

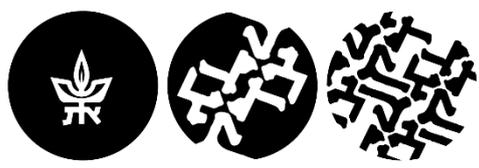


# Generosity in Times of Crisis

Israeli Helping Behaviors During the  
COVID-19 Pandemic

Hagai Katz  
Galia Feit

*Series Editors*  
Pamala Wiepking  
Cassandra M. Chapman  
Lucy Holmes McHugh



**The Institute for  
Law and Philanthropy**  
Buchmann Faculty of Law  
Tel Aviv University

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We are a collaborative research group involving over 50 scholars from more than 20 countries led by Professor Pamala Wiepking.

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### Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank their international collaborators who participated in this project and/or collected data for the generosity project in other countries: Cassandra M. Chapman, Wendy Scaife, Barbara M Masser, Marie Balczun, and Lucy Holmes McHugh (Australia); Michaela Neumayr, Michael Meyer, Astrid Pennerstorfer, and Berta Terzieva (Austria and Germany); Henrietta Grönlund and Anne Birgitta Pessi (Finland); Steinunn Hrafnisdóttir and Ómar H. Kristmundsson (Iceland); Karl Henrik Sivesind, Daniel Arnesen, and Bernard Enjoras (Norway); Irina Mersionova and Natalya Ivanova (Russia); Sung-Ju Kim (South Korea); Johan Vamstad (Sweden); Pamala Wiepking, Cathie Carrigan, and Yongzheng Yang (USA). The series editors thank Una Osili and Femida Handy for their support, as well as the University of Queensland's Business School and the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy for seed grants that helped fund the preparation of this report.

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# 1. Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the world into a health crisis that has had devastating effects on the global economy and public life in many countries. Little is known about how people have responded to two competing pressures caused by the crisis in many countries: increased community need coupled with decreased financial capacity to help others.

In Israel we collected longitudinal philanthropic behavior data, comprised of 88 weekly surveys of approximately 560 participants each week (between Dec. 2018 to Sept. 2020). In total, we sampled 26,737 individuals and collected nearly 50,000 responses. By philanthropic behavior we mean giving and volunteering, both formal and informal, towards various social causes.

Three key findings emerged:

1. The pandemic has led to a decrease in philanthropic behavior, especially in informal giving rates and both in formal and informal volunteering rates.
2. In contrast, the rates of formal giving and the amounts of donations to nonprofit organizations remained mostly unchanged during the crisis.
3. The impact of the crisis regarding philanthropic behavior was most evident among economically vulnerable populations, whose positions in the labor market are relatively weaker.

**Managerial Implications.** Nonprofits may wish to:

1. Direct efforts towards online fundraising during such crisis. This seems to be an effective tactic to fill the gap in formal giving.
2. As for volunteering, nonprofits may need to boost their capacity to provide diverse alternatives for suitable volunteering opportunities during crisis.
3. Nonprofits must realize that informal giving is in decline, and make deliberate efforts to reach individuals with unmet needs. One possible strategy could be to mobilize the social networks of existing clients.

**Policy Implications.** Governments may wish to:

1. Policymakers should consider how to mitigate the negative implications of the economic uncertainty on giving and volunteering.
2. The decline in informal giving and volunteering throughout the crisis suggest cracks in the solidarity that characterizes Israeli society, putting the informal element of the social safety net at risk. Government should take measures to reinstitute and strengthen informal social nets, and additionally develop alternatives to fill in for the declining informal social support during crisis. Government (national or local) can support outreach effort to unserved individuals by providing incentives to organizations that would encourage and assist them in that task.

## 2. Introduction: COVID-19 and Public Generosity

In early 2020, the world was thrown into a health crisis that had devastating effects on the global economy and social life in many countries: the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing (September 2021), more than 225 million people have contracted the virus globally and over 4.6 million people have died (Worldometer, 2021). By April 2020, more than 3.9 billion people from 90 countries – around half the world’s population – were told by their governments to stay at home to slow the spread of the virus (Sandford, 2020). These restrictions had knock-on effects for people’s social lives, as many people were separated from friends and family for long periods of time. Restricted movement (and associated dampened spending) also devastated many economies, with more than 225 million full-time jobs being lost from the global economy and unemployment rates skyrocketing in many countries (Hassan, 2021). In short, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a global crisis that has severely impacted social and economic life in many countries.

The pandemic has had two competing effects in relation to the provision of social support to communities in need. On the one hand, the crisis amplified need: many more families than usual found themselves in need of support due to sickness or unemployment, especially families from vulnerable communities. On the other hand, because the global economy was straining and many families were facing difficult times, nonprofits and social programs faced reduced flows of income and support (CAF, 2021). Yet little is known about how people responded to these twin pressures: did the pressures of the pandemic constrain generosity, or were people able to find ways to help each other regardless? The purpose of this report is to answer this overarching question:

*How have generosity behaviors manifested and changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

We define generosity as all forms of behavior that people engage in with the intention of benefiting others (including people, animals, and environments).<sup>1</sup> Generosity behaviors therefore include both formal and informal support. Examples of formal generosity behaviors are donating money to charities, volunteering for nonprofit organizations, or giving blood. Informal generosity behaviors include helping people they know, helping strangers, and participating in grassroots community groups.

To answer our research question, we formed a team of researchers working in eleven countries to collect data on the formal and informal generosity practices that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries included in the research project were Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States. Country reports will be available online at: [www.globalgenerosityresearch.com](http://www.globalgenerosityresearch.com). This series is part of a broader research initiative from “The Global Generosity Project” led by Professor Pamala Wiepking from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in the United States.

By understanding generosity responses to this particular crisis, we can learn more about how individuals and societies respond to crises in general. Such knowledge can be used to develop policies and practices that ensure the United States will be able to withstand future shocks while maintaining a thriving and harmonious social fabric. To this end, we include a summary of our key findings and recommendations for both nonprofits and government.

