't.

Currently ranked #1 in the US App store, #1 social networking app in the UK App Store, UpScrolled operates in six languages: Arabic, English, Spanish, Italian, French, and German. The platform crossed one million users this weekend, adding 500,000 people in three days. When TikTok experienced recent outages, users migrated to UpScrolled in significant numbers. The platform's X profile gained 11,000 followers overnight. Growth has been organic, no paid acquisition, no algorithmic amplification, just people telling each other that there's finally an alternative.

> **UpScrolled is building social media that refuses to silence you.**



Issam Hijazi, the founder of UpScrolled.

This momentum proves something important: People want to be seen and heard, and they will move to where that's actually happening. The opportunity to reclaim digital sovereignty and refuse the extraction economy of mainstream platforms is what advocates, independent journalists, creators, and everyday users have been waiting for.

> **A platform as an infrastructure that enables connecting the way social media was intended before Big Tech and venture capitalists placed profit over your opinion. This is the architecture of resistance.**



Hijazi, backstage at Web Summit Qatar 2026.

For Palestinian creators, journalists, and entrepreneurs, a platform free from algorithmic suppression isn't a convenience. It's survival. It's a fight against erasure, literal and digital.

When your livelihood depends on visibility, and visibility depends on systems you cannot see or appeal, you're building on sand. When you're documenting atrocities and the algorithm decides your truth is bad for engagement, you're not just losing reach, you're being economically disappeared.

This is what economic resilience looks like in the digital age. Not merely surviving the blockade of physical goods, but refusing the blockade of thoughts and ideas. Building communication channels that cannot be quietly throttled. Owning the means of connection.

But the need extends far beyond Palestine. UpScrolled has become a refuge for what might be called "collapse-honest" voices. The people who discuss difficult realities: Climate breakdown, economic instability, politics, systemic injustice, occupation, without the sugar-coating that brand-safe platforms demand. Anyone whose content challenges power, threatens corporate partnerships, or simply refuses to be optimized for advertiser comfort has felt the algorithm's invisible hand.

The platform doesn't claim to solve every problem. Transparent human moderation at scale is untested. Revenue models remain in development. Sustainability questions are real. But the alternative – continuing to build audiences on platforms that can erase you without explanation – isn't sustainable either.

In Palestinian culture, the olive tree represents sumud (steadfastness). It's the practice of remaining rooted despite every effort at uprooting. This isn't romantic metaphor. It's survival strategy developed over generations of displacement. When everything can be taken from you except what you've rooted deeply enough to outlast the taking, you learn to build for durability rather than speed.

UpScrolled applies this principle to digital space. Mainstream platforms grow like industrial farms; fast extraction, maximum yield, discard what doesn't produce. They're built for quarterly earnings, for venture capital returns, for growth metrics that demand constant engagement increases regardless of human cost.

UpScrolled grows slowly and invites users to scroll differently. With roots deep enough to survive whatever comes. Not because slow growth is virtuous, but because infrastructure that serves communities, rather than extracts from it, requires different timelines, different incentives, different measures of success.

This is resistance not as protest but as construction. Not as opposition but as alternative. When the systems designed to connect us instead exploit us, building new systems isn't fantasy, it's necessity.

Can a platform designed to respect users' time and agency actually survive in an economy that rewards addiction? The attention economy punishes restraint. Every incentive points toward exploitation. The history of ethical tech alternatives is mostly a history of failures to scale.

UpScrolled is betting there are enough people exhausted by being farmed. People are tired of platforms that treat anxiety as a feature and attention as a resource by which to extract in order to sustain something that is built differently. Early evidence suggests that bet may be sound. When given viable alternatives, users move faster than platform network effects predict.

> **UpScrolled is betting that enough users are tired of being exploited.**

For now, the infrastructure is being built. Users are migrating. Communities are forming. The alternative exists. The resistance to mainstream options is real. It is, in its way, a very Palestinian approach: Planting trees whose fruit you may never taste, because you believe in a future worth building anyway. Not because you're certain of success, but because accepting that connection must always come with exploitation is unacceptable. The grove is growing.

Information is accurate at the time of publication.

