



allmep

Alliance for
Middle East Peace

COVID-19 IMPACT REPORT



**A Resilient Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding
Sector in the Face of the Coronavirus Pandemic**

FALL 2020



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ABOUT ALLMEP

ALLMEP – The Alliance for Middle East Peace is a coalition of over one hundred Israeli and Palestinian organizations promoting people-to-people peacebuilding. ALLMEP secures and scales up funding to expand trust-building interactions between Palestinians and Israelis, and provides capacity-building support and visibility to amplify the voices and impact of our member organizations in the region. We connect individuals and groups to create a critical mass that live and act in support of peace.

Together, through our network, we work to bring greater resources and attention to the entire community of peacebuilders. ALLMEP works internationally to educate key audiences, including opinion makers, elected representatives, government officials, American and international funders, and the international community about the critical opportunities and needs of people-to-people efforts. In the region, we build a community among our members, enhance better communication and coordination in the field, build their capacities, develop best practices, and serve as a platform for partnership and cooperation.



INTRODUCTION

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Israel and Palestine in March 2020, the social and economic effects were immediately devastating. But efforts to stop the spread of the virus have also had a significant impact on the region's civil society and their work towards peace.

Peacebuilding activities bring together Israelis and Palestinians who would otherwise never meet, and the pandemic goes directly against the core of what these organizations do. The entire sector promotes physical encounters as a way to transform intolerance and prejudice into mutual respect and understanding.

As a result of social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders, organizations were not only able to meet in person and conduct their work, but had to significantly alter their theories of change. The economic effects of the pandemic were also immediately felt by the peacebuilding sector, whose funding sources have been diverted to urgent issues relating to the pandemic. As such, the pandemic has brought many organizations in the Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding sector to a near halt. At the time of writing, COVID-19 is spiking once more, with Israel being the first country to enter a second phase of nationwide lockdown. The threats and opportunities identified in this report should be considered as ongoing and escalating, rather than a wave that has now passed.

CHALLENGES



The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in an already challenging funding environment for the global development and humanitarian fields. Prior to the pandemic, over [1.7 million Palestinians](#) were food insecure, 53% of Gazans lived below the poverty line, and 2.4 million Palestinians were in need of humanitarian assistance. With limited funding available for this current crisis, the international community has had to divert funding from other urgent efforts including funding peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance.

Over the course of 10 interviews with ALLMEP members, we identified key challenges that characterize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding sector.



FINANCIAL

- **Israel will [enter its first recession in more than two decades](#).** The economic crisis in the West Bank is deeper, as it was already in a recession prior to the pandemic. **The Palestinian economy is shrinking** by an estimated [7.6%](#) during the pandemic, pushing the recession into a deep depression.
- **The entire region is highly dependent on civil society**, providing interventions that governments either cannot or will not provide themselves. The peacebuilding sector, which provides essential services to many communities, has been particularly hard-hit as it depends on global donors and support from foreign governments.



PRACTICAL

- With [1.5 billion](#) children currently out of school worldwide, **civil society is an obvious fallback for parents in need of childcare. In Israel and Palestine, [30% of peacebuilding organizations are focused on youth](#) and provide these services widely**; their absence has been felt deeply as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.
- While most of the region's peacebuilding organizations have attempted to transition to an online model, it has been difficult to remotely discuss the sensitive topics- such as personal narratives, identity, and displacement- normally covered during in-person dialogue sessions. **This has led many organizations to cancel their programming**, seeing more harm in having the conversations remotely than in waiting until the pandemic passes.



POLITICAL

- With the suspension of coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, **civil society is one of the only remaining channels for cross-border contact between Israelis and Palestinians**. This places an undue burden on peacebuilding organizations, and has also created public opinion challenges that threaten the legitimacy of their work.
- Widespread [Palestinian opposition](#) to the normalization agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, respectively, has resulted in further challenges for peacebuilding organizations, whose participants are often accused of "normalization" of the occupation.
- **Foreign assistance to the Palestinians – the primary funding source for Palestinian civil society – [dropped by 25%](#) in the first four months of 2020**, compared to the same period in 2019.