## 3. Research Method

### 3.1 Participants and Procedure

Data were collected in eleven countries during the second half of 2020 and early 2021, with at least 644 participants per country (range 644 – 5900). In many countries, efforts were made to generate a nationally representative sample of participants. The data collection in Israel was significantly different from that in other countries, making comparisons challenging. In all other countries, the data is cross-sectional, with one (or at most two or three) elaborate national surveys.

In Israel, we collected longitudinal data, comprised of 88 weekly surveys of approximately 560 participants each week. In total, we sampled 26,737 individuals and collected nearly 50,000 responses. Weekly samples were independent, and sampled from a large national online panel of over 120,000 individuals. Approximately 10% of the respondents replied more than three times over the whole duration of the study. Ergo, the data collection was cross-sectional with very minor overlap between weekly samples.

The weekly samples were representative of the adult population in Israel, comprised of approximately 500 respondents from the Jewish populations, and 60 respondents from the Arab population up to the age of 40. The weekly sampling, usually on Wednesdays, was random and stratified on the following parameters: gender, age, region and religiosity. The sampling filtered out panel members who participated in three or more of any of the panel's surveys in the month prior to the sample, as well as those who participated in our survey the previous week.

### 3.2 Timing and COVID-19 Context

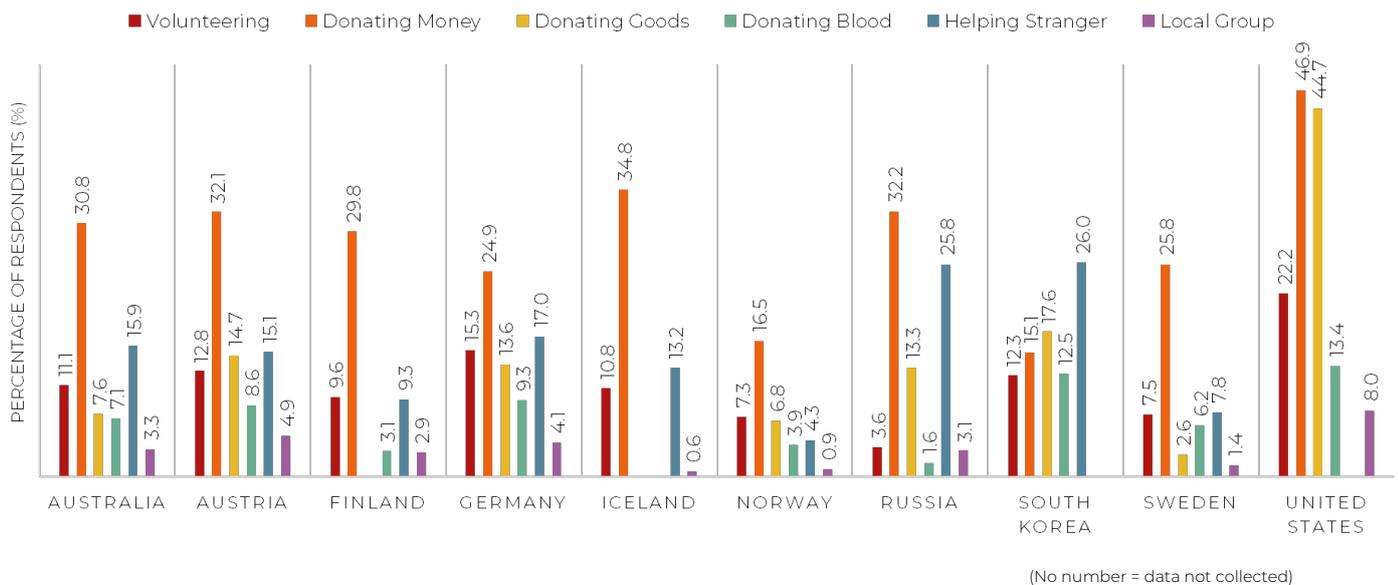
The Israeli weekly surveys were conducted from December 1, 2018 through December 31, 2019, and from February 19, 2020 through September 30, 2020. This allows us to make comparisons regarding reported actual behaviors between the period of the pandemic and the previous year, rather than suffice with retrospective self-reports.

In total, 88 weekly samples were collected. The data collection period covers the emergence of the pandemic through the first lockdown (mid March 2020, with a total of 390 confirmed cases and no deaths) and up to the first two weeks of the second lockdown (September 18, 2020 totaling 182,001 confirmed cases and 1,263 deaths (WHO Coronavirus [COVID-19] Dashboard, [covid19.who.int/info](https://covid19.who.int/info)). During that time, Israeli government had instilled and removed restrictions almost erratically, generating a decrease in the confidence of the public in its policies and in the effectiveness of the restrictions and countermeasures.

## 4. Global Comparison

As seen in Figure 1, manifestations of generosity behaviors varied across national contexts. We asked participants which generosity behaviors they had engaged in since the beginning of the pandemic. Some countries did not ask about all behaviors. In most countries, donating money was the most common generosity behavior reported.

