

# MEPI Alumni Connection

## رابطة خريجي ميبي



### 2020 MEPI Alumni Survey

### Student Leaders Program Alumni 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. Ghadeer Odeh conducted analysis and Fatma Gdoura drafted this report with input from the program team.

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# MEPI Alumni Connection

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## 2020 MEPI Alumni Survey: Student Leaders Alumni Highlights

In total,   
**176** respondents 

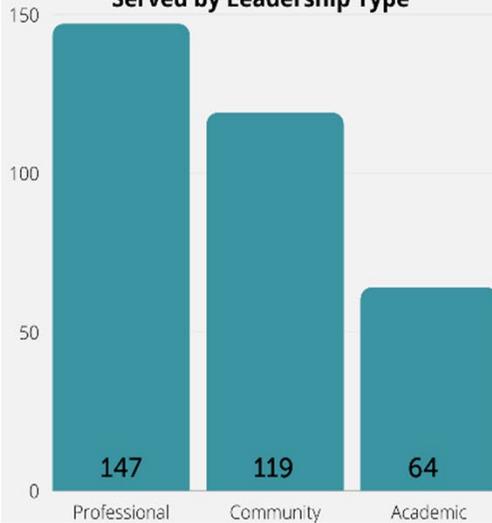
### Respondents' Impact on Communities

**32**

Alumni Projects 

**148,600+** Beneficiaries reached

### Number of Leadership Roles Served by Leadership Type



### Respondent Profile

#### LEADERSHIP

**103** served in leadership roles in the past year 

#### CITIZENSHIP

 From **12 MENA Countries**

#### GENDER



20-29 **75.5%**

30+

**17%**

#### AGE

### Occupation Level

Self-employed/Business owner

7%

Executive level  
22.7%

Mid level  
39.1%

Entry level  
31.3%

Nearly 75% of alumni are currently working 

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## I. Introduction and Background

For nearly two decades, the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) has fostered partnerships between citizens, civil society, the private sector, and governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to resolve local challenges and promote shared interests in the areas of participatory governance and economic opportunity and reform. The MEPI Alumni Connection aims to further strengthen and sustain a network of approximately 1,500 graduates since 2003 of MEPI leadership programs including the Student Leaders Program, Tomorrow's Leaders Program, Leadership Development Fellowship (LDF), previously the Leaders for Democracy Fellowship. The MEPI Alumni Connection offers a variety of activities to meet the needs of the alumni by promoting community and business leadership through alumni engagement in countries in the MENA region including Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. Egypt is not a country that is included for the Student Leaders (SL) program.

This report presents and analyzes the 2020 MEPI alumni survey results from the alumni respondents of the Student Leaders (SL) program. The Student Leaders program is a rigorous leadership program for up to 60 undergraduate and graduate students annually from the Middle East and North Africa. In smaller cohorts hosted by various U.S. academic institutions, students develop leadership skills and expand their understanding of civil society and participatory governance and how both may be applied in their home communities. Participants meet American peers, engage in local community service activities, and observe and take part in the governmental process on the local, state, and federal levels. The program emphasizes lessons in participatory governance and the application of leadership skills.

## II. Methodology and Limitations

In 2020, the MEPI Alumni Connection team surveyed alumni of all years (2003-2020) of MEPI leadership programs to gain a better understanding of the backgrounds and needs of these alumni, the impact of MEPI leadership programming in MENA, and assess mid-line results of the MEPI Alumni Connection. The survey is conducted biennially, with an initial Needs Assessment having been conducted in 2018.

In July-September 2020 an online survey with up to 64 questions provided in both English and Arabic was distributed to all MEPI leadership alumni with contact information in the MEPI Alumni Connection database. The questions were designed to learn more about engaging the MEPI alumni; the impact of MEPI programming on alumni professional, personal, and community leadership development; and the reach of MEPI programming and alumni in MENA.

Responses were collected using Survey Monkey. The survey was distributed initially to a representative group of 20% of the alumni to test the effectiveness of the collector over the course of a week. Fewer questions were subsequently marked as required as well as the question order adjusted to encourage increased responsiveness to the end of the survey before distribution to the other 80% of alumni. Alumni that had not completed the survey received reminders approximately weekly via SurveyMonkey. Alumni were encouraged by IREX, MEPI, US Embassies and other MEPI leadership program stakeholders via program platforms and activities to complete the survey. Team members called a selection of alumni from diverse programs and countries who had not responded to

the survey to encourage them to do so. Alumni who completed the survey were eligible to be randomly selected for a professional development honorarium.

The survey was closed in September 2020 with a response rate of 30% (504/1663). Prior to analysis, responses were cleaned of duplicates and any response from individuals not eligible for the MEPI Alumni Connection, for a total 408 eligible responses. For analysis and reporting, the open-ended answers in Arabic were translated into English.