LESSONS



The peacebuilding community is resilient in the face of every challenge.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ALLMEP's member organizations have worked tirelessly to ensure their core programs and essential services continue. They have come up with innovative solutions to problems that did not exist a few months ago, utilizing technology to adapt and engage their communities. For many organizations, the pandemic has elicited a newfound appreciation for partnership, and underscored potential cooperation within the Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding sector towards their common goals. We at ALLMEP have been humbled to see the creative and resilient ways in which our community has come together and persevered, and are proud of this sector's capacity to adapt and innovate in these trying times.

These are the core lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding sector:

- **The services that peacebuilding organizations provide for their communities are not just nice – they are necessary.**
- **Moving beyond dialogue and coexistence programming, during the pandemic, organizations have especially focused on providing critical support and direct community services while finding opportunities to advance dialogue towards peace.**
- **ALLMEP member organizations have found that the pandemic has only underscored the importance of their work and pushed them to innovate and expand.**
- **The topics of online dialogue have shifted from identity and conflict to mental health and other personal experiences that affect both Israelis and Palestinians under lockdown.**



RECOMMENDATIONS



As policymakers look to address the challenges facing the peacebuilding sector, ALLMEP offers the following recommendations, based on interviews with leaders in the sector and analysis of the pandemic's impact on their work:



Support emergency supplemental funding for peacebuilding organizations, whose capacity has been painstakingly built and cannot easily be restored in a time of political and economic uncertainty.



Develop greater coordination among major funders for the peacebuilding field. Key donor states rarely coordinate their efforts with regard to civil society funding, and even less so with private funders. Increased coordination will lead to more efficient and effective funding, as well as opportunities for cross-pollination and partnership during the pandemic.



Restore all development and humanitarian assistance to the West Bank and Gaza. While the recent release of \$5 million to combat the pandemic in the West Bank is notable, the U.S. ceased all development and humanitarian assistance to the West Bank and Gaza in August 2018. Though [some organizations](#) were able to mobilize private resources to fill the gap, it is not enough to meet the needs on the ground. This has been [devastating](#) to the region's development and humanitarian NGOs, including peacebuilding organizations, who have had to cut back life-saving programs and even shut down. This assistance is critical for vulnerable families in the West Bank and Gaza. It paves the way for stability and must persist as a foundation towards achieving a lasting peace.



Enact the [Middle East Partnership for Peace Act of 2020](#). Inspired by the success of the International Fund for Ireland, the bipartisan, bicameral Middle East Partnership for Peace Act will leverage and increase public and private contributions worldwide, funding joint economic initiatives and civil society projects that promote coexistence and a broad support for peace, improving both social and economic conditions in Palestine and Israel. The bill will provide an infusion of over \$100 million over five years to radically scale up peacebuilding programs in the region.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



- 20** VENTILATORS DONATED TO PALESTINIAN ICUs
PROJECT ROZANA
- 1,000** HIGH SCHOOLERS ATTENDED VIRTUAL EVENTS
THE ABRAHAM INITIATIVES
- 2** SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS TO PAY FOR PROGRAM
ALUMNI'S UNIVERSITY STUDIES
MEET- MIDDLE EAST ENTREPRENEURS OF TOMORROW
- 50** DUNAMS CULTIVATED IN THE SOUTH HEBRON HILLS,
PROVIDING FOOD FOR 100 VULNERABLE LOCAL
FAMILIES
TAGHYEER MOVEMENT
- 17,000** NEW SUBSCRIBERS TO "THE HOPE" PODCAST
STANDING TOGETHER
- 120** NEW STUDENTS RECRUITED FOR AN INNOVATIVE
NEW ONLINE SEMINAR
MEET- MIDDLE EAST ENTREPRENEURS OF TOMORROW
- 200K+** PEOPLE GATHERED WORLDWIDE FOR THE LARGEST
PEACE EVENT EVER JOINTLY ORGANIZED BY
PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS
COMBATANTS FOR PEACE + THE PARENTS CIRCLE-FAMILIES FORUM
- 500** FOOD PARCELS DISTRIBUTED TO OVER 2,500 PEOPLE
IN 20 PALESTINIAN COMMUNITIES
TAGHYEER MOVEMENT
- 1/3** OF STAFF FURLOUGHED DUE TO THE PANDEMIC
THE ABRAHAM INITIATIVES
- \$1M** LOST IN DONOR SUPPORT
MEET- MIDDLE EAST ENTREPRENEURS OF TOMORROW
- 20** WOMEN IN NEW WOMEN'S NATIONAL COUNCIL
MACHAPACH-TAGHIR



