



Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues

May 2021

May 2021 Escalations: Jewish-Arab Clashes Within Israel

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INTRODUCTION

On May 10, a series of recent clashes that had been largely [localized to East Jerusalem](#) escalated into national and regional conflict. An Israeli [police raid on the Al Aqsa Mosque](#), [circulated widely on social media](#), along with escalations at the Damascus Gate and planned evictions in Sheikh Jarrah¹, was the spark for Hamas rockets from Gaza, [widespread demonstrations in](#) Arab communities within Israel, [and violent riots by Arab citizens in mixed cities](#) and neighborhoods. The latter spiraled into some of the worst inter-ethnic violence between Jewish and Arab citizens in history, shaking Israeli society.

The escalation within Israel began with arson and attacks on Jewish property by mobs of young Arab men in Lod, and which then spiraling out to Akko, Ramle and several other mixed cities and neighborhoods² This rapidly deteriorated into inter-ethnic clashes, including retaliatory attacks

¹ A longstanding court battle over rights for dozens of residences in this East Jerusalem neighborhood which had been owned by a Jewish community prior to 1948 places hundreds of Palestinians at risk of imminent eviction. This highly sensitive case has intensified tensions between Jewish and Palestinian East Jerusalemites. Thus far, the Israeli courts have ruled with the company. [See here](#) for an in-depth explainer.

² For a chronology of events, [see here](#).

between Jews and Arabs, Jewish vigilantes arriving to mixed cities and Arab towns, clashes with police, [lynchings of both Jewish and Arab citizens](#), ransacking of homes, and burning of synagogues. By the morning of Thursday, May 13, [IDF battalions and border police](#) had been sent to Lod, Ramle, Jisr A Zarka, Um al Fahm and Akko. Protests and demonstrations also took place in Arab towns and cities, [many without altercation](#), some involving clashes with law enforcement.

These escalations are being widely compared to the [watershed events of October 2000](#) (in which 12 Arab citizens and a Palestinian were killed by Israeli police) for their anticipated impact on Jewish-Arab relations and Israel's social fabric. Arab MK Issawi Frej and many others warned that current escalations may be worse: "Back then, we saw mostly clashes between Arab society and the police. [What we're seeing now is between Arab citizens and Jewish citizens. It's like a civil war.](#)"

Why now? After a decade of concerted efforts to improve social and economic conditions in Arab society and on the cusp of groundbreaking Jewish-Arab political participation, what went wrong?

While much of the focus has been on the perfect storm of national and ideological triggers, longstanding socio-economic and political realities in Arab communities and mixed cities made conditions ripe for unrest. It is important to note that most of the violence was perpetrated by groups of young men: Arabs from some of the most disadvantaged demographics in Israel; Jews largely members of vigilante and extremist groups.

As leaders and organizations work to deescalate tensions, assess damage, and begin to look towards rehabilitation, these underlying factors will be critical to their work. Already, shared society organizations have begun to mobilize effectively, contributing to cautious optimism that some of the deeper gains made in the field over the last decade did not only endure, but will prove vital to the recovery.

LEAD UP TO EVENTS

East Jerusalem³ is among the most sensitive issues in Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, but "[only infrequently did waves of East Jerusalem protests, mostly around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, spark demonstrations elsewhere in Israel.](#)" This time, writes Haaretz' Jack Khoury, "[the pictures from Sheikh Jarrah and those from the Damascus Gate steps have awoken Israel's Arab citizens.](#)"

The flashpoints in East Jerusalem did not erupt all at once. In the weeks before and during Ramadan, fault lines related to contentious Jewish-Palestinian relations in the city, including

³ Most of the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem hold Jerusalem [conditional residency but are not Israeli citizens](#). People with residency status can vote in Jerusalem municipal elections and receive Israeli health and social benefits as long as they continue to reside in Jerusalem. They do not hold Israeli passports and cannot vote in national elections. In recent years, growing numbers of East Jerusalemite Palestinians are seeking Israeli citizenship.

housing rights, religious worship, political and national identity escalated,⁴ culminating [into a perfect storm of triggers](#).⁵

As issues in East Jerusalem intensified over Ramadan, so did the [participation of Arab citizens](#), who travelled there in greater numbers to worship and to take part in demonstrations. Caught up in clashes with Jewish counterdemonstrators and police, many Arab citizens rekindled their identification with the issues in the city and the broader Palestinian struggle, drawing connections to their own longstanding sense of unequal and second-class status as citizens of Israel.

