

MEPI Alumni Connection

رابطة خريجي ميبي



MEPI Alumni Connection

Midline Impact Report



Acknowledgments

The MEPI Alumni Connection develops an active alumni network that fosters long-lasting relationships and opportunities to stimulate social and business entrepreneurship in the MENA region. The MEPI Alumni Connection supports community leaders from across the Middle East and North Africa to strengthen their networks, collaborate on leadership initiatives, and develop their skills in order to contribute to their communities.

IREX would like to acknowledge the contributions of MEPI alumni who took the time to respond thoughtfully to the biennial survey and share their experiences. Data collection outreach was conducted by the program team and supported by MEPI staff and partners. Hallie Davis conducted analysis and drafted this document with support from the MEPI Alumni Connection team.

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Midline Impact Report

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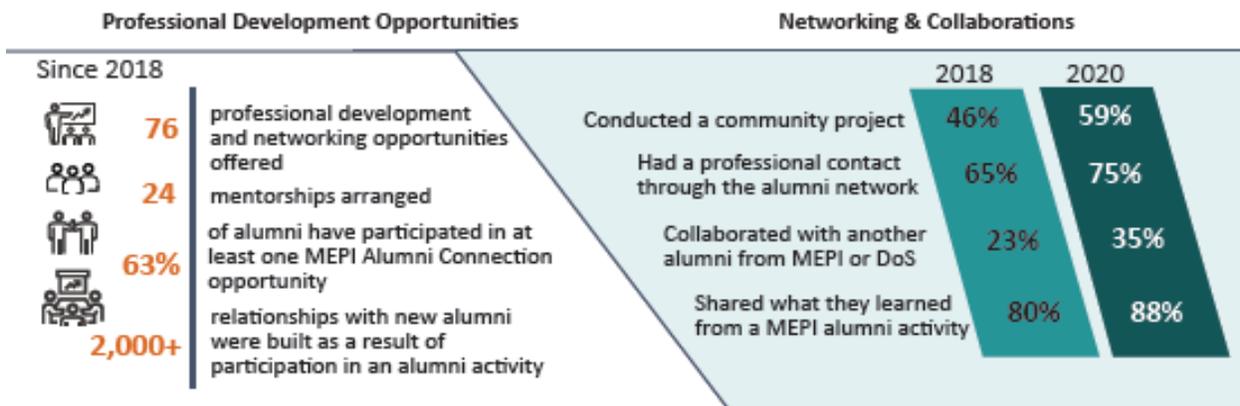
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How is MEPI Alumni Connection helping promote inclusive economic development in MENA?



How is MEPI Alumni Connection strengthening networks and civic collaboration in MENA?



How is MEPI Alumni Connection supporting leaders that contribute to stable communities?



*As of August 2021

Executive Summary

This report highlights midline results and impacts of MEPI Alumni Connection activities from 2018 to 2021 using program records, the 2020 biennial survey, and the 2018 Needs Assessment survey. Results indicate that the MEPI Alumni Connection has helped promote inclusive economic development, strengthened networks and civic collaboration, and built leadership skills to contribute to stable communities in the Middle East and North Africa.

According to survey responses, alumni's economic environment has improved since 2018, as evidenced by increased employment rates. Alumni have also contributed to improving economic growth in the region and their communities through entrepreneurial activities. These activities have been encouraged and supported by the MEPI Alumni Connection through fostering collaborations and providing grant opportunities. Alumni have developed partnerships through the alumni network and benefited from small grant opportunities.

Alumni responses also indicate increasing engagement with the diverse networking opportunities and support offered by the MEPI Alumni Connection. This engagement has led to numerous positive outcomes for alumni, including helping to strengthen their community projects, building relationships with one another and with Department of State alumni, and fostering collaborations with civil society organizations. Moreover, survey responses indicate these projects and collaborations have positively benefited thousands of individuals and alumni communities across the Middle East and North Africa.

MEPI Alumni Connection

The MEPI Alumni Connection, a program sponsored by the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and implemented by IREX, develops an active network of community and business leaders across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that fosters long-lasting relationships, leadership skills, and opportunities to stimulate social entrepreneurship in the MENA region to advance stability and prosperity in the region.

The MEPI Alumni Connection focuses on creating local and regional networking opportunities, providing professional development, encouraging innovation through small grants, and providing tailored training and technical assistance to MEPI leadership alumni in coordination with U.S. embassies in the region.

