

Online Freelance Work in Palestine

An initial survey



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Introduction

Given the growth of online freelancing, and the unique difficulties encountered by people in Palestine, this survey set out to examine the opportunity for online freelancing in Palestine.

The aim of this survey was to identify whether online freelance sites were attractive to people in Palestine, how active or successful they are, and to see whether there were specific problems holding them back.

Method

We received a total of 26 responses from online freelancers based in Palestine, from an invitation list of around 90 names on Elance. Given that most freelancers listed on Elance, of whatever country, are inactive, we see this as a satisfactory response, if not definitive.

Conclusions

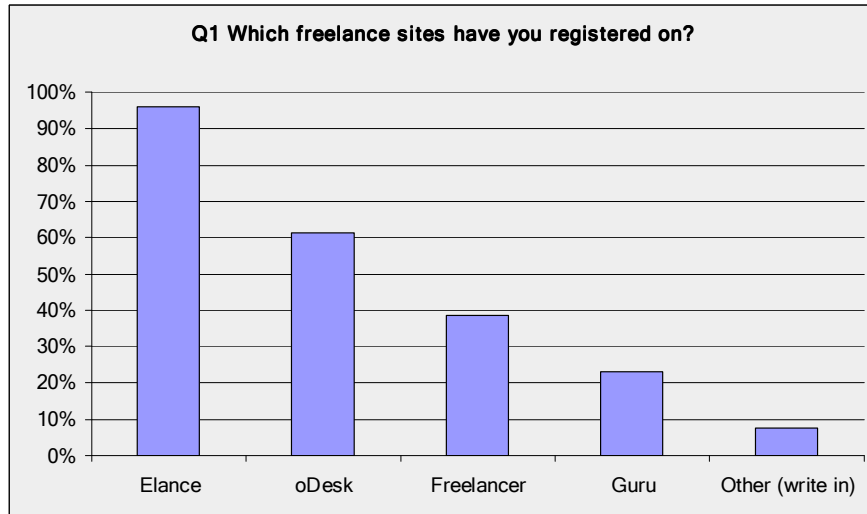
1. Respondents see the online freelance sites as good opportunities to earn money.
2. A minority of freelancers earn sizeable revenue from online work, which demonstrates that it is quite possible to earn a living online.
3. For many, however, success rates are very low. The freelancers have put forward various reasons for this. Surprisingly, most are not unique to Palestine. Even power cuts are found in countries like the Philippines. Others, such as the level of competition, may stem from a lack of experience, lack of training and a poor self-confidence which manifests itself in a failure to bid for work in a positive and professional manner. A third set, insufficient commitment, indicate the need to promote a commercial and rigorous approach to winning work.

Further steps are listed at the end of this document.

Analysis

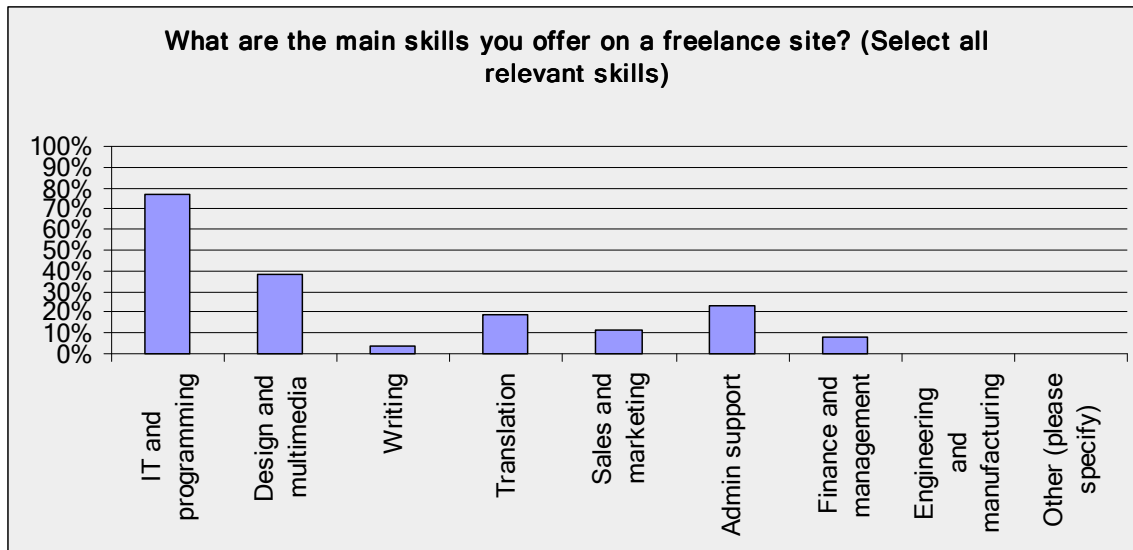
On what sites do the freelancers register?