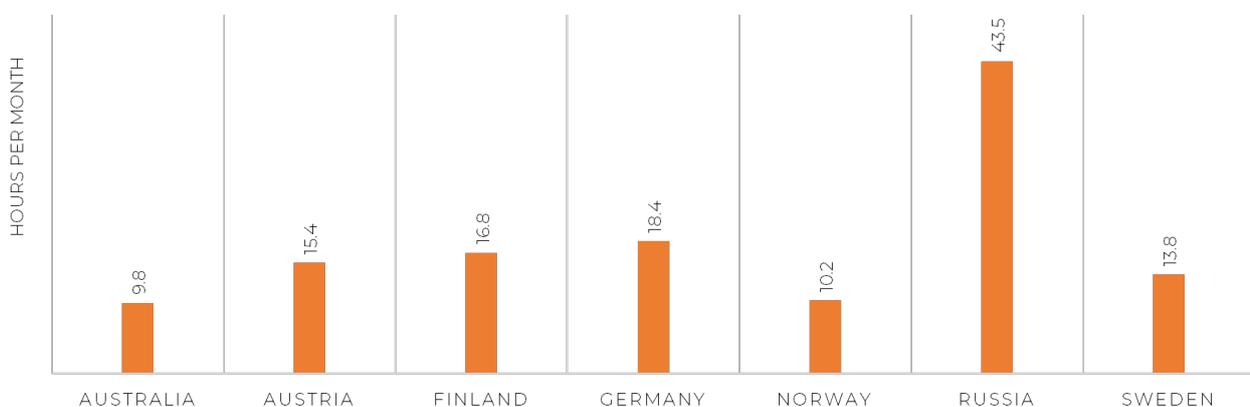
**Figure 1.** Generosity responses during pandemic



The extent of generosity behaviors varied significantly across nations. Respondents in different countries showed large differences in terms of the number of hours they volunteered each month<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 2).

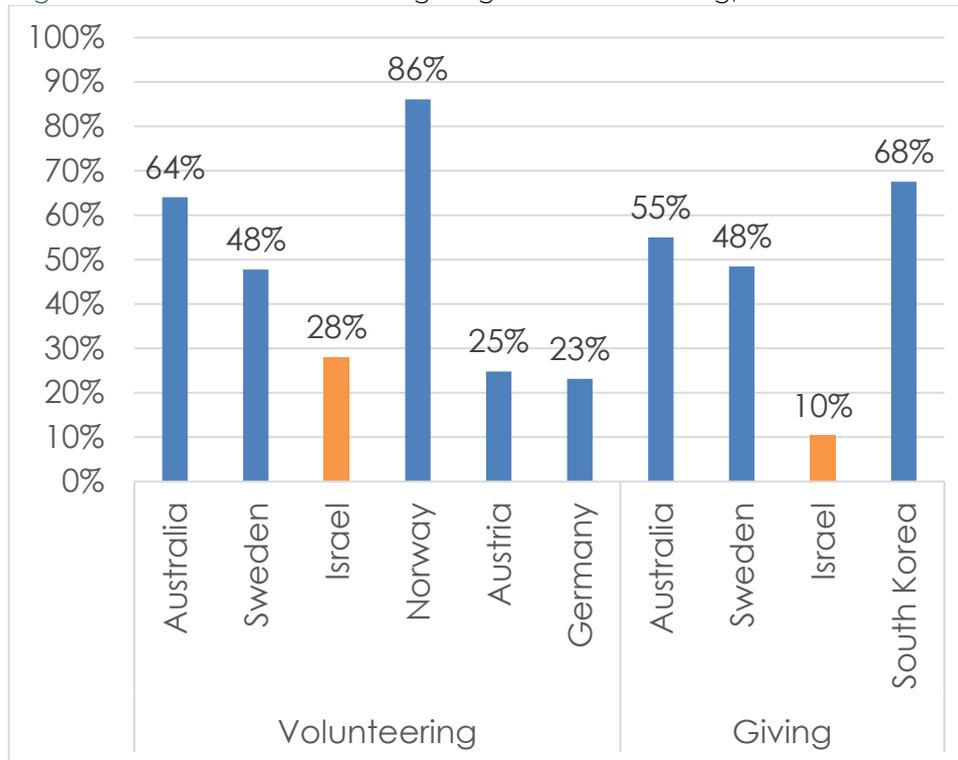
Of the hours volunteered per month (Figure 2), Russia stands out with 43.5 hours, about 2.5 times more hours than volunteers in Austria, Finland, Sweden and Germany. Yet Russia also had the lowest percentage of volunteers during the pandemic (Figure 1: 3.6%), compared with 22.2% of Americans, 15.3% of Germans and 12.8% Austrians.

**Figure 2.** Average number of hours per month spent volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic



Since the data collection methods in Israel were very different from those applied in the other nations, we cannot perform a direct comparison. We can compare, with curation, as data allows, the change in the incidence of giving and volunteering in selected countries between 2019 and 2020 (the numbers in Figure 3 represent relative change in percent, calculated as  $1 - (2020/2019)$ ).

Figure 3. Decline in the rate of giving and volunteering, Israel and selected nations, 2019-2020



As we can see, in all nations we could compare at this point there were declines in both giving and volunteering of between 10% and 86%. The decline rate of volunteering in Israel was more or less in the middle of the scale, higher than in Germany and Austria, but lower than in Australia, Sweden and Norway. The decline rate of giving in Israel, however, was substantially lower than in Australia, Sweden and South Korea.

## 5. National Findings

The key purpose of this report is to examine how Israelis responded to the COVID-19 crisis; in particular, how individuals came together to help support those directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19. Below we consider the different forms of generosity behavior that were common in Israel during the pandemic and how these generosity behaviors changed during the pandemic. We then discuss a particular example of how generosity manifested in Israel during the crisis.