PROJECT ROZANA

[Project Rozana](#) brings Israelis and Palestinians together through the lens of public health. The organization is built on three key initiatives: training, transportation, and treatment. While the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the training and treatment aspects of their work, Project Rozana has been remarkable in stepping up to ensure chronically ill Palestinians and Israelis alike are getting the supplies and support they need during this pandemic.

As a result of the pandemic, Project Rozana launched a crucial [initiative](#) in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority. Working with Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Maliki, they are providing vital medical equipment to Palestinian hospitals. With support from medical manufacturers ResMed and the Australian Government, Project Rozana delivered over twenty ventilators to Palestine. Through a partnership with well-known Palestinian health training provider Juzoor, they are also ensuring that Palestinian health professionals are working with Israeli experts to gain essential up-to-date best practice training.

When asked about their biggest success during these hard time, Executive Director Ruth Rosen remarked:



“WE ARE PLEASED TO BE ABLE TO DELIVER IN LINE WITH OUR MISSION, WITH THE KEY COMPONENT NOW FOCUSING ON THE TRAINING TO BE ABLE TO FULLY UTILIZE THE EQUIPMENT PROVIDED. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT WHENEVER THERE’S A CHALLENGE, THERE IS ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY.”



PROJECT ROZANA

Right: Dr. Raed Mansour, Project Rozana International Regional Director and Dr. Riyad Al-Maliki Palestinian Foreign Minister





THE ABRAHAM INITIATIVES

[The Abraham Initiatives](#) has been building a shared society in Israel for over thirty years through local initiatives in education, police-community relations, leadership training, and more. When the pandemic hit, The Abraham Initiatives was faced with three main challenges: securing its finances in times of uncertainty, transitioning programs to an online model, and flattening the curve in Arab society.

In response to the first challenge, the organization made difficult decisions to ensure its survival, including furloughing one-third of its staff, and cutting salaries for the rest. In response to the second, they raised awareness of Arab society's specific vulnerability to COVID-19 and advocated for steps to provide needed services. They also helped the IDF Home Front Command translate health directives in Arab communities. During Ramadan, they submitted recommendations to prevent virus spread and requested aid packages for Arab families in mixed cities. Adapting to the new digital environment, they developed a multitude of cultural events, such as Hebrew-Arabic entertainment for children and a comedy show for teenagers, which together drew over 1,000 virtual participants.

Despite the pandemic, The Abraham Initiatives continues to play a key role in improving the relationship between Arab communities in Israel and the police. During this period, they released a [new study](#) on the rising violence facing Arab society in Israel and brought their recommendations to the Israeli police and government. As has always been their mission, they are reminding the government that Jewish-Arab relations are critical to the health of the state, and that "everyone is a citizen and needs to be seen as such."



**"EVERYONE IS A CITIZEN
AND THEY NEED TO BE
SEEN AS SUCH"**



ABRAHAM INITIATIVES
מبادرات אברהם
יזמות אברהם



PATHWAYS INSTITUTE

[PATHWAYS Institute for Negotiation Education](#) brings together people from different backgrounds, using an educational model to teach the skills necessary to tackle challenging issues. Like so many organizations in Israel and Palestine, the pandemic has had a massive impact on their financial health, accelerating their transition into a social business model.

Though limited access to technology presented a challenge in serving some members of their community, PATHWAYS was able to successfully transition from an in-person environment to digital one. They shifted quickly to a highly experimental method, testing out interactive approaches and engagement methods and regularly evaluating the results.

