

## Compete – Young Professionals Program

SNAPSHOT	
<b>Organization(s)</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>Project Name</b>	Compete – Young Professionals Program
<b>Location</b>	West Bank and Gaza
<b>Date(s) of Implementation</b>	September 30, 2016 – April 1, 2017
<b>Funding Amount</b>	USD 78,134
<b>Partner(s) / Funder(s)</b>	SAP; DAI
<b>Number of Youth Beneficiaries Trained</b>	Total: 18   Women: 11   Men: 7
<b>Number of Youth Beneficiaries Employed</b>	18
<b>Avg. Monthly Earnings of Youth Beneficiaries after Program</b>	USD 700
<b>Change in Income for Youth Beneficiaries (USD)</b>	Increase from USD 0 to USD 700 per month
<b>Avg. Length of time for Youth Beneficiaries to find work</b>	Immediate placement
<b>Type(s) of Digital Work</b>	Private Sector – ICT Sector
<b>Source of Metrics</b>	Internal monitoring and evaluation Final program assessment

### ABOUT COMPETE – YOUNG PROFESSIONALS PROGRAM (YPP)

USAID’s West Bank & Gaza Mission seeks to increase the competitiveness of the Palestinian private sector, resulting in expanded job opportunities for Palestinian youth. USAID/West Bank and Gaza assistance also advances public private partnerships (PPP) that align business interests and capabilities with development objectives to produce cost-effective, scalable, and sustainable programs addressing key priorities.

The USAID-funded Compete Project, implemented by DAI, has several objectives:

1. The project seeks to facilitate rapid expansion on critical sectors of the Palestinian economy which show the most potential for growth. To do so, the project provides technical assistance to companies and expertise on how to maximize the value of their products.
2. The project also works on improving market access and participation and increasing competitiveness of local SMEs.
3. Finally, the project aims to improve access to services through the development of local business associations and business service providers.

The intermediate objective of the Compete Project’s Young Professionals Program (YPP) is to provide high-quality technical training on SAP Enterprise software to recent Palestinian university graduates, with an emphasis on female graduates. The YPP’s overall goal is to provide SAP with a pipeline of young Palestinians who are well-trained in SAP enterprise software, and who also possess soft skills in critical

areas such as design thinking, interviewing, marketing, and communication. SAP ultimately plans to expand its market presence in the West Bank and throughout the MENA region by placing YPP graduates in positions with both local and regional SAP partners. Thus, SAP’s ability to grow its business in the West Bank and larger MENA region is dependent on the success of its Young Professionals Program.

## PROJECT DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

Program Design	Supply-Side Components		Demand-Side Components	
	Training & Skills Development	✓	Improving Access to Finance for SMEs	×
	Employment & Intermediation Services	✓	Capacity Building & Information Provision	×
	Subsidized Employment	×	Targeted Sector-Specific Approaches	×

## ACTIVITIES

In 2017, SAP, a leading global enterprise software company, delivered the first iteration of its Young Professionals Program (YPP) to a cohort of Palestinians recently graduated from local universities. The YPP conducted an intensive 45-day bootcamp to provide targeted training in multiple aspects of SAP’s enterprise software. The bootcamp also included several modules of soft skills training. Successful graduates receive an SAP Software Certification documenting their completion of SAP’s globally-recognized Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) training program. Bootcamp graduates were then offered a three-month apprenticeship with local ICT firms to provide hands-on work experience and networking opportunities.

Rather than provide “generic” training on software development and other ICT competencies, the Young Professionals Program builds students’ skills in the various components of the SAP enterprise software suite, including specific applications such as SAP Business One, HANA Modelling, and the SAP Integration Framework. In addition to training tied to SAP’s software, program participants are also taught soft skills in communications, marketing, and giving effective presentations. This enabled graduates to not only utilize, but also promote, SAP’s product line.

A unique aspect of the Young Professionals Program is that the main goal is for trainees to find full-time employment directly with SAP or one of its local partners, rather than simply earning a certificate. As such, YPP offers apprenticeships to prepare program graduates for eventual full-time employment within the SAP family of companies.

SAP’s partner development division conducted due diligence on Palestinian ICT companies, ultimately selecting four companies to become SAP partners. While the training was being conducted, SAP enrolled the new partner companies in a partner development program to facilitate linkages with SAP’s larger regional partners. The project strengthened local companies’ ability to serve as shadow implementers for SAP’s regional partners. The ultimate objective was to enable local SAP affiliates to expand into the regional enterprise software market on their own. The program enjoyed a 50% success rate, leading SAP to choose two of the four companies originally selected to become SAP partners.

## RECRUITMENT

**400**  
applications received

**5%**  
selection rate

SAP employees conducted a rigorous candidate selection process for the YPP, including individual interviews, cognitive testing, personality profiling, and essay writing, to ensure that the chosen candidates had the highest chance of successfully completing the program. Of the 400 applications sourced from Palestinian companies and universities, SAP chose 18 candidates to enroll in its Young Professionals Program, a selection rate of less than 5%. SAP's main recruitment criterion was that all YPP applicants must be university graduates. This is because SAP wanted a pool of candidates who had already demonstrated the technical aptitude and initiative that are expected of all their employees.