Most surveyed freelancers are registered on at least two freelance sites; Elance is the most popular among respondents¹ with 96% followed by oDesk with 60%. Freelancers in Palestine who responded to our survey show that there is an understanding of the importance of registering on several freelance sites to achieve better results in finding online jobs. (Q1)



What skills do the freelancers offer?

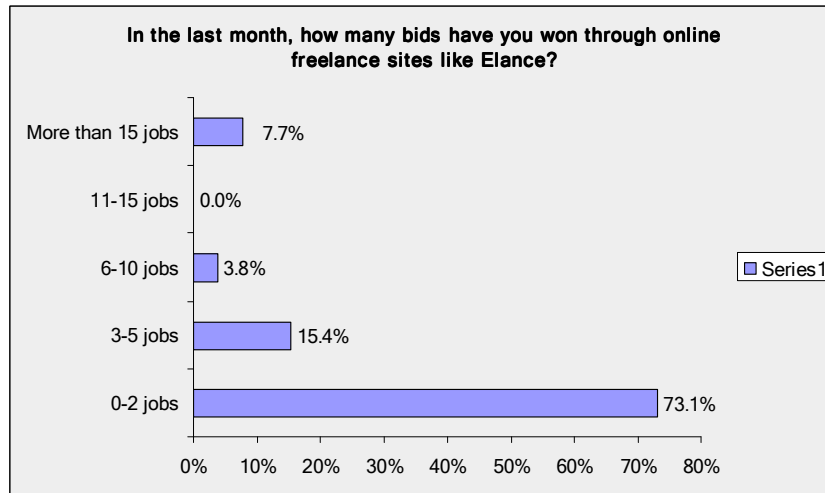
Most of the Palestinians on the freelance jobs sites are offering skills related to IT; with 76% offering IT and programming skills and 36% offering design and multimedia skills.



¹ Note: the survey was conducted among Elance freelancers, though this was because prior analysis showed that Elance had the most Palestinian freelancers.

How successful are they?

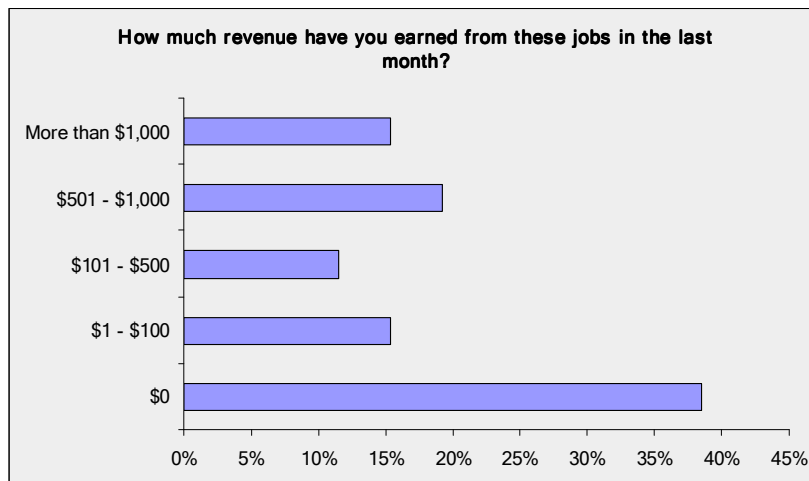
The overwhelming majority had won 0-2 jobs, which really means zero jobs. It indicates that Palestinians aren't currently successful in winning jobs online. (Q3).



However a minority has won more than 15 jobs a month, indicating that success is possible.

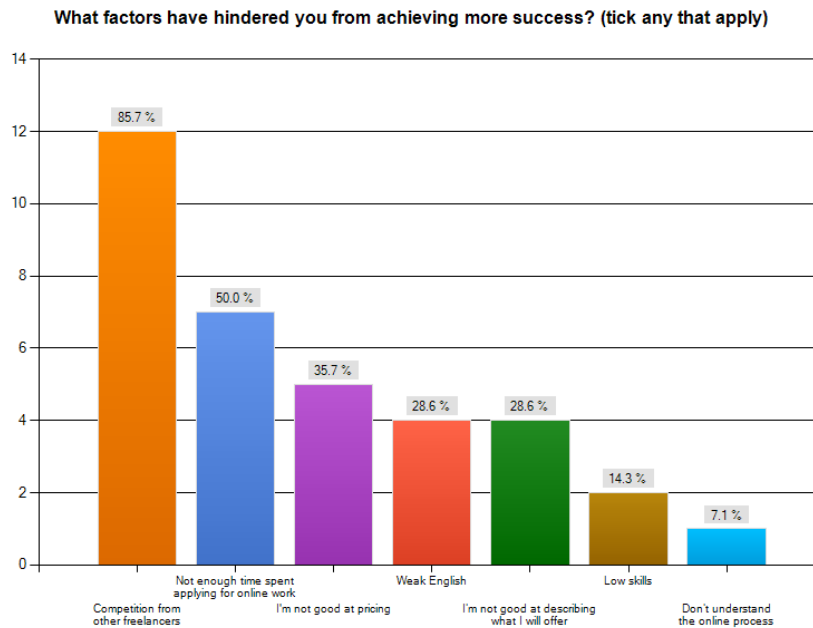
These results show the need to train Palestinians about how to win bids, for example through pricing, bid writing etc. (Q2)

52% of the survey population reported earning less than \$100 from freelance jobs sites (40% earning \$0). Yet a minority was earning more than \$1,000 a month from online freelancing. (Q4)



Reasons for lack of success

The respondents said that the main reasons for their lack of success were: competition from other freelancers (85%), not enough time spent applying for online work (54%), and not being good at pricing (38%).



We have to ask ourselves, what is the competition (mostly people in India) doing that makes them better? And can Palestinians emulate that?

However, the argument about competition may be illusory: simply a lack of self confidence, or a lack of training.

These results reflect the need to train Palestinian online freelancers on how to win bids (e.g. competitors, pricing, etc.). (Q5)

Reasons for success

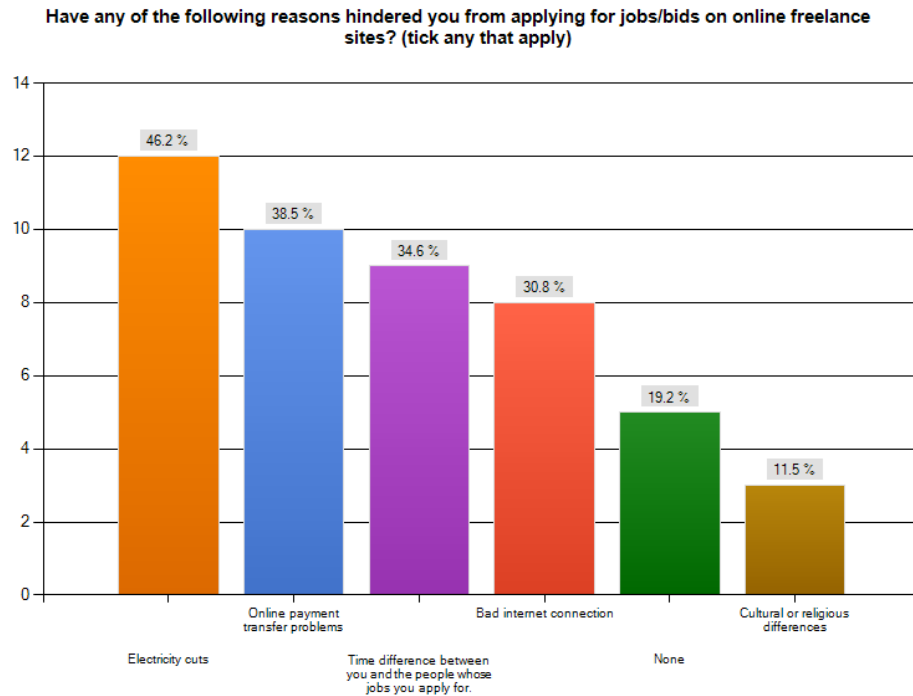
The 48% of the survey population who reported earning more than \$100 from freelance jobs sites said that the main reason for this success was 'good technical skills' (100%). Other reasons for success on the freelance jobs sites as described by our survey population are: good understanding of clients' needs (67%) and sticking to the area where they felt they are strongest (50%). (Q6)

What problems do they face?

Palestinian freelancers who responded to our survey expressed three main problems when dealing with freelance jobs sites: electricity cuts (44%), online payment transfer problems (40%), and time difference from their clients (36%).

Although 60% didn't mention problems in their payment process, we believe that the payment issue is one of the main reasons hindering Palestinians from applying for online

freelance jobs, and thus a banking solution is really needed in Palestine to allow skilled Palestinians to evolve in using the freelance jobs sites. (Q7)



What percentage of respondents' income comes from freelancing online?

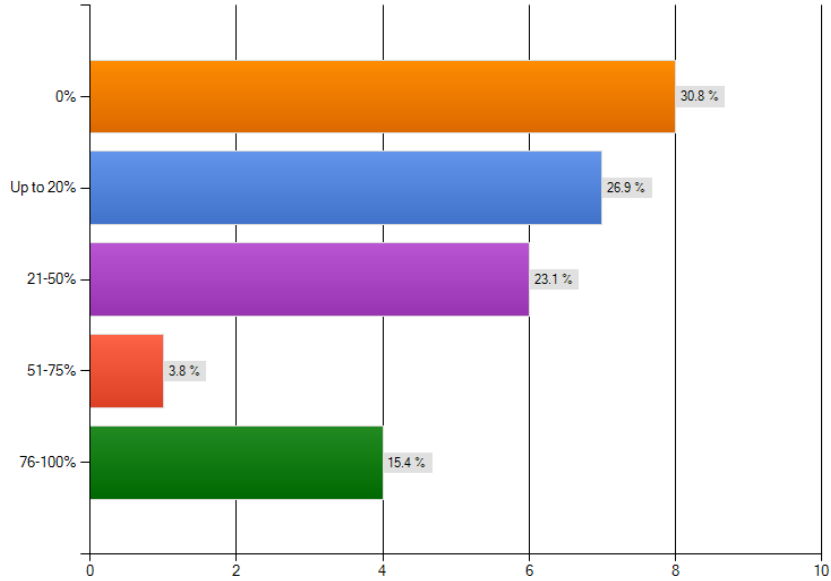
56% of the survey respondents indicated that freelance jobs sites only contributed 20% or less of their income in the past 90 days, with many failing to earn any income.

However, a minority said it contributed over three-quarters of their income.

Again this highlights the gap between the successful freelancers and those who have not learnt how to win bids.

Palestinian freelancers require more skill on how to use the freelance jobs sites, and make more income from it, so as to increase the proportion that these sites contribute to the freelancers' income. (Q9)

In the last 90 days, what proportion of your income has come from freelance sites?

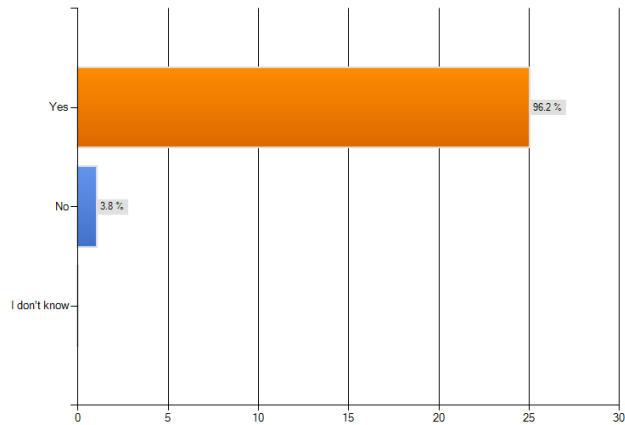


Are freelance sites adequate as a main source of income?

56% of the respondents indicated that freelance jobs sites would not be adequate as the main source of income (Q10). However, 96% of them see that these sites are a good place for Palestinians to earn extra money (Q16).

This is because their daily jobs don't pay enough money, and the freelance jobs sites offer work beyond the borders of Palestine and on a flexible schedule.

In your opinion, are freelance sites a good place for some Palestinian people to earn extra money?



Reasons for a positive view of freelance sites

When asked to explain their reasons, they said:

- Inside Palestine there are few opportunities and they pay little money. It's not enough to get a good life.
- Because of the differed of the financial situation, people outside Palestine can pay more.
- Because it gives the freelancer the freedom to focus on the work which he love the most, and he can manage his time well , and the result of that is the freedom of work and earn a good money.
- because the Palestinians have a high unemployment and a weak economy and they have a limit resources but they have many skills specially in IT
- Because it is easy to access, and there is no need to go out Palestine
- Simply because you will work from home to over million clients over the world. Freelancer websites can help many Palestinian people to get enough income for living.
- Because there are few jobs in Palestine, no more opportunities for new graduates and workers, so freelance sites give them golden way to earn money.
- Many skilled Palestinians can't find any job. They have many skills that are needed from many customers. So, they can provide the needed services to those customers, earn money and grant good experience.
- Free work hours and very flexible job opportunities you can find the exact job matches your skills. No need to go to other town in order to find work you can just do it from home without having to have high budget to start, just a laptop and fast internet connection
- Well, there is too many unemployed Palestinians specially who lives in Gaza , and who can't go out side of Gaza so being a freelancer is a good opportunity to overcome Gaza siege.

We believe that Palestinian freelancers could earn enough money from freelance jobs sites if they dealt with the sites in a more committed way, improve their skills and update their profile, as well as constantly bidding on jobs.

What was their experience of freelance sites?

Respondents had a very positive experience of freelance sites (Q15):

- I am using freelancer.com website as a main source to get a work for 3 months. and really, everyday I learn more and more.. in a technical field and dealing with clients.
- I'm new at freelance sites, I registered for Elance and I got 5 jobs so far , and I earned about 600 USD , Now I'm trying to withdraw the money, if the withdrawal process succeeds , I will put more effort on the website.
- it's an additional income source but it needs to have a good skills or to be professional in your field
- I worked for 2 clients and got paid. But I have a lack of time to invest in freelancing sites as they need a lot of time to build a profile and to got known
- freelance make my skills so good, and I'll keep working on it
- I tried only elance and I took some jobs from it, and I want to get more
- working in freelance sites needs more skills , ability to convince , more previous samples and patience . you should manage your time and work because you are the manager of yourself , so you are expected to balance between work and biding and improving skills.

- The more work and skills I have, the more chances there will be. + the need of electrical equipments in the Gaza case.
- I found out that Elance is the best choice, I am using many other freelancing sites, but 90% is elance and 10% all other sources. My experience was good , my rate is high and I have satisfied customers . I concentrate on working on vb.net, c#, vb and Java applications.
- great experience, i had to learn new technologies because each day i have new customer needs and i will have to search an learn in order have better competition chances.

What obstacles have respondents encountered?

When asked to write down what obstacles stood in their way (Q18), respondents pointed to the following:

Competition:

- High competition from other freelancer some with cheaper prices and better profile and work history. -The difficulties to build a profile and get trusted by clients. -Lack of time.
- PayPal & Indians offering bad price and quality
- The Indian freelancers, because they offer less price and they are too many, so the competition is very high

Electricity cuts:

- The Electricity cuts is the main obstacle now, I schedules my work, and my life on the electricity cuts, whatever the time is night or morning, Except if I have a backup electrical equipment as gasoline generator or inverters with batteries which need an Independent budget to continue as a freelancer. The time is the second, I need the time to learn more skills, to have internet
- The main obstacle to me would be the electricity problems that i mentioned before. So if you come and live here you will know what i am talking about!

Payment methods:

- the most usual obstacles are there is no Electronic money solutions for us ,, and add for this we can Not get a bank account easily in here.. we are trapped between both occupation authority and Palestinian authority
- money transfer process
- The most obstacles are the electricity cut off and the Money Transferring.
- payment method like Paypal did not support my country... its the only way to withdraw the money

Other, including language barriers

- the bids some time not clear. 2- the language. 3- the procedures not easy for the contractor

- when i make a proposal for Elance jobs , most of them canceled or awarded for some one else. Also i think, when client see my country he may select some one else me, most clients not prefer to select Palestinians.

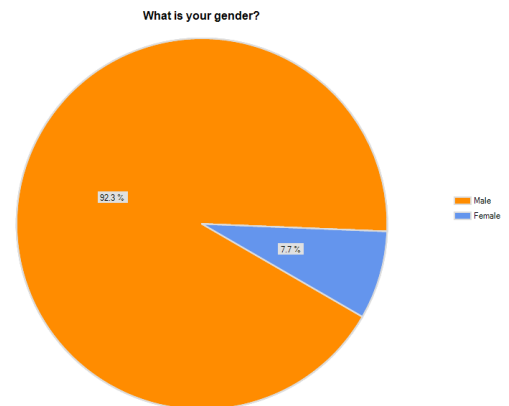
How well off are they generally?

Most respondents (60%) reported that they don't get paid enough through all their income sources (Q13), and 28% reported being paid less than an average Palestinian (Q14).

This suggests the need to create more awareness of how to make more money through online freelance sites and the big potential they offer. It indicates that more skill building is needed on how to win bids and make the best out of the freelance jobs sites.

Demographics

- 9 out of ten respondents were male (Q23)
- Most were aged 14-40
- 70% were married
- 84% had 0-2 children.
- They live mainly in Gaza and Ramallah.



Further work

Further work might include the following steps:

- Analysis among successful freelancers in India and elsewhere of the key factors for success in winning work.
- One-to-one mentoring, pairing successful freelancers with ones in Palestine.
- Free guides to winning work.
- Workshops in Palestine to train people to succeed in online freelancing.
- Promotional campaign in Palestine to promote online work
- Technical skills training
- Website containing a database of Palestinian freelancers
- Promote the use of Palestinian freelancers in the Middle East and beyond.
- Appointment of a manager in Palestine to carry out this work, and identify further steps.
- Street research in Ramallah or Gaza to learn more about people's awareness, interest and skills.