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UpScrolled was founded by Issam Hijazi and is supported by Tech for Palestine. The platform is available on iOS and Android. Visit upscrolled.com and newsroom.upscrolled.com.

Personality of the Month

Mahmoud Zaiter

Crafting Dignity Through Digital Resilience in Gaza

By Mounir Qleibo



Mahmoud Khamis Abdel Aziz Abu Zaiter, a content creator and media professional from Deir al-Balah in the Gaza Strip, embodies a profound form of digital resilience under prolonged siege. Known for his photography, humor, and human-centered storytelling, Zaiter has cultivated a wide following by documenting Gaza's everyday life – a narrative often eclipsed by dominant crisis frameworks. His education in UNRWA schools and at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, where he earned a degree in Arabic language and media, provides an academic foundation that grounds his work in clarity, credibility, and deep social awareness.

Zaiter's path to digital entrepreneurship emerged not from conventional ambition but from structural necessity. In Gaza, where traditional employment has collapsed under blockade, infrastructural decay, and the absence of a functional labor market, online work has become a vital pathway to income, autonomy, and dignity. His journey reflects a broader reality: Here, digital labor is less a symbol of global innovation and more a mechanism of survival.

Central to Zaiter's philosophy is a rejection of the idea that digital work is purely individual or profit-driven. He frames it instead as a social act that is intimately connected to community needs, especially for young people facing relentless uncertainty. In this context, technology is not a luxury or a passing trend but a functional tool for maintaining continuity in an environment of instability.

Operating digitally from Gaza involves navigating constraints seldom seen elsewhere. Chronic electricity outages disrupt productivity, while unstable internet transforms routine tasks into exercises in patience and risk. Financial barriers compound these challenges, as restricted access to international payment platforms forces reliance on costly, informal alternatives that erode sustainability and trust. Together, these limitations create a work culture defined by improvisation rather than optimization.



The blockade further impedes access to equipment and technical upgrades, directly affecting competitiveness. Zaiter describes a culture of extreme resourcefulness that includes extending device lifespans, repurposing tools, and prioritizing utility over ideal conditions. According to Zaiter, time management is dictated less by deadlines than by the availability of electricity and network stability, fundamentally redefining conventional productivity.

Yet, amid these challenges, Zaiter insists that digital initiatives must carry tangible social value to endure. His focus remains on skills transfer, individual empowerment, and creating limited but meaningful opportunities for remote work. As he articulates it, innovation in Gaza lies not in developing new technologies, but in maximizing the impact of simple tools within severe constraints.



The social returns of this approach manifest in incremental but significant ways: individuals gaining marketable digital skills, small teams connecting with clients beyond Gaza, and communities preserving a sense of productive agency. While these outcomes may appear modest from the outside, within Gaza they represent critical forms of economic and psychological resilience. Here, success is measured first by continuity, not scale.

Zaiter also cautions against viewing digital work as a comprehensive solution to siege and destruction. Digital entrepreneurship in Gaza operates without safety nets and under constant pressure; its primary achievement is often survival, not growth. Meaningful support, he argues, must begin with ensuring basic stability such as reliable electricity, functional internet, lawful payment channels, and training aligned with actual labor-market needs.

Ultimately, Mahmoud Zaiter's work redefines innovation in Gaza. It is not a trend or a privilege, but an expression of dignity, a determined insistence on remaining visible, productive, and connected to the world, despite every systemic constraint.

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Book of the Month I

All Our Kitchens

A Cookbook for a Free Palestine

With contributions by 29 chefs and recipe developers

Collected by Mia Jacobs and George Gwynne

Available online at All Our Kitchens



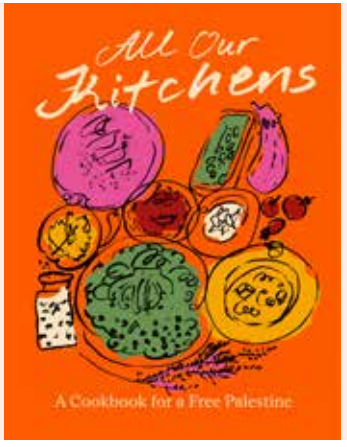
Twenty-nine chefs and recipe developers in the UK, Ireland, and Palestine have come together to create All Our Kitchens: A Cookbook for a Free Palestine, a digital cookbook that sends all profits directly to Palestinian aid organizations working on the ground in Gaza.