The ongoing clashes deepened Arabs' sense of injustice: comparisons were drawn over the heavy use of [police forces to reign in Arab rioters](#) versus an inadequate protection from nationalist Jewish extremists; events in East Jerusalem were [widely perceived as intentional provocation](#); and heavy shelling of Gaza in response to rocket attacks provoked sympathy and anger on behalf of their Gazan co-nationals.

Given the difference between Arab and Jewish perceptions of the crisis, [social media and public discourse became a secondary battleground](#), both reflecting the gulf and at times enhancing it directly.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Along with a sequence of triggers, conditions in Arab communities within Israel were ripe for eruption: "The combination of the COVID-19 year with the large number of Arab deaths, the huge unemployment rates (Arab employment was hit the hardest in the population), and peaks of violence in Arab society created a barrel of explosives." – [Merav Arlosoroff, The Marker](#).

Economics. Despite [significant socio-economic development efforts](#) and progress over the last decade, the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis [hit Arab society disproportionately hard](#). The number of young Arabs—and young men especially—not in any form of employment, education or training, (a number already declining for Arab males before the crisis) swelled to 30%.⁶ Poverty

⁴ For example, this year the first day of Ramadan and the eve of Israel's Memorial Day landed on April 13. With the President about to speak at the Western Wall, police entered the Al Aqsa mosque compound and cut wires to loudspeakers that broadcast the call to prayer to avoid interruption. Some, including the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, point to this as the turning point. Read more: Kingsley, Patrick. "[After Years of Quiet, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Exploded. Why Now?](#)" *New York Times*, May 15, 2021.

⁵ These include (i) a [Tik Tok challenge](#) in early April in which Arabs harassed Jews that increased tensions and drew retaliations, (ii) the first day of Ramadan and Israel's Memorial Day both taking place on April 13 and police cutting-off Al Aqsa loudspeakers, (iii) eviction proceedings in the [Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood](#) and related demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, some of which were [violent and involved Joint List MKs](#), (iv) [closure of the Damascus Gate Plaza during Ramadan](#) after weeks of these [escalating Jewish-Arab tensions](#) in the city (v) police activity [in the Al Aqsa Mosque](#), (vi) the end of Ramadan, [Jerusalem Day](#), and key Sheikh Jarrah hearings falling on the same days, (v) [Hamas](#) inserting itself as an actor in East Jerusalem, both with regard to Al Aqsa mosque and in the [context of elections in the West Bank](#).

⁶ "Most of the conflagration is among young people: 22% - 30% of Arab men aged 18-24 are unemployed (do not work, do not study and are not in training or in any other setting), without any employment or educational horizon, and many of them degenerate into crime. 58% of young Arabs indicted in criminal offenses are inactive. 'What has been happening in recent days is an expression of the deep frustration that the Arab population has felt in recent years,' said Dr. Marian Tehawkho, a researcher in Arab society at the Aaron Institute at the IDC." Arlosoroff, Meirav "[Before we degenerate to the Events of October 2000, we need to stop and think](#)." *The Marker*, May 12, 2021

and violence increased on Arab streets and the influence of crime organizations in Arab communities grew.

There is a direct correlation “between the inaction of those young men and the significant increase we see in crime rates in Arab society,” explains economist Dr. Marian Tehawkho.⁷ “60% of the youth involved in crime are those who were inactive at the time,” she continues. “A young Arab who is busy with his studies, higher education, or engaged in quality employment, will think twice whether to go in the direction of crime or riots.”

