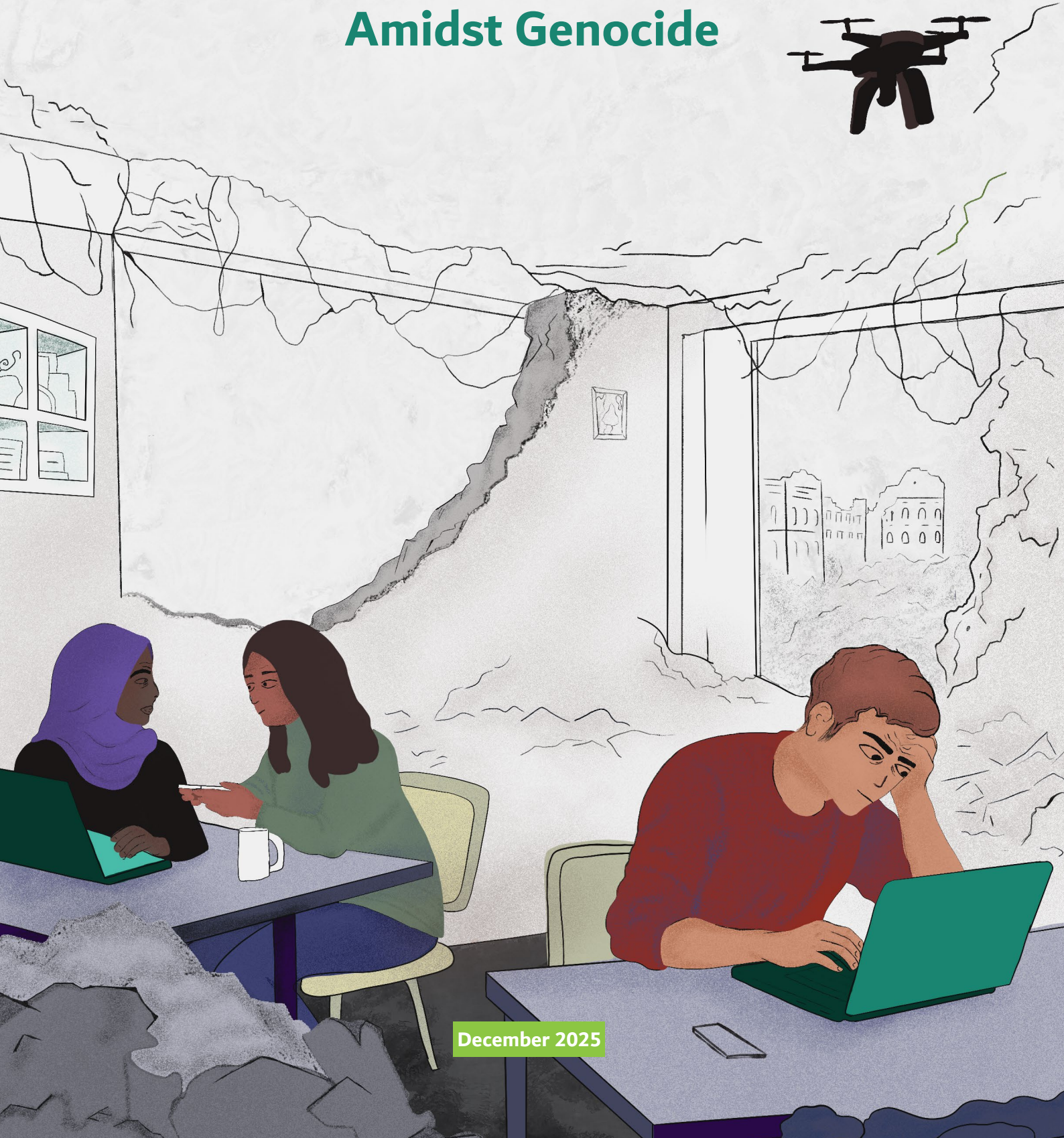




# The Impact of the Gaza Blockade and the Destruction of Telecommunications Infrastructure on the Digital Economy Amidst Genocide



December 2025

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7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media

## **The Impact of the Gaza Blockade and the Destruction of Telecommunications Infrastructure on the Digital Economy Amidst Genocide**

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## Executive Summary

Before October 2023, Gaza's digital economy was a fragile yet vital source of livelihoods for thousands of young people living under blockade. Despite years of isolation, power outages, and inadequate infrastructure, a generation of skilled youth developed their online careers by turning to remote work as one of the few ways to earn a living. Internet access was widespread but unreliable, dependent on cables controlled by Israel that could be disrupted at any moment. Entrepreneurs and freelancers faced further isolation due to financial restrictions, as global payment systems like PayPal were unavailable and banking channels were often blocked. Strict import controls limited access to essential technology, while travel bans hindered participation in international training and collaboration. Yet Gaza's youth adapted with remarkable creativity. Training programmes helped thousands of freelancers and coders access global markets and find work through international platforms. Remote work became an economic lifeline, providing foreign income for families and fostering a growing community of digital professionals who demonstrated Gaza's potential.

This fragile progress was crushed after October 2023. Israeli bombardments destroyed the telecommunications infrastructure that sustained Gaza's digital economy. Airstrikes on towers, fibre lines, and coworking spaces left most of the territory without power or internet. Businesses that once worked with international clients saw their contracts cancelled, communications severed, and their income ceased to exist. The loss of key mentors and entrepreneurs deepened and accelerated a growing departure of skilled professionals. However, even under siege, Gaza's digital workforce displayed extraordinary resilience. Freelancers reorganised their work around short-term windows of connectivity, travelling to solar-powered hubs or public charging points to send files and contact clients. These improvised co-working spaces became lifelines, where displaced workers shared electricity, internet, and advice.

Therefore, this report aims to examine the impact of the Gaza blockade and the destruction of telecommunications infrastructure on the digital economy of the Gaza Strip. It is based on a survey conducted after October 2023 involving 183 participants and 30 in-depth interviews with freelancers, entrepreneurs, and civil society actors. The survey highlights a young, predominantly digital workforce (81% aged between 18 and 34) and (72% displaced) struggling to survive amid systemic collapse. Fewer than half own both a smartphone and a computer, and only 17% have a backup electricity source. Eight out of ten face daily internet shutdowns, while nearly all experience major disruptions on a weekly basis. Three-quarters have lost more than half their income, and 41% have lost almost everything. Contract cancellations reached 86%, causing reputational damage and reduced visibility on digital platforms. Even when work was completed, broken banking systems and blocked payment platforms meant many were unpaid or lost up to 30% of their earnings in fees. More than half reported regular account restrictions, further isolating Gaza from the global digital economy. Beyond material losses, digital surveillance created a constant sense of insecurity. Nearly two-thirds of respondents worried frequently about being monitored, leading many to hide their location or self-censor online. With formal institutions absent, freelancers relied on informal networks, which offered shared access to the rarely available power, the internet, and resources. These community-led initiatives became the backbone of Gaza's digital survival, demonstrating solidarity and resilience in the face of crisis.

The interview findings highlight the urgent need for a human-centred approach to rebuilding Gaza's digital economy, where internet access is recognised as a humanitarian necessity and telecommunications and energy systems are prioritised in reconstruction efforts. Achieving genuine digital inclusion also requires challenging the systemic barriers that continue to exclude Palestinians from global participation. For instance, global payment platforms should eliminate discriminatory restrictions on Palestinian accounts, while donors should establish secure and low-cost payment channels to ensure fair access to digital markets. Simultaneously, providing reliable hardware, affordable co-working spaces, and gender-sensitive facilities would enable freelancers to work safely and productively, fostering both economic resilience and social equity.



Complementary training in digital marketing, platform algorithms, and client relations can help rebuild professional visibility, while non-governmental organisations should act as intermediaries to reconnect Gaza's freelancers with global clients and opportunities. Recovery efforts must particularly prioritise women, youth, and people with disabilities, ensuring that no one is left behind in the rebuilding process. Ultimately, strengthening local freelancer networks and raising awareness among global clients about Gaza's extraordinary working conditions are vital steps towards fostering fairness, dignity, and opportunity for a generation determined to remain connected to the world.

## Introduction

In the years up to October 2023, the Gaza Strip's telecommunications infrastructure and emerging digital economy faced significant challenges. Gaza underwent over 18 years of blockade and frequent attacks, which left its telecom networks fragile and outdated<sup>1</sup>. Unlike the West Bank, which began receiving 3G mobile service in 2018 and is now negotiating to upgrade to 4G, Gaza remained limited to 2G networks. Access to modern equipment is severely restricted, and excessive surveillance tools are being implemented to monitor the population. This situation made Gaza one of the most digitally isolated areas globally<sup>2</sup>. Years of economic decline left much of the population impoverished, and the latest available data (pre-2023) indicated that about 58% of Gazans owned a smartphone, compared to 83% in the West Bank<sup>3</sup>. Fewer people could afford modern devices, meaning that even when internet service was available, not everyone could easily connect online. Since October 2023, the ongoing genocide<sup>4</sup> has further devastated Gaza's digital economy and IT infrastructure. Airstrikes and systematic destruction have targeted telecom towers, data centres, and internet service providers, leaving large parts of the Strip disconnected for extended periods. This compounded the long-standing digital isolation by dismantling what little infrastructure remained, severely restricting access to communication, information, and online economic activity. The destruction has not only disrupted business operations but has also severed vital lifelines for freelancers, digital entrepreneurs, and displaced youth, who rely on connectivity for survival.