The beautifully designed 100-page cookbook features recipes from TV chef and author Andi Oliver and Mezcla author Ixta Belfrage, alongside prominent Palestinian voices that include bestselling author Sami Tamimi, Jerusalem-based chef Izzeldin Bukhari, recipe developers Jenan Ashi and Nisreen Shehada, and work by poets, including 19-year-old Taqwa Ahmed al-Wawi from Gaza.

Sami Tamimi uses his platform to celebrate the richness of his Palestinian culinary heritage. His contribution to the cookbook reflects years of work in bringing the flavors and traditions of Palestinian cooking to wider audiences. The full collection of recipes intentionally spans continents to demonstrate global attention on Palestine. Kenji Morimotoi contributes his family's version of nishime, an essential part of Japanese winter dinners, while "Great British Menu" presenter Andi Oliver brings her grandmother's recipe for pepperpot, the national dish of Antigua.

Still, at the heart of the project are our Palestinian contributors themselves. Jerusalem-based chef Izzeldin Bukhari, founder of Sacred Cuisine, who leads food tours through Palestine, contributed rummaniyeh (featuring rumman, pomegranate), a dish he champions for its cultural significance. "Our culinary heritage and identity spring from the creative genius of our ancestors, who mastered local ingredients and transformed the land's abundance into timeless recipes," he explains. For Bukhari, sharing this dish is about ensuring that it reaches beyond those who already know it, keeping the tradition alive for future generations.

Palestinian Welsh recipe developer Jenan Ashi shares her version of mujaddara, writing "Whether it's for the lure of sticky fried onions, or for the minty tomato and onion salad that's eaten alongside it, mujaddara always finds its way into even the most reluctant of hearts." The cookbook also includes poetry, including the powerful "I Long for My Old Life" by 19-year-old Taqwa Ahmed al-Wawi, who is currently studying English literature at the Islamic University of Gaza.



The project takes its name from a simple truth: Food brings people together, and solidarity means sharing space – in kitchens, across tables, across borders. Palestinian cuisine and produce carry the story of the land and the communities who have cultivated these ingredients for generations. Food is how cultural knowledge passes down through families, how traditions are maintained, and how heritage is preserved.

The book was created by North London couple Mia Jacobs, a chef with a global following of over 250k, and George Gwynne, an associate producer behind September 2025's sold-out Together4Palestine benefit concert at London's Wembley Arena. As a



Jewish chef standing in solidarity with Palestinians, Jacobs sees the project as an expression of shared values across communities. One hundred percent of profits from the £10 digital cookbook go to The Zaynab Project and Gaza Soup Kitchen, both providing direct humanitarian relief in Gaza. Mina Shakib, executive director of The Zaynab Project, describes their work as "deeply human: feeding families, caring for orphaned children, delivering clean water, and supporting mothers who are rebuilding their lives under unimaginable circumstances."

With contributors whose combined Instagram following exceeds 12 million, All Our Kitchens represents a significant mobilization of the UK food community around Palestinian solidarity and cultural preservation. The digital format ensures that maximum funds reach those in need while making the cookbook instantly accessible to anyone, anywhere.

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Book of the Month II

Gaza: The Dream and the Nightmare

By Julie M. Norman and Maia Carter Hallward

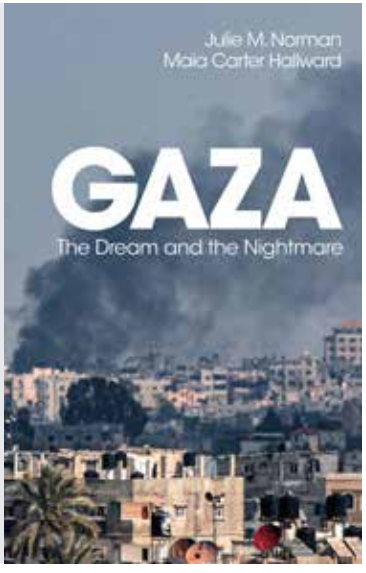
Polity, January 2026

Available in hardcover, softcover, ebook, and audiobook formats

Gaza: The Dream and the Nightmare







In this book, Julie M. Norman and Maia Carter Hallward offer a powerful new perspective on the history of Gaza. With rigor and nuance, the authors tell the story of the enclave from its colonial foundations, across the decades of occupation, to the devastation of the ongoing war. Rather than focusing on elites or abstract politics, at the book's heart are ordinary Gazans – students, aid workers, journalists, and teachers – whose firsthand testimonies vividly illuminate the realities behind the headlines.

