

Igniting the Tech Hub in Palestine

Palestine is not the first place you would normally consider when you hear the words “tech hub”. A background of economic and political instability does not conjure up images of successful startups in any area. However, a new programme funded by the World Bank is attempting to change that.

The IGNITE Investment Readiness Program is part of the Innovative Private Sector Development project. Its aim for the past two years has been to improve economic opportunities for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by:

- fostering a local startup ecosystem; and

- helping to connect Palestinian entrepreneurs within that ecosystem to larger and more secure international markets.

This year, IGNITE supported 14 tech startups, including businesses in the EdTech, CleanTech and HealthTech spheres. Over 10 weeks, these startups were coached by a range of experts in their fields in a bid to best prepare them to secure investment.

The programme culminated in a showcase where each startup presented their businesses to regional and international investors, seeking to raise between \$150K and \$2M in external funding.

London Law Collective was delighted to be involved in the IGNITE programme. Several of the firm's lawyers provided legal coaching to the startups, particularly as to how to prepare data rooms for the perusal of potential investors and legal matters to focus on at an early stage of business growth.

Tim Herbert, a director at London Law Collective, said: *"Bright ideas can arise anywhere, even if difficult geopolitical situations exist. It is hugely rewarding to help nurture those ideas through the programme and give the founders an opportunity to evolve and progress."*

Key themes that arose from the IGNITE programme were:

A large number of the startups sought to either:

- put in place businesses that exist elsewhere in the world, but which had not, to date, been expanded into the Middle East (for example, a business to customer food delivery service or an app based logistics system); or

- take advantage of particular local circumstances or culture (for example, a business offering booking and reviews of Palestinian beauty treatments or an Arabic learning platform to be rolled out across Europe to take account of increasing demand to learn the language, (Arabic is now the second most spoken language in Sweden)).

The wish for Palestinian startups to connect with and take advantage of more advanced, and more secure, startup ecosystems. Many founders were considering whether to expand or move their business into an overseas jurisdiction: the US or the UK being the top contenders. Founders appeared particularly attracted by UK ecosystem, with:

- its ability to raise funds via world-leading tax incentive programmes such as SEIS/EIS,

- its generous research and development tax credits programme; and

- its well-recognised position in the world as a safe and efficient place to do business, particularly for startup companies.

Tim continues, *"working on IGNITE has opened our eyes to the complexities that startups face in certain parts of the world. The support we have provided seems to be striking a chord and we hope to continue to support IGNITE in the coming years."*

The IGNITE Program is implemented by DAI Global LLC and delivered in partnership with Rainmaking, uMake and Gaza Sky Geeks. London Law

Collective is one of many partner organisations supporting the scheme with expert legal advice and coaching.

Article by MADDYNESS UK