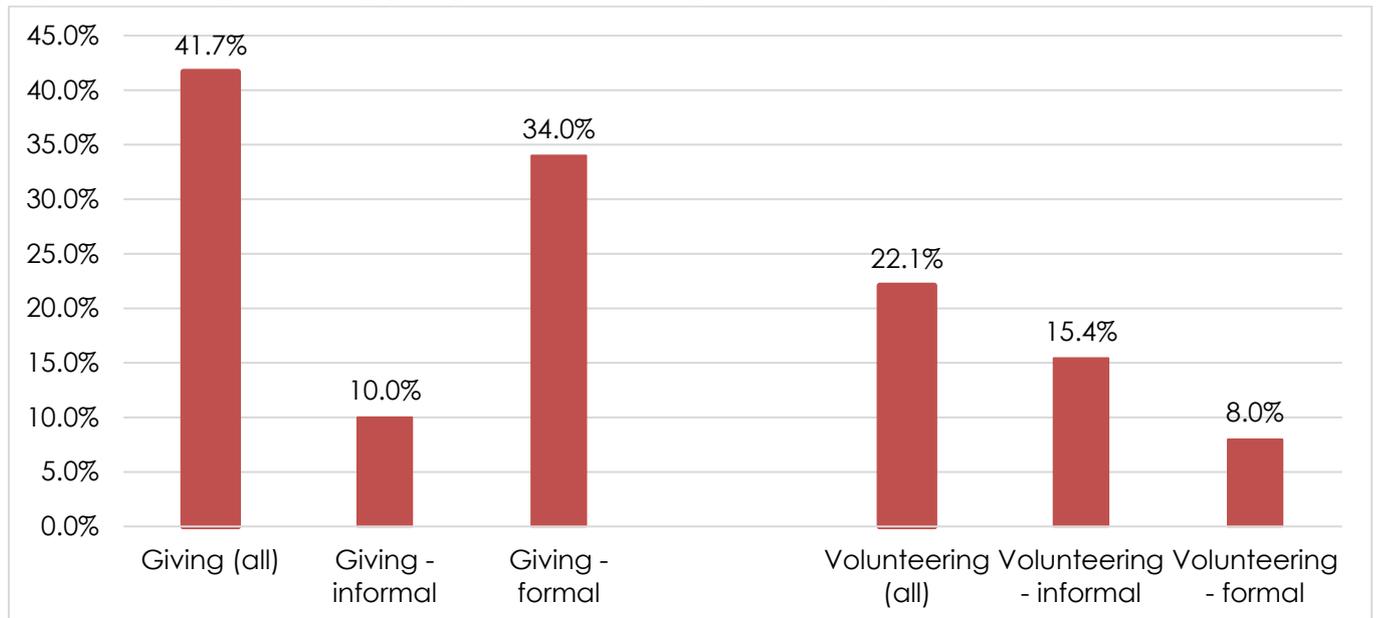
### 5.1 Generosity During COVID-19

Between February and September 2020, the weekly overall donor rate was on average 42%. The average weekly rate of donors giving formally to organizations was 34%, while the average weekly rate of donors giving informally was 10%<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 4). The rate of those reporting that they donated both formally and informally during the same week was 2%. Weekly donation rates fluctuated.

Although in sum the weekly rates were mostly stable and the average weekly differences in donation rates were relatively low and stood at 4% for both formal and informal donations.

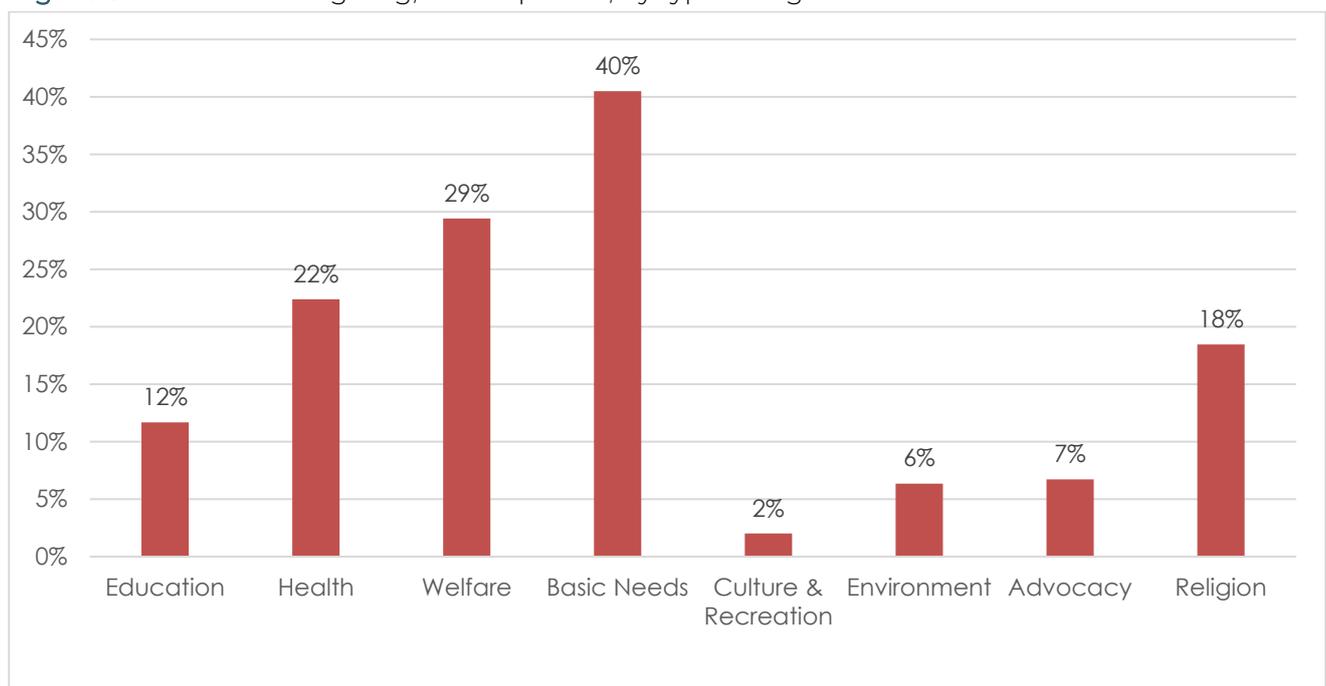
The overall rate of volunteers was 22%. The rate of respondents reporting formal volunteering was 8% and the rate of reporting informal volunteering was 15%. Engaging in both formal and informal volunteering in the same week was reported by 1% of our respondents.