What also sets this book apart is its refusal to sensationalize or oversimplify. The authors explain how Gaza's political, economic, and geographical isolation contributed to the crescendo of violence that feels both inevitable and intolerable to those living inside it. The result is a story not of villains and victims, but of human beings navigating an untenable reality.

The book furthermore reckons with the legal, moral, and humanitarian debates surrounding Gaza, from war crimes investigations to the contested meaning of resistance and the politicization of aid. It examines the failures of diplomacy and international law, the contested role of UN agencies, and the lasting impact of policies made far from Gaza's borders.

Gaza: The Dream and the Nightmare serves as a timely and necessary disruption of media clichés and political binaries, telling the story of Gaza with clarity, compassion, and from the perspective of its own people.

Alan Dowty, a professor at University of Notre Dame and the author of *Israel/Palestine*, states, "This book is a vivid narrative of the Gaza experience, explaining how Gaza became an isolated and unique front in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how this led to its radicalization and a denouement of tragic proportions."

"This book provides a very readable account of the history of Gaza from the mandate period to the First Intifada and on until the present, coming into its own with a comprehensive account of the events following the 7 October attack by Hamas on Israel. It draws on press sources and informed commentary, illuminated by personal testimonies to draw out the contested terrain of interpretation regarding this beset and besieged strip of land," says Anthony Gorman, a senior lecturer in Islamic and Middle Eastern studies at University of Edinburgh.

Amahl Bishara, an associate professor at Tufts University, calls it "A brave and compelling book that brings together many voices from Gaza and beyond to help readers understand the region's history as well as the grave contemporary moment it faces."

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Book of the Month III

PALESTINE

PAINFULLY BEAUTIFUL

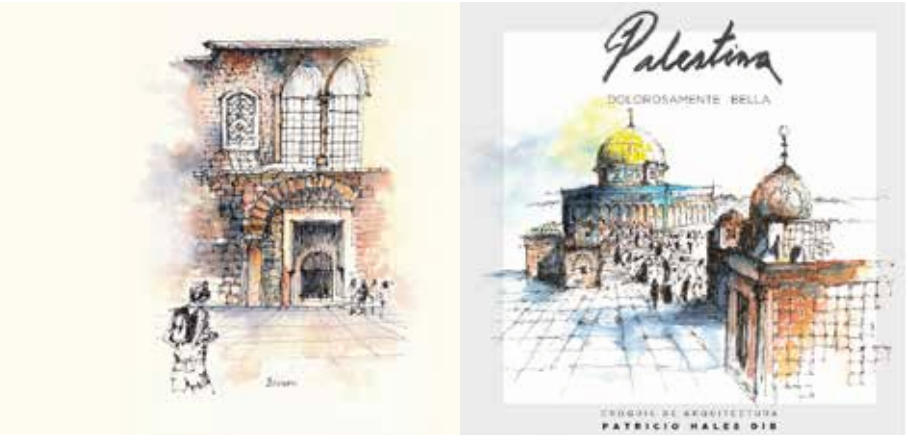
By Patricio Hales

Hardcover, 156 pages

To order the book, please contact the author at patriciohales@hotmail.com.

All profits will go to Palestinian children.





In the author's own words:

I chose to talk about Palestine through drawing. Convinced that Palestine is much more than its suffering, I created this book to highlight that this country is also characterized by beautiful people and stunning architecture. In doing so, I am not trying diminish awareness of, or ignore, its suffering. Rather, I wish to raise awareness of the beauty that gives Palestine the strength to endure the violence to which it has been exposed for decades. Palestine's heritage sites are an integral part of its cultural identity and a joy that feeds the hope and resilience that characterizes the Palestinian people.