<sup>1</sup> Al-Shabaka (2025). Gaza's Telecommunications: Occupied and Destroyed. Available at: <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/gazas-telecommunications-occupied-and-destroyed/#:~:text=face%20significant%20barriers%20to%20digital,these%20digital%20challenges%20have%20escalated>

<sup>2</sup> Alsadeh, A. (2023). Palestinian ICT Infrastructure and Its Impact on Human and Digital Rights. Available at: <https://datatracker.ietf.org/meeting/118/materials/slides-118-hrpc-palestinian-ict-infrastructure-and-its-impact-on-human-and-digital-rights-updated-00.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2023). The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology issued a joint press release on the occasion of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, May 17, 2023. Available at: <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=4510>

<sup>4</sup> "According to the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip." Source: OHCHR (2025). Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip, UN Commission finds. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds>

## This report addresses **four** questions:

- 1** How have the Israeli blockade and destruction of telecommunications disrupted Gaza's digital economy, affecting freelancers, entrepreneurs, and online businesses?
- 2** What are the socio-economic impacts on young Gazans in terms of income, jobs, and mobility amid siege, war, and displacement?
- 3** How has access to digital financial services, remote work, and cross-border e-commerce been impacted, and how are young freelancers adapting in Gaza and other areas of displacement?
- 4** What roles do Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), donors, UN agencies, and civil society play in supporting Gaza's digital recovery and resilience, and what rights-based, locally driven strategies can guide reconstruction and inclusion?



## Constraints on the Digital Economy in Gaza pre-October 2023

For Gaza's aspiring tech entrepreneurs and freelancers, the environment before 2023 presented significant challenges. The blockade and telecommunications collapse created numerous obstacles for anyone attempting to start a digital business or work remotely.

## 2.1 Outdated Infrastructure

By 2022, approximately 92% of households in Gaza had access to some form of internet at home<sup>5</sup>. However, much of this access depended on fixed lines and local Wi-Fi networks via copper ADSL lines, with fibre-to-the-home networks mainly located in the West Bank. Similarly, although over 83% of individuals in Gaza (aged 10 and above) were internet users by 2022, their experience was heavily limited<sup>6</sup>. Average broadband speeds in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) were approximately 26 Mbps in 2022; however, Gaza frequently experienced significantly lower speeds due to network congestion and infrastructure issues<sup>7</sup>. Gaza's internet relied dangerously on a single fibre-optic cable through Israel, giving Israeli authorities control over Gaza's bandwidth with no alternative routes. Damage or shutdown could instantly cut off Gaza's internet<sup>8</sup>.

## 2.2 Limited Access to Markets and Payments

Gazan freelancers face obstacles in reaching customers and receiving payments because major services, such as PayPal, are unavailable due to policies and regulations. This hinders the acceptance of international payments, putting Gaza startups at a disadvantage. Local options like PalPay exist, but many clients prefer PayPal, which can result in freelancers missing opportunities. A web designer said, "With PayPal not operating in Palestine, it is like another checkpoint stopping us." Traditional banking, though connected to SWIFT, is slow and often unsupported by gig platforms. This financial isolation limits Gazans' access to the global digital marketplace, despite internet connectivity<sup>9</sup>.

## 2.3 Import and Equipment Barriers

Building a tech business in Gaza faced major hurdles due to difficulties in importing hardware, spare parts, and advanced Information and Communication Technology (ICT) devices. Israel's restrictions on items, such as servers, switches, high-end computers, and sensors, resulted in strict regulations or bans<sup>10</sup>. Entrepreneurs needing specialised equipment for tech hubs or workshops faced lengthy approval processes or accepted inferior tools. The infrastructure for startups, including laptops, smartphones, and routers, was costly and hard to access.

<sup>5</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2023). The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology issued a joint press release on the occasion of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, May 17, 2023. Available at:

<https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=4510>

<sup>6</sup> Al-Shabaka (2025). Gaza's Telecommunications: Occupied and Destroyed. Available at:

<https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/gazas-telecommunications-occupied-and-destroyed/#:~:text=face%20significant%20barriers%20to%20digital,these%20digital%20challenges%20have%20escalated>

<sup>7</sup> Al-Shabaka (2025). Gaza's Telecommunications: Occupied and Destroyed. Available at:

<https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/gazas-telecommunications-occupied-and-destroyed/#:~:text=face%20significant%20barriers%20to%20digital,these%20digital%20challenges%20have%20escalated>

<sup>8</sup> The Guardian (2023). Gaza internet cutoff: Israel siege casualties. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/27/gaza-internet-cutoff-israel-siege-casualties#:~:text=The%20Palestinian%20Red%20Crescent%20Society,landline%2C%20cellular%20and%20internet%20communications%E2%80%9D>

<sup>9</sup> Reuters (2021). Palestinians urge PayPal to offer services in West Bank and Gaza. Available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/palestinians-urge-paypal-offer-services-west-bank-gaza-2021-10-21/>

<sup>10</sup> International Trade Administration (2023). West Bank and Gaza Country Commercial Guide. Available at:

<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/west-bank-and-gaza-information-and-communication-technology-ict>

## 2.4 Travel and Networking Restrictions

Travel restrictions severely limit the growth of Gazan entrepreneurs, preventing them from attending conferences, meeting clients, or accessing global networks. The Rafah crossing opens irregularly, and Israeli permits are rarely granted, mainly for humanitarian reasons. This obstructs in-person mentorship and investor visits. Despite challenges, West Bank tech founders can participate in events abroad, unlike their counterparts in the Gaza Strip. Isolation and a small market hinder scaling and external investment, forcing most startups to target niche markets abroad and operate remotely, which often leads to connectivity and payment issues<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Palestinian Return Centre (2018). The Suffocation of Gaza Strip: The Protracted Closure of the Rafah Crossing and its Impact on Building a Successful and Self-Sustaining Society. Available at: <https://prc.org.uk/en/post/3916/the-suffocation-of-gaza-strip-the-protracted-closure-of-the-rafah-crossing-and-its-impact-on-building-a-successful-and-self-sustaining-society>



## Rise of Remote Work and Freelancing Despite Constraints

Due to Gaza's physical isolation, cut off by land, air, and sea, the internet became a key economic link, connecting residents to global markets. By 2021, only 35% of businesses in Gaza had computers for daily work. Interestingly, a higher proportion of Gazan businesses (84%) reported using social or professional networks, such as Facebook, for outreach, compared to 77% in the West Bank<sup>12</sup>. This demonstrates how Gazan entrepreneurs adapted to the available tools, utilising social media to market and even sell locally, as more advanced digital infrastructure, such as dedicated e-commerce websites and payment gateways, was unavailable. Starting in the 2010s, Gaza experienced a significant rise in remote work, often referred to as a "leap of remote work"<sup>13</sup>. Tech-savvy graduates with limited opportunities locally began freelancing for international clients across regions such as the Gulf, Europe, and North America. By the early 2020s, this trend had gained momentum, with Gaza's outsourcing and freelancing sectors expanding to serve clients in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and other countries. Platforms like Upwork and Fiverr increasingly featured Gaza-based programmers, graphic designers, and digital marketers offering their services worldwide. In many respects, remote work became a vital economic lifeline, enabling Gazans to generate income despite the blockade. Additionally, it fostered a form of digital export, bringing essential foreign currency in exchange for online services. Thousands of skilled individuals earned online certifications, improved their English skills, and competed internationally in fields such as software development, graphic design, and digital marketing. Support from both international and local NGOs contributed to this growth<sup>14</sup>.

The ICT sector was a crucial and rapidly expanding part of the Palestinian economy, accounting for approximately 4% of GDP (roughly \$651 million in 2022) and providing employment for nearly 9,000 people across 700 companies in the West Bank and Gaza. Mainly composed of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, it is increasingly seen as a strategic catalyst for economic growth and digital transformation. ICT service exports have grown significantly, from \$2 million in 2000 to over \$134 million in 2021, indicating the increasing global presence of Palestinian tech companies. With a young, educated workforce of more than 2,500 IT graduates each year, the sector benefits from strong human capital; however, gaps still exist between university training and industry requirements. Some initiatives, such as the Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies (PITA), have sought to close these gaps. Meanwhile, incubators like Palestine's Information and Communications Technology Incubator (PICTI) and Gaza Sky Geeks support startups in fields like coding, FinTech, and e-commerce. Despite only a third of Palestinian firms having an online presence and low digital payment adoption, these constraints also create opportunities for future expansion. Increased female participation (27% of the ICT workforce) and ongoing support from local and international stakeholders are helping the Palestinian ICT sector emerge as a vital driver of economic resilience, innovation, and sustainable development<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2023). The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology issued a joint press release on the occasion of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, May 17, 2023. Available at: <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=4510>

<sup>13</sup> Palestinian NGO Network (2022). Prospects For the Development of The IT Sector in The Gaza Strip. Available at: <https://en.pngoportal.org/uploads/documents/2022/12/zvF2z.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Gaza Sky Geeks (2024). The Impact of the Gaza Crisis on the Palestinian Tech Ecosystem, available at: [https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/gsg-report2\\_compressed-5.pdf](https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/gsg-report2_compressed-5.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> German Outsourcing Association (2023). Palestine, Outsourcing Destination Guide. Available at: [https://www.pita.ps/public/files/Files/ICT-Guide-Palestine\\_2023\\_stf-16-04\\_final\\_web.pdf](https://www.pita.ps/public/files/Files/ICT-Guide-Palestine_2023_stf-16-04_final_web.pdf)

Instead of competing on low costs, Palestinians positioned themselves as a hub for high-value specialisations, targeting niche markets and delivering exceptional customer service. This approach builds on their key strengths, including a highly educated, literate, and skilled workforce as one of the best in the region, with strong technical expertise and excellent English proficiency. These attributes make Palestinian talent particularly appealing to international clients seeking quality-driven partnerships. Added to this is a strategic geographic advantage since the oPt shares excellent time zone alignment with Europe (around a two-hour difference). This combination of expertise, service quality, and accessibility strengthens the oPt's position as a competitive and distinctive outsourcing destination. In addition, what truly distinguishes them is their exceptional soft skills and remarkable resilience. Consistently highlighted in reports and interviews, Palestinian, and particularly Gazan, talent is praised for being hardworking, adaptable, and quick to respond to changing circumstances. Their ability to remain flexible under pressure, collaborate effectively across cultures, and maintain a strong work ethic in challenging conditions makes them a valuable asset in competitive global markets. Alongside upskilling programmes and training academies, tech hubs and coworking spaces have played a pivotal role in shaping the Palestinian digital economy, particularly in the Gaza Strip<sup>16</sup>.

