

Israel Journal of  
**SOCIAL POLICY**

**COVID-19 and its impact  
on civil society in Israel**



Published by

THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE OF ISRAEL

February 2024

No. 122

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## Summaries of the main articles



## Donation and volunteering in Israel at the onset of Covid-19 outbreak: A question of solidarity?

*Hagai Katz<sup>1</sup> and Galia Feit<sup>2</sup>*

The human response to humanitarian, natural, or man-made disasters is characterized by a convergence of individuals, communities, public entities, businesses, and civil society organizations – mobilizing to support those affected in various forms, including donations and volunteering.

These giving trends are closely related to social solidarity. The two-way relationship between solidarity and giving that characterizes a close-knit society is particularly highlighted during crises. Since abundant evidence exist of an increase in giving behavior during various crises in the world and in past crises in Israel, and in light of the claim that Israeli society is a solidary society, an increase in giving behavior during the Covid-19 crisis was reasonably expected.

We tested this hypothesis through a longitudinal study that included weekly surveys on donations and volunteering in 88 independent weekly representative samples of the Israeli adult population, in two periods of time: between December 2018-December 2019 and between February 2020-September 2020. The weekly polls included approximately 500 respondents from the Jewish population and approximately 50 respondents from the Arab population (up to the age of 40), totaling 26,737 individual participants, and almost 50,000 responses.

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, our analysis of the time series indicates that between February2020-September 2020, there had been a substantial and significant decrease in formal and informal volunteering rates and informal donations, as well as a slight decrease in formal donations. The decrease is particularly prominent among disadvantaged populations that were severely affected socially and economically due to the crisis.

Part of the decrease may be explained by the unique characteristics of the Covid-19 crisis, which by its nature hindered volunteering activity. However,

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our findings also indicate a decrease in solidarity in Israel alongside the appearance of segmented solidarity between ethnic, religious, and national affiliations, as well decreased solidarity with the elderly and persons with disabilities. We suggest several measures that the government and civil society organizations should attempt to strengthen solidarity and ensure an effective response during a crisis.

## “Between the rocket and the outbreak”: Social service nonprofits in southern Israel dealing with COVID-19, social peripherality, and security threat

*Noga Pitowsky-Nave*<sup>3</sup>

Social service nonprofits (SSNs) have become the main channel for social service provision in most neoliberal welfare economies, as they deliver essential welfare services to vulnerable and marginalized populations. This paper explores the specific characteristics of SSNs operating in civil society in southern Israel, a peripheral area characterized by higher rates of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion, as well as by the ongoing security threat due to its proximity to Gaza. Specifically, it examines their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences.

Data were collected during 2021-2022 using in-depth interviews with 24 directors of SSNs providing services to various populations in southern Israel, including elderly people, people with disability and youth at risk. Thematic content analysis of the interview data produced three main themes. First, “*The Coronavirus gave us a serious knockout*”: the interviewees shared their experiences of marginality and lack of access to essential social services, as well as logistic difficulties resulting from their peripheral location. The pandemic intensified existing difficulties in recruiting staff, helping service users and raising funds. The second theme, “*Like a never-ending rocket attack*”: referred to the combined effects of the pandemic and ongoing rocket attacks from Gaza, leading the interviewees to feelings of

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anxiety and burnout. On the positive side, the interviewees reported that their past experiences in dealing with emergency situations helped them survive the pandemic. The third theme was “*This is my lifework*”: despite all the hardship described, the interviewees shared their deep feelings of engagement with the area, and their commitment to develop and provide quality social services.

The results show that SSNs operating in southern Israel cope with intersections of financial, social and security-related hardships, that have been intensified in recent years since the Covid-19 outbreak. Despite these multiple challenges, the organizations have been able to maintain their vitality and service delivery to local inhabitants. These results are discussed in light of the “organizational resilience” theoretical framework, which relates to organizations’ ability to survive and even grow in times of crisis. The paper contributes to the organizational resilience scholarship and to its application in the context of social services operating under conditions of a global pandemic, security threat, marginality and social exclusion. Implications for social services and policies are discussed.

## Nonprofits at risk: Financial health of nonprofits with concentrated revenue in times of crisis

*Osnat Hazan*<sup>4</sup>

Diversification in revenue sources is praised as promoting the “financial health” of nonprofits (NPIs) for decades now. However, accumulating empirical studies yields ambivalent results. The present research studies the financial health of NPIs in Israel (*amutot*) facing the Covid-19 crisis, contingent on their revenue concentration. The paper focuses especially (but not exclusively) on the group of NPIs that are dependent on a *dominant* revenue source: having one type of revenue (donations, income from services, or governmental funding) as responsible for at least 90% of total income. The research is based on administrative data of all the active NPIs

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in Israel, on which they reported to the Israeli Corporations Authority regarding their activity in the years 2018–2020.