**Figure 4.** Average of weekly giving and volunteering rates, Feb-Sep 2020



Donors who gave to nonprofits most often targeted organizations providing basic needs, which seems plausible as the pandemic and its economic repercussions have generated need among the more fragile. Second and third among donor preferences are organizations providing welfare and health services, which again makes sense in the context of a health and economic crisis.

**Figure 5.** Rate of formal giving, Feb-Sep 2020, by type of organization

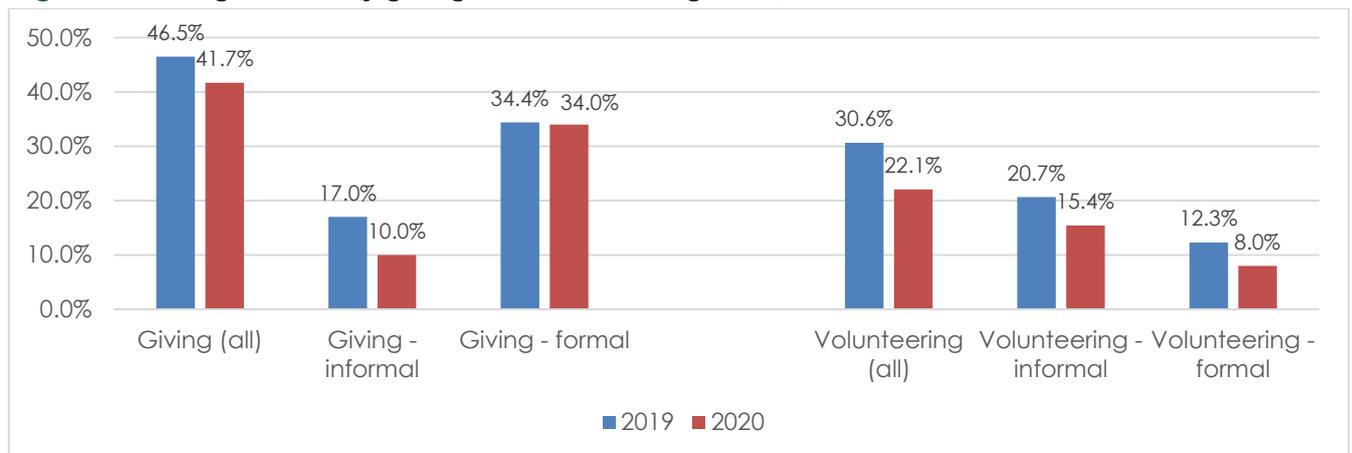


The weekly formal contributions (to nonprofits) during the first months of the pandemic were relatively stable, at NIS 227 on average (about EU 58), with a standard deviation of less than NIS 50. The highest donations reported were two donations of NIS 100,000. The distribution is skewed towards small weekly sums, and 50% of the donors gave NIS 100 or less a week.

## 5.2 Changes in Generosity

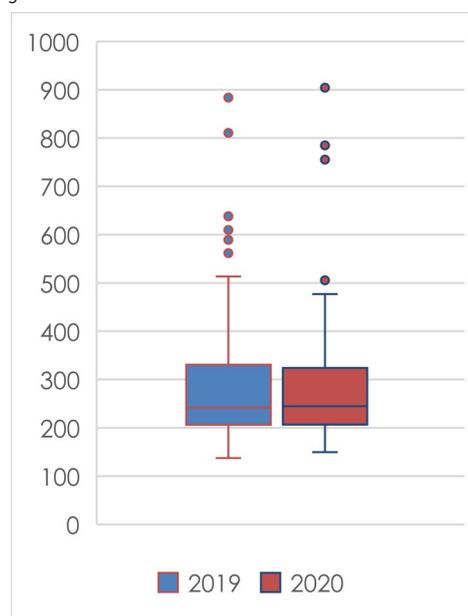
Our methodology allows us to explore two types of change: a comparison with the patterns before the pandemic, but also dynamics in philanthropy throughout the pandemic (for the period we collected data). Figure 6 shows an overall decline in the rates of giving and volunteering across the board, although the decline in formal giving is considerably smaller.

**Figure 6.** Average of weekly giving and volunteering rates, 2019-2020



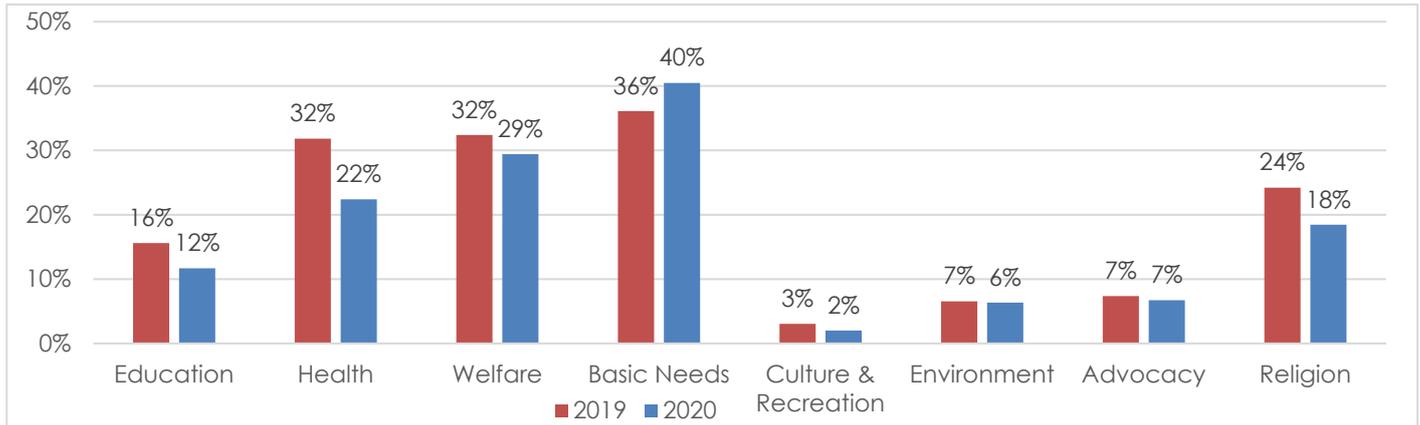
The average sums of money given did not change at all, from 227.87 New Israeli Shekel (NIS) in 2019 to 226.55 NIS in 2020. However, the variance and the distribution of weekly donations did change. In figure 7 we can see that the average weekly donation in the two years is virtually identical. However, the range and the variance of weekly average donations declined in the pandemic period, with fewer people on average giving very high or very low donations.