Before October 2023, Gaza's coworking scene was lively and dynamic, with popular venues such as Eleven Hub, LEGO Spaces, and Gaza Sky Geeks' own facility in Capital Mall. In this environment, "coworking" became almost synonymous with freelancing, functioning not only as shared workspaces but also as lively community hubs where digital professionals could network, collaborate, and access resources vital for developing sustainable online careers. With academies such as Gaza Sky Geeks, TAP (Talent Acceleration Platform), Manara, GGateway, and Re:Coded, the oPt has established itself as a strong source of talent in diverse fields, including web development, machine learning, marketing, sales, and more. These academies go beyond simply preparing freelancers; they have introduced remote internships, traineeships, and train-to-hire programmes that serve as key pathways to employment. By connecting graduates directly with local and international employers, these initiatives have created sustainable job opportunities and helped integrate Palestinian talent into the global digital workforce<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank Group (2021). Palestinian Digital Economy Assessment. Available at: <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/472671640152521943>

<sup>17</sup> Gaza Sky Geeks (2024). The Impact of the Gaza Crisis on the Palestinian Tech Ecosystem, available at: [https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/gsg-report2\\_compressed-5.pdf](https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/gsg-report2_compressed-5.pdf)

## The Collapse of Gaza's Digital Sector Post-October 2023

The genocide in Gaza caused severe damage to the internet and phone infrastructure. On October 8, an Israeli strike levelled Gaza's Al-Watan Tower, which housed a major communications company, knocking its services offline<sup>18</sup>. The following day, the main Palestinian telecom provider, Paltel, saw one of its offices destroyed by a bombing. By October 10, Israeli attacks had destroyed two of Gaza's three main mobile communication lines, forcing the entire population to depend on a single remaining backbone for cellular and internet service. This physical damage, including bombed transmission towers, severed cables, and ruined network hubs, immediately stops connectivity for hundreds of thousands of residents<sup>19</sup>. Consequently, the International Labour Organisation stated that Gaza's job market became almost non-existent due to the economic destruction<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch (2023a). Gaza: Communications Blackout Imminent Due to Fuel Shortage. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/15/gaza-communications-blackout-imminent-due-fuel-shortage>

<sup>19</sup> Access Now (2023). Palestine unplugged: how Israel disrupts Gaza's internet. Available at: <https://www.accessnow.org/publication/palestine-unplugged/#:~:text=people%20in%20the%20West%20Bank>

<sup>20</sup> The Guardian (2024). 'We have no choice': Gazan workers find a lifeline in freelancing amid war. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/03/remote-worker-gaza-palestine-israel-war#:~:text=I%20t%20took%20more%20than.or%20so%20others%20work%20remotely>



### 4.1 Infrastructure in Ruins

The destruction of Gaza's infrastructure is extensive, with over \$18.5 billion in damage caused to homes, commercial buildings, roads, water systems, and digital infrastructure<sup>21</sup>. Since the beginning of the genocide, the telecommunications infrastructure has sustained extensive damage, with initial assessments indicating that approximately 75% of the network has been affected and at least 50% completely destroyed. This has rendered not only business continuity impossible but also disconnected Gaza from global digital networks, undermining years of investment in the territory's digital economy. As part of a complete siege, Gaza's sole power plant ran out of fuel by October 11. With no mains electricity, telecom sites and internet service providers had to rely on generators; however, Israeli authorities barred fuel deliveries, causing the generators to run out of fuel. Under these conditions, erratic power and fuel shortages led to major outages, as operators struggled to maintain network operations. Internet traffic in Gaza decreased by over 80% during October 2023<sup>22 23</sup>.

### 4.2 Excessive Surveillance of Palestinian Online Activities

Israeli authorities have long monitored Palestinian communications, especially during this genocide, using advanced digital tools such as big data analytics and Artificial Intelligence to surveil Gaza's population. Investigations by Human Rights Watch show that the Israeli military used secret systems like "The Gospel" and "Lavender," which rely on extensive databases of Gaza residents' phone and internet activity, to select targets for airstrikes<sup>24</sup>. A joint investigation by The Guardian, +972 Magazine, and Local Call reveals that Israel's cyber intelligence agency Unit 8200 utilised Microsoft's Azure cloud to store and analyse millions of phone calls from Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. This project, initiated after a 2021 meeting between Unit 8200's commander and Microsoft Chief Executive Officer Satya Nadella, became operational in 2022, enabling officers to sift through vast call data that includes up to a million calls per hour, to support military actions. By July 2025, over 11,500 TB of data were stored in Azure data centres in the Netherlands and Ireland. Microsoft initially claimed it was unaware of how its data and technologies were being used, though recent reporting begs otherwise. An external review announced in May 2025 concluded that there had been no harm to civilians. However, subsequent reporting in August 2025 revealed extensive inappropriate use of Microsoft services and technologies, casting doubt on the earlier findings. According to The Guardian, senior Microsoft executives expressed uncertainty about the credibility of information provided by Israeli employees who "may have felt more bound to their country's military than their employer."<sup>25</sup> The technological aspect of the war has made Gaza's connectivity risky, as every call or online post could feed targeting algorithms, exacerbating the digital collapse<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> World Bank Group (2024b). Joint World Bank, UN Report Assesses Damage to Gaza's Infrastructure. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/04/02/joint-world-bank-un-report-assesses-damage-to-gaza-s-infrastructure>

<sup>22</sup> Access Now (2023). Palestine unplugged: how Israel disrupts Gaza's internet. Available at: <https://www.accessnow.org/publication/palestine-unplugged/#:~:text=people%20in%20the%20West%20Bank>

<sup>23</sup> Wamda (2024). The impact of the Gaza crisis on the Palestinian tech ecosystem. Available at: <https://www.wamda.com/2024/07/impact-gaza-crisis-palestinian-tech-ecosystem>

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch (2023b). Questions and Answers: Israeli Military's Use of Digital Tools in Gaza. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/10/questions-and-answers-israeli-militarys-use-digital-tools-gaza>

<sup>25</sup> The Guardian (2025b). Microsoft investigates Israeli military's use of Azure cloud storage. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/aug/09/microsoft-israeli-military-azure-cloud-investigation>

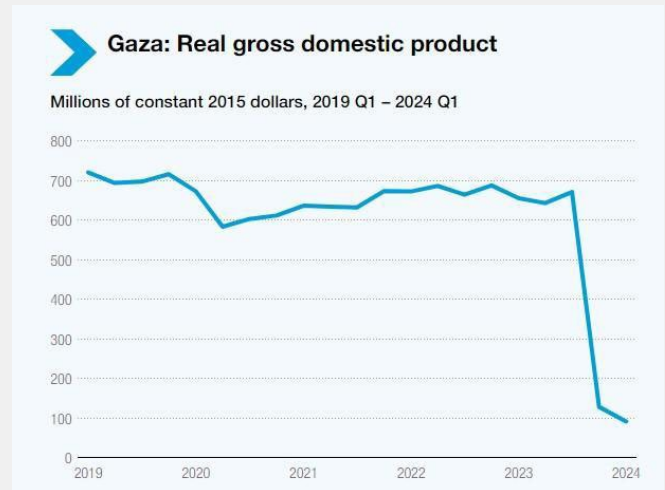
<sup>26</sup> The Guardian (2025a). 'A million calls an hour': Israel relying on Microsoft cloud for expansive surveillance of Palestinians. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/aug/06/microsoft-israeli-military-palestinian-phone-calls-cloud>

### 4.3 Collapse of Client Networks and Cancellations

The genocide has caused the widespread cancellation of international and regional contracts, leading to the collapse of years of client relationships and trust. Gaza-based tech firms, particularly those offering outsourcing and digital services, have faced significant challenges in maintaining client communication due to ongoing power outages, internet disruptions, and safety concerns. Many clients have completely ceased operations due to the security situation, forcing online businesses in Gaza to indefinitely suspend their projects. As a result, these businesses have been unable to pay salaries for months, worsening the humanitarian crisis and creating a chain reaction across dependent households.