About the Midline Impact and Results

The MEPI Alumni Connection conducted an original Needs Assessment survey in 2018 to learn more about the alumni network and how best to serve MEPI alumni. The team conducted a biennial survey in 2020 to learn about changes to the network, engagement with the MEPI Alumni Connection, and how to best continue to meet alumni needs. This impact report highlights midline results and impacts from program records, the 2020 biennial survey, and a comparison of 2020 and 2018 survey responses. Data from program records are as of June 2021, unless otherwise specified.

This report shows that MEPI alumni activities and events have been predominant factors in helping achieve the program's objectives of collaborating on a project, sharing program information, and starting a community or business project. MEPI alumni events help mitigate natural fadeout effects of engagement over time by keeping alumni and their networks connected.

Who are the MEPI alumni, and how has the MEPI alumni network changed since 2018?

MEPI Alumni Connection participants are a diverse set of community and business leaders from across 14 countries in the Middle East and North Africa who have participated in a MEPI leadership development program from 2003 to 2021. Participating countries include Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. Egypt is included in the 2020 survey only for Tomorrow's Leaders Program alumni. The reach and networking capability of the MEPI Alumni Connection have continued to grow and expand. **In 2018, there were 1,365 MEPI alumni in the program database with contact information. By 2020, the database had grown to 1,663 MEPI alumni, an increase of 22%.**

Alumni of the Year Awards recognize alumni for their leadership potential and dedication to community needs in their home countries. Since 2019, the MEPI Alumni Connection has recognized 24 alumni across seven countries.



Asma Rouabhia (SLP, Tunisia), first place winner of the 2019 MEPI Alumni of the Year Award, is a young social entrepreneur and trainer in entrepreneurship, community solutions, and leadership. A speaker in youth conferences, she is the founder of ProActive Youth, Tunisia's 2019 laureate of Women in Africa awardee, and a winner of the Accelerate MENA Contest.

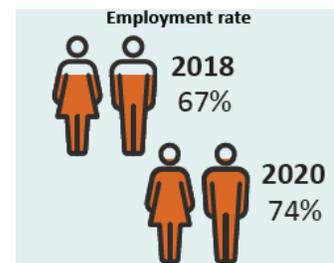
Survey responses indicate that MEPI alumni continue to remain engaged with the MEPI Alumni Connection. In 2018, more than a third, 42% (567/1365), of alumni with contact information responded to the Needs Assessment survey. Two years later, in 2020, there were fewer alumni who completed the survey. However, even amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic, 25% (408/1663), of alumni responded to the 2020 biennial survey.¹

There are notable changes in the engagement of respondents from 2018 to 2020. Among both years, there is an even representation of males and females. However, older respondents at least 30 years old made up a larger portion of the 2020 respondents, 40% (149/408), compared to those in the 2018 survey, 30% (172/567). There were also differences in representation among alumni from MEPI leadership programs. In 2018, alumni from the Tomorrow's Leaders Program made up 17% (151/567) of respondents, while in the 2020 survey, they made up 21% (84/408). Additionally, alumni who completed their MEPI program more than two years prior were more likely to respond to the 2020 survey. In 2018, respondents who completed their program prior to 2016 made up 59% (333/567) of respondents. In comparison, the 2020 survey shows respondents who completed their program prior to 2018 made up 69% (280/408) of the total number of respondents. Responses from the 2020 survey also demonstrate an increase in alumni living abroad or outside their country of citizenship.

As demonstrated by the 2020 survey responses, alumni live all over the world. An estimated 74% (203/273) of alumni reside in their home country, and 26% (70/273) reside outside their home country. Comparatively, in 2018, an estimated 23% (133/569) of alumni resided abroad.² Additionally, an estimated 84% (249/296) of alumni live in MEPI Alumni Connection eligible countries while 16% (47/296) do not. Among those who reside outside of MEPI eligible countries, 7% are in Europe, 4% in North America, 3% in the Middle East, and 1% in Central or Eastern Africa.

How is MEPI Alumni Connection helping promote inclusive economic development in MENA?

The MEPI Alumni Connection encourages alumni to promote MEPI values of stability and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) through professional development opportunities, promoting networking and collaborations, and entrepreneurial grants.



Employment

In the past two years, alumni's economic situation improved, as evidenced by the employment rate among alumni increasing from 67% (377/564) in 2018 to 74% (301/408) in 2020. The employment rate of alumni between the ages of 20 and 29, increased from 61% (238/392) in 2018 to 68% (150/222) in 2020. Additionally, alumni from the Student Leaders Program also experienced an increase in employment from 59% (176/297) in 2018 to 74% (131/176) in 2020.

