

Iron Swords War

SNAPSHOT

October
25, 2023*

Civil Society Response

Needs, Responses, and Challenges

*The brief offers a current overview¹ based on the information accessible to us at this time.

The Challenge

Civil society organizations and independent groups of citizens were the first to respond to the acts of terror and massacre on Saturday, 7.10.2023, and they continue to address the evolving and growing needs of various populations – victims and their families, refugees and displaced individuals, students, people with disabilities, veterans, and the general public in Israel.



Status of Civil Society Organizations

➤ Three Response Circles

- **Circle I – Emergency Response Organizations.** These are organizations skilled in providing various emergency services such as “Natal,” “Eran,” and “Enosh.” Many organizations opened an emergency hotline to provide various responses early in the morning on Saturday, 7.10.23; “Yedidim” (offering various operational and logistical responses, such as distributing supplies and equipment), “Pithon Lev,” “Latet,” and similar organizations that provide logistical responses, including food supply and combat equipment.
- **Circle II – Organizations that do not routinely operate in emergency areas but have the capacity to mobilize in emergency situations** and engage quickly and flexibly through the tools at their disposal, such as youth organizations, educational organizations, and community organizations (e.g., “Eretz Ir”).
- **Circle III** – These are **organizations that do not typically engage in emergency response efforts.** Instead, they have paused their primary activities and are facing economic challenges because they can no longer generate

¹ This status report is based on a meeting held by the Jewish Funders Network (JFN) and the Forum of Foundations in Israel on October 25, 2023. The speakers at the meeting were as follows:

- **Ron Barkai**, CEO of Civic Leadership.
- **Ronit Bar**, CEO of the Israeli Council for Volunteering.
- **Gigi Levi-Weiss**, co-founder of the Civilian Emergency Organization (The Hamal), led by “Brothers in Arms” organization.
- **Attorney Liron Hanetz**, Deputy CEO of the Government and Society Division in the Prime Minister’s Office.

During the meeting, a mapping of civil society organizations was presented, with an emphasis on economic aspects, collaboration with the government, and philanthropy. The presentation covered the landscape of volunteering and the associated challenges. An overview of the activities of the Civilian Emergency Organization (the Hamal) that was established with the outbreak of the war was given, and an update was provided regarding the government’s response to the issue of cross-sector collaboration.

income independently, and their provision of services to the government is only compensated when they actively provide those services. It's important to highlight that in such instances, the beneficiaries of these organizations are affected tremendously, making this a significant and complex issue that demands a response.

➤ Economic Implications Based on Organization Types and Activities

- **Announcement of "freezing" contracts and government support:** When the demand for various emergency services intensifies during crises, it leads to the suspension of the organizations' regular programs, resulting in immediate consequences. This is particularly critical for vulnerable populations (e.g., Bedouins, women who have survived prostitution). It's noteworthy that the Ministry of Welfare has taken exceptional measures by continuing support and sometimes even increasing it, while the Ministry of Health and Education haven't responded similarly, causing further uncertainty.
- **Impact on sales and services**
- **Effect on regular donations:** Many donors redirect their support to wartime efforts.
- **Influence on human resources:** The unusually high enlistment of reservists has significantly disrupted the activities of civil society organizations. In numerous cases, questions arise about what constitutes a "vital operation," especially in terms of whether providing aid to at-risk populations should be considered a vital operation that would postpone an employee's reserve duty.

➤ Status of Arab Civil Society Organizations

- Security needs are apparent within Arab society, including within their own organizations.
- Arab civil society is in a more vulnerable position and is more adversely affected than Jewish civil society organizations. These organizations had limited economic activity from the outset and lack necessary infrastructure to handle a crisis.
- For additional insights into the situation of Arab society during the war, please refer to the following sources [here](#) and [here](#).