**Figure 7.** Distribution of weekly donation sums in New Israeli Shekel (NIS), 2019-2020



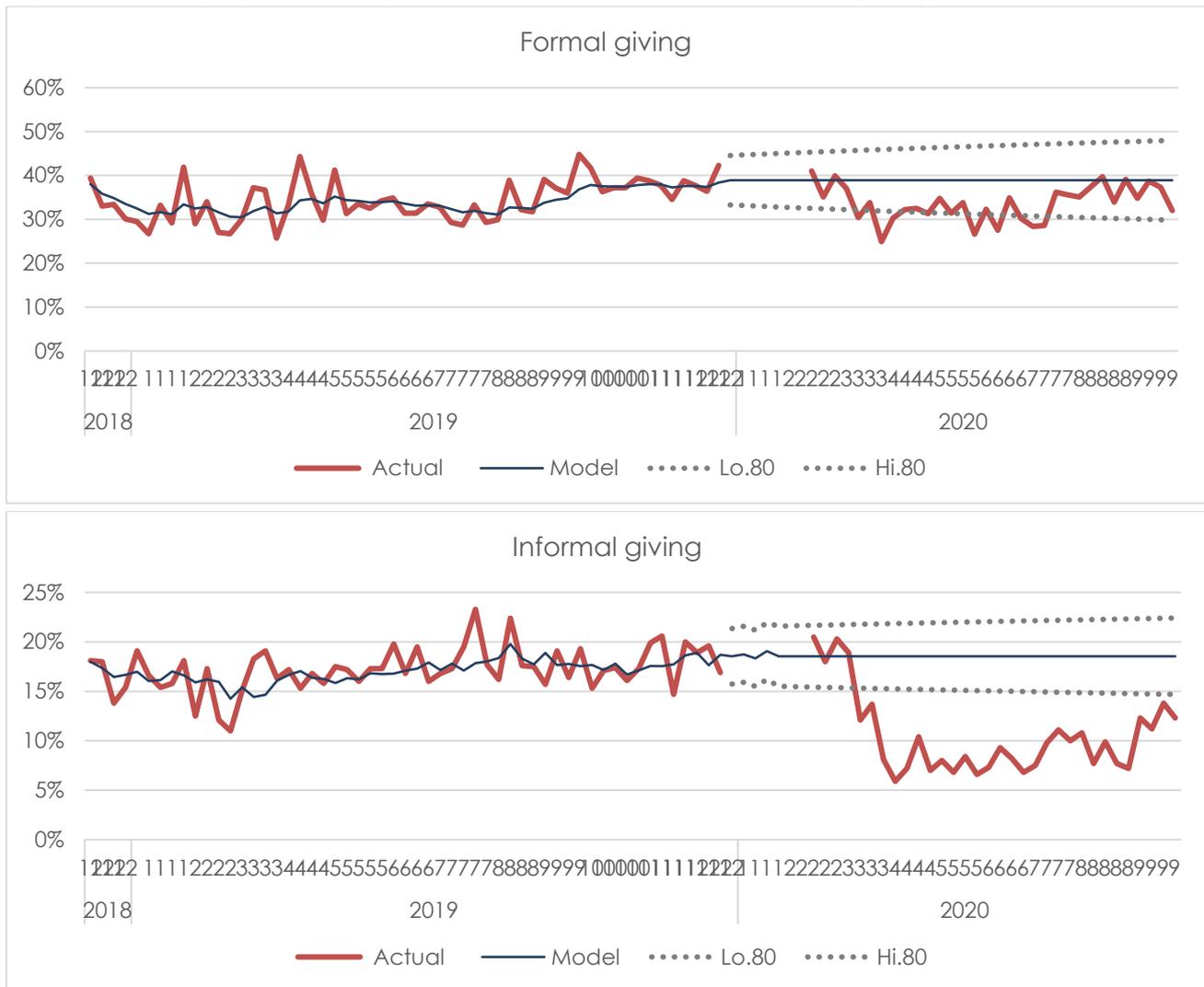
Changes were evident also in the targets of formal giving. The only type of organizations that enjoyed a rise in numbers of donors is those engaged in the provision of basic needs (Figure 8). The propensity of the public to give to other types of organizations has declined. The most dramatic decline is seen in the field of health. This may seem odd, in the context of a deadly pandemic. However, in the political culture of Israel, despite continued processes of privatization of human services since the 1980s, the public continues to view the government as responsible for the provision of human services – including health care provision (Cohen, Mizrahi, & Yuval, 2011).

Figure 8. Rate of formal giving, by type of organization, 2019-2020



When we examine the dynamics throughout the pandemic period, interesting patterns can be seen. The time-series analysis seen in Figure 9 reveals the difference in the effect of the pandemic on formal vs. informal giving<sup>4</sup>. In these charts, the thick colored line shows the actual weekly rates of giving, and the thin black line shows the model generated by these data points. Up to the end of 2019, the model is based on actual data for 2019, while in 2020 it offers forecasting based on the 2019 real data. The dotted lines above and below the forecast line represent a "confidence range" of 20% possible error above and below the forecast.