### 4.4 A Free-Falling Economy

Since the start of Israel's genocide in Gaza on October 7, 2023, the economic devastation has been unprecedented. During the first half of 2024 alone, Gaza's GDP contracted by an estimated 86% year-over-year (with the ICT sector declining by 91.7%), marking the sharpest decline ever recorded. Real income per capita in Gaza has fallen to its lowest level on record, plunging from approximately US\$2,328 in 1994 to less than US\$200 in 2024. Around 88% of private establishments have sustained damage or been destroyed. Meanwhile, prices have surged to unprecedented levels. The consumer price index in Gaza has risen by more than 309% year-on-year, driven by severe supply chain disruptions. Food prices have increased by approximately 448% compared with October 2023. These price spikes, combined with widespread shortages of essential goods, have drastically eroded purchasing power across all income levels. Even households with access to liquidity face extreme constraints due to the scarcity of basic commodities<sup>27</sup>. The UNCTAD (2024) reports that Gaza's unemployment rate has soared to 79%, up from 46.4% in mid-2023<sup>28</sup>.



Source: UNCTAD (2024)

### 4.5 The Acceleration of Brain Drain

The economic collapse and prolonged humanitarian crisis are accelerating the oPt's decades-long brain drain. This reflects a growing loss of hope among skilled professionals, who see little possibility of professional or personal recovery in Gaza under current conditions. The oPt already suffers from one of the highest rates of skilled migration in the MENA region, a figure likely to rise drastically in the aftermath of the current genocide. On October 30, Israeli fire killed Tariq Thabet, director of a Gaza business incubator who had spent 15 years supporting young entrepreneurs. Two weeks later, another airstrike killed Abdelhamid al-Fayoumi, founder of a successful Gaza software company and a mentor to many startups. The same day, Dr Yasser al-Alam, often called the "godfather of entrepreneurship" in Gaza, was also reported killed. The loss of such figures has been described as "eliticide", targeting the professionals who would help rebuild the economy<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> World Bank Group (2024a). Impacts of the Conflict in the Middle East on the Palestinian Economy. Available at: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/7fa86a3dc815d1b545b1eb0f129e351b-0280012024/original/WorldBank-PalestinianEconomicUpdate-Dec2024-final.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> UNCTAD (2024). The Economic Impact of the Conflict in Gaza. Available at: [https://unctad.org/news/economic-crisis-worsens-occupied-palestinian-territory-amid-ongoing-gaza-conflict#:~:text=Gaza's%20Gross%20Domestic%20Product%20\(GDP,sixth%20of%20its%202022%20level](https://unctad.org/news/economic-crisis-worsens-occupied-palestinian-territory-amid-ongoing-gaza-conflict#:~:text=Gaza's%20Gross%20Domestic%20Product%20(GDP,sixth%20of%20its%202022%20level)

<sup>29</sup> Al Jazeera (2023). Gaza's entrepreneurs are being killed by Israel. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/5/gazas-entrepreneurs-are-being-killed-by-israel>

## Palestinian Resilience During the Genocide

Despite these extraordinary challenges, Gaza's digital workforce has demonstrated notable resilience and innovation during the genocide. By mid-2024, local initiatives established several free co-working spaces, such as Taqat Gaza (Arabic for "energies" or "capacities")<sup>30</sup> powered by solar energy, where displaced freelancers gather to access weak signals and share battery life. To optimise usage, organisers divide each day into shifts, with mornings reserved for full-time remote workers, while afternoons cater to part-time freelancers and students<sup>31</sup>. This structured system enables many individuals to connect online for at least a few hours each day.



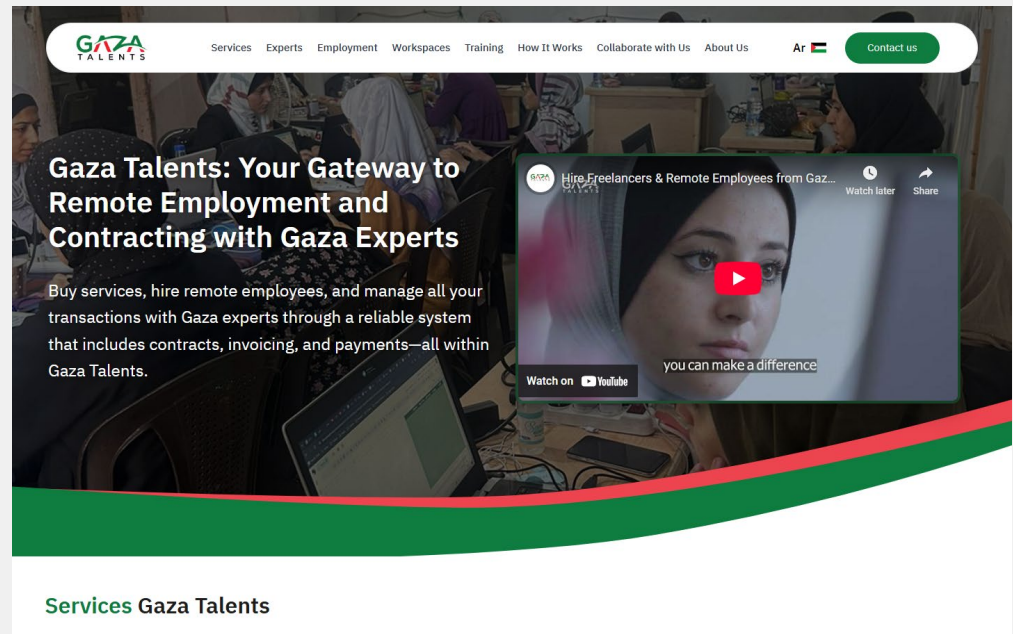
Source: The Guardian (2024)

<sup>30</sup> Taqat Gaza: <https://www.taqat-gaza.com/en>

<sup>28</sup> The Guardian (2024). 'We have no choice': Gazan workers find a lifeline in freelancing amid war. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/03/remote-worker-gaza-palestine-israel-war#:~:text=I%20t%20took%20more%20than,or%20so%20others%20work%20remotely>



Moreover, Gaza Talents<sup>32</sup>, as a digital platform, emerged to empower freelancers and remote workers in the Gaza Strip, offering them a bridge to global job markets amid blockade, displacement, and the ongoing genocide. Established to connect Gaza's skilled youth with international clients, Gaza Talents provides an integrated environment for training, job placement, and project management, helping freelancers overcome structural barriers such as restricted movement, electricity shortages, and payment blockades.



Freelancers are also adapting their approach to client engagement, often negotiating extensions or flexible terms due to the unreliable electricity and internet. The most remarkable adaptation is the collective solidarity they display, sharing resources such as electricity, connectivity, and physical space to enable as many as possible to continue earning a living. These ad-hoc digital lifelines are often the only way to earn an income now, but they carry risks where workers must travel through rubble to access hotspots, all under threat of airstrikes. Even highly resilient remote workers are being pushed to their limits by the connectivity collapse. Essentially, Gaza's ability to participate in the remote global economy has been severely limited, leaving an entire population cut off from learning opportunities and online livelihoods when they are needed most.

<sup>32</sup> Gaza Talents: <https://gazatalents.com/en>

## Data and Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method design to examine how the collapse of Gaza's digital infrastructure has affected freelancers and digital entrepreneurs. It combined qualitative and quantitative data with desk research and policy analysis to capture the multifaceted impact of Israel's blockade and the destruction of telecommunications infrastructure before and after October 2023. The first phase involved structured desk research to trace the evolution of Gaza's digital economy through academic literature, NGO and UN/OCHA reports, and media coverage. This phase identified trends in investment, entrepreneurial activity, and employment in the gig economy, and compiled a timeline of key disruptions to contextualise primary data. The second phase involved an Arabic online survey distributed to 183 individuals engaged in Gaza's digital economy, targeting freelancers, remote workers, and fintech users. Disseminated via youth networks, incubators, universities, and civil society organisations, the survey addressed income loss, access to digital payments, internet shutdowns, censorship, and coping strategies. Data was statistically analysed and triangulated with qualitative findings to identify broader patterns and insights. With minimal missing data (~1.36%), the findings are robust and representative. Respondents are predominantly young (81% aged 18–34, with 43% in the 25–34 age range) and mostly women (62%), reflecting both Gaza's youthful demographics and the growing role of women in the digital workforce. The majority (72%) are internally displaced, underscoring the severity of the humanitarian crisis.

The third phase consisted of 30 semi-structured interviews with freelancers, entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, and telecommunications professionals across the Gaza Strip. Participants were purposively selected to ensure diversity in gender, geography, and economic sector, with interviews conducted securely online to ensure confidentiality and safety. An interview guide was informed by prior fieldwork and trauma-sensitive research protocols. All interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed, translated, and thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns of disruption, adaptation, and resilience. Ethical standards were upheld throughout, ensuring informed consent, data protection, and psychological safety for participants in a highly volatile environment. Despite its rigorous design, the study faced significant limitations due to the ongoing siege, infrastructure collapse, and restricted access to affected communities. Reliance on remote communication limited spontaneity and representation, potentially excluding the most disconnected or displaced individuals. Self-reported data may also contain recall bias, and the findings, while robust, should not be generalised beyond Gaza's context.