Entrepreneurship

Alumni have contributed to improving economic growth in the region and their communities through entrepreneurial activities. **According to 2020 survey responses, 157 alumni have started their own business or organization after their experience with MEPI.** Of the 157 alumni, 59% were male and 41% were female. Additionally, 73% had completed their MEPI program before 2018 and 27% completed their program in or after 2018. Alumni entrepreneurial activities were encouraged and supported by the MEPI Alumni Connection through fostering collaborations and providing grant opportunities.

¹ Percentages represent the total of number of eligible responses after data was cleaned of any duplicates, incomplete responses, or errors.

² In 2018 alumni respondents could select multiple countries for their citizenship, while in 2020 they could only select one.

Among alumni who reported starting a business or organization, 77% (120/156) had support from a partner or partner organization. Moreover, 44% (51/117), of alumni with a partner met through their MEPI program or the alumni network. Alumni have also benefited from MEPI Alumni Connection support through the Alumni Venture Fund (AVF) entrepreneurial grants. The small grants provide seed funding for innovative ideas to develop new partnerships, foster sustainable collaboration in priority areas, and expand the impact of alumni to address needs in their local communities.



Since 2018, the MEPI Alumni Connection has distributed \$341,058 in AVF funds to 47 alumni across eight countries. Of the 47 alumni who received funds, 27 were male and 20 were female. Additionally, 30 alumni were from the Leadership Development Fellowship, 14 from the Student Leaders Program, and 3 from the Tomorrow’s Leaders Program. A further 47 MEPI or US Department of State alumni partnered with these alumni in implementing these activities.

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AVF projects have impacted an estimated 18,441 people and continue to benefit communities. According to 2020 survey responses, 27% (11/41) of alumni who received an AVF noted their project was still being implemented either by alumni or a partner organization, even after the award was completed.

**Alumni Venture Fund
Entrepreneurial Grants**



\$341,058 funds distributed

47 alumni awarded

8 countries

18,441 beneficiaries

How is MEPI Alumni Connection strengthening networks?

The MEPI Alumni Connection strengthens ties between alumni from various programs to build networks and collaboration to serve the communities in which they live and work through virtual and in-person discussions, training, and summits. Since 2018, alumni have become increasingly engaged with the diverse networking opportunities and support offered by the MEPI Alumni Connection. This engagement has led to numerous positive outcomes for alumni, including helping to strengthen their community projects, building relationships with other DoS alumni, and fostering collaborations with civil society organizations. Moreover, survey responses indicate these projects and collaborations have positively benefited many individuals and alumni communities.

Engagement with Networking and Professional Development Opportunities

The MEPI Alumni Connection offers numerous opportunities for alumni to connect through social media and professional development and networking opportunities. **Since launching the MEPI Alumni Facebook group in March 2019, membership has grown to 566 alumni as of June 2021. Membership in the MEPI Alumni LinkedIn group, launched in April 2018, has reached 548 members as of June 2021.**

Responses from the 2018 Needs Assessment indicated that 54% (304/566) of alumni participated in networking activities in the past year, including networking events, training, and U.S. Embassy organized events. In 2020, 48% (159/334) of respondents participated in a networking activity organized by the Department of State (DoS) or DoS Alumni. In addition, 63% (216/344) of alumni reported participating in at least one MEPI Alumni Connection networking or professional development opportunity within the

past two years. Based on 2020 responses, the activities with the highest participation were networking events, webinar(s), the Summit, meetings, and virtual discussions.³

Participation in Professional Development Activities



Note: Data based on 216 responses from the 2020 biennial survey.

Since 2018, the MEPI Alumni Connection has offered 76 virtual and in-person professional development and networking opportunities. As events and activities transitioned online due to the pandemic, the MEPI Alumni Connection has continued to engage with alumni. Quarterly MEPI alumni virtual discussions had an average of 17 alumni attendees per discussion; eight alumni completed the digital storytelling training series, and 39 alumni developed their media literacy skills through the virtual Learn to Discern (L2D) trainings. In addition to connecting alumni with networking and professional development opportunities through the program, the MEPI Alumni Connection also highlights scholarship, conferences, grants and other professional development opportunities to alumni through a month newsletter as well as via social media.

How is MEPI Alumni Connection strengthening civic collaboration in MENA?