The results were analyzed through quantitative data analysis and qualitative coding. The data has been disaggregated and further analyzed by gender, citizenship, age, and MEPI program and program completion year, where relevant. Due to the lengthy nature of the survey, the response rates for the questions were uneven and low for many of the questions. All percentages utilized in this report, therefore, are calculated as percentage (%) of total respondents for each corresponding question.

Responses from the Student Leaders alumni represent 18.35% (176/959) of the eligible SL alumni with contact information in the MEPI Alumni Connection database at the time of the survey and represent responses from eligible graduation years (2005-2019) except 2005.

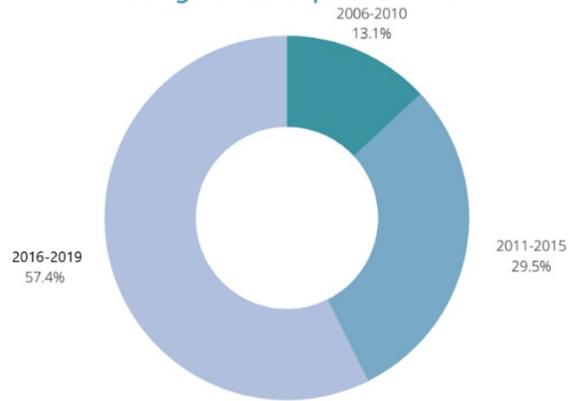
### III. Results

#### A. Respondent Profile

##### Program Completion Year

A total of 176 alumni responded to this survey. The vast majority (57.4%) of respondents are those who completed the SL program in the past four years (2016-2019).

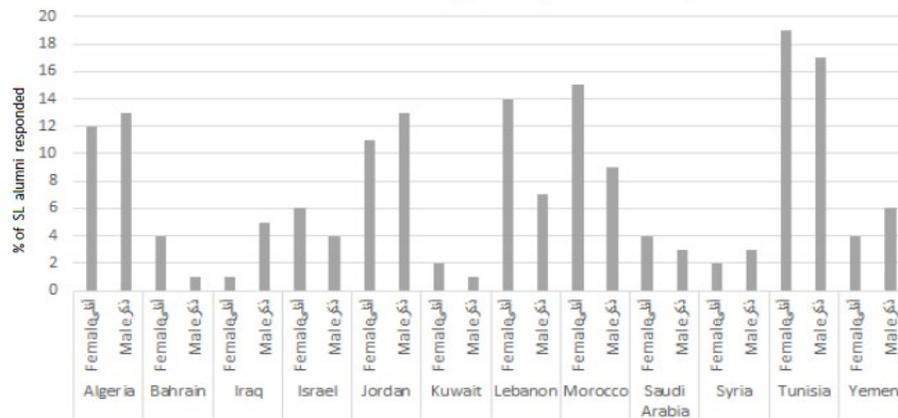
Number of SL Alumni Respondents by MEPI Program Completion Year



##### Gender

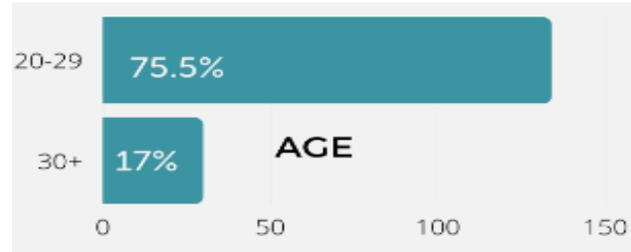
There are slightly more respondents identifying as female at 54% (94/176) than male at 43% (82/176). Notably, in Bahrain with 80% (4/5), Morocco 79.1% (15/24), and Lebanon 66.7% (14/21) of respondents identifying as female.

Gender Breakdown By Country of Citizenship

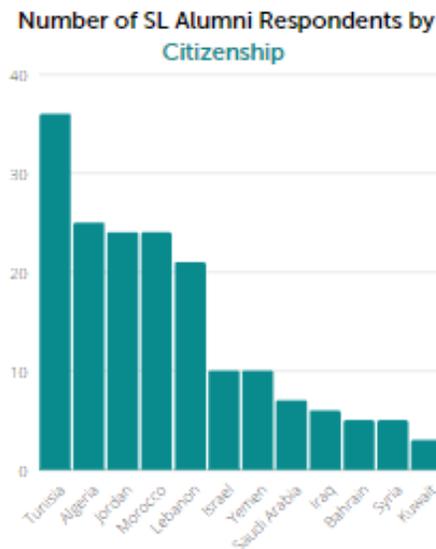


## **Age**

Most respondents are between the age of 20 to 29—with 75.5% (133/176) from the age 20-29 group, 17% (30/176) above the age of 30, and 7.3% (13/176) who did not disclose their age. This is reflective of the fact that the SL program is for current undergraduate and graduate students and that the majority of the respondents had completed the SL program in the past four years, therefore the alumni respondents tend to be relatively young.