I learn from the children of Gaza. Standing among the rubble of destroyed homes, one of them smiles on television and talks optimistically about his love of football: "I play very well, I'm going to be like Messi," he asserts. "Maybe I'll go to Europe," he adds, laughing among the destroyed buildings. Children express such vital hope enthusiastically in front of cameras, even though they are surrounded by death. Life bursts into their pain and strengthens them. Sometimes, when I see them laugh, I am moved to tears.

I invite you to recognize that the struggle against pain persists in a nation that coexists with beauty. To this end, I have drawn temples, houses, heritage sites, victims of daily attacks for decades, before and after the ongoing destruction of Gaza.

Palestine suffers and yet fascinates with its ancient architecture. Prominent intellectuals use words to artfully express its identity and describe its problems. I chose to talk about Palestine through drawing. In this book my hand speaks with a pen and Indian ink, showing its architectural heritage because all architecture is a testament to development. I show what my eyes feel about the urban environment I've encountered on my various short travels to the most known places of this nation.

Palestine endures repressive urban architecture throughout the territory that has been left by the partition since 1947. In Gaza and the West Bank, neighborhoods are surrounded by military barriers, checkpoints, the Wall, and daily military oppression. Almost everyone, including many Jewish communities, condemn the ongoing arbitrary detention, discriminatory regulations, house demolitions, and construction of illegal settlements that appropriate Palestinian territory and buildings. They reject the colonialist military policy that is in practice sanctioned by the United Nations and the international community.

My sketches aim to promote the preservation of the architecture that Palestinians love and care about, the diverse religious spaces that are revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and the beautiful buildings where the adherents of the three largest monotheistic religions practice their faith. Through my sketches I invite you to visit some of the architectural treasures I have been able to visit in order to help preserve them.

In recent years, Palestinians have been victims of extensive persecution, with such deadly horror that various legal and humanitarian organizations around the world have described as genocidal attacks. My sketches show a people who suffer yet care for and continue to cultivate their beautiful heritage. This is why I say that Palestine is beautiful... but painfully beautiful.

Patricio Hales

SCAN
TO SHARE

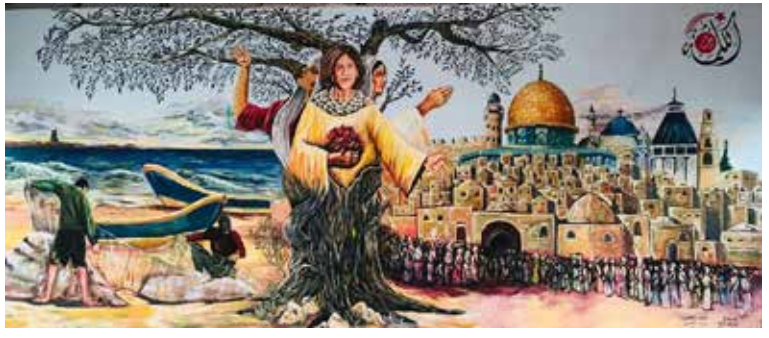
Artist of the Month

Mohammed Jabr

A Palestinian Visual Artist and Trainer from Gaza



The work of Palestinian visual artist Mohammed Jabr is a powerful integration of creativity, education, and social engagement, using visual arts as a tool for expression, empowerment, and cultural resilience in Palestine. A Palestinian refugee from the town of Ashdod, he was born in Gaza in 1981 and obtained his bachelor's degree in art education from Al-Aqsa University, Gaza. Mohammed is a founding member of the Gaza Center for Culture and Arts and an active member of the General Union of Palestinian Visual Artists. His deep commitment to advancing the arts and culture in Palestine is augmented by his aim to express the Palestinian cause, convey the plight of his people in Gaza, and share the Palestinian narrative with the world through visual arts.



Mohammed has participated in numerous exhibitions and festivals, both locally and internationally, since 2001. These include group and thematic exhibitions in Gaza, Ramallah, and Beirut, as well as participation in the Gaza Contemporary Art Festival. In 2019, Mohammed worked in the studio of the iconic visual artist Suleiman Mansour as an assistant artist and was a facilitator of drama and arts activities as well as a psychosocial support program for children at Tamer Institute. A major recent artistic achievement is the sculptural mural *Fish Without Identity* that was installed on Gaza's beach in 2023 in a project managed and implemented under the Palestinian Ministry of Culture's Cultural Fund.