The COVID-19 crisis has given PATHWAYS a new understanding of the importance of partnership in the field. The organization has developed two main initiatives which involve radical cooperation during the pandemic. First, they have created an [online leadership and negotiations course](#) for alumni of the ALLMEP network who are already involved in people-to-people exchanges. They also leaned into cooperation as a fundraising instrument, seeking financial partners whose mission aligns closely with their own.

The pandemic has forced PATHWAYS to look inward and focus on their mission and vision. As a result, they are focusing on empowering their team and putting people before projects. When asked what they have learned so far, Michael Schanll, Co-Director of PATHWAYS emphasized:

“COOPERATION NEEDS TO UNDERPIN EVERY STRATEGY. WE ARE NOT AN ISLAND, WORKING ON THIS FIELD ALONE. WE LEARNED ABOUT RESILIENCE OF PARTNERS IN THE FIELD, ESPECIALLY MANY PALESTINIAN PARTNERS WHOSE REALITY IS TWICE HIT BECAUSE OF GEOPOLITICAL ISSUES. MOST IMPORTANTLY WE LEARNED WE ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK. PROBLEM SOLVING, NEGOTIATION, AND NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS ARE CRITICAL PIECES OF WHAT TO TEACH IN THIS CONFLICT.”



PATHWAYS
INSTITUTE FOR
NEGOTIATION
EDUCATION

TAGHYEER MOVEMENT



[Taghyeer](#), the Palestinian National Nonviolence Movement, focuses on engaging Palestinian society on a way forward to achieve social change and national goals through nonviolence. Taghyeer normally works by training local communities on civic engagement. Workshops and trainings have been postponed since COVID-19 restrictions were imposed, but Taghyeer has been busier than ever. Taghyeer worked closely with its Messengers of Change who are spread throughout the West Bank in order to address the rising public health and economic needs due to the COVID-19 crisis. The organization distributed five hundred food parcels to over 2,500 people in twenty communities in Palestine.

They have focused on expanding by launching an [agriculture project](#), cultivating fifty dunams of land in the South Hebron Hills. In two days, volunteers were able to gather enough food to feed one hundred families. Taghyeer is partnering with other ALLMEP member organizations like Green Land Society to transfer patients between hospitals and provide protective equipment for local communities.

While the pandemic has heavily impacted Taghyeer's finances and their programs, they continue to innovate in order to serve their local communities and ensure their constituents are able to live in dignity by providing food and essentials. Muhanad Alkharaz, the Executive Director of Taghyeer, stated:



“WE’VE LEARNED THAT NOBODY CAN DO EVERYTHING ON THEIR OWN. NOW, WE’RE WORKING AS A COALITION. THE PROCESS OF THINKING TOGETHER IS IMPORTANT. WE HAVE TO ADVOCATE FOR THAT PARTNERSHIP NOW AND IN ALL FUTURE PROJECTS.”



MAHAPACH-TAGHIR



[Mahapach-Taghir](#) is a grassroots feminist Israeli organization that builds social change through education and community empowerment. Through the pandemic, the organization has taken on a vastly different role in their community, providing direct services including: food and other essential needs, mental health resources for students, a domestic violence hotline for women, and building new relationships with local authorities. They are creating new programs in response to the effects of the pandemic, including a Feminist Emergency Headquarters to address the increase in violence against women.



In shifting their mission to address the immediate needs of their community, Mahapach-Taghir has redefined their approach to their work, built new relationships, and developed stronger communication with their participants and their team. They have also established a Women's National Council, a group of twenty women with representatives from each community. The Council meets every month and together decides on how to address issues of gender violence.

תגביר
Mahapach-Taghir
מהפך

"WE WERE REMINDED OF THE RELEVANCE WE HAVE IN THE LIVES OF THE COMMUNITIES WE ARE IN AND OF THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP WE HELP CREATE THERE. WE REFINED THE ESSENCE OF WHAT WE DO, OF OUR COMMON VALUES AND OF OUR MODUS OPERANDI, AS A STAFF."