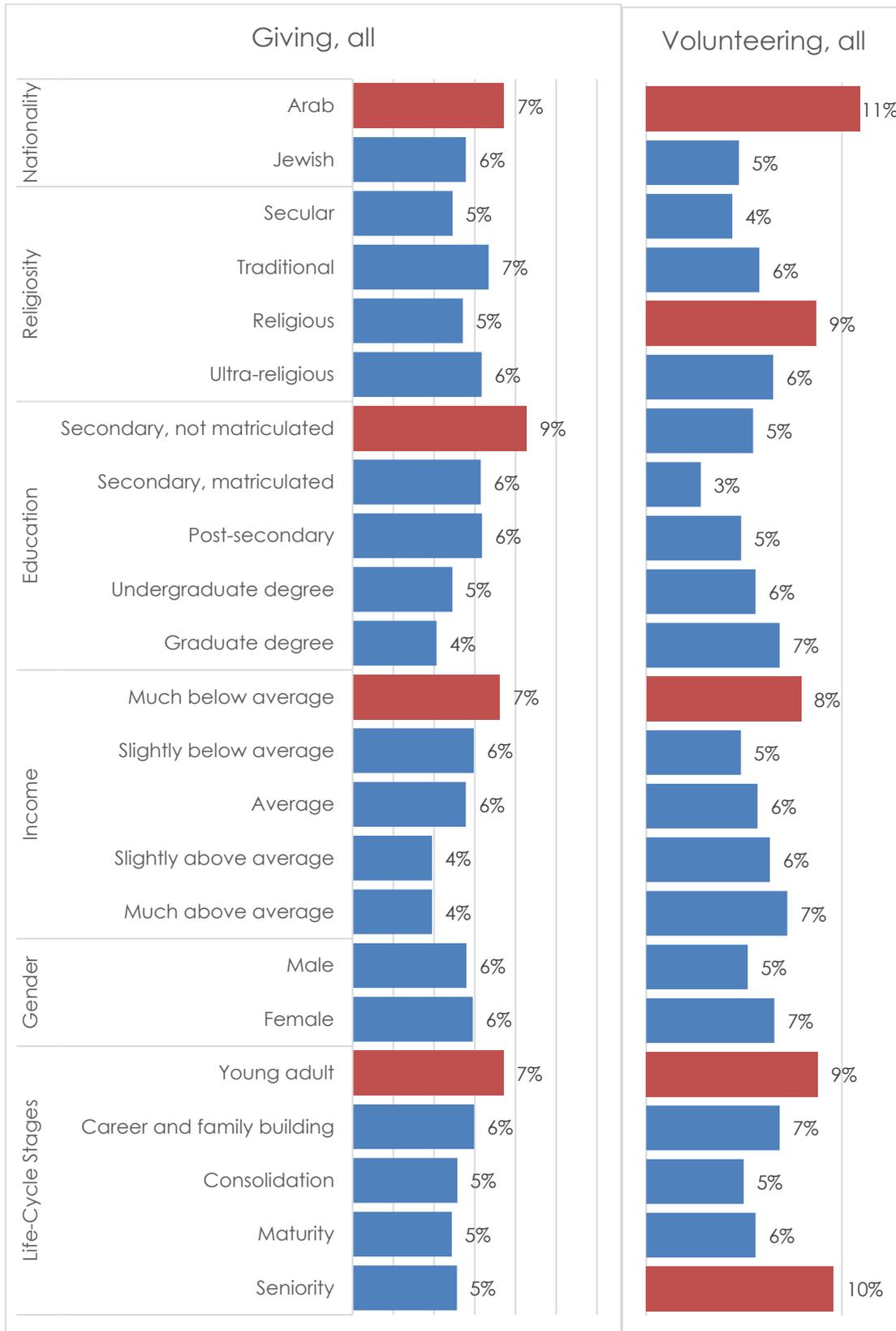
Figure 9. Weekly reported and projected rates of formal and informal giving, 2019-2020



An interesting picture emerges when we distinguish between formal and informal donations. As both charts show, although giving rates fluctuate, they mostly remain within a rather steady range and form a complex trend. Given the trend of 2019 data, the best model predicted found for 2020 is a little above a simple average of 2019 data, for both formal and informal giving, expressed in a straight line. In both charts, we see a decrease in reported giving rates shortly after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Israel. However, two differences are evident. Formal giving remained mostly within the 20% confidence range, and returned to 2019 predicted levels in July, with the summer vacation. The decline in informal giving, however, was much greater, and the small rise during the summer didn't correct for this decrease.

Since March 2020 we added two questions to our weekly survey, asking whether respondents have decreased or increased their giving and/or volunteering in the recent week due to the COVID-19 crisis. The responses, shown in figure 10, demonstrate that the greatest declines were among specific socioeconomic groups: Arabs, younger and older persons, and persons with low income (in the highlighted bars). This implies that most impacted were groups that were particularly affected by the lockdowns and by the economic and labor-market impacts of the crisis.

Figure 10. Average weekly rate of respondents reporting decline in giving or volunteering, March-September 2020



## 5.3 Case Study

This report has focused primarily on the generosity behaviors of individuals. However, philanthropies, nonprofits, corporations, and communities have all demonstrated social innovation during the pandemic and in face of crisis. One outstanding example of demonstrating not only generosity but also cross-sector collaboration was the formation and operations of the [“Veshamarta”](#) campaign for elderly geriatric patients across Israel. By mid-march 2020, in the early days of the pandemic outbreak in Israel the realization hit that approximately 25,000 residents in 300 geriatric institutions are in acute danger and a protocol for their protection has yet to be developed and implemented. Facing this complex situation philanthropists, non-profit organizations, volunteer organizations and a host of corporations joined forces and set out on a complex logistic campaign to procure and supply protective equipment for elderly geriatric residents and their care-taking staff, to provide - through various means - emotional support to residents due to social distancing provisions, to develop and implement care-taking protocol and guidelines amid the pandemic and to map and respond to various general and individual needs within these institutions. Soon after its initiation, local municipalities and government lent their support to this cross-sector joint venture through additional funding. Eventually, the “Veshamarta” campaign was integrated by the government into the then-developing program of protection of the elderly - “Fathers and Mothers Sheild” - led by the Ministry of Health.