Alumni have strengthened their community by conducting projects. 46% (260/567) of alumni in 2018 and 59% (228/388) in 2020 conducted at least one community project. **According to 2020 responses, community projects positively impacted over 140,000 individuals. Most alumni who conducted a project, 66% (141/213), had collaborated with someone they met through the alumni network or their MEPI program.** The MEPI Alumni Connection also helped respondents conduct and expand community projects by offering a menu of opportunities and support. Among respondents who conducted a community project, 38% reported receiving at least one form of support. The most common support respondents received was through the Alumni Venture Fund (39%). Other forms of support included mentorships (22%), training/resources (17%), the MEPI Day of Service (14%), and partnerships with MEPI alumni (9%).⁴

In addition to supporting community projects, results show that the MEPI Alumni Connection helped increase networking among alumni. **According to 2018 responses, 65% (365/564) of alumni had professional contact with other MEPI alumni through the alumni network. By 2020, this number increased to 75% (252/334).** Survey responses also indicate that networking increased among females. Females who noted they had professional relationships with other MEPI alumni increased from 77% (225/291) in 2018 to 87% (151/173) in 2020. Alumni from Iraq and Syria also experienced a large increase in the number of professional relationships. In 2018, 75% (24/32) of alumni from Iraq and 46% (12/26) from Syria reported they had professional relationship with other alumni. By 2020, this number increased to 95% (20/21) in Iraq and 79% (15/19) in Syria. Additionally, 71% (229/324) of respondents from the

³ Percentages based on 216 respondents from 2020 who participated in a networking or professional development opportunity.

⁴ Percentages based on 217 respondents who conducted a community project and could select multiple options.

2020 survey reported that as a result of their participation in a MEPI Alumni Connection activity, they were able to build a relationship with at least one new alumna.

Collaborations were also fostered through the MEPI Alumni Connection. Per 2018 responses, 23% (130/564) of alumni collaborated with at least one other alum from MEPI or the Department of State on a project, initiative, or business idea. In the 2020 survey, this number grew to 35% (116/335). Data show that MEPI alumni who reported attending DoS or MEPI alumni networking events were 4.5 times more likely to report collaborating with other alumni.

Alumni also collaborated with civil society organizations (CSOs). In 2018, 82% (467/568) of respondents partnered with a CSO, business, or local governing council to promote awareness of an issue. **In 2020, 77% (251/328) of alumni led events or activities in collaboration with CSOs.**⁵ The majority of Tomorrow's Leaders Program alumni, 60% (37/62) also reported leading events with CSOs. **Additionally, 2020 alumni responses indicated that over 1,400 events and activities were led by alumni in the past two years.**

How is MEPI Alumni Connection building leadership skills to contribute to stable communities?

The MEPI Alumni Connection expands alumni leadership skills to increase their contributions to their local, national, and regional communities through a variety of activities including virtual discussions and trainings, small grants, as well as an annual MEPI Day of Service, the regional Summit, and small grants.

Regional Alumni Summit

The regional Alumni Summit connects alumni across the region to strengthen the network and share their work and expertise with each other. The 2019 MEPI Alumni Summit supported 133 MEPI alumni from nine different program years, 2009 to 2018, as well as MEPI implementing partners, volunteers, and expert guests to learn from each other on topics of common interest. Following the Summit, 92% of alumni respondents to the evaluation, conducted in the month after the Summit, felt more

The MEPI Day of Service is a movement by the MEPI alumni network to foster community engagement. Through this annual activity from 2019-2021, **55 alumni leaders in seven countries** have reached more than **12,000 community members** through in-person and virtual service activities.



Rabie Zaimia (LDF, Algeria) initiated the “WEAR Your Face Shield and KEEP Smiling” advocacy campaign in 2020 to encourage community members to respect measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. As part of the campaign, he and his team hosted an expert in a webinar to answer audience questions around health precautions, resilience, mental health, and supporting their communities in a time of crisis.

⁵ The decrease in collaboration may be due to changes in question wording. The 2018 question asked about partnerships with civil society organizations, businesses and local governing councils whereas the 2018 question only included civil society organizations.

connected to the MEPI Alumni network, 80% had a new entrepreneurial or project idea, 72% had a stronger professional network, and 79% plan to collaborate with other alumni on a project or business idea.

According to 2020 biennial survey responses, conducted nearly a year after the Summit, the Summit helped to grow long-term collaborations among alumni and organizations. **37% (42/114) of respondents collaborated with an alumnus who participated in the Summit, and 18% (16/91) collaborated with an organization(s) who had participated.** It also helped alumni strengthen and sustain their network and professional skills and experiences as leaders. Among Summit participants, 78 provided responses in the 2020 survey regarding what Summit experience was most helpful while serving their communities. Among responses, 41% (32/78) reported that the Summit expanded their personal and professional network with other alumni. Another 29% (23/78) expressed that the Summit allowed them to share ideas and experiences with others, which improved their motivation and desire for community impact. Additionally, 19% (15/78) described that the most beneficial aspect of the Summit was the new skills they gained, such as project management and grant writing.⁶

“Through more cooperation with other MEPI alumni at the Summit, I was able to implement some of the lessons I learned and the projects I saw in my local NGO, plus the NGOs I saw attending the Summit provided us with more insights and ideas into better team management and better advocacy for our projects.”

MEPI Leaders Grant

MEPI Leaders Grant

Since 2020
 Recipients: 69 alumni
 Funds Awarded
 \$164,503
 Beneficiaries
 6,059*
 Countries
 10

*As of August 2021

The MEPI Leaders Grant (MLG) offers small grants to eligible MEPI alumni to support their efforts in leading their communities or take advantage of professional development opportunities, building resilience during the uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2020 and August 2021, the MEPI Alumni Connection awarded 69 alumni, 42 males and 27 females, with \$164,503 MLG awards across 10 countries. Among recipients, 39 are alumni of the Leadership Development Fellowship, 26 are alumni of the Student Leaders Program, and four are from the Tomorrow’s Leaders Program. Among projects awarded, 47 completed projects have reach 6,059 participants, with additional projects and expected results ongoing.

The MEPI Alumni Connection likely has a broader influence beyond its direct impact on helping respondents develop new relationships and collaborations as many alumni have shared what they learned from alumni activities with colleagues and family. In 2018, 80% (454/564) of alumni shared what they learned through a MEPI alumni activity (event, training, partnership, etc.) with others. **In 2020, the percentage of alumni who shared what they learned increased to 88% (289/329).** In 2018, respondents who shared what they learned were most likely to do so with their friends (22%), colleagues (20%), and family (15%). In 2020, respondents were most likely to share what they learned with colleagues (25%), in-person (20%), with family (14%), and on a social media page (14%).⁷

⁶ The remaining 10% (8/78) did not provide an explanation as to their experience with the Summit.

⁷ 2018 data based on 454 respondents and 2020 data based on 289 respondents who shared what they learned through a MEPI alumni activity. Multiple options could be selected.

Looking ahead for MEPI alumni engagement

The MEPI Alumni Connection offers a range of networking and professional development opportunities to appeal to a diverse set of alumni. Through events, activities, and financial support, the MEPI Alumni Connection has helped foster alumni's professional network, leadership skills, and community impact. Looking ahead, there are opportunities for the MEPI Alumni Connection to continue and further strengthen its support for alumni.

According to 2020 survey responses, the majority of alumni had participated in at least one MEPI Alumni Connection networking activity. However, 50% (206/409) noted they had not participated. Not being invited was the primary reason alumni reported they did not attend any events in 2020, 36% (74/206). All alumni who completed the survey had current contact information in the MEPI Alumni Connection database and therefore would have received a request to subscribe to alumni notifications, emails, and events. Respondents who indicated they were not invited to events may not be receiving information because they decided to unsubscribe from monthly newsletters. Still, 14% of alumni (28/206) indicated that they found it too difficult to travel to MEPI alumni events. As most events transitioned to an online format during the COVID-19 pandemic, additional research should be conducted to understand alumni's continued barriers to participation and the avenues through which these barriers may be overcome. Additionally, not being interested in the topic of events was reported as the least common reason, 6% (13/206), in 2020. This result indicates that the topics covered during alumni events are of interest to alumni. However, future programming may address additional pathways of reaching out to and engaging with alumni, including the increased interest in and engagement from virtual activities as observed during 2020-2021.

During the upcoming years, **networking events, including networking with diplomats and professionals, was the most preferred activity for 92% (365/398) of the 2020 biennial survey respondents.** The format of events most preferred among 55% (224/406) of respondents was 2-4-day intensive training. Additionally, **the top three skills respondents wanted to develop were project management, 25% (101/408), conflict resolution, 24% (96/408), and decision-making, 20% (83/408).** **The majority of respondents, 71% (284/402), said their number one financial need to implement their projects was grant funding, and 63% (253/402) said their number one non-financial need was access to a professional mentor.** While the MEPI Alumni Connection has arranged 24 mentorships across eight countries, the limited interested to date indicates a need to further investigate what a professional mentor means to the alumni.

Results from the 2018 Needs Assessment and 2020 biennial survey and program records indicate that MEPI Alumni Connection activities have helped increase alumni's ability to impact their communities. Networking, professional development, and grant opportunities have helped alumni grow their network, build professional relationships, and develop collaborations. Opportunities have also helped alumni implement and expand community projects and initiatives, further increasing their community reach and impact.