

# A strong civil society for peace

## Context

The country programme encompasses the three different regions of Israel, the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza. Despite local differences in politics, economy and society, there are structural similarities across all three regions: internal divisions and the absence of a sense of unity, leadership that is hardly deemed legitimate, a widening gap between poor and rich, and a high percentage of disadvantaged groups in society. In addition, the worldwide phenomenon of “shrinking space” – constantly dwindling room for manoeuvre available to civil society players – combines with growing disregard for the rule of law to further complicate the work of civil society organizations in the regions. The upshot is a high level of human rights violations

Another major challenge is working in the context of an ongoing conflict. While the injustices resulting from the conflict persist, it will not be possible to come to terms with the past in the classic way.

## Objectives, priorities, activities

Against this backdrop, one country programme priority is to support civil society stakeholders such that they can work effectively despite the challenges mentioned. With the help of civil society organizations, the resilience of vulnerable communities is to be strengthened and local and national decision-makers approached with a view to safeguarding the rights of those communities.

The Israeli public is another priority. As the ones able to influence Israeli policy





towards the Palestinians, they play a pivotal role. The programme therefore includes several projects designed to raise awareness among the Israeli public regarding the situation of Palestinians.

The dwindling legitimacy of the political leadership can be observed on both sides of the conflict, especially in the eyes of younger people. The country programme therefore supports the emergence of new and young leadership who will take over responsibility and could also succeed in transcending boundaries. This calls for capacity building and networking. At the very basis of the entire country programme is the championing of the rule of law, whether at the national level in Israel/Palestine, Switzerland or at the European/international level.

The project activities enable people to access land, develop transformative resilience and become aware of and able to stand up for their own rights.

### **Target groups**

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The programme's target groups are Palestinian landowners and farmers who are fighting for their land, vulnerable residents of East Jerusalem who are overlooked in urban planning, residents of the Gaza Strip who are particularly at risk owing to the humanitarian situation in this area, Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons, Bedouin communities in Israel, and Jewish Israelis aspiring for a shift in mindset and a change in the Israeli public.

### **Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships**

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Represented in the Open forum are HEKS/EPER partner organizations that work together towards the aims of the country programme. In Israel/Palestine, HEKS/EPER is represented in AIDA, the Association of International Development Agencies, while locally and in Europe HEKS/EPER is a member of ACT Alliance. In Switzerland HEKS/EPER is a member of the Forum for Human Rights and maintains communication with the WCC.

### **HEKS/EPER on the ground**

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The HEKS/EPER country office in Jerusalem is responsible for overseeing, coordinating and monitoring the programme.

### **Topics and working approach**

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The work of HEKS/EPER is guided by the "human rights-based approach". The principal criterion for its work is the goal of respect for human rights. On this basis, HEKS/EPER pursuing the goal of transforming the conflict in Israel/Palestine in a non-violent manner, with the involvement of all those affected by it. To this end, HEKS/EPER empowers civil society on both sides of the conflict, and through the Open Forum, provides a safe space for dialogue between partner organizations. In view of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, HEKS/EPER combines conflict transformation and development cooperation with its humanitarian work there.

#### **Country:**

Palestine/Israel

**HEKS/EPER No.:** 360.501

#### **Responsibility:**

Kerstin Göller, Desk Officer for Palestine/Israel

#### **Contact:**

Swiss Church Aid (HEKS/EPER)  
Communication  
Seminarstrasse 28  
8042 Zurich  
Switzerland  
Phone: +41 44 360 88 10  
E-mail: [projektdienst@heks.ch](mailto:projektdienst@heks.ch)  
[www.heks.ch/english](http://www.heks.ch/english)