“Veshamarta” campaign (Rafaeli, 2020)

## 6. Conclusion

In this section we briefly summarize the findings about Israeli's generosity behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic and elaborate potential implications both for government policy and nonprofit management.

### 6.1 Key Findings

There are three key findings from this report. Firstly, we found that the pandemic has led to a decrease in philanthropic behavior, especially in informal giving rates and both in formal and informal volunteering rates. These findings indicate the great impact the distancing and isolation guidelines had on the one hand, and the fear of infection on the other, which translated to "stay home" actual behavior. We can safely assume that the restrictions prevented random or planned encounters with opportunities for donation and volunteering.

In contrast, the findings show that the rates of formal giving and the amounts of donations to nonprofit organizations were mostly unchanged during the crisis, at least in the months for which we have data.

Lastly, as we saw, the impact of the crisis on philanthropic behaviors was most severe among economically vulnerable populations, whose positions in the labor market are relatively weaker, further exacerbating the welfare repercussions of the crisis.

### 6.2 Implications for Nonprofits

Results suggest that people engage in generosity behaviors, even during times of crisis. When circumstances allow they seek informal giving or volunteering opportunities but also look for formal opportunities to engage. This is where nonprofits step in.

Presumably, the fundraising efforts of some of the nonprofits compensated for the financial difficulties caused by the pandemic. Potentially, data from organizations' tax reports for 2020 will provide needed confirmation. Also, there was likely a sufficient shift to online donations, that compensated for some of the declines. Online fundraising seems to be an effective supplementary tactic. We encourage nonprofits to bolster their online fundraising capacity. As for volunteering, while there was a decline, it seems that willingness remained, therefore nonprofits may need to boost their capacity to provide alternatives for suitable volunteering opportunities during crisis.

The decline in informal giving and volunteering should motivate nonprofits to consider casting a wider net and adopting strategies to improve their outreach to individuals whose reliance on informal help during normal times brought them during the pandemic to lose their support.

Noting their embeddedness in their communities, nonprofits are most capable of reaching such unmet need. One possible strategy would be to tap on the social networks of existing clients to outreach similar persons whom they haven't served thus far.

## 6.3 Implications for Government Policy

Results suggest that government policies – especially around social distancing requirements and lockdowns had very real impacts on people's generosity behaviors. The economic repercussions of the pandemic seem to have particularly severe influences. Policymakers should put more thought into how to mitigate the negative implications on giving and volunteering due to the economic uncertainty that came with the pandemic.

Israel is usually depicted as a solidary society, and previous crises, of other types (humanitarian, military) raised a sense of national belonging or solidarity with the victims and led to an increase in philanthropic behavior (e.g. Katz et al, 2007). In the COVID-19 crisis, all are victims (or potential victims), both from the pandemic itself and its economic implications. Consequently, the solidarity effect was replaced by a retreat into one's home, both physically and symbolically. This probable phenomenon is worrying. Our findings give the impression of a crisis that has no national garnet, in which any potential donor is at risk of being harmed or has already been harmed, and has no identified "other" to reach. These patterns join other signs that indicate a decline in social solidarity in Israel in recent years (Horowitz & Lissak, 2012), and illuminate the vital need to address the various problems in the social fabric of Israel as soon as possible. It also means that the informal element of the social safety net is at risk under such universal extreme circumstances. Government should consider this risk and prepare accordingly, by planning ahead and by developing alternatives to fill in when this component of social assistance fails, so it can be deployed when circumstances justify. If nonprofits are closest to those affected by this decline in the informal safety-nets, government is best positioned to support them in this endeavor. Government can provide financial and other incentives to assist nonprofits to undertake this mission.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Notes

1. A full overview of generosity behaviors can be found on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/mznqu/>).
2. Due to unusual outliers, the data has been winsorized for two countries at the 99th (Australia) or 95th (Russia) percentile.
3. Please note that all the data presented here is weekly averages over an extended period of time.
4. The time-series analyses were performed by D. Osnat Hazan, Director of the Law and Philanthropy Institute's nonprofit data lab.

## 8.2 Additional Information About Sample

Variable	Value	%
Nationality	Arab	10.0
	Jewish	90.0
Gender	Male	48.9
	Female	51.1
Life-Cycle Stages	Young Adult	18.4
	Career And Family Building	29.4
	Consolidation	26.5
	Maturity	21.0
	Seniority	4.6
Education	Secondary, Not Matriculated	10.0
	Secondary, Matriculated	21.5
	Post Secondary	21.3
	Undergraduate Degree	32.8
	Graduate Degree	14.3
Religiosity	Secular	49.4
	Traditional	33.4
	Religious	10.7
	Ultra-Religious	6.6
Income	Much Below Average	23.1
	Slightly Below Average	18.7
	Average	22.8
	Slightly Above Average	26.1
	Much above average	9.3

## 8.3 Additional Findings

A detailed report which includes additional findings and analyses is available in Hebrew from: <https://bit.ly/2WGLEvI>



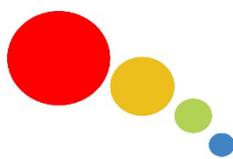
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The Institute for Law and Philanthropy (ILP) is a research body at Tel Aviv University Law School. In line with TAU Law's commitment towards social justice, ILP's mission is to help integrate philanthropy into Israel's socioeconomic policy and support the country's philanthropy in its quest to foster a more equitable and prosperous society. The Institute operates in three predominant areas – research, education, and community outreach. Taking an international perspective, the Institute strives to develop research capacity, to foster creative knowledge exchange between academic and practice communities, and to disseminate the evidence base to inform policy and practice.

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