The main findings are: first, a dominant revenue source is very common in Israel (with 60% of NPIs relying on a dominant revenue source), with the most frequent source being donations (over 40% of NPIs rely dominantly on donations); second, financial vulnerability (as one of the two aspects of financial health) is greater in average amongst NPIs with a dominant revenue source; third, revenue concentration contributes to greater financial vulnerability; and fourth, the more concentrated the revenue is, the greater the odds-ratio in favor of ceasing activity instead of continuing will be. The findings also strongly point to a greater risk for smaller NPIs: amongst medium-sized NPIs and even more so amongst small NPIs in comparison to large NPIs, financial vulnerability is greater and more strongly affected by revenue concentration.

Last but not least, the financial vulnerability differs significantly depending on the type of dominant source: as opposed to relying dominantly on donations or on income from services or not relying on any dominant source, relying on governmental funding as the dominant revenue source actually reduced NPIs' financial vulnerability (above and beyond the relation between revenue concentration and vulnerability). Furthermore, amongst NPIs that relayed mainly on governmental funding (at least 50% of income) the level of revenue concentration does not contribute to financial vulnerability, whereas amongst NPIs relying mainly either on donations or on income from services or not relying on any main revenue source, revenue concentration does increase vulnerability. Thereby, the minority of NPIs that relied heavily on governmental funding were less exposed to risk in comparison to the rest of NPIs facing a double crisis, since 2020 was not only the first and most acute year of the COVID-19 crisis but also a year of a political crisis in Israel hence the government functioned with a limited interim budget. That is opposed to the majority of NPIs which rely heavily on donations which are at the greatest risk.

This research addresses the importance of choosing the aspect of financial health (vulnerability vs. capacity) contingent on the context. Specifically, when exploring times of crisis, it seems more fruitful to study the financial vulnerability of NPIs. The paper includes a theoretical background, detailed findings, and a discussion of the findings.

## “Swimming in stormy waters”: Social organizations’ coping with uncertainties – the first COVID-19 lockdown as a test case

*Ayelet Makaros<sup>5</sup> and Havazelet Ariel<sup>6</sup>*

Managing an organization in crisis has always been a tremendous challenge. It is even greater in the current era of complexity, uncertainty, chaos and unpredictable, accelerated changes. Upon the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020, social organizations were forced to cope with the unknown, tested by the challenge of preparedness for crisis and uncertainty. The present qualitative study addresses how social organizations handle uncertain situations by examining their coping with the first COVID-19 lockdown as a test case. It is informed by semi-structured interview with twelve directors of social organizations from the public and third sectors in Israel. Thematic analysis identifies seven core areas in the organizations’ coping with the first lockdown, all consistent with the theoretical literature. The authors analyze the seven areas that emerged from the findings and offer recommendations to social organizations, which will help them prepare for situations of uncertainty and other future emergencies.

## Between organizational crisis and pandemic crisis: Nonprofit mergers as a crisis coping strategy?

*Itay Greenspan<sup>7</sup>, Michal Almog-Bar<sup>7</sup>, Hillel Schmid<sup>7</sup> and Ayelet Oreg<sup>8</sup>*

As a health, social, and economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for civil society organizations (CSOs) to fulfill their social roles and meet their service mission objectives. This paper seeks to examine whether and how the merger of civil society organizations can serve as a strategic way of coping with an organizational crisis caused by an external shock such as

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the COVID-19 pandemic. We focus on eight case studies of mergers of Israeli CSOs in diverse areas of welfare, disability, social change, and more. Using in-depth interviews and a survey methodology of senior executives and board members who have participated in the merger process, we explore the motives, barriers, and key processes characterizing these mergers. The findings are organized around three stages in the merging process: *pre-merger*, when the motives and barriers were examined; *merger*, where decision-making mechanisms, strategies of coping with conflicts, as well as issues of belonging and identity were examined; and *post-merger*, where attitudes towards the outcomes of the merger and its success in various organizational areas were assessed. The findings point to a lack of proper preparation and orientation for the merger, the existence of ego struggles between managers and workers, and a need for greater socialization of the employees during the merger process. It also points to the need to plan for and attend to the human capital in nonprofit mergers, to build a shared sense of belonging and solidarity, and to the value of shaping a new and shared organizational culture. We conclude by discussing the importance of mergers as a response to internal-organizational and external-environmental crises.