## Narrative Analysis of the Survey and Interviews on the Digital Economy Under Blockade

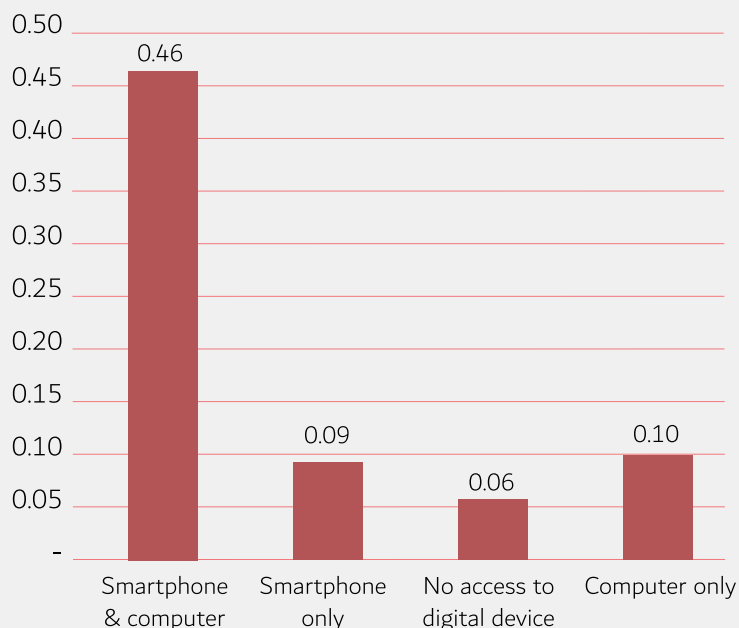
### 7.1 Introduction

The sections below combine findings from the survey and interview to discuss how the digital workforce is coping, including how they connect to the internet, how they adapt (or fail to do so), how outages impact their income and reputation, and how they receive payments (or often struggle to do so). Each point is supported with concrete numbers from the survey, as well as interview quotes, woven in with facts and statistics from sources about Gaza's internet and economy during the ongoing genocide.

## 7.2 The Connectivity Crisis

The survey reveals that Gaza's digital workforce operates under severe infrastructural constraints, highlighting the critical infrastructural deficiencies faced by Gaza's digital workforce (see chart below).

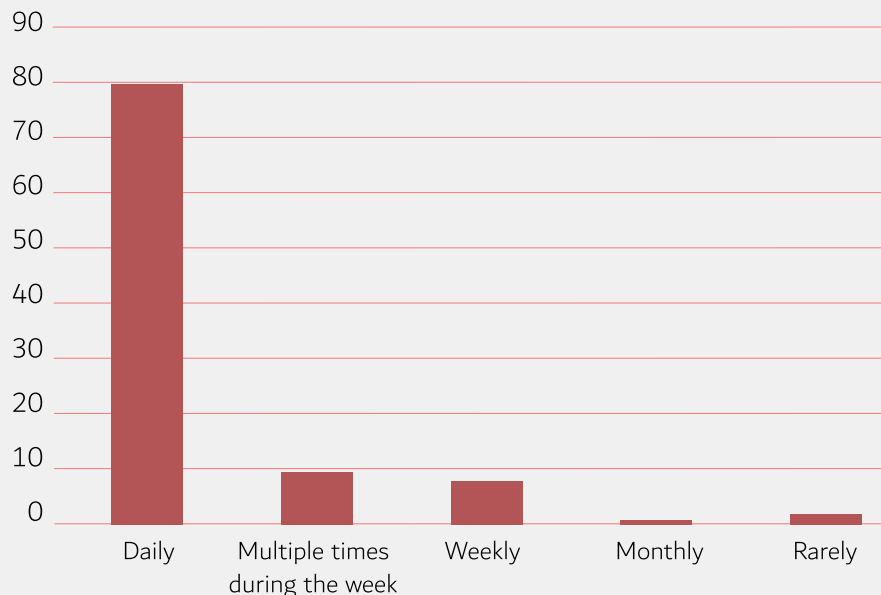
### Devices used for online work in Gaza Post October 2023



For most freelancers, this absence of essential digital infrastructure is a daily challenge. As one mobile developer explained, **“Programming consumes a great deal of battery power, and my device would be drained within an hour. The repeated switching on and off of electricity also damages equipment”** (Interviewee 21). They described charging their laptop “whenever possible” at public points or at the co-working space Taqat, which initially offered free access to power and internet before introducing a symbolic fee.

Another participant recalled that **“at the beginning of the genocide, there was no internet at all, so my colleagues and I stopped working completely”** (Interviewee 24). A web designer described being **“disconnected from the internet for about eight months... Internet access in most southern areas was extremely poor”** (Interviewee 26), while a media presenter recounted relying on e-SIMs whose **“quality was insufficient due to limited speeds, which made it extremely difficult to deliver work”** (Interviewee 25). Some lost not only access but also the equipment itself: **“When my house was bombed, I lost everything. All my equipment was destroyed, and I cannot replace it now because the prices are extremely high”** (Interviewee 28). These personal stories reflect the survey data, which show a high level of network disruption in Gaza's daily life (see the chart below).

### Frequency of internet shutdowns and slowdowns in Gaza Post October 2023



Such extended blackouts severely hinder freelancers' ability to meet deadlines or stay in touch with clients. Several interviewees explained how routine outages disrupt every aspect of their work. One freelancer said simply, **"I struggled because of power cuts and internet outages"** (Interviewee 21). A UX/UI designer explained that **"during the war I lost these opportunities because of the internet cuts"** (Interviewee 22). A translator noted that even when internet access resumed, the quality was poor: **"I faced great difficulty charging my devices and, even when the internet was available, the connection was extremely weak"** (Interviewee 29). Others spoke of months-long disconnections: **"I had to stop completely after we were displaced to the south. I was disconnected from the internet for about eight months"** (Interviewee 26).

External monitors have documented the collapse of connectivity. By mid-October 2023, approximately 83% of Gaza's fixed-line internet users had been cut off, and half of the territory's fibre-optic lines were down<sup>33</sup>. Overall, internet traffic across Gaza declined by more than 80 % during October 2023<sup>34</sup>. Entire governorates periodically went offline; on 27 October, Paltel announced a "complete interruption of all communications and internet services" after bombings destroyed the last international fibre routes<sup>35</sup>.

For digital workers, this infrastructure destruction transforms daily work into a challenge. A freelancer who stayed in the North of Gaza explained, **"At the beginning of the genocide, I stopped because of internal displacement... Remaining in the north strengthened my resilience and encouraged me to continue"** (Interviewee 25). A computer engineer also reflected that to earn a reasonable income, **"I needed a full team, as larger projects require continuous communication with clients, but that was impossible in the north"** (Interviewee 23).

Overall, both quantitative and qualitative evidence point to a landscape of ongoing digital disruption. For Gaza's freelancers, a stable connection has become a rare luxury, maintained only through resilience, improvisation, and collective coping. These voices clearly demonstrate that connectivity in Gaza is not just a technical issue, but a condition that influences whether digital work and livelihoods can be sustained.

### 7.3 Coping Mechanisms and Adaptations

The most common coping mechanism reported in both the survey and interviews is mobility, literally moving from place to place in search of a signal or electricity. Counting both solo answers and combined strategies, approximately 65% of survey respondents reported having to relocate to areas with better connectivity or power at times. This often means walking or driving to a neighbourhood where electricity has been restored via alternative sources for a few hours, or where an internet tower is still operational. Some go to friends' or relatives' homes that have generators; others seek public spaces, such as cafés or co-working spaces, that offer connectivity.

<sup>33</sup> Wired (2023). The Destruction of Gaza's Internet Is Complete. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/gaza-internet-blackout-israel/#:~:text=Across%20Paltel%E2%80%99s%20network%20on%20October.and%20SpeedClick%20could%20not%20be>

<sup>34</sup> Wired (2023). The Destruction of Gaza's Internet Is Complete. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/gaza-internet-blackout-israel/#:~:text=Across%20Paltel%E2%80%99s%20network%20on%20October.and%20SpeedClick%20could%20not%20be>

<sup>35</sup> BBC (2023). People in Gaza uncontactable and all communication down as Israel intensifies bombing. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67241362>

The interviews confirm that this constant movement has become a defining feature of digital life under blockade and genocide. As one freelancer explained, **“I charge my laptop and devices whenever possible... At present, there is the Taqat initiative. Initially, it was entirely free, and I was one of the early beneficiaries”** (Interviewee 21). Another recounted, **“When I first returned to work, I went to a small workspace in Al-Zawaida to start bidding on projects again... Later, I registered at the Taqat co-working space. By December 2024, the situation became more stable with better internet access”** (Interviewee 24).

Freelancers move constantly between such hubs to catch the brief windows of connectivity. One participant who works in voice-over said, **“At present I rent a co-working space... Before that, I relied on e-SIMs for internet access, but the quality was insufficient due to limited speeds, which made it extremely difficult to deliver work”** (Interviewee 25). Another described relying on public charging points, explaining, **“I had to stop completely after we were displaced to the south. I was disconnected from the internet for about eight months, then relocated to Rafah... From the start of the war until I returned to the north, I only found one available co-working space for a single month”** (Interviewee 26).

Such mobility, however, is dangerous. Travelling across Gaza to find a working connection exposes people to bombardment. One freelancer reflected, **“I sometimes visited relatives who had internet access or used shared workspaces, even though this exposed me to additional risks of bombardment”** (Interviewee 1). Yet, as many participants explained, they have no alternative if they wish to sustain their income. This mirrors wider accounts such as Hope Hub, a solar-powered co-working initiative where dozens of displaced freelancers gather to “vie for the coveted internet connection” in the middle of a devastated city<sup>36</sup>. Across Gaza, communities have formed around any location that still provides power or network, whether a repurposed classroom, a tent, or a particular street corner.

A second pattern visible in both the survey and interviews is non-adaptation, reflecting structural limits rather than personal failure. Roughly one-third of respondents report that they were unable to adapt, even after trying multiple strategies. Freelancers repeatedly emphasised that the scale and duration of outages make work technically impossible. A freelancer explained, **“Currently, I have stopped working since the middle of the war. I also tried to develop my skills, but I was unable to. I lost my mobile phone, and with it I lost access to many specialised programmes for people with visual impairments... I had to move repeatedly, more than nine times”** (Interviewee 4). Similarly, a translator observed, **“I faced great difficulty charging my devices and, even when the internet was available, the connection was extremely weak.”** (Interviewee 29) Others echoed this sense of helplessness, noting that prolonged blackouts simply erase any feasible way to meet deadlines or maintain communication with clients.

