



Civil Society Engagement in Israel During the Iron Swords War: Emerging Trends and Preliminary Insights" Highlights

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Introduction

The terrorist attack launched by Hamas on Israeli civilians in the Gaza envelope on October 7, 2023, igniting the Iron Swords War, prompted a widespread mobilization effort to bolster Israel. Pre-existing social divisions were set aside as many individuals were urged to partake in these mobilization efforts, encompassing both military and civilian support across both Israel and the diaspora. These endeavors were orchestrated by nonprofit organizations, voluntary initiatives, philanthropic entities, and dedicated individuals who rallied, on an unprecedented scale, under the banner of "Defending Our Home."

This document aims to review the civil engagement during the initial two weeks of the October 2023 War, highlighting prominent trends and addressing challenges while offering valuable insights. We extend our gratitude to the numerous organizations and individuals who contributed information and support to this assessment.

Civil Initiatives

In the mapping we conducted, we discovered evidence of over a thousand civil initiatives that have been active across Israel since the outbreak of the war. These initiatives emerged and operated in various sectors of Israeli society.

The mapping revealed a diverse array of activities encompassing the following: the establishment of organizations composed of military and police veterans to provide physical assistance in rescuing citizens during the initial days of the war; the evacuation of civilians from conflict zones and their subsequent reception; the courageous rescue and evacuation of animals from these zones; the collection and transportation of essential equipment and food supplies for civilians in both southern and northern conflict areas; the preparation of food, equipment, and preventive measures at evacuation sites; as well as support for the families of those who were abducted or went missing during the war, and assistance for bereaved families. These are just a few of many additional activities that demonstrated the resourcefulness and dedication of Israeli society during times of crisis.

Notably, civic initiatives operating at the local or affiliated level played a significant role. These included local groups formed within cities and towns to address the specific needs of their community, such as providing assistance to bereaved families, families of the abducted, missing, and injured individuals within the community. Additionally, local groups extended their support by offering temporary accommodation in apartments to evacuees in designated settlements. It's worth mentioning that the majority of these local groups were not confined solely to their respective localities, rather also conducted activities beyond. Furthermore,



there were other groups established based on affiliations or specific professional backgrounds, further diversifying the efforts and resources dedicated to these crucial initiatives.

Civil initiatives emerged as a formidable force in addressing the pressing needs and urgent challenges that surfaced in Israeli society during the initial two weeks of the war. These included critical tasks like rescue operations, evacuations, temporary accommodation, the distribution of essential food and medical supplies, as well as the provision of much-needed psychological support.

These organizations played a crucial role in providing the initial response to fundamental and urgent needs that were left unaddressed by the government. Nevertheless, it is imperative to establish effective coordination between the activities of civil organizations and the mechanisms within local authorities and other government bodies. Additionally, it is advisable to consider ways to sustain some of the internal structures when transitioning their operations towards tasks associated with supporting the population during the ongoing combat operations. This can help civil organizations evolve into a valuable support force for the government agencies' activities.

The involvement of volunteers played a significant role in effectively addressing the multitude of needs that emerged on the ground during the initial two weeks of the war, facilitated through civil initiatives, associations, and local authorities. Preliminary findings indicate that a substantial proportion, approximately 48.6%, of the Israeli population engaged in volunteering during this critical period. This figure stands out as not only a considerable volume on its own but also in comparison to the volunteerism rate during the Covid crisis, which saw a 33% increase. In particular, the rate of volunteerism among the Arab Israeli population during the war reached 29%, a notable rise from the 19% recorded during the Covid crisis.

As previously discussed, the fields of volunteer activities and their scope were both diverse and extensive. In contrast to the volunteerism observed during the Covid-19 crisis, where young volunteers were predominant, the first two weeks of the Iron Swords War saw participation from volunteers across all age groups. Notably, in the younger age group (18-35), a noteworthy 46% actively engaged in volunteering, while the middle age group (35-55) recorded a 52% participation rate, and the older age group (+55) contributed significantly with a 52% involvement rate. Remarkably, the rates of volunteerism were almost equal for both men and women, as well as for individuals with religious and secular affiliations. The utilization of technological tools that facilitate digital volunteering played a pivotal role in expanding volunteerism to reach remote or mobility-limited populations.

The survey also uncovered that a substantial majority of volunteers (28%) in this war can be described as spontaneous volunteers, those who had not engaged in volunteering previously and chose to do so spontaneously during the war. In contrast, 21% were individuals who had previously volunteered as part of their regular routine. These findings underscore the wide-ranging participation of citizens who had not volunteered prior to the onset of the war. Notably, the newcomers to the volunteering efforts during the war exhibited a more secular orientation compared to religious and traditional volunteers. Furthermore, they predominantly



had above-average incomes, in contrast to volunteers with average or below-average incomes.

The survey highlighted several primary volunteer activities among the participants, which included collecting, packing, and distributing food and equipment (engaged by 50% of the volunteers), transportation of people, food, and equipment (22%), providing valuable assistance to the security forces, such as the IDF, police, standby units, and guarding settlements (22%), actively participating in outreach activities through social networks (18%), and offering essential aid to evacuees from settlements located in the south and north (18%). It's worth noting that these were the most prominent activities, but there were various other volunteer tasks that also played significant roles during the war effort.

Volunteers and Donations

Many of the volunteers seamlessly integrated their volunteer efforts with contributions of equipment and financial support. This was accomplished through their active involvement in voluntary initiatives and crowdfunding campaigns.

Civil Society

A multitude of professional nonprofit organizations actively participated in the massive civil mobilization effort, showcasing a collective commitment and dedication that spanned thousands of initiatives. These organizations brought their specialized expertise and resources to the forefront, aligning their efforts with the broader community-driven response to address the pressing needs that arose during this extraordinary period. This collaborative engagement not only emphasized the diversity and depth of their involvement but also exemplified the unity of purpose that drove these nonprofits to contribute their unique skills and knowledge in support of their fellow citizens.

During the initial two weeks of the war, a remarkable mobilization of financial resources took place, surpassing the levels observed during prior military operations and even exceeding the response to the Covid-19 crisis. Particularly noteworthy was the swift and substantial mobilization of support from North American Jewry. The total contributions from Jewish federations and Jewish organizations in North America are estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, underlining the tremendous outpouring of support. These donations were channeled to address a wide array of pressing needs.

Substantial donations also flowed in from the citizens of Israel, with contributions coming through various channels. These included funds raised through crowdfunding and collective campaigns on social networks, as well as direct donations made to a range of organizations and institutions dedicated to the cause.

The study was a collaborative effort between the Institute for the Study of Civil Society and Philanthropy in Israel at Hebrew University, the Israeli Council for Volunteering, Civic Leadership the umbrella organization of Israeli nonprofit organizations, and the Forum of Foundations in Israel. It included several surveys. The survey of volunteering during the first two weeks of the war was administered by the Geocartographia company and included 1000 participants constituting a representative sample of the adult population of Israel aged 18 and over.