➤ Key Information

- "Civic Leadership" has introduced a dedicated [website](#) for this period, "The Civil Coalition of the Third Sector," where they post updates. These are categorized by government updates, RFI's and procurement documents, philanthropic contributions, tools and professional knowledge, media announcements, and collaborations with civil society partners.
- An [Excel table](#) detailing the activities and needs of organizations.
- [Israel Mobilizes](#) – A national initiative aimed at providing assistance during times of crisis, led by a broad, cross-sector collaboration that includes the JFN, the Forum of Foundations in Israel, the Social-Economic Forum, leadership from the business sector, Home Front Command, the Civil Assistance Center, civil leadership, and local authorities.

Volunteering: Spontaneous and within Organizations

- [The Israeli Council for Volunteering](#) acts as an umbrella organization that collaborates with the Home Front Command. In the current emergency, they stress the ethical nature of volunteering, ensuring that paid workers are not replaced by volunteers. They also operate a hotline for volunteer management.
- Volunteering is **currently at its peak** within both formal organizations and informal initiatives. Survey data indicates that 48% of volunteers serve spontaneously and consistently, though in Arab society, that figure is only at 3%.
- A **decline** in volunteering is expected based on past experiences, requiring strategic adaptation.
- **Coordination and synchronization challenges** are present with over a thousand non-formal organizations using technological tools. There is also a proliferation of civil coalitions, making it difficult to coordinate among them.

➤ Mapping the needs for volunteer integration

- Support for **municipalities that are absorbing evacuees** (e.g., Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Tiberias, Eilat) that have expanded and even doubled the population in need of services, due to the influx of displaced and refugees.
- Support for **smaller cities with minority populations**, often including vulnerable populations, and lacking essential services (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies).
- **Lack of services in absorption centers**, such as food and laundry services, particularly near the Dead Sea area, leading to social tensions among residents. A shortage of recreational activities is also noted.
- **Anticipating future needs:** Utilizing schools as accommodation centers. If additional evacuations are to be required, preparations should include separation by family, kitchens, and more.
- **Assistance for the families of captives and “Nova” survivors.** There’s a strong need for support and volunteering, extending beyond trauma to include financial support and childcare needs.
- **Security in the authorities, volunteers for Preparedness squad.**
- **Providing aid to people with disabilities and the elderly.**
- **Support for supporters:** Actions to prevent burnout, training, and guidance are required.

Review of the Civilian Emergency Organization (The Hamal) (led by the “Brothers in Arms” Organization)

Background – Over the past year, the movement engaged in the struggle for democracy and has given rise to a considerable pool of volunteers and established a managerial structure. These volunteers quickly mobilized to address immediate needs following the acts of terror on October 7th. In a matter of days, approximately 1,000 people were actively engaged in the “Hamal”. Today, this organization operates in an organized and well-structured manner.

The Hamal, under the leadership of “Brothers in Arms” Organization, collaborates with other groups, such as the “Tech Headquarters” and “Women Building an Alternative.” Additionally, there are emerging initiatives that align with the Hamal on various fronts. The Hamal has one administrative staff member, while all the others work as volunteers.

The Hamal encompasses around 15,000 volunteers daily (approximately 100,000 volunteers in total). The spirit of volunteerism fosters solidarity, strengthens bonds, and serves as a means to mitigate tensions. In this context, also the connection with the Jewish diaspora plays a vital role.

➤ Main Objectives

1. To support the IDF from a civilian perspective.
2. To ensure that anyone affected by the terrorist attack copes in the best and smoothest way possible.
3. To actively participate in the future nation-building process.

➤ Principles and Modes of Operation

- **Swift response and transfer of activities to governmental authorities when feasible.** For instance, during the initial days, soldiers encountered difficulties reaching their units. In response, The Hamal organized protected vehicles and drivers armed with personal weapons, who transported soldiers in coordination with the Southern Command. By the third day, full responsibility for the operation was assumed by the IDF, and the project was closed. However, not all areas of assistance can be seamlessly handed over to the government.
- **Emphasis on personal connections to enhance social cohesion.** For example, delivering aid packages to families in a personal and caring manner through volunteers who also check on the well-being of the recipients, rather than handling assistance in a purely “business-like” manner.
- **Utilization of technological solutions**, such as implementing an emergency button on websites known as “We’re Coming.” This solution was born out of a lack of response from the army, police, and the Home Front Command during the early days of conflict, which facilitated the evacuation of 2,000 people, including those from fire zones.