Some participants attempted technical fixes, such as switching providers, setting up backup connections, or using VPNs to bypass restrictions. A small number (~6%) reported changing their service providers or relying on generator-powered community networks. As one developer described, **“The responsibility lies with the space managers, who should coordinate properly with service providers and explain the number of users”** (Interviewee 21). These measures offered little relief when the entire backbone was down. **“I stopped after six months. I was relying on e-SIM internet access, but eventually even that became unreliable, especially after displacement”** (Interviewee 13).

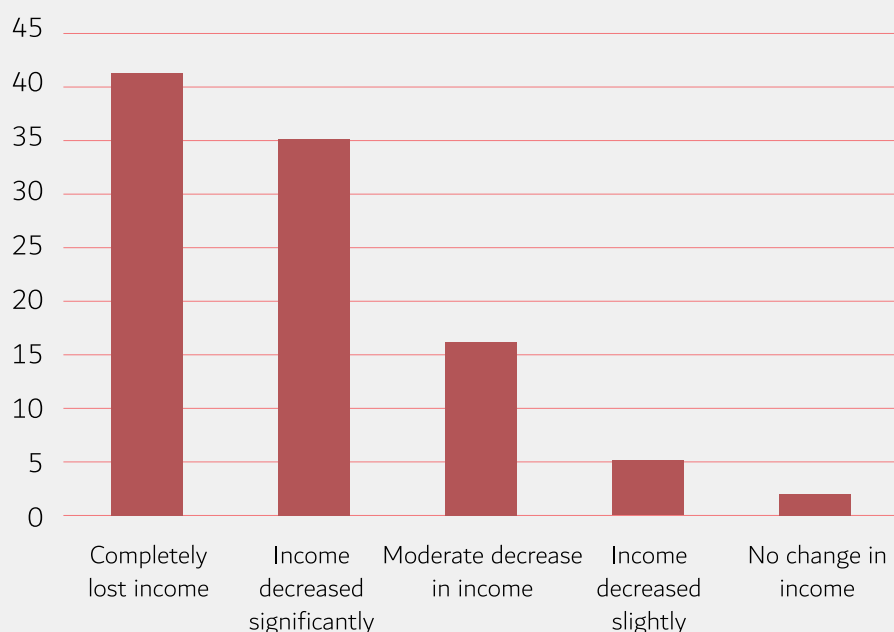
<sup>36</sup> The Guardian (2024). ‘We have no choice’: Gazan workers find a lifeline in freelancing amid war. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/03/remote-worker-gaza-palestine-israel-war#:~:text=I%20t%20took%20more%20than,or%20so%20others%20work%20remotely>

Indeed, by 31 October 2023, fifteen of Gaza's nineteen local internet service providers had no connectivity, and the remaining four were heavily disrupted<sup>37</sup>. As one voice-over artist put it starkly, **"I cannot work at all."** (Interviewee 28). In such conditions, neither relocation nor technical improvisation can compensate for the collapse of the infrastructure itself. For Gaza's digital workers, chasing connectivity has become part of the job, a continual search for signal, electricity, and survival.

#### 7.4 Impact on Productivity and Income

The survey findings reveal a catastrophic collapse of income among Gaza's digital workers (see the chart below).

**Impact of digital and telecom disruptions on income among Gaza's online workers**  
Post October 2023



This financial collapse has immediate humanitarian consequences. Many freelancers in Gaza are the sole earners for their extended families, and income losses quickly translate into shortages of food, water, and medical supplies. Several interviewees detailed a sharp decline in their income, as well as a direct link between power cuts, lost connectivity, and unpaid projects. One web developer explained, **"Most clients did not accept the disruptions, and I had to stop one project altogether because of the circumstances"** (Interviewee 3). Another freelancer said, "I often had to decline work at the start. Clients usually expect very fast delivery, but my working hours are now limited to daytime when there is solar power. Before the war, I could work throughout the day" (Interviewee 8). A freelancer recounted, **"When the internet returned in September 2024, I reconnected with some clients. Some had already left me, while I tried to approach new ones. My work requires daily communication with clients, but when I informed them that I would have interruptions, they refused to continue working with me. Their priority was their projects"** (Interviewee 12).

Contract cancellations are widespread. 86% of survey respondents said clients cancelled projects because work could not be delivered due to internet or electricity outages, or other circumstances beyond their control. These cancellations have long-term consequences. As one freelancer observed, **"As long as you are from Gaza, clients view you as a risk. Many disappear after you reassure them that you can deliver. Their reasoning is purely political. Freelancers in Gaza face challenges that make consistent commitment extremely difficult"** (Interviewee 24).

<sup>37</sup>Access Now (2023). Palestine unplugged: how Israel disrupts Gaza's internet. Available at:

<https://www.accessnow.org/publication/palestine-unplugged/#:~:text=people%20in%20the%20West%20Bank>



**“I avoid telling clients that I am based in Gaza; I only disclose this if I am displaced or if delays become unavoidable”** (Interviewee 25). For freelancers, dependent on online platforms, this translates into lasting reputational damage, algorithmic penalties, lower search rankings, and reduced visibility. **“After my prolonged absence, my online accounts became inactive, which reduced my visibility to clients,”** one freelancer explained (Interviewee 23).

These stories highlight that Gaza’s freelancers are caught in a vicious cycle where power and connectivity failures lead to missed deadlines, which cause cancellations and reputational decline, ultimately reducing future income opportunities. The result is an economy forced into a state of survival. Freelancers must allocate their scarce income to emergency power solutions, transportation to active internet hubs, or data packages, while accepting less favourable terms, smaller deposits, and longer payment periods, just to keep projects alive. Over time, this leads to debt accumulation and the depletion of assets. So, the very severe income-loss category (76–100%) being the largest reveals that even those who manage to adapt, by compressing files, shifting to lighter tasks, or working offline, cannot escape the structural limits of siege conditions. For Gaza’s freelancers, power and connectivity cuts are not minor technical inconveniences; they are the primary mechanism through which the digital economy is being throttled. As one participant concluded, **“In general, most freelancers are currently without work. I am ready for any opportunity”** (Interviewee 4).

### 7.5 Payments and Digital Platforms

Even when Gazans complete their work and earn money, receiving payment remains challenging. The survey reveals a patchwork of payment methods that are often broken and fragile, characterised by restrictions, middlemen, and high fees that reduce earnings. Respondents reported using various ways to receive international payments, but no single method dominates. The most common method was bank transfer to local accounts (used by 46% of respondents), typically with clients or platforms wiring funds to banks such as the Bank of the oPt. However, this method is unreliable as many bank branches and ATMs have been destroyed or are not operational, and cash supplies have become limited. Some Gazans even repair worn-out banknotes because new cash is not arriving<sup>38</sup>.

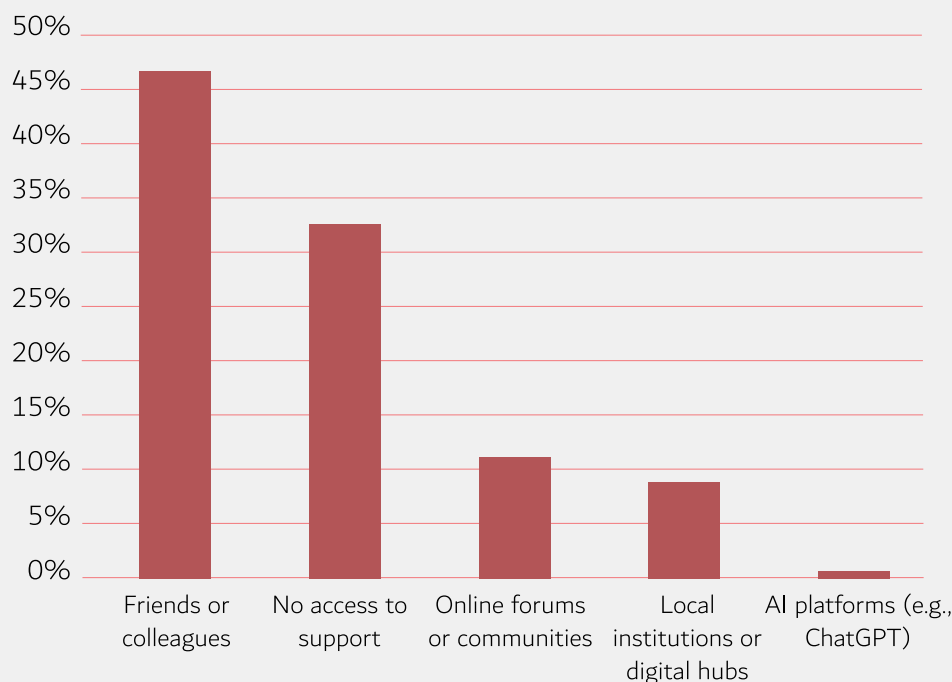
Other common methods included PayPal (26%) and local e-wallets (21%) such as PalPay or Jawwal Pay. But these channels are often used creatively or precariously. PayPal does not officially operate for Palestinians in Gaza or the West Bank, forcing freelancers to rely on workarounds such as borrowing a friend’s foreign account, using relatives abroad, or establishing stealth profiles with non-Palestinian addresses. One respondent explained, **“On the first day of the war, my account was closed because I was in a restricted area. They refused to release my funds without verification. After I submitted the documents, they permanently closed the account. I now have to wait 180 days before I can withdraw the money”** (Interviewee 9). Another added, **“Each transfer cost me 50 US dollars in fees, which is a large amount given the limited income”** (Interviewee 25). Moreover, one interviewee explained, **“On Mostaq<sup>39</sup>, payments are processed through PayPal, and during the war, all PayPal accounts for people in Gaza were closed. Between withdrawal fees, cashing charges, and co-working space subscriptions, you can end up losing more than you earn”** (Interviewee 21).