## **Citizenship & Place of Residence**



The SL alumni respondents represented all the MEPI Alumni Connection eligible MENA countries for Student Leaders alumni, with the greatest number of respondents from Tunisia at 20.45% (36/176), followed by Algeria at 14.20% (25/176), Jordan and Morocco at 13.64% (24/176) evenly in terms of citizenship.

The respondents' current or primary country of residence were much more varied, with 35 SL alumni expanding to other countries including in North America and Europe, illustrating that not everyone is residing in their country of citizenship, with a sizeable number living in the United States. Countries of residence include the United States at

17.1% (6/35), Lebanon at 14.3% (5/35), Egypt at 11.4% (4/35), France at 11.4% (4/35), two respondents in Canada, Germany, Palestine, Qatar, UAE, and one respondent each residing in Belgium, Denmark, Kuwait, Poland, Turkey, and the U.K. respectively.

## **B. Impact of MEPI**

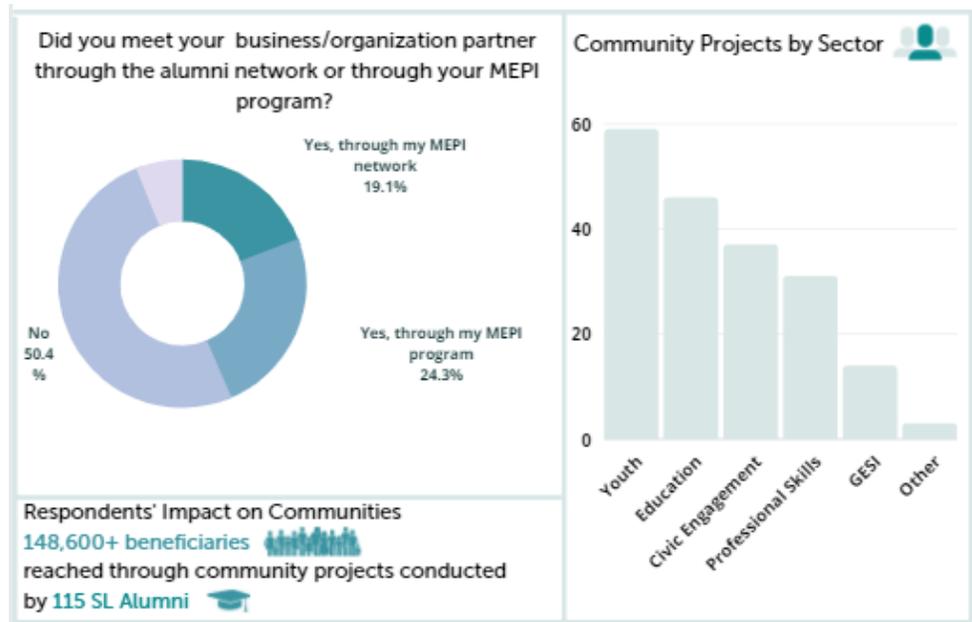
### **1. WHAT HAVE THE TL ALUMNI DONE AFTER THEIR MEPI PROGRAM**

Overall, the alumni of the SL program reported becoming better leaders in their communities after their MEPI program participation.

## 1.1 COMMUNITY PROJECTS

A majority, 60.8% (107/176), of the respondents said they conducted a project in their community in the past two years. More females, at 54.2% (58/107), conducted a project in their communities, which parallels the overall percentage of female respondents (54%). Through their projects, the alumni respondents report having reached about 148,607 beneficiaries in total, with the number of beneficiaries reached per alumni ranging from approximately 4 to 10,000 people.

Among those who started a project in the last two years, more than half (55.1%) conducted a project in youth engagement, followed by projects in education (43%) and civic engagement (34.6%).



115 SL alumni

respondents answered if they collaborated with someone in the last 2 years. Almost a quarter, or 24.3% (28/115) of those who responded saying that they started a project in the last two years collaborated with someone they met through their MEPI leadership program, and 19.1% (22/115) collaborated with someone they met through the larger MEPI alumni network. This highlights how MEPI programs strengthen networks, which can support community involvement.