Subsequently, the initiative expanded to help rescue animals and is now applied in agriculture. Digital forms are used for submitting requests and providing assistance. Monday.com and cybersecurity companies are also involved.

- **Top-Down and Bottom-Up:** Requests are sourced from citizens, communities, local authorities, military commanders, and more.
- **Focus on developing expertise and professionalism.** For example, in the first days, Israelis donated equipment from their homes for aid purposes. Later, procurement took place in Israel and abroad, along with the development of an aerial system led by Einat Guez. Now, there is a need to transfer leadership to someone capable of managing the activity.

➤ Mapping Five Key Civilian Needs

1. Housing.
2. Food.
3. Equipment and supplies (approximately 40 tons of equipment distributed daily).
4. Enrichment and extracurricular activities beyond formal education.
5. Mental health support through collaboration with local mental health centers.

➤ Long-Term Projects

- Mental health support for years to come.
- Rehabilitation and reconstruction, in conjunction with the administration, for the communities around Gaza. This long-term project involves full services for the communities, including the establishment of a “Supporting Bord” adjacent to each community, managed by Hamal and featuring representatives from high-tech companies, banks, and more, to ensure commitment and long-term support.

➤ Public Relations

The “Tech Headquarters” has established a public relations hub comprising approximately 60 volunteers, including marketing professionals and content writers from Israel and around the world. The Hamal is raising funding for this, as there is a sense that “we are losing the battle of global public perception.”

➤ Funding and Donations

Funding for activities is sourced from donations or independent purchases of products and services, often facilitated by the Hamal. When it comes to military equipment the Hamal operates in coordination with the IDF and provides only the essential items required to save lives. The donations intended for emergency assistance are entirely separate from standard accounting, with funds earmarked for emergency operations. Other Hamal organizations autonomously raise and allocate donations for the Hamal and parallel emergency activities.

Government and Society Division – The Activities of Civil Organizations

The governmental response, at the infrastructure level, has been gradually advancing. The joint emergency work between the government and civil organizations is a beam of light. The key efforts within the Government and Society Division in the Office of the Prime Minister include:

- **Partnership in Shaping Policies and the Nature of Aid** through the rapid establishment of multi-sectoral roundtables, organized within days of the outbreak of the war. These roundtables cover various sectors such as children and youth, economic resilience, community recovery in psycho-social aspects, and support for caregivers.
- **Developing a Broad Response to Civil Organizations’ Needs:** This includes integrating support for public benefit organizations as an inherent part of the economic plan for business assistance (e.g., fixed expense grants). It also involves examining the unique needs of civil organizations and providing dedicated solutions (e.g., expanding

engagement contracts and exemptions from tax on donations). Additionally, reducing bureaucratic and financial burdens on civil organizations is pursued whenever possible.

- **Gathering of Needs, PR/Community, Networking, and Expertise:** This involves connecting civil organizations with various government ministries, including the Division of Rehabilitation.
- **In future:** The end of the war, when it arrives, will not mean the end of many needs that emerged during the emergency and public benefit organizations' cooperation. The Office of the Prime Minister and civil organizations must plan ahead to ensure that continuous support mechanisms are in place.

Emphasis for Philanthropy

- We are in a time where the "third sector" has become the "first sector", and "Without it we wouldn't be here" – among other things thanks to dozens of years of philanthropic activity and support.
- **The call for action is for philanthropists to:**
 - Act responsibly in ensuring the societal resilience over time.
 - Continue their regular donations alongside emergency assistance, avoiding the "drying up" of critical areas.
 - Release funds with minimal bureaucracy and expedite payments to 2024.
 - Communicate directly with civil organizations to assess their needs and ensure the mental resilience of their teams.
- **Philanthropic Cooperation**
 - Providing aid to organizations in cooperation with one another.
 - Collaborations between donors and foundations in key areas (education, mental health); work through interest groups that were established.