<sup>38</sup> The New Humanitarian (2025). “Cash became a commodity”: The liquidity crisis compounding suffering in Gaza. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2025/04/17/cash-became-commodity-liquidity-crisis-compounding-suffering-gaza>

<sup>39</sup> An Arabic freelance platform: <https://mostaq.com/>

These obstacles are structural, not individual. Payoneer requires Israeli-linked bank accounts that Palestinians cannot access. Other payment routes, such as cryptocurrency (used by approximately 10%), pose a high risk and low liquidity, while smaller Arab-based platforms remain limited in their reach. Even promising alternatives remain exceptions rather than the norm. As one designer explained: **“Forlanzo provides services for managing freelance work, including payment solutions. Funds can be withdrawn within a day with 0% commission, provided the freelancer links the account to the Bank of Palestine”** (Interviewee 22).

**Sources of technical and digital support among Gaza’s online workers**  
Post October 2023



However, such arrangements are fragile and depend on limited institutional cooperation. Many others still rely on informal intermediaries, individuals abroad, or local money exchangers to withdraw funds. **“I often use an intermediary with a PayPal account to withdraw funds from Mostaqi, but that means losing a portion of the money”** (Interviewee 24). **“Sometimes I rely on relatives, but typically the commission was around 7% before the war. During the war, it increased to as much as 30% if you wanted to receive cash”** (Interviewee 26).

For some, payment channels disappeared entirely. One voice-over freelancer explained, **“Previously, it was straightforward. I used money exchange offices; I would send the office’s account details to the client, and the client would transfer the funds directly to the office, incurring a 2% fee. I also had a local e-wallet where I could receive some transfers. But during the genocide, I used the account of a relative, who then transferred the funds into my bank account”** (Interviewee 28).

Over half of respondents (56%) said they face restrictions using the very financial platforms they depend on, 32% “sometimes,” and 24% “frequently.” These restrictions are geopolitical, regulatory, and technical all at once. PayPal’s exclusion of Palestinians, even while serving Israeli settlers in the same areas, is symbolic of digital apartheid<sup>40</sup>. The blockade extends to banking operations as Israel’s restrictions on postal and monetary flows have cut off cheque and card services, and liquidity shortages have forced limits on e-wallet transactions.

<sup>40</sup> Mondoweiss (2023). PayPal upholds its ban on Palestinians. Available at: <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/05/paypal-upholds-its-ban-on-palestinians/>

Internet blackouts further interrupt access even when users technically have functioning accounts. One interviewee summarised **“Payment remains the greatest challenge... We also need solutions for verifying and restoring lost PayPal accounts”** (Interviewee 21). Another added, **“I rely on my brother’s European account to receive payments, since my own account was closed. Transfers through Bank of Palestine are also very difficult”** (Interviewee 29).

The consequences are devastating. Even when freelancers manage to overcome connectivity barriers to deliver work, the money might not arrive, or they lose a significant portion through cascading fees. A client may pay \$1,000, but after weeks of delays, deductions, and conversions, only \$600 might reach Gaza. The inability to receive payments reliably prevents freelancers from reinvesting in better equipment or training. Some have attempted to find alternatives through community initiatives, but the problem persists at a systemic level. **“There is a local platform called Fawateery, but most clients hesitate to use it”** (Interviewee 21). **“We need stable workspaces with reliable internet and electricity. The main problem lies in payment transfers. Fawateery is not entirely secure and can be vulnerable to breaches”** (Interviewee 18).

### 7.6 Community, Support Networks, and Collective Engagement

Survey results indicate that Gaza’s digital workforce operates in an environment where formal technical support is scarce and collective structures are underdeveloped, resulting in many individuals relying on informal networks or working independently. When asked who they usually turn to for digital or technical support, nearly half (46%) of respondents pointed to friends or colleagues, underscoring that peer-to-peer solidarity has become the primary mechanism for maintaining digital livelihoods. In stark contrast, a third (33%) reported having no access to support at all, revealing a profound gap in resilience. Only small proportions rely on online forums or communities (11%) or local institutions and digital centres (9%), while just 1% reported using AI platforms like ChatGPT for support, unsurprising given the combination of connectivity and financial constraints, electricity shortages, and restricted digital access as summarised below:

Such grassroots efforts demonstrate how collective initiatives fill the gaps where institutional structures falter. A freelancer added, **“Taqat started as a free space and then covered \$50 per person. My colleagues and I founded an initiative called Watad<sup>41</sup> to provide workspace fees through external donations. We also distribute guides and offer training for freelancers”** (Interviewee 24). These examples demonstrate that peer-led and community-driven projects, rather than official programmes, are sustaining Gaza’s digital ecosystem. They provide not only internet and power but also a sense of belonging and shared resilience. As one organiser described: **“The idea was to support freelancers by covering their subscription fees once or twice, to help them secure their first projects”** (Interviewee 21).

However, such solidarity is fragile and uneven. While the survey shows that 29% of respondents participate in youth-led digital initiatives, the majority (71%) do not, largely because displacement and precarity limit the ability to engage consistently. Even those who have founded initiatives find it difficult to sustain them. One project leader explained that **“The initiative has been running for more than five months and has been well received, but I have not found any initiative willing to support it”** (Interviewee 30).

This absence of institutional backing echoes across the interviews. Another freelancer reflected that **“During the genocide, NGOs were largely absent... most organisations closed their doors. Some private initiatives emerged but were later destroyed in airstrikes”** (Interviewee 30).

<sup>41</sup> Watad for Gaza is an initiative dedicated to empowering freelancers across the Gaza Strip during the genocide.

Such testimonies highlight the enormous untapped potential of Gaza's young digital community. Despite minimal resources, youth-led initiatives like Taqat, Watad, and Gaza Talents have become engines of innovation, connecting freelancers, offering peer mentorship, and rebuilding capacity. Yet their reach remains limited, constrained by geography, electricity, and funding.

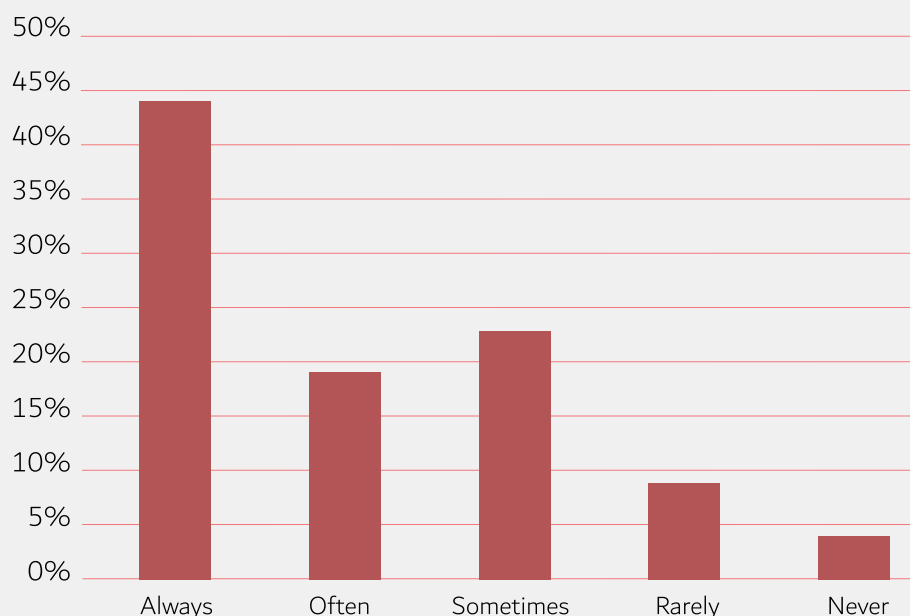
Participation in online freelancer communities also remains low. Approximately one-third (34%) of survey respondents report not being part of any online support community, while another 18% are unaware of their existence. Among those who do know of them, 27% are members but inactive, and only 22% describe themselves as active participants. In other words, fewer than one in four digital workers in Gaza are meaningfully engaged in online spaces designed to support them. Interviewees themselves noted the lack of structured networking as **“There should be initiatives to provide free or subsidised co-working spaces since the cost can exceed \$260 per person. Also, employment projects could help connect freelancers to clients”** (Interviewee 26). **“We need a supporting body for small-scale projects”** (Interviewee 27).

Where participation does occur, it often emerges from necessity rather than formal coordination. One UX designer recounted how she created Gaza Talents precisely to fill that gap, saying that **“Freelancers from Gaza have an excellent reputation, so I thought of creating a dedicated platform where we could showcase our services directly to the world”** (Interviewee 22).

### 7.7 Surveillance and Digital Privacy Concerns

Survey results highlight major concerns among Gaza's digital workforce about surveillance and digital privacy, as per the chart below:

**Concerns about surveillance and digital privacy among Gaza's online workers**  
Post October 2023



These figures confirm that privacy fears are a core aspect of Gaza's digital experience. Behind this practical frustration lies an implied anxiety that every technical weakness can also be exploited. Even the small minority who said they rarely (9%) or never (4%) worry is not necessarily free from risk. They might work in low-sensitivity roles such as e-commerce or technical design, or they might have simply become desensitised after years of digital monitoring.