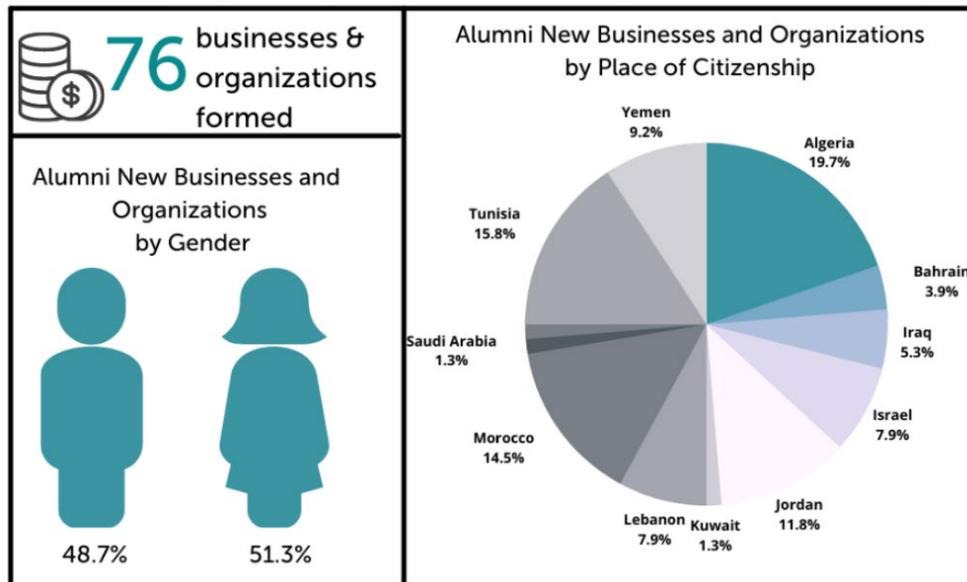
## 1.2 LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Many of the alumni respondents indicated serving in leadership roles, with 58.5% (103/176) of respondents having served in a leadership role in the past year. Of note is that 49.5% of female respondents (51/103) served in leadership roles and 50.5% of males (52/103), meaning approximately equal gender distribution amongst leaders both in number and proportion. Among those who indicated serving in leadership roles, 64 roles were in professional settings, 47 roles were in community settings, and 35 roles were in academic settings; the responses are not mutually exclusive of each other as the question allowed for multiple selections.

**58.5%** Served in Leadership Roles in the past year



Respondents also showed initiative by forming new businesses and organizations. 43.2% (76/176) of respondents (39 females, 37 males) indicated starting their own business (for-profit) or organization (non-profit/non-governmental) after their experience with MEPI.

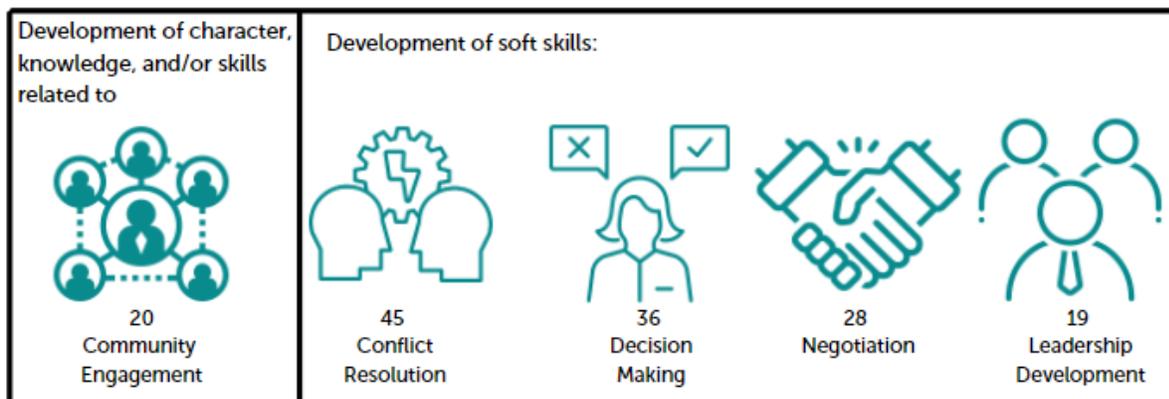


Alumni from the North African region had the highest number of alumni creating new businesses and organizations formed after their MEPI experience with 19.7% (15/76) from Algeria, 15.8% (12/76) from Tunisia, and 14.5% (11/76) from Morocco.

## 2. WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF MEPI ON THE ALUMNI

When asked how MEPI helped develop their ability to make an impact in their community via an open-ended question format, many respondents highlighted a wide range of benefits. These include, most notably, the development of various soft skills and the development of their character, knowledge, and/or skills that helped them better engage with their communities (20 mentions). The top soft skills highlighted were conflict resolution (45 mentions), decision making (36 mentions), negotiation (28 mentions), and leadership development (19 mentions).

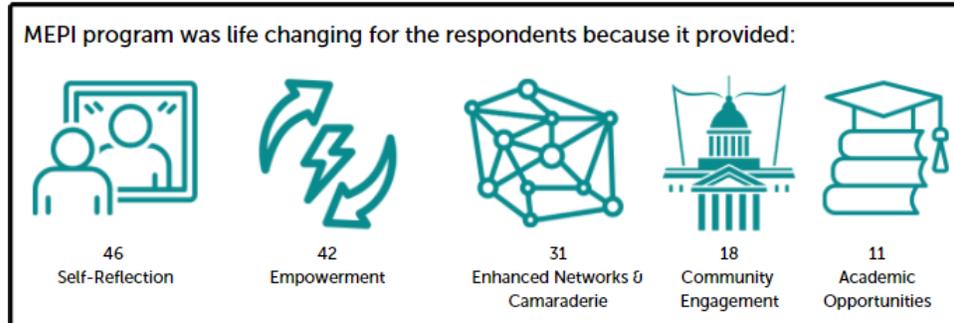
Q. How has MEPI helped you develop your ability to make an impact in your community?



In total, 53.4% (94/176) alumni responded that MEPI was indeed a life changing experience. This was representative across gender, with 48 females and 46 males responding that MEPI has changed their life. Respondents

highlighted that MEPI helped them develop personally and professionally, as it allowed for self-reflection (46), empowered them to act (42), enhanced their networks and instilled a sense of camaraderie among program

Q. Many alumni say that MEPI was a life-changing experience. How, if at all, did MEPI change your life?



participants (31), encouraged them to engage in the community (18), provided them with critical academic opportunities (11), and increased their global perspective (5).

“ MEPI has taught me how to say yes to the right opportunity. I noticed that after my MEPI experience, I became better at planning, networking, and making decisions. ”

“ MEPI experience has developed in me more confidence, changed my perspective towards the impact of small changes and how they do help in major changes, it helped me develop more interpersonal skills as well as gain more professional skills and the know-how of communication and maintaining relationships. ”

“ MEPI SLP 2017 course on "social entrepreneurship" at Benedictine University was what ignited the idea which turned into a startup that's implementing a recycling circular economy model in Algeria. ”

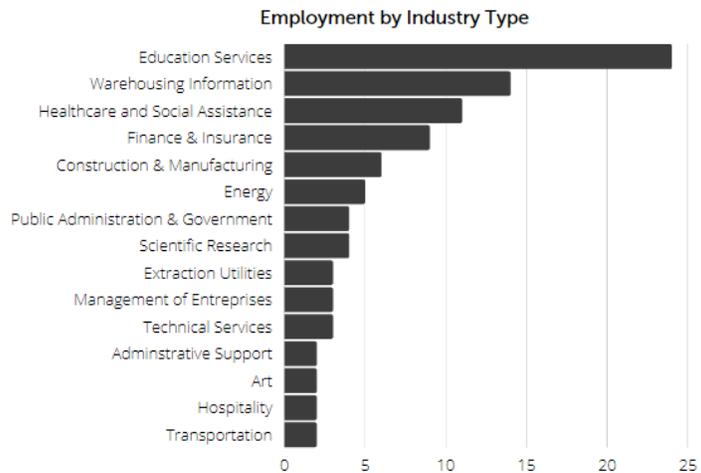
“ MEPI is a life changing experience. First MEPI was an eye-opening experience for me. Going out from an underprivileged community to the USA challenged my ideas, concepts and beliefs as a star. The experience was enlightening in various domains and prepared me to become a global citizen and get international exposure that boosted my personality and career. ”

## EMPLOYMENT

More than half of the respondents, 74.4% (131/176), indicated that they are currently employed. Employment is nearly equal among male and female respondents, with 50.04 % (66/131) of male respondents and 50.04% (65/131) of female respondents reporting being employed. Out of all those employed, 30.5% (40/131) hold entry level positions, 38.2% (50/131) hold mid-level positions, and

22.1% (29/131) hold executive level positions. A smaller percentage of alumni at 6.87% (9/131) are self-employed or business owners.

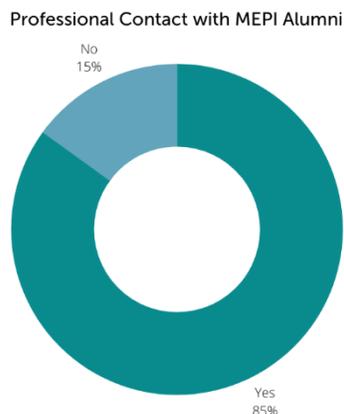
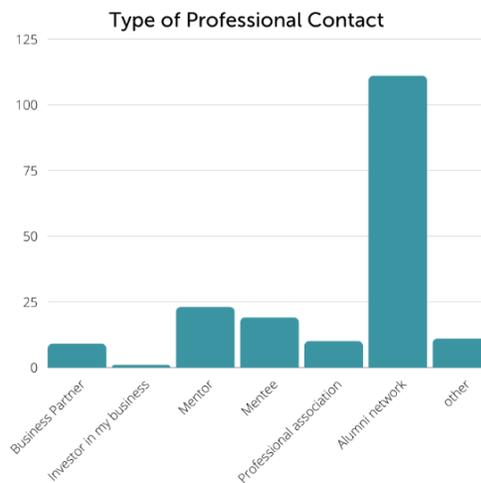
The largest industry represented by alumni is education services (24). Other represented industries are warehousing information (14), healthcare and social assistance (11), finance and insurance (9), construction and manufacturing (6). Energy and public administration and government are mentioned by five alumni each. Food services and scientific research were selected by four alumni evenly. Extraction utilities, management of enterprises, and technical services are mentioned by three alumni each. Administrative support, art, hospitality, and transportation were each selected by two alumni.



## C. Impact of MEPI Alumni Connection

### 1. WHAT WERE ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES LIKE

Respondents overall displayed high levels of engagement with other MEPI alumni. 85% (147/173) of the respondents indicated that they had some sort of professional contact with MEPI alumni, with 64.2% (111/173) of respondents having contact through the alumni network, which is the highest category for both males and females. 13.3% (23/173) of alumni report serving as mentors and 11%

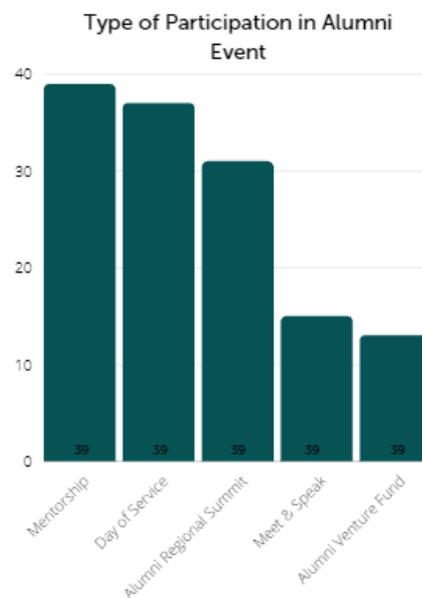


(19/173) as mentees. 5.8% (10/173) have engaged through a professional association. 5.2% (9/173) report engaging with other alumni as a business partner and 6.4% (11/173) of alumni respondents report engaging with alumni through other means.

34.5% (49/142) of alumni respondents participated in networking or professional development activities organized by DoS or DoS alumni in the past two years. These include 40 respondents aged 20-29 and 9 alumni aged 30-39. There was almost equal distribution in gender with 25 alumni identifying as female, and 24 identifying as male.

Regarding MEPI Alumni Connection activities specifically, 44.6% (41/92) of the respondents participated in networking or professional development opportunities through the MEPI Alumni Connection. 33.7% (31/92) of the respondents participated in the 2019 Regional Alumni Summit; among those who participated, 35.5% (11/31) subsequently collaborated with alumni from the Summit and 6.5% (2/31) collaborated with an organization from the Summit. 46.2% (6/13) participated in the Pitch Fest at the Summit and reported having received technical support to implement the project that they pitched. Additionally, 17% (30/176) participated in the mentorship program; 23 as mentors and 19 as a mentee. Six out of the 23 mentors also participated as a mentee in the past.

Among those who answered that they did not participate in any MEPI Alumni Connection activities, the top reason 40.1% (31/77) selected was, “I did not have time to attend any MEPI Alumni networking events during the past year.” This was followed by, “I was not invited to any MEPI Alumni networking events during the past year,” selected by 29.9% (23/77) alumni and, “It was too difficult for me to travel to any MEPI Alumni events during the past year,” selected by 22.0% (17/77) alumni. This may be indicative that some alumni are not receiving information about these events or that no events were organized in their country of residence during the past year. The lowest selected category was, “I was not interested in the topic of any MEPI Alumni events during the past year,” selected by 7.8% (6/77) of alumni.

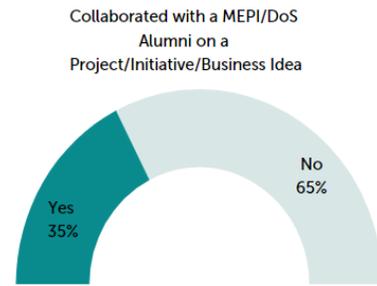


## 2. WHAT WERE THE IMPACTS OF THE ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES?

142 alumni responded if they collaborated with a MEPI or DoS alumni on a project, initiative, or business idea in the past two years. A sizeable, but not large, portion of the previously mentioned networking and professional development events led to collaborations with a MEPI or DoS alumni. 35% (49/142) of the respondents indicated that they collaborated with a MEPI or DoS alumni on a project, initiative, or business idea in the past two years. 139 alumni responded if they collaborated with a community-serving organization (CSO). 72% (99/139) of the respondents organized a total of 418 events and/or activities in collaboration with CSOs to promote specific issues and awareness during the past two years, with an average of three events organized by each respondent. Among them, there was relatively an equal male to female distribution with 49 lead by women and 50 lead by

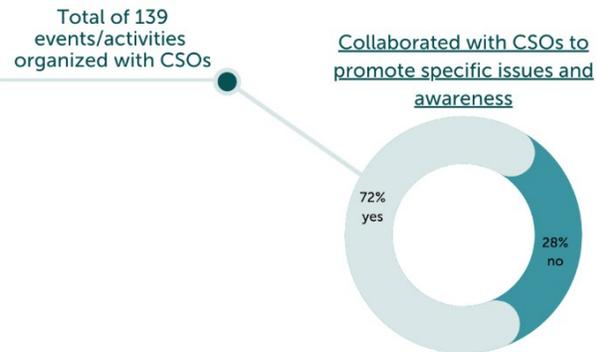
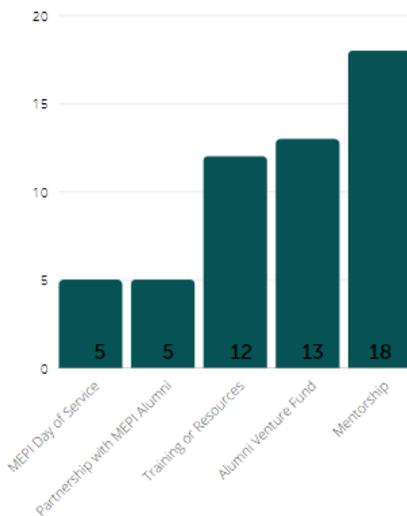
male SL alumniage distribution skewed younger with 77% of those in the 20-29 age group and 23% of those aged 30-39.

When asked, “Did you get support on your [community] project from the MEPI Alumni Connection?” 46.0% (64/139) of alumni answered the question. The highest category of support was mentorship with 18 alumni, 66.7% (12/18) of whom were female. The Alumni Venture Fund followed with 13 alumni, training or resources with 12 alumni, partnership with MEPI alumni and MEPI Day of Service with five alumni evenly.



173 alumni have reported sharing a MEPI alumni activity (event, training, partnership, etc.) with others in the past two years. The impacts of the alumni activities are likely to be much larger, as 99.4% (172/173) of respondents indicated that they shared what they learned, mainly with colleagues (102/173) and family (58/173).

Types of support received for [community] project from MEPI Alumni Connection Program



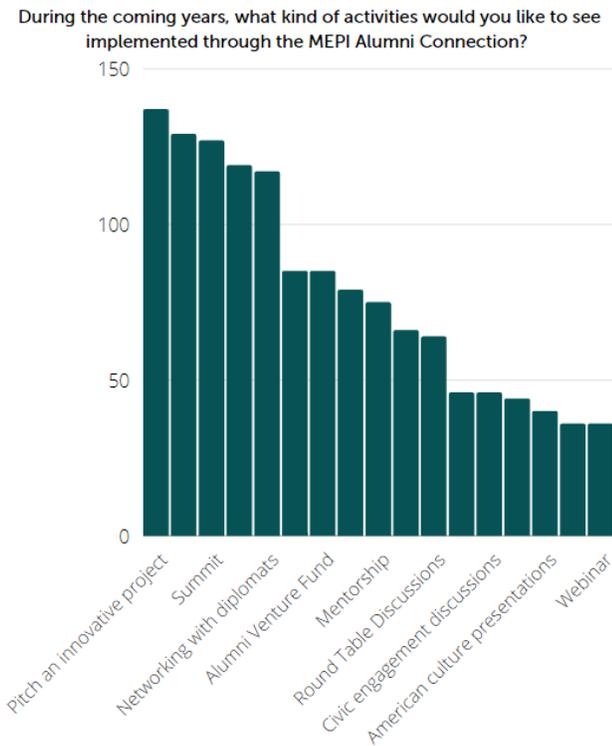
## D. MEPI Alumni Interests

### 1. WHAT ACTIVITIES DO THE SL ALUMNI WANT THROUGH THE MEPI ALUMNI CONNECTION

The respondents displayed a high interest in networking events (with both professionals and diplomats), a summit, mentorship, panel discussions, and online training.

In terms of the skills that the respondents would like to further develop to advance their community and professional leadership, the respondents had many and varied interests including: pitch an innovative project (137), networking (129), a summit (127), networking with professionals (119), networking with diplomats (117), panel discussions (85), alumni venture fund (85), online training (79), mentorship (75), day of service (66), round table discussions (64), open house (46), civic engagement discussions (46), virtual discussions (44), American culture presentations (40), alumni of the year award (36), and webinar (36).

Among areas for technical skills-development, respondents were most interested in women and gender issues (31), renewable energy/environmental issues (27), and technology/entrepreneurship (25). Other interest areas suggested were policy evaluation/impact assessment and education for development. Over half (58%) of the alumni respondents said that the MEPI Alumni Connection offers resources appropriate and relevant to their current professional or academic level.