LITAL AYALON, CO-DIRECTOR



ECOPEACE MIDDLE EAST



[EcoPeace Middle East](#) brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists to promote cooperative efforts to protect their shared environmental heritage. Accustomed to responding to environmental disasters, EcoPeace quickly invested in redesigning their program, seeing the pandemic as an opportunity to develop new programming that would be suitable in any scenario.

EcoPeace has learned to see the pandemic as an opportunity, and have been especially in creating programs in response to it. The organization is currently developing a virtual immersive meeting environment for people-to-people activities, in which participants can make their own avatar and meet in realistically constructed historical sites in the Jordan Valley to accomplish quests and challenges together. Virtual reality offers not only a solution to the challenge of meeting others while physical contact is restricted, but also an opportunity to work beyond the boundaries that real life in the region allows. By experiencing free movement across borders, as well as across time, participants gain a unique perspective on the environmental impact of human interventions and climate change, and an opportunity to reimagine what the future can look like.

The organization famously holds in-person tours of shared environmental heritage sights, and are now developing virtual tours to the same places, including the Jordan River. These tours will allow for participants to see and understand places they would normally be unable to visit because of human borders.

Through the pandemic, EcoPeace has learned how adaptive they can be and try new things and use new tools to develop out-of-the-box programming.

“THERE IS NO LIMIT TO HOW MUCH WE CAN ADAPT TO. WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN VERY ADAPTIVE, BUT WE NEVER REALIZED TO WHAT EXTENT. THE PANDEMIC HAS SHOWN US THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD STAFF, THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX, AND NOT GIVING UP.”

**DALIT WOLF GOLAN,
ISRAELI DEPUTY DIRECTOR**



**EcoPeace
Middle East**





MIDDLE EAST ENTREPRENEURS OF TOMORROW

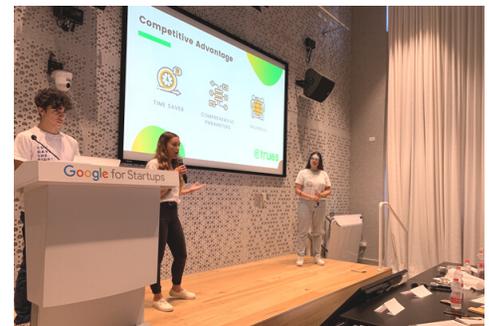
[Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow](#) – MEET is a three-year educational program dedicated to Israeli and Palestinian teens (15-17 years old) recruited in equal numbers from both nationalities and genders. Together, they learn computer science, social entrepreneurship, and leadership skills. The education is provided by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)– MEET’s main partner– which enables MEET to recruit from the region’s most promising youth. Each year, almost three hundred students participate in the MEET program.

When the pandemic hit, MEET was able to shift to an online model quickly thanks to their MEETx program, which was established two years ago with the goal of extending MEET’s program deep into the West Bank and Israel’s periphery.

MEET finished their academic year online, but hoped that their summer program would continue in person. By June, they still planned to hold their annual summer camp in person with safety adjustments. When Israel was hit with a second wave of COVID-19 a month ahead of the camp’s start date, the organization was forced to consider a plan B.

For a moment, it looked like MEET’s annual would not happen for the first time in sixteen years. Due to their commitment to bringing their students together, the MEET team was able to come up with plan B, C, and D to ensure an online seminar would still be possible under all circumstances.

Powering through, MEET held their first Online Seminar with the same level of professionalism and enthusiasm of their in-person programs. Although the organization has struggled financially and has had to switch their plans multiple times, they continue to hold strong to their mission and show up for their community.



meet™

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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THE ABRAHAM INITIATIVES
COMBATANTS FOR PEACE
ECOPEACE MIDDLE EAST
GIVAT HAVIVA
MAHAPACH-TAGHIR
MIDDLE EAST ENTREPRENEURS OF TOMORROW
THE PARENTS CIRCLE-FAMILIES FORUM
PATHWAYS INSTITUTE FOR NEGOTIATION EDUCATION
PROJECT ROZANA
STANDING TOGETHER
SQUASHBOND
TAGHYEER MOVEMENT

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