



WHITE PAPER

July 2025

ADAPTING FOR IMPACT:

Intergenerational Strategy in the Peacebuilding Sector

Executive Summary:

This research examines the crucial role of intergenerational collaboration in addressing cross-communal and cross-border peacebuilding challenges, drawing on interviews and focus groups conducted with over 100 professionals working within the peacebuilding sector in the Palestine/Israel context. This is all the more pressing at this critical moment, as local professionals and organizations are grappling with the devastating impacts of the war that started in October 2023. Drawing on insights from early, mid-career, and veteran peacebuilding professionals, this analysis addresses the impact of the current political period on younger professionals in particular, highlights areas of long-standing intergenerational tensions, and proposes frameworks and strategies to enhance intergenerational collaboration, adaptability, and sustainability in the field. These insights are relevant for those involved in environmental peacebuilding and the broader peacebuilding sector.

Publication Notes

About the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies and the Center for Applied Environmental Diplomacy

The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies is a leading academic and research institution in the Middle East, preparing future environmental leaders from across the region to cooperatively address shared ecological challenges. Through cross-border research, hands-on fieldwork, and a university-accredited program, the Arava Institute fosters innovative environmental solutions that build trust, promote sustainability, and model peaceful cooperation in conflict-prone areas.

The Center for Applied Environmental Diplomacy (CAED) at the Arava Institute works to resolve critical regional environmental issues and to build trust in the region through the implementation of cross-border, locally led, decentralized, environmental, and humanitarian initiatives. Grounded in 30 years of the Arava Institute's experience, these initiatives can be scaled and replicated to address regional challenges, build confidence in cross-border cooperation, and revive belief in negotiated political solutions.

Acknowledgments

Shira Kronich and Ambreen Ben-Shmuel (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) contributed equally as lead authors. Mohammad Al-Azraq (Trent University) and Liel Maghen (Elham - The Day After) made significant contributions to the research. All authors were involved in data collection and analysis, as well as supporting the final phases of writing.

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How to Cite

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1. Introduction: Why Intergenerational Collaboration is Essential for Peacebuilding and Environmental Diplomacy

These insights emerged from a larger NextGen–InterGen project conducted by the Center for Applied Environmental Diplomacy at the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies. As one of the most veteran organizations in the Israel/Palestine peace organizational ecosystem, the Arava Institute has long grappled with the complex tensions that arise when working toward cooperation in a worsening and protracted conflict. With a mandate to advance cross-border environmental cooperation in particular, the Arava Institute’s long-standing engagement with over 2,000 students and alumni, shaped by three decades of regional and sectoral change, has compelled the organization to confront intergenerational tensions, foster collaboration across age cohorts, and reflect more intentionally on how leadership is shifting both internally, within the environmental sector, and across the broader peacebuilding field.

Notably, many professionals participating in the Arava Institute’s initiatives are also actively involved in other peacebuilding

efforts across the region. As a result, the insights emerging from this project, while grounded in cross-communal environmental efforts and diplomacy, are deeply relevant to the wider peacebuilding community, reflecting broader patterns of generational change, organizational adaptation, and field-wide transition.

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Much of today's veteran peacebuilding efforts build on the foundational relationships forged by senior leaders over years of trust-building and project implementation. As the peacebuilding sector enters its fourth decade, many of these leaders seek to sustain and pass on the work, recognizing that partnerships and approaches will inevitably evolve. We have noted challenges in integrating early and mid-career professionals in environmental diplomacy, who often, while sharing a peacebuilding goal, apply

different approaches and methodologies. We see that addressing these challenges requires leveraging the strengths of multigenerational professionals and leaders.

The NextGen-InterGen project originated from conversations and initiatives between NextGen, which refers to early- and mid-career professionals, and LegacyGen, comprising longer-term or veteran professionals who recognized the need to consider leadership transition, intergenerational engagement, and the long-term sustainability of organizational strategies. This project began in 2023 with a triple mandate: the first was to better integrate early- and mid-career professionals into CAED peacebuilding efforts, which had struggled to engage and retain younger members over the past several years. The second, influenced by the post-October 7th environment, sought to assess how NextGen professionals felt about collaborative Israeli-Palestinian efforts and their willingness to engage in them at this time. The third, in response to intergenerational differences and challenges seen over the past years, sought to consider constructive approaches to intergenerational collaboration in peacebuilding work. So far, we have completed initial research, including interviews and focus groups, and are now looking to expand this intergenerational process. This white paper outlines key findings and strategies that emerged from our research.

2. Post-October 7th Impact on NextGen Peacebuilding Engagement

The findings in this section draw on interviews conducted with NextGen professionals from the broader peacebuilding sector in the first half of 2024. Our sample includes 32 percent Israelis, 47 percent Palestinians, and 21 percent individuals from the broader MENA region, all of whom were previously active and open to peacebuilding work in the past few years (prior to October 2023). When asked about their willingness to engage in peace and cooperation efforts in the months following the war, they responded with the following answers:

The Yeses, marked by caution and openness: 58 percent of participants remained committed to, active in, or open to peacebuilding engagement. However, many within this group emphasized a heightened sense of caution and the importance of grounding their involvement in shared values. They stressed that engagement must not ignore the tangible needs and traumas resulting from the war, and called for approaches that intentionally leave space for both cross-communal and uni-national work. Participants highlighted the need to avoid a “business as usual” mindset, advocating instead for peacebuilding that acknowledges the profound pain of

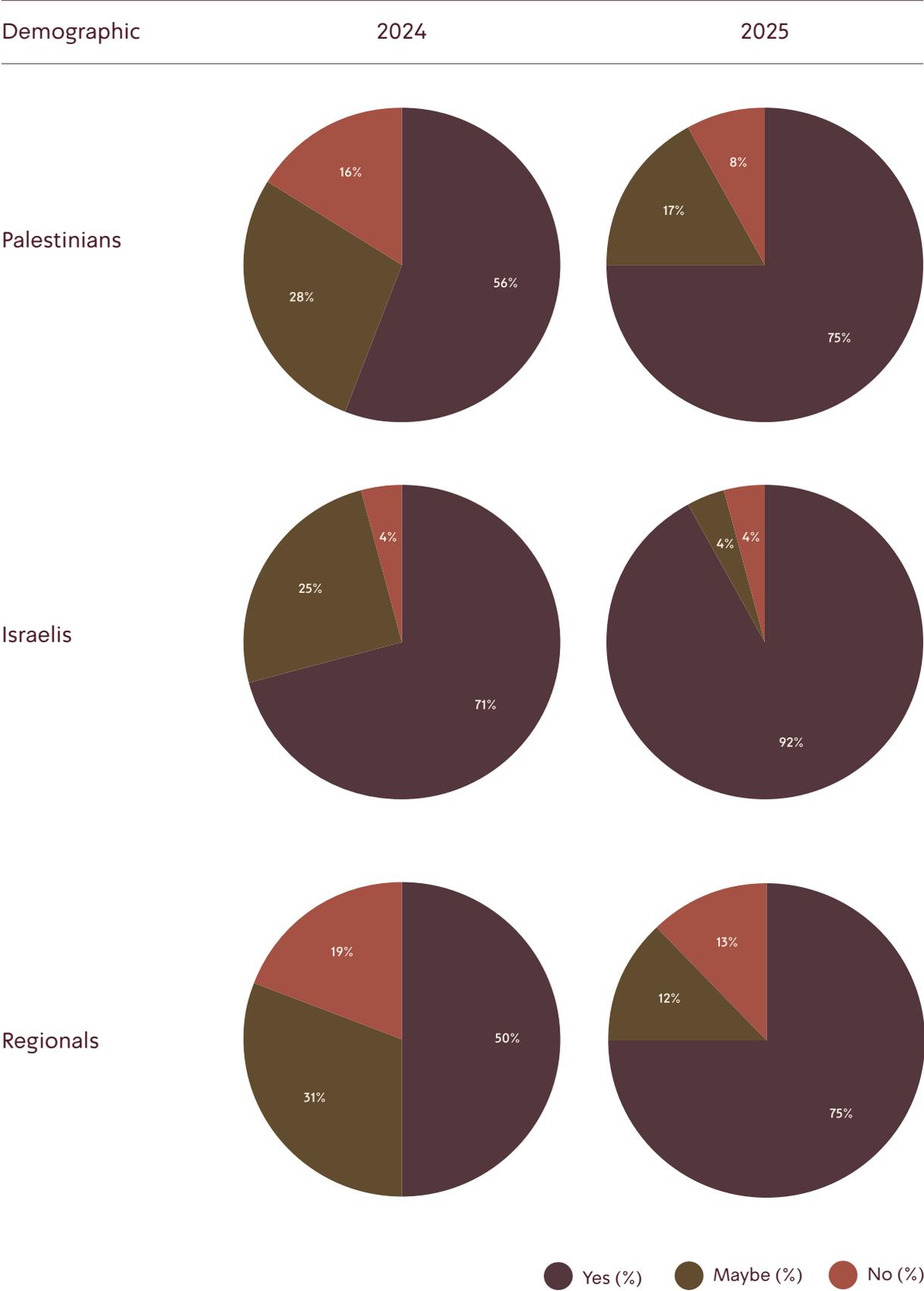
this period and responds with sensitivity and relevance. Among this group, 43 percent were Palestinian, 41 percent were Israeli, and 16 percent were regional professionals.

The Maybes, marked by heightened hesitation and uncertainty: 28 percent of peacebuilders expressed significant hesitation about re-engaging in cross-communal and cross-border work, preferring to pause or reevaluate their current efforts. Many were concerned that certain language or partnerships risked minimizing ongoing violence or normalizing inequities. Some also questioned the sincerity or peacebuilding commitment of former partners, reflecting both hurt and doubt about whether this is the right time, or the right context, for renewed cooperation. Of this group, 52 percent were Palestinian, 24 percent were Israeli, and 24 percent were from the broader Middle Eastern region.

The Nos, seeking withdrawal and disengagement: 14 percent of interviewees, previously active in peace work, have stepped away from the field entirely or cut ties with people from the other ethnonational group, at least for the time being. This finding underscores the immense strain on once-committed peacebuilders. Of the Nos, 55 percent were Palestinian, 25 percent were Israeli, and 20 percent were regional actors.

These numbers highlight the complex dynamics that peace organizations and

Figure 1.
Peacebuilders' willingness to engage in cross-communal and cross-border work, 2024 & 2025



professionals navigated in the months following the war. These findings also highlight the increased challenges faced by Palestinian professionals in particular. At the same time, because Palestinians comprised the largest demographic group in the sample, their higher absolute representation among the “No” and “Maybe” responses reflects this distribution rather than a disproportionately lower engagement rate.

A brief follow-up assessment conducted in early 2025 noted further shifts. The Nos and Maybes decreased to 10 percent and 12 percent, respectively, and many of these NextGen professionals are active and reengaged in peacebuilding efforts (78 percent). Many in this latter group of Yeses did note the continued care with which they approach their work at present, expressing their desire to avoid efforts that seemed to overlook the ongoing period of trauma and war.

3. Intergenerational Differences and Approaches

While there is a spectrum of opinions and perspectives among early-career, mid-career, and veteran peacebuilding professionals, including across Palestinian and Israeli lines, several generational themes crosscut ethnonational

differences. Notably, Israeli and Palestinian LegacyGen professionals often articulate issues in more similar terms to one another than to their NextGen counterparts. These patterns manifest in approach, discourse, and action.

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While there are exceptions, the majority of professionals interviewed, who are engaged with numerous peacebuilding organizations across Israel and Palestine, aligned with these broader generational differences.

NextGen

As a group, NextGen places a much stronger emphasis on structural critique and engagement, addressing root causes, and seeks to be more political. As one interviewee noted, “We need to challenge fundamental power structures and address root causes.” Many emphasized the importance of advocacy, political framing, and confronting injustice, particularly in relation to the occupation and systemic inequality. Lacking opportunities to

fully pursue these goals within more established organizations, many NextGen professionals also participate in smaller-scale, more independent efforts, sometimes in parallel to their institutional roles. They more frequently referenced the psychological and emotional toll of the post-October 7th period, including how trauma has impacted them and their work. In the immediate aftermath, many also raised questions about how their efforts were perhaps inadvertently sustaining the conflict while trying to assess how to better contribute to its resolution.

LegacyGen

LegacyGen professionals typically adopt a more pragmatic and less political (and, at times, apolitical) approach, which is also reflected in their discourse and action. As one LegacyGen member noted, “We are working within existing systems to make incremental change,” and “the smartest course of action is to stay with what we know and deliver within our areas of expertise.” Many in this cohort, often in senior leadership roles, expressed concern about shifting discourse and political messaging that could alienate partners or supporters. Following October 7th, while all generations experienced disruption, fewer LegacyGen members reported that the events prompted deep reflection on the effectiveness of their approach or their role within the peacebuilding sector. While deeply heartbroken and impacted, they were often more resolute in their work and collaboration.

How vs. What

While peacebuilders across generations broadly agree on both the need to pursue peace and the importance of the means used to achieve this end, tensions often arise in how these priorities are sequenced or emphasized. For many NextGen professionals, