AFF MEMBER UPDATES:

In August, Beirut was rocked by a series of devastating explosions that wreaked havoc throughout the capital and beyond, causing an already fragile socio-economic situation to worsen. Here are some of the interventions our member organizations implemented to support the communities in Lebanon as they continue to, once again, rebuild the city's infrastructure and the morale of its inhabitants.

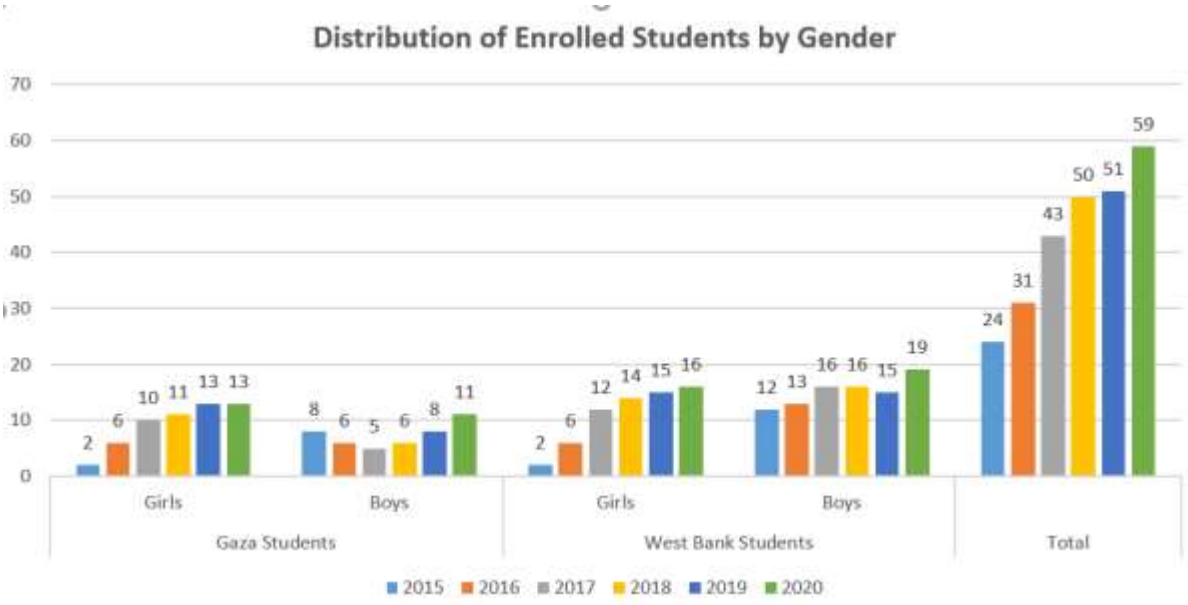
Coding Education in Pandemic Times: Paltel Group Foundation

Paltel Group Foundation journey over almost half a decade is full of challenges. It is not only Corona Pandemic that formed exceptional conditions around the Foundation work; other economic, political and social conditions now and then placed the Group as well as other Palestinian society components in a crisis, but we never give up.

The first few months of the Pandemic came in the same period of Paltel Group Foundation's season of coding education preparation. The selection of Participants usually starts in March, and the annual training camps every year takes place in June and July. Without any hesitation, Paltel Group Foundation decided to keep everything in place by using communication technologies for running Code for Palestine annual camp for school students as well the Code + Design Bootcamp for universities' students. Nothing has changed except for the transition from traditional means to ICT means.

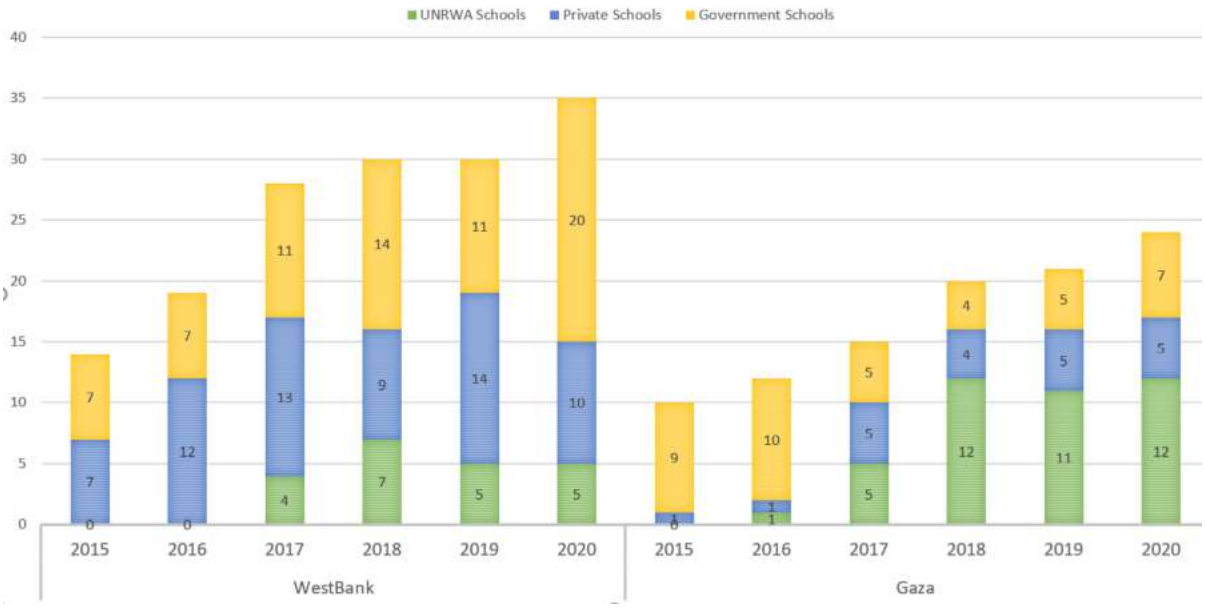
Code for Palestine has two tracks: school students & university students

Code for Palestine for school students is a 3-year program that targets students at age 14 until they are 17 years old who spend three years in coding education to end up with a graduation project. Each participant attends three summer camps and a series of full-day classes all over the year months. Instructors/ senior students from Stanford University in the Silicon Valley (Department of Computer Science & The Design School) volunteers to teach Palestinian students coding, design thinking, and problem-solving. In 2020, the summer camp ran entirely online with a comprehensive schedule that responded to the expectations of all students and instructors. Although it was "Mission Impossible" but it was accomplished the right way and even better. Students presented their graduation projects online and were reviewed and discussed by their instructors. While schools and universities were closed, Code for Palestine students was spending hours a day learning and coding. Besides design thinking and problem solving, the students attended intensive sessions to learn to code in Python and Turtle for year 1 and React Native (JavaScript, HTML, CSS, Git / GitHub, Firebase) in years 2 and 3 through practical applications and projects.

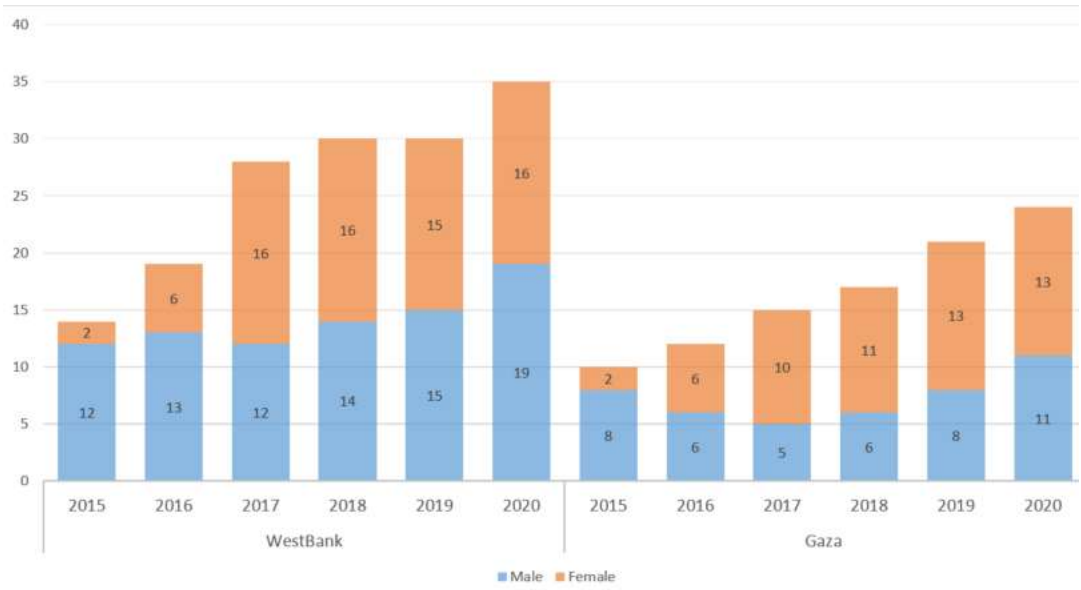


Code for Palestine has resulted in establishing [Code.X, a non for profit organization registered in the Silicon Vally] established by the first group of instructors volunteered for Code for Palestine five years ago. In 2015 four CfP instructors came up with [CodeX] idea to deploy to program in other countries and they started with China and Albania; they still have the plan to reach more countries based on the CFP model. However, Code.X continue recruiting volunteers from the University of Stanford for CFP and add significant value from their experience as graduates for the university and currently working at top tech companies in Silicon Valley.

Numbers of admitted students in Public, UNRWA, and Private Schools by Year



Number of Admitted Students in West Bank and Gaza by Year of admission



Code for Palestine graduates also become TAs in the program after their graduation and admission into universities studying computer science; in 2020, a total of 32 TAs worked in the program from previous Code for Palestine students. Similarly, international instructors are always eager to volunteer for teaching Palestinian students coding and design thinking skills; 100% of the international volunteers strongly advise their colleagues to come to Palestine and volunteer with Code for Palestine.

A total of 17 CFP students got admissions in reputable international universities to study computer engineering or computer science. Part of the graduates was granted scholarships to enable them to continue their studies in these universities; host universities included Stanford, MIT, and the University of Minnesota in addition to other universities around the world.

"I learned how to think outside the box, how to be confident, how to be willing to take risks".

-Code for Palestine graduate, 2017

"Code for Palestine was an incredible experience. I discovered it wasn't enough to teach a coding language; you also have to teach the right mindset. We want to build their ability to tackle tough, ambiguous, unsolved challenges".

— Jessie Duan, Volunteered Instructor, 2015 and 2017

"The students are why I went back twice. I've kept in contact with many of them over the years, and it's incredibly rewarding to see them grow and continue to nurture an interest in CS".

— Rory MacQueen, Volunteered Instructor, 2015, 2016, 2017

International Exchange and Exposure: the program also included an exchange component with Korean startups and incubators to improve awareness of the latest ICT products and services available in Korea and to enhance the entrepreneurial skills of participants to utilize it to the best and flourish the startups' sector in Palestine. Ten participants selected from "Code for Palestine", three female students and seven male students in addition to 3 PGF Staff had such a learning experience as a result of this visit.

After graduation from CFP, Paltel Group Foundation continues to follow up on the students' academic and professional progress and make use of their experience in the program itself. Akram from Jenin from the first cohort was admitted into Stanford University to study computer science and obtained a scholarship for his studies. While attending university education, Akram worked with an ML company named Imagery in Palestine; that's how CfP creates further opportunities for participants at an early stage in their professional life.

Bilal From is one of the first cohort students who obtained admission at MIT with a scholarship to study computer science, Bilal is happy about his achievement and believes this will bring success to his professional life.

Batool from Hebron started with CFP as a student and is now a Teaching Assistant at the program while she studies computer engineering at Birzeit University in Palestine. Batool is making an added value to the program as she has the student's experience as well as the instructor's one.

In summer 2020 and with Pandemic conditions, 30 international volunteering instructors worked day and night to make the virtual camp a success. They prepared 66 lecture videos for the students to attend and organized a total of 289 classes on Zoom and other conferencing technologies. Also, they used Mural as a Design Thinking tools to increase interactions and virtual group working between the participants.

The second track is the Code + Design Bootcamp for universities' students. The Bootcamp is an annual reputable program that targets universities' students, as well as, fresh graduates in Computer Science and Math who wish to take the challenge and attend a unique program. The program consists of a 4-week summer camp in addition to an online course with Udacity that ends up obtaining a Nanodegree in one of the coding topics. In 2020 all participating students took the Data Science Track as this is one of the current leading issues in coding. A total of 100 students were granted scholarships to attend the Nanodegree in Data Science or Android with Udacity in 2017-2019; usually, all participants obtain the Nanodegree which helps them get proper jobs soon after receiving the degree. Almost 100% of Bootcamp graduates get employed in reputable international and local companies since the Nanodegree employability rate is very high.

"Teaching in Gaza gives me a sense of importance and meaning which I had never felt before. It is a rare opportunity to visit a place in which you feel appreciation for the knowledge you deliver."

Peniche, an International Trainer Participated in the training camp

"I felt the effect there; I wondered during the final presentations, that: Are students the same people who joined the program two weeks ago?"

O. Abboud, an International Trainer/ Participated in the training camp

The year 2020 summer formed a new and unique experience for Paltel Group Foundation in running coding programs and moving onwards to online teaching besides traditional teaching; it's not only teaching but also the process of selecting the best nominees using online technologies. Announcing the programs, registration, shortlisting, interviewing, and final selection all took place online, this formed a lesson for future use of technology in both teaching and management of the coding programs.

"I Didn't Go to Silicon Valley. It Came to Me. Back in April this year, I was sitting in the lecture at the university with all the carelessness in the world, having a big goal not knowing how to achieve it or what the steps that I should take to reach where I want to be, hearing my instructor telling us that "Paltel Group Foundation is here today and they have a program that you might be interested in, Luckily, I was careless enough to skip my next class and listen to what is Code + Design Bootcamp".

Leen Abu Shqair, Bootcamp participant

Creating new opportunities out of the crisis is a big lesson learned, the teams worked day and night from home, all of that was the fruit of a solid Risk Management Plan that Paltel Group maintains and updates to be ready for any exceptional conditions. In Corona Pandemic times, many life aspects stopped, but Coding Programs of Paltel Group Foundation continued, thanks to modern management and ICT for this experience.

Paltel Group foresees the future of coding with full ambition in implementing well-structured coding programs for all age groups to respond to the needs of young entrepreneurs by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to help in taking the risk and start new startups; to well-placing Palestine on the entrepreneurship map.