These experiences correspond to reports by organisations such as 7amleh and Access Now, which document both mass surveillance and algorithmic exclusion. For many Gazans, the question is not whether their communications are monitored, but how much. Freelancers working with foreign clients or NGOs handling sensitive data often fear both professional and political consequences if their activity is flagged. The 19% who often worry represent those whose vigilance fluctuates, their anxiety rising during internet blackouts, escalations, or when using particular apps or platforms. The 23% who sometimes worry may not work in politically sensitive sectors but still internalise the risk, moderating what they post or share. Several interviewees described self-censorship and hiding their location. **“As for Fiverr, I chose not to use it because it is managed by Israelis, so I decided not to continue working on it”** (Interviewee 23). **“Most of our efforts focused on exposing the crimes of the Israeli army. We attempted to highlight this, but there were no international organisations that could guarantee protection or a safe channel through which to make our voices heard. Everyone was hesitant to become involved. I also tried to connect with external organisations and individuals”** (Interviewee 5).

In short, the survey data and interviews together depict a workforce that sees privacy as both fragile and politicised. Freelancers must navigate overlapping layers of threat: surveillance by occupying authorities, monitoring by platforms, and scrutiny by clients. Their coping mechanisms, such as concealing their location or channelling payments through others, are acts of quiet resistance. Digital visibility, for many, is a double-edged sword, as it is essential for finding work, but also poses dangers in a landscape where being online can make one visible to those in power.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Gaza's digital economy serves both as a testament to human resilience and a reflection of structural injustice. Before October 2023, thousands of young Palestinians had transformed isolation into opportunity, creating online livelihoods that crossed borders and offered a glimpse of economic hope under siege. This fragile ecosystem, however, relied on unstable infrastructure, power, internet, and finance, all of which were controlled by external actors. The devastation following October 2023 not only destroyed physical connectivity but also dismantled the delicate networks of trust, reputation, and professional opportunity that Gaza's freelancers had thoroughly established over the years. Still, amidst destruction and displacement, the determination of Gaza's digital workforce to stay active and connected highlights a deeper story of collective endurance and creativity in the face of systemic collapse.

The report's findings highlight both the extent of loss and the enduring sense of solidarity. As freelancers and entrepreneurs face broken infrastructure, disrupted payment systems, and digital isolation, their dependence on informal networks and community-led initiatives illustrates a powerful form of grassroots resilience. These micro-collectives, rooted in shared struggle, have become the true backbone of Gaza's digital survival. Nonetheless, maintaining this resilience requires more than humanitarian compassion; it necessitates structural reform. Rebuilding Gaza's digital economy must start with recognising internet access as a fundamental human right and ensuring that digital connectivity is prioritised within reconstruction and development efforts. Meaningful recovery also depends on dismantling global barriers that exclude Palestinians from participating in digital spaces. Fair access to online markets, inclusive financial systems, and investment in skills and safe workspaces are essential to restore both dignity and opportunity. Ultimately, supporting Gaza's digital workers is not merely an act of aid but an act of justice that affirms their right to connect, create, and contribute to a global digital future on equal terms.

## Key Recommendations

Gaza's economic recovery prospects depend on increased international support for Palestinians. Following a ceasefire, this support can connect Gaza's skilled workforce with remote jobs overseas. Palestinians have improved their digital skills over the past decade, forming a talent pool for the global digital economy. The following suggestions, drawn from surveys and interview findings, aim to strengthen Gaza's digital economy during and after the genocide.



### 9.1 #ReconnectGaza: Building Resilient Digital and Power Infrastructure for Recovery

To rebuild Gaza's digital economy, the top priority must be restoring and rebuilding telecommunications and power infrastructure with resilient, sustainable systems that guarantee reliable connectivity even during crises. This aligns with the goals of 7amleh's #ReconnectGaza campaign, which urges the international community to prioritise restoring digital access as a crucial lifeline for communication, work, and education. Alongside infrastructure repair, immediate aid should provide freelancers with essential hardware and power solutions such as reliable laptops, smartphones, and accessories distributed through interest-free loans or at symbolic prices. Solar-powered chargers, portable batteries, and small generators suitable for low-electricity settings should support these efforts, while local repair centres can help prolong the lifespan of devices. To ensure long-term recovery, a Digital Recovery Fund should be established to finance equipment, microloans, and digital workspaces, managed transparently by trusted local and international partners.

### 9.2 Create Accessible and Inclusive Internet Hubs

Amid the widespread destruction of infrastructure in Gaza, establishing internet hubs in strategic locations would supply reliable electricity, high-speed broadband, and shared resources for those lacking the required equipment or space to work. These hubs could be funded and set up through collaborative efforts from international donors, local NGOs, municipal authorities, and the private sector, functioning as social enterprises that charge minimal fees while providing subsidies to youth, women, and low-income freelancers. Each hub should include shared devices like laptops, printers, and charging stations to reduce individual expenses. Gender-sensitive design is essential, including women-only hours, childcare options, and secure transport to ensure fair access. Likewise, accessible hubs for people with disabilities should be fitted with ramps, ergonomic furniture, and assistive technologies such as screen readers and adaptive software. Incorporating on-site technical support and peer mentorship programmes would help these hubs become collaborative spaces that foster learning, community, and resilience.

### 9.3 Restore Fair Access to Digital Markets and Platforms

Freelancers in Gaza continue to be excluded from major digital payment and work platforms due to geo-blocks and discriminatory account closures. To address this, international pressure from organisations such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Palestinian Monetary Authority (PMA), and NGOs should be exerted on global payment platforms to lift restrictions on Palestinian accounts. Meanwhile, regional alternatives that accept local bank accounts should be supported and promoted. Freelancing platforms should be encouraged to suspend penalties, reputation losses, and algorithmic downgrades during crises, ensuring that temporary disruptions caused by war or power outages do not permanently harm freelancers' visibility and income. Transparency measures, such as fairness and accountability reports, would help rebuild trust between freelancers and platforms. Additionally, awareness campaigns targeted at international clients can help them understand Gaza's working conditions and promote more flexible timelines, alternative payment arrangements, and inclusive collaboration practices.

### 9.4 Strengthen Professional Capacity Through Training and Mentorship

After years of blockade and repeated destruction, many freelancers in Gaza face skill gaps that limit their ability to compete globally. Rebuilding their professional capacity requires structured training and mentorship programmes coordinated by universities and educational institutions, in partnership with local tech communities and international development agencies. These initiatives should strengthen both technical and business skills through online and in-person workshops adapted to unstable electricity and internet conditions. Training should focus on advanced digital tools, artificial intelligence, and sustainable online business practices. Pairing junior freelancers with experienced mentors can further enhance their confidence and provide

valuable practical guidance. To enhance competitiveness, institutions can facilitate equitable access to essential digital tools and learning resources through subsidised licences or vouchers supported by donors. Priority should be given to beginners and job seekers facing the greatest barriers. This investment in human capital can help Gaza's freelancers regain confidence, stay ahead of technological advances, and expand their professional opportunities.

### 9.5 Establish External Technical and Logistical Support Units

Given the ongoing restrictions on Gaza's infrastructure, establishing an external technical support unit could offer sustained assistance to freelancers and digital workers. Hosted by a university consortium, professional association, or international development agency in the West Bank or a neighbouring country, the unit could provide remote helpdesk services in Arabic and English, troubleshoot software and connectivity issues, and offer guidance on cybersecurity and digital resilience. It could also act as an intermediary with global freelancing ecosystems, facilitating account access, secure payment processing, and dispute resolution, while remaining platform-neutral. In addition to technical assistance, the unit could host regular webinars, mentorship sessions, and networking events to strengthen skills and professional connections. By providing consistent and reliable support, this initiative would enhance productivity, resilience, and morale among Gaza's digital workforce.

### 9.6 Build Organised Networks, Teams, and Representation

Freelancers in Gaza often work in isolation, which limits their bargaining power and access to larger contracts. Creating collective structures, such as a national freelancers' association or union, could strengthen their collective voice when advocating for fair labour policies, digital rights, and transparent dealings with online platforms. Alongside this national body, local freelancer networks across governorates could promote collaboration, resource-sharing, and peer learning. These networks would enable freelancers to combine their expertise, form project-based teams, and tackle more complex assignments together, thereby enhancing competitiveness and community resilience. Providing training in project management, leadership, and collaborative digital tools would help freelancers function more effectively as cohesive teams for international clients. Regular online and face-to-face networking events could further foster solidarity and a shared professional identity within Gaza's expanding freelance sector.

### 9.7 Foster Partnerships and NGO Engagement for Market Access

NGOs can play a vital role in rebuilding trust between Gaza's freelancers and international clients. By acting as intermediaries, NGOs can verify freelancers' credentials, host their portfolios, and connect them with reliable clients while enabling secure payment channels. NGOs and international partners should also engage in advocacy to highlight Gaza's digital talent and the structural challenges they face. Awareness-raising campaigns through social media and global events can attract clients who are receptive to flexible, ethical collaborations. Diaspora communities can contribute valuable networks, mentorship, and investment, helping integrate Gaza's freelancers into international value chains. By combining credibility, advocacy, and practical support, these partnerships would restore freelancers' market access and promote a more sustainable and inclusive digital economy.



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