Mohammed's professional development has been supported by a wide range of specialized training courses in graphic printing, theater of the oppressed, video art, and training of trainers, which he obtained through respected institutions and organizations. The skills he acquired have strengthened his capacity to design, implement, and manage art programs that serve children, youth, and communities.

Mohammed has thus played a vital role in numerous cultural, educational, and psychosocial initiatives. He has worked as an art expert at Al-Bureij Forum within a capacity-building program supported by the International Cooperation Foundation, and served as a facilitator and trainer in several UNRWA programs that offered summer games and creative initiatives for children. Mohammed has also contributed extensively to government and UNRWA schools through projects that decorated school walls with sculptural murals, combining art with educational and environmental enhancement, working in collaboration with international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mohammed has been actively involved in community-based and child-focused programs. He has facilitated psychosocial support through visual arts at Al-Qattan Center for the Child, and taught drama and visual arts at Ma'an Development Center and advanced drawing techniques to talented youth through centers affiliated with the General Union of Cultural Centers.



Three months before the outbreak of the war, Mohammed travelled to Egypt to receive medical treatment. The surgery was performed during the first days of the war, and he received a kidney that was donated by his brother who had also gone to Egypt. Mohammed's wife and children, however, are still living in a displacement tent in central Gaza, after their home in northern Gaza was destroyed. Mohammed's wife is also a visual artist and a graduate of Gaza's Al-Aqsa University. Mohammed is trying to find work in Egypt, but without residency, it hasn't been easy. He hopes that conditions will improve so that he can return to Gaza.

SCAN TO SHARE

Patience, Ya Bassem

In a laid-back interview in November 2025 with Cenk Uygur, founder of the staunchly pro-Palestinian online news show The Young Turks, Bassem Youssef, the Egyptian American comedian and former physician who's become an influencer with millions of followers, was not the Bassem we're used to watching attentively. The normally sharp-tongued Bassem almost always shocks his interlocutors – particularly those who whitewash the genocide – with facts, confidence, smiles, and of course, humor; often dark. With Cenk, he was upbeat alright, but he totally lacked the confidence of the argument. He appeared more than concerned; he was afraid that things weren't going well. He even clearly stated that "all is lost" and that with resources, media, political influence, and schemes, our opponents will most certainly win the ultimate battle. Eventually, we will be denied the freedom to publicly express our views and support for Palestine on social media, he claimed. I'm not sure how he feels today, but that day, Bassem had thrown in the towel.

No, Dr. Youssef, all is certainly not lost. It is our opponents who are the *Don Quixotes* of today, fighting the wind. No amount of money or influence will ever cleanse and exonerate the perpetrators of the genocide, and the good people of the world know this. Palestine has become an idea and a synonym for injustice. Ideas never die. It has also become a global symbol of – and a call for – freedom and liberation for all. It's not over yet, but the course is set and there is no turning back. No, ya Bassem, you just have to be a bit more patient to reap the benefits of the flood which, in fact, is changing the world.

Electing Zohran Mamdani as mayor of New York City is nothing but a sign of the type of new leaders emerging particularly in the West. I expect the upcoming November elections in the US will be a turning point. The polls being conducted in the US clearly show a change in the tide, even in conservative circles. Even Trump admitted that in the past, one bad word about Israel would end your career; now one good word on Israel and your career is done. An exaggeration I know, but it's another sign of the changing times. The shift, albeit slow, of economic and even military power from the West to the East, with the emergence of BRICS, can only help Palestinians and other oppressed peoples of the world to achieve their goal of liberation. The list is long: major things are most certainly happening around the world. So patience, ya Bassem, patience!

Of course I had to post a comment under the talk-show interview video in which I advised Bassem to stay away from the media until his condition improves!



Sani Meo
Publisher





Bank of Palestine Global Expansion

Bank of Palestine has received in-principle approval from the Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA) of Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) to establish a fully integrated banking operation.

The new license will enable Bank of Palestine to operate a branch within ADGM, offering regulated banking and financial services, including depositing and investment transactions, to serve Palestinian communities around the world.

Operations are expected to commence in the second half of 2026.