As for the format of events or trainings that most interests the SL alumni, respondents indicated that they preferred online events to in-person ones. In addition, they preferred weekend hours (79) or evenings (46), with a low preference for during work hours (13). The respondents also indicated a preference for longer (2-4 day) intensive trainings (103) compared to shorter (up to 1-day) trainings (44).

Most alumni respondents (74%, 93/126) always feel secure and comfortable participating in MEPI Alumni Connection activities, while 22% (27/126) often feel secure, and 2.3% (3/126) infrequently feel secure. 2.3% (3/126) rarely feel secure. Two out of three of those who felt infrequently secure were male, and two out of three of those who rarely feel secure were male as well. Two out of three of those who rarely feel secure are from Saudi Arabia (1 female, 1 male).

## 2. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT WOULD THE SL ALUMNI WANT TO GAIN THROUGH THE MEPI ALUMNI CONNECTION?

Most respondents indicated desiring both financial and non-financial resources to launch projects or initiatives. In terms of financial resources, respondents answered that grants (121), followed by investments (73), and donations (56) would most help them feel prepared to improve their projects or start new ones. When it comes to non-financial resources, the respondents answered that a professional mentor (122), followed by access to alumni or professionals with relevant experience (89), partner(s) (82), access to in-person training (71), and access to online training (54) would help them feel prepared to launch an initiative.

The majority (58%) of alumni respondents follow at least one MEPI social media page—the most popular being the MEPI official Facebook page (100), immediately followed by the MEPI Alumni Facebook group (99), the MEPI Alumni LinkedIn Group (61), and the MEPI Instagram (8). On MEPI social media, respondents note wanting to see content on opportunities, including professional/jobs,

training, volunteering, scholarships/grants/funds, as well as content on ongoing and successful community projects and opportunities to engage with other alumni.

## IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, MEPI's Student Leader's (SL) Program and the MEPI Alumni Connection had significant impact on the participants and subsequently the larger communities.

In terms of the MEPI Alumni Connection, the program did a good job of meeting its goal to develop an active alumni network that fosters long-lasting relationships and opportunities to stimulate social and business entrepreneurship in the MENA region. Alumni connections remained strong following SL program participation with a large majority of respondents (85%) keeping in contact with a MEPI alumni professionally. While the MEPI Alumni Connection led to some collaborations (35%) with other MEPI or Dos alumni on a project, initiative, or business idea, a large majority of respondents (72%) indicated collaborating with CSOs to promote specific issues.

The survey results show high demand for financial resources with 68.8% (121/176) of alumni interested in gaining support through grants. 44.6% of alumni respondents have participated in networking or professional development opportunities through the MEPI Alumni Connection. Additionally, there is a strong interest exhibited among alumni in networking with other professionals to help launch initiatives. In order to further support the alumni, the U.S. Department of State and the MEPI Alumni Connection should continue to offer grants to support alumni's projects and entrepreneurial activities. In terms of activities, more networking events should continue to be offered as they are greatest in demand.

While participation rate among MEPI alumni in the mentorship program was 17%, there is a large demand for professional mentors and access to alumni or professionals with relevant experience. MEPI Alumni Connection should, therefore, focus on opportunities for alumni to network with and increase their access to professionals with relevant experience.

The MEPI Alumni Connection should take extra steps to ensure that all SL program participants, especially participants from Saudi Arabia, feel safe while participating in program activities. In order to address the issue of a few participants reporting that they did not always feel safe during the program, follow-up research will need to be done on why they did not feel safe and what can be done to address the issue.

In terms of MEPI programming, responses and feedback from the SL alumni indicate that the Student Leaders program and MEPI Alumni Connection align very well with MEPI's mission of "fostering partnerships among citizens, civil society, the private sector, and government institutions to generate shared solutions that promote stability and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa." Responses indicate that the SL alumni have been particularly strong in fostering partnerships among citizens, civil society, and to a certain extent, private sector; it is unclear to what extent MENA government institutions were involved in projects led by SL alumni. Many (34.6%) of the alumni-led community projects focused on "civic engagement" and, thereby participatory governance, which is one of the core objectives of the MEPI program. Economic opportunity, which is another core objective of the

MEPI program, was also tackled through various avenues: developing professional skills (74.4% of respondents indicated that they were employed), conducting project activities (60.8% of the respondents said they conducted a project in their community in the past two years), starting new businesses (43.2% of respondents indicated starting their own business for-profit or organization non-profit/non-governmental after their experience with MEPI), and creating business relationships (9 alumni respondents stated they have created business partner relationships with other fellow alumni).

This assessment is made possible through the MEPI Alumni Connection, a program of the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) of the U.S. Department of State and implemented by IREX.

<https://www.irex.org/project/mepi-alumni-connection>