The recruitment phase lasted for 3 months, during which time the YPP was advertised extensively in local print media, as well as through social media and university-affiliated alumni networks and electronic bulletin boards. SAP also held in-person sessions at local universities to explain the YPP to interested graduates. Advertising materials emphasized that applicants graduating from the program would become more competitive candidates for highly-desirable IT jobs. The program also specifically encouraged female applicants to apply for the program, based on SAP's internal data documenting a higher performance rate by the program's female graduates. The YPP has a standard cohort size of 24, based on SAP's preferred class size. Of the 24 candidates selected for the Palestinian training, 18 ultimately enrolled in the program. Of the 18 YPP enrollees, 11 were women.

## IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Recruiting recent graduates to apply for the program was not a challenge, given the high number of IT and engineering graduates from local universities, and the high youth unemployment rate. The main challenge for program staff was limiting the number of program placements to fit the small firm size and the limited markets accessible by local companies operating in the West Bank. The inability to place a higher number of trainees with local firms underscores the need for parallel donor support to increase local market capacity for IT services, while working to provide companies with greater access to outside markets.

## BENEFICIARY EXPERIENCES

*"During the training, I learned new knowledge in different fields... I learned how the whole [SAP] system works... I learned how to think in a different way... and I was able to be more confident from the... communication skills course. Now I am able to harvest all the hard work I've put into this training program. Thank you, SAP!"*

*Rahaf, female program graduate*

Palestinian youth face an increasingly competitive labor market without the proper skills or tools to compete effectively. This gap stems primarily from the lack of students' relevant skill sets compared to

actual market needs. A major barrier to increasing youth employment is the nearly complete lack of career development services to help bridge the gap between educational outcomes and the skills demanded by the local job market.

More than half of program participants were women, and all program participants (including women) found jobs within the SAP family of companies immediately after completing the training. Unemployment among Palestinian women is higher than it is among their male counterparts. Thus, the YPP had a disproportionately beneficial impact on Palestinian women by providing them job opportunities with a globally-recognized company in the multi-billion-dollar enterprise software market.

*“The program has many benefits. The most powerful one is having a global certificate which is also considered as a diploma. My goal now is to implement what I have learned in order to improve myself and improve this country.”*

*Rahaf, female program graduate*

*“Life is IT and IT is business. SAP is the company that brings them together. This program gave me the chance to learn how business processes are done, and to improve myself in logistics, finance and accounting. SAP also played a great role in upgrading my soft skills. It was really an amazing experience.”*

*Renad, female program graduate*

*“The SAP Yong Professional program gave me new ideas and ways on how to manage new projects by arranging the duties, timing, material, and the human resources according to the project requirements. Throughout the SAP training I was able to understand the importance of both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the company, and how these two factors will affect the economy in general, since SAP isn’t only helping me develop myself, but also it is in fact helping the whole Palestinian economy by allowing local companies to be more effective and efficient in their business processes.”*

*Ibrahim, male program graduate*

## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

**18**

**beneficiaries trained**

**100%**

**beneficiaries hired**

**61%**

**female participation**

All program participants successfully found jobs in their field after completing the training. Because of the training, not only were they more marketable, but they were also able to retain their jobs.

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Change in beneficiaries' livelihood strategies.** All eighteen participants successfully completed the training and found work immediately thereafter. Average income increased from USD 0 per month to USD 700 per month, leading to substantial improvements in the participants' salary history and work experience.
- 2. Limitations of the intervention.** As the training was conducted solely by SAP, conducting oversight of implementation, budgeting, and logistics required a great deal of planning and coordination between SAP and the Compete Project team, who provided on-the-ground logistical support to SAP to facilitate the training process.
- 3. Unintended consequences of project implementation.** Unintended positive program consequences include increasing the networking opportunities for youth who may not have known each other prior to joining the program. Program participants found it difficult to network and travel to seek job opportunities due to restrictions on movement and access for Palestinians living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Perhaps by using the lessons learned in the training that they completed, the experience gained from their new jobs, and the connections that they made, they will be able to partner together in the future.
- 4. Opportunities and/or barriers to scale the project.** The program was replicated once in partnership with GIZ and SAP. The main obstacles to scaling the program are budget size as well as the movement and access restrictions in the West Bank mentioned previously. Opportunities exist for donors to scale the program's impact by co-funding future trainings and by recruiting not only additional local companies, but also, where possible, larger multinational companies operating in the region who would be willing to employ program graduates on a trial basis, hopefully eventually leading to their permanent employment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Identify market needs.** The YPP initiative was highly successful, with 100 percent of program graduates finding immediate employment within the SAP family of companies. The program clearly filled an existing gap in the graduate-to-employee transition of college-educated Palestinian youth. Similar programs should also focus their activities on addressing identified market needs.
- 2. Determine professional skills needed.** Those implementing digital jobs programs should first study the local market to determine the specific professional skill sets that are needed by local firms, and then tailor their programs so that local employers will be guaranteed that graduates they hire have the hard and soft skills that these companies need to succeed.
- 3. Public-private partnerships are means of financial sustainability interventions for youth.** Public-private partnerships can continue to provide significant opportunities for digital job interventions for youth. One strategy to increase the scale and financial sustainability of IT skills training programs is to encourage companies who benefit from hiring graduates of these programs to co-fund future trainings or to invest in their own in-house training programs. An additional way to provide great digital employment opportunities for Palestinian youth is to leverage the fact that

IT jobs are not totally dependent on local firms. Program implementers could identify international IT firms that outsource part or their entire workforce, enabling local Palestinian youth to access job opportunities well outside the boundaries of the West Bank and Gaza.