Mixed Cities. Israel’s mixed cities and neighborhoods⁸ are in many ways a microcosm of some the most contentious fault lines in Israel’s Jewish-Arab relations. Tensions over [residential development rights](#), [housing and evictions](#) (especially in neighborhoods where the Jewish nationalist ‘Gar’in Torani’ movement has taken root⁹), criminal activity and enforcement play out daily in [Lod](#), Ramle, and Jaffa. These parallel conflicts in East Jerusalem and tap into the broader sense of inequality and injustice on the national level. “[The story of Jerusalem is like Lod. We feel that they also want to remove us from our homes](#),” said Maha al-Naqib, a former Lod city council member to the Wall Street Journal.”

Notably, the mixed cities in which the most severe eruptions took place are also among Israel’s most disadvantaged and troubled communities. “[Only 33% of Arabs in Lod and only 43% of those in Acre are employed](#),” writes Nasreen Hadad Haj’Yahya. “The average salary of Arab men in Lod, Ramla and Acre is less than NIS 8,000.¹⁰ The average expenditure per Arab high school student in the cities involved is NIS 26,000, compared with NIS 43,000-31,000 per Jewish student. 48% of Arab households in mixed cities are poor compared to 38% in Arab urban localities. Arab neighborhoods in the mixed cities are also a concentration of crime and violence. 20% of those murdered in Israel are Arabs living in mixed cities.”¹¹

National Politics. Israel’s national political crisis, in which four nearly consecutive elections have failed to yield a stable government, has left many Arab citizens both disillusioned with and wary of the motives of national leadership. The Joint List’s “attempt to enter Israel’s political sphere was rejected with a resounding slap in the face” explains sociologist Ameer Fakhoury, referring to the political alliance representing Arab citizens in the Knesset until a recent split prior to the March 2021 elections. “When the political gates are closed, violence opens.”¹²

⁷ Pasovsky, Uri. “[I knew it would not end well’: The researcher who warned about the state of Arab society](#).” *Globes*. May 12, 2021 (Hebrew)

⁸ Israel has five cities formally referred to as mixed: Haifa, Jaffa, Lod, Ramle, and Akko. Cities becoming mixed in recent years are Nof Hagalil, Carmiel, Ma’a lot-Tarhisha, Be’er-Sheva. Today, an estimated 11% of Israel’s Arab citizens live in mixed cities.

⁹ “Years before the mixed Arab-Jewish city of Lod erupted in mob violence, a demographic shift had begun to take root: Hundreds of young Jews who support a religious, nationalist movement started to move into a mostly Arab neighborhood with the express aim of strengthening the Israeli city’s Jewish identity. A similar change was playing out in other mixed Arab-Jewish cities inside Israel, such as nearby Ramla and Acre in the north.” Kershner, Isabel “[Before Rage Flared, a Push to Make Israel’s Mixed Towns More Jewish](#),” *New York Times*, May 23, 2021.

¹⁰ 2018 average salary for Israeli males was [NIS 12,498 per month](#). Overall average for Arab men (including mixed cities) is NIS 8552 (courtesy Nasreen Hadad Haj’Yahya).

¹¹ Ilan, Shahar “[The Cities Involved Have Been Left Behind, We Need to Invest There](#).” *Calcalist*, May 18, 2021. (Hebrew)

¹² Ibid. Ilan, Shahar ([Hebrew](#)).

Though politically Arab leaders were on the [cusp of an unprecedented political breakthrough](#) after the last election—including [outreach and cooperation between PM Netanyahu and MK Mansour Abbas](#)—Arab voter turnout sank to [a near all-time low](#) following the Joint List’s rejection in the third round.¹³ Many in Arab society and the Israeli left place blame on the Prime Minister for fomenting divisions and incitement against them.¹⁴

After issuing a [joint call for calm with MK Mansour Abbas](#), Chair of the Joint List, MK Ayman Odeh, later [tweeted](#): “The last two days are not Netanyahu's failure - this is the reality he longs for... We must not give up. A collective struggle of Arabs and Jews is the response to the violent vision of Netanyahu, Ben Gvir, and Smotritch,” referring to leaders of ultra-national religious parties.

The [resurgence of Kahanist and ultra-national Jewish parties](#) in current coalition negotiations has furthered concerns. Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai accused the chairman of [the ultra-nationalist party, Otzma Yehudit, MK Itamar Ben Gvir](#), of inflaming the current round of violence and encouraging right-wing groups to retaliate.

Since the eruptions began, “[at least 100 new WhatsApp groups have been formed for the express purpose of committing violence against Palestinians](#), according to an analysis by The New York Times and FakeReporter, an Israeli watchdog group that studies misinformation.”¹⁵ The latter has “[identified some twenty thousand Jewish extremists using social media to organize attacks](#), and another eighty thousand far-rightists fomenting anti-Arab sentiment.”¹⁶

Police-minority Relations. Prior to this crisis, relations between the police and Arab communities were already strained. Arab citizens have been disappointed with the police for their [perceived ineffectiveness](#) at preventing the crime and supporting personal safety in Arab communities. Simultaneously, Arab citizens feel overly targeted by police who they say treat them as an enemy population, with tactics many see as culturally insensitive, [too focused on use of force](#), and disconnected from the root causes of the rising crime rates.

Under these conditions, the increased presence and activity level of police in Arab communities as protests began increased tension and fueled the protests even further. Arab communities were particularly upset by the deployment of Israeli Border Police, which are a specialized and highly-militarized unit that is part of both the police and the IDF—and are the forces seen on social media as storming the Al Aqsa Mosque.

In the wake of escalations, clashes with police, and large numbers of arrests, the Arab Higher Follow Up Committee reflects the asserts that law enforcement “intensified the demonstrations,” condemning “the backing it gave to gangs of fascists who attacked Arab civilians.” In its press release, the Head of the National Council of Arab Mayors is quoted: “We are the ones who calmed the winds despite the provocations of the far right and a large number of policemen who attacked passers-by.”¹⁷

¹³ See here for Task Force summary of the [election results](#) and [coalition negotiations](#) as they pertain to Arab citizens.

¹⁴ Scheindlin, Dahlia. “[For Years, Israel's Leaders Have Cultivated Ethnic Hatred. This Is on Them](#)” *Newsweek*, May 13, 2021.

¹⁵ Frenkel, Sheera “[Mob Violence Against Palestinians in Israel Is Fueled by Groups on WhatsApp](#)” *New York Times*, May 19, 2021.

¹⁶ Avishai, Bernard, “[Even with a Ceasefire, Israel Must Face a Changed Reality](#).” *The New Yorker*, May 21, 2021.

¹⁷ “The High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens in Israel Calls for an End to the Arrests Campaign Against Arabs” Press Release. May 25, 2021.

PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The eruption of street-level, inter-ethnic violence sent shockwaves through the Israeli public, Jewish and Arab alike. As destruction and clashes spiraled out of control, the gulf between Jewish and Arab circles widened, with fear and anger fueling much of public discourse on both sides.

Conflict at the Center

Among Jewish citizens, these events strengthened readiness to view Arabs at large as an enemy. On the right especially, writes Bernard Avishai [“there is more bravado: calls to disarm Gaza, and to suppress Israeli Arabs as a fifth column.”](#)¹⁸ In a recent column, senior journalist Ya’akov Amihai, drew the correlation directly: “From close-up they lit synagogues on fire, and from afar launched rockets.”¹⁹

Calls to boycott Arab businesses circulated widely in social media; maps of “Jewish-owned” businesses were distributed in Lod; and ‘Jewish-owned’ began to appear on shop windows.²⁰ [“The spontaneous attacks on Jews in or near Arab towns,”](#) continues Avishai, “are hard to explain without understanding how youth violence may be channeled into anti-Israel rage.”

Among Arab citizens, the correlation between East Jerusalem, Al Aqsa Mosque, Gaza, and Lod strengthened as well, but from the perspective of a shared sense of inequality and injustice. [“\[T\]he intensity of the anger was far greater than in October 2000.”](#) Jack Khoury writes. “Many young people took to the streets and didn’t wait for any leader. They came out to say: Enough humiliation, enough aggressive behavior. We aren’t indifferent, we’re equal citizens; we’re not Israeli Arabs, we’re Palestinians who are Israeli citizens.”²¹

On the left, there are calls for reengagement of the Palestinian question along with its impact on Israeli society. “The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dominates Israeli politics,” writes public opinion expert, Dahlia Scheindlin, saying this is the heart of the issue. “The occupation and the festering political conflict since 1948 [have permeated every part of our society, political and social institutions, and well-being.](#)”

Within days, peace and solidarity [demonstrations of Jews and Arabs](#) began to take place across the country, calling for calm, [“partnership, equality and Israeli-Palestinian peace.”](#) Still, while much of Arab society and Israeli progressives may agree with Haaretz’ Jack Khoury that “only a solution to the real issue – namely an end to the occupation and the [promotion of an agreement whose results would also filter down into Israel](#)” could bring about change, engaging a plurality of the Jewish community remains a challenge.

Images and events from Lod created a sense of vulnerability and insecurity among many Jewish Israelis, leading to a [massive spike in gun license requests](#) among Jews over this period. [“Many of the Jewish citizens right now are under attack,”](#) says Sally Abed, a Palestinian citizen and leader of Standing Together. “They are afraid and they want to hear a very equal voice condemning

¹⁸ Ibid. Avishai, Bernard, May 21, 2021.

¹⁹ Ahimeir, Ya’akov, “I supported sitting with Mansour Abbas. I was mistaken.” *Israel Hayom*, May 23, 2021. ([Hebrew](#))

²⁰ Amit, Hagay, “Dear People of Israel: We Need to Weaken Them,” *The Marker*, May 12, 2021. ([Hebrew](#))

²¹ Khoury, Jack. [“And Then – Boom! The Dream of an Arab-Jewish Partnership Went Up in Smoke,”](#) *Haaretz*, May 24, 2021.

violent attacks on both sides. They don't want to hear about the occupation; they want to hear about the end of violence."

Arab Leadership

In Arab society, MK Essawi Frej (Meretz) was the first to come out resolutely against violence, saying within a day of the outbursts that "[anyone who calls themselves a public figure in Arab society must call for restoring calm](#)." MK Ghaida Rinawie Zoabi (Meretz) joined [Tag Meir](#) and the [Abraham Initiatives](#) to [visit the synagogue center that was set on fire in Lod](#), hear from community representatives, and express solidarity. Similarly, MK Mansour Abbas of the Islamist Ra'am party, visited and [promised to restore the synagogue](#) burnt down in Lod.

But a 24 hour delay by many Arab leaders prompted criticism. [PM Netanyahu called on Arab leaders to be more vocal in a video statement from Lod](#). President Rivlin [made a direct appeal to Mudar Younes](#), head of the National Council for Arab Mayors, saying Jews and Arabs alike, must hear the Arab leadership sounding a clear and strident voice against this wild violence.

"[The atmosphere in Arab society is very charged](#)," Younes said later, explaining the difficult position of Arab leadership. "[O]n the ground they are demanding protest because we cannot be apathetic to what is happening in Gaza and Sheikh Jarrah, and now with developments in the West Bank."

Moreover, for Arab leadership, just a call for non-violence would not reflect the depth of fear and sense of injustice and inequality within Arab society. Speaking on Arabic radio, MK Odeh and MK Abbas appealed to [the Arab public stay indoors both to stop the violence, but also because of their own danger](#) of coming under attack.

National Strike

On Tuesday, May 18th, the Arab Higher Monitoring Committee—comprised of leading political figures from across Arab society in Israel—called a nationwide strike. A "nonviolent protest to send a message to the Israeli establishment and Israeli public that it's not possible to separate the Arabs in Israel from what is happening in the Strip, in the West Bank and in Jerusalem," and in protest of "[the assault on the Arab public in general and in mixed cities in particular](#)."

The strike, held in coordination with Fatah and Hamas, [was widely observed](#).²² Resulting [millions of dollars in losses](#), the strike underscored the significance of the Arab population in the Israeli labor-market and its capacity to organize.

Reactions to the strike further reflected the polarities in Israeli public discourse regarding Arab citizens and Jewish-Arab relations. [Many Arab employees were fired or threatened with termination for participating](#) and many still face tense work situations upon return.

At the same time, many [companies and institutions expressed their support](#) for Arab citizens, for shared society between Jews and Arabs, and for the right of workers to demonstrate. On the same day as the strike, *Globes*, Israel's leading financial newspaper published its own special front

²² Lee, Yaron "[General Strike Highlights Israel's Dependency on Palestinian Workers](#)," *Haaretz*, May 19, 2021.

page [titled, “We Want to Live Together,”](#) with a statement signed by hundreds of CEOs and entrepreneurs. Cellcom, a telecom giant, whose workers’ committee held a work-stoppage in solidarity with Jewish-Arab coexistence, but [received significant backlash, plunging 2% on the stock market.](#)

“Many Jews didn’t understand our intentions,” Baqa Al-Garbiya supermarket owner, Mohammad Athamna, explained regarding the strike. [“We don’t favor violence, on the contrary, with this quiet and peaceful protest we are saying we favor equality,”](#) he added. “The start of the solution is when they will give an Arab child education like a Jewish child, with the same budget. I pay taxes just like you, I deserve to be an equal citizen.”

Ongoing Tensions

As of the writing of this report, the intense clashes within the country have been quelled, but both the pre-existing issues and those inflamed by the violence remain. More demonstrations are being planned by both Arab citizens and right-wing organizations in mixed cities.

[Israeli police have stepped up activity](#) to prosecute and arrest individuals involved in the riots. With Arabs being the majority of those arrested thus far, the operation is raising heated [controversy over policing practices and Arab citizens.](#) Meanwhile, the Attorney General is expected to submit his legal opinion on eviction cases in [Sheikh Jarrah by June 8,](#) with potential to reignite tensions regardless of outcome.

These tensions were front and center at the second meeting of the [Knesset Special Committee for Arab Affairs](#) on May 27, in which discussion about the recent violence in Lod were so heated that the committee could not continue. Arab leaders and organizations spoke about being unfairly targeted by police, including high rates of detention and abuse; Jewish MKs and residents of Lod rejected the description of violent riots as demonstrations, when they were in fear for their lives.

VIBRANT CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE

Within this difficult period, a vibrant civil society and grassroots response is [widely seen as a silver lining.](#)²³ Along with [solidarity and peace demonstrations including Arabs and Jews](#) by organizations like [Standing Together, Tag Meir,](#) the [Hand in Hand Schools’](#) communities and many more, civil society organizations jumped into action to deescalate, promote shared living, support individuals immediately impacted by the violence, and begin serious assessment and planning for the rehabilitation in the difficult days ahead.

Statements. Almost immediately, many organizations convened leaders from different sectors to issue public calls to end the violence, while reiterating support for solidarity and Jewish-Arab relations.²⁴ Examples include a [statement by the Abraham Initiatives](#) signed by 10 Jewish and 3 Arab city council members of mixed cities calling. Through [a Sikkuy initiative,](#) the 14 Arab and Jewish heads of local authorities in the Sharon region in central Israel called for an end to all

²³ Kampeas, Ron [“‘It looks dire but I’m hopeful’: Jewish and Arab coexistence activists respond to the violence in Israel’s streets.”](#) JTA, May 13, 2021. See also Prashker, Mike [“Strong webs of shared Israeli citizenship”](#) Times of Israel, May 21, 2021.

²⁴ View a collection of [statements here.](#)

violence, and [many others](#). By some estimates, the number of organizations that issued their own statements in support of shared and peaceful Jewish-Arab relations is in the hundreds.

Forums. Many organizations convened emergency conferences and forums to [enhance coordination](#) among shared society actors, [educators](#), grassroots organizers, business, and [high-tech leaders](#). Under the framework of the National Council for Arab Mayors, twenty-six Arab organizations activated the [Arab Emergency Committee](#), which was previously established during COVID-19, to address and promote the needs and concerns of Arab citizens.

Policy. The [Knesset Special Committee for Arab Affairs](#) convened twice in the wake of escalations. Civil society organizations and government representatives presented policy papers, data and recommendations on a host of immediate and longstanding concerns. These include: police activity in Arab society pertaining to high rates of crime in general and the detention of Arabs in the wake of escalations; violence between Jews and Arabs in mixed cities, welfare needs in Arab society; unemployment and inactivity among Arab young adults; health; welfare; representation in the media, and more.

Impact and Resilience

One result of this activity is that some of the initial [fears of unfathomable damage to](#) Jewish-Arab relations are being tempered by cautious optimism: “I’m old enough to remember the dreadful feeling of an irreparable rupture between Jews and Arabs in October 2000,” wrote Gilad Halpern, co-host of the Tel Aviv Review podcast. [“Yet we are at a much better place today, in terms of inter-communal relations,](#) then we were then.”²⁵

Unlike the period following October 2000, when [shared society organizations practically shut down](#), there is a strong indication that the [“infrastructure they created to advance coexistence in times of crisis are up and running.”](#) Networks of leaders and professionals, available data and research, and established conceptual frameworks mean that sophisticated analyses and informed proposals for recovery from the crisis are emerging within days and weeks.

There are also good indicators efforts over the last decade are bearing fruit. One powerful example is the response of the private sector to recent events. There was “an unprecedented outpouring of statements from Israel’s business leaders” in Israel, as well as [“an immediate surge of internal communications”](#) promoting solidarity and understanding among Jewish and Arab employees.²⁶

Momo Mahadav, CEO of Maala, the Israeli organization that sets standards for corporate social responsibility (CSR), attributes this directly to “the ongoing work in diversity and inclusion of the past decade,” and gives credit to organizations such as [Co-Impact: The Partnership for a Breakthrough in Arab Employment](#).

²⁵ Ibid. Kampeas, Ron.

²⁶ “Intel, The Strauss Group, Israel Discount Bank, Applied Materials, SAP, Western Digital, Osem and Tnuva were among dozens of companies that added calming, constructive voices to the public debate.” Leichman, Abigail Kleinm [“The Israeli companies taking a stand for coexistence,”](#) *Israel 21*, May 25, 2021.

[“Internal Arab-Jewish conflict has always been high on Co-Impact’s list of risks during risk management assessments,”](#) explains Stephanie Daon. “Now, precisely during such a complex period, we see that companies that have incorporated and internalized inclusion into their company DNA are able to better cope with the current crisis and are maintaining organizational and social resilience while displaying courageous leadership.”

ACTIONS AREAS

The clashes sparked a wide gamut of ideological and economic issues, many already in discussion. Leaders from all sectors are moving quickly to identify immediate priorities as well as push forward on key underlying factors. While insights into relevant actions are expected to emerge over time, the following is a partial and preliminary list of intervention areas currently considered among the most potentially impactful.

- **Frameworks for Arab Young Adults.** Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the high rates of NEET young adults (‘Not in Employment, Education or Training) in Arab society was already identified as a social and economic liability. Over the pandemic, many Arab students didn’t have any schooling, and since schools have opened, many have simply not returned. The most extreme cases are also in Israel’s already weakest communities like the Negev Bedouin, thwarting the paths of an entire generation. Along with ensuring schools reopen and reach students that have or are at risk of dropping out, there is an effort to establish gap year programs for youth 18-24 on a national scale tailored for Arab society. Such programs have a proven record of providing constructive intervention at perhaps the most vulnerable and important life stage of Arab young adults. In collaboration with shared society organizations, such interventions are developed in two main areas: Leadership and higher education with the Authority for Economic Development, and access to labor market and professional training in collaboration with the Israeli Employment Service.
- **Arab Men’s Employment.** Over the last decade, great emphasis has been placed on boosting Arab women’s employment as a key point of intervention for reducing poverty in Arab society. As a result, Arab women’s employment rates, pre-COVID-29, rose to roughly 38.5%, nearly doubling in less than twenty years. Arab men, meanwhile, have had much higher employment rates, close to that of Jewish men, though with much higher representation in low-wage, low-skill and informal labor. As a result, Arab men are more vulnerable in times of crisis and were hit very hard by the pandemic. They are also more vulnerable to automation and changes in industry. Already in 2018, economists saw a dip begin in Arab men’s employment. The 2020 pandemic hit Arab society and men especially hard. Overrepresented in informal labor, many cannot access benefits. Rates of Arab families on welfare and in poverty rose significantly over this time. Anecdotal reports suggest that Arab men on a meaningful employment track are less present in violent demonstrations.
- **Crime Reduction and Improved Police Services.** Several plans to reduce violent crime and improve police services in Arab society have been developed over the two last years; they are currently awaiting government approval and budgeting. First, submitted by the Prime

Minister's office and budgeted at NIS 150 million, has yet to be implemented. Second, submitted by the National Council of Arab Mayors and the Arab Higher Follow Up Committee, was not accepted, fully or partially, by the state. Plans include measures to both adapt police capacities to Arab society and address root causes. Separate plans aim to enhance financial inclusion, improve opportunities for Arab youth, and promote overall economic development are in development, which have an impact on crime as well.

- **Arab Communities in Mixed Cities.** In 2015, the government launched an unprecedented five-year economic development plan for Arab society, GR-922, as well as similar plans for Bedouins in the Negev, the Druze population, and East Jerusalem. Channeled predominantly through Arab municipalities, the bulk of development budgets did not reach Arab communities in mixed cities. As previously mentioned, Arab citizens in mixed cities have lower-than-average incomes and higher poverty rates than the rest of Arab society. Proposals are now being developed with the Authority for Economic Development of the Arab Sector in the Ministry of Social Equality. The proposals, commonly discussed as '922 for mixed cities,' are expected to run into difficulties in early stages. The issue of equity when budgeting for one population in mixed cities is expected to end up being discussed legally, by supreme court.
- **Shared Life Education.** A [report by the State Comptroller](#) published the same week as the riots shows that the Ministry of Education has [failed to implement system-wide shared life education curriculum in Israeli schools since 2009](#), despite adopting recommendations and making commitments to doing so. The result is very partial and uneven programming, with fewer than 1% of teachers having participated in racism prevention training.
- **Strengthening the Arab Civil Sector.** Over the last ten years, the government adopted and scaled programs developed by civil society organizations in its efforts to narrow socio-economic gaps for Arab citizens. This resulted in the growth and professionalization of participating organizations and strengthened cooperation between them and the central government. While some of these organizations are Arab, joint Jewish-Arab, and shared society organizations, most Arab-led NGOs—addressing a host of social and community issues—have not been part of this process and are still comparatively weaker. There is a need to strengthen the capacities and coordination with Arab NGOs such that the civil sector can be inclusive, well-informed, and reach Arab communities when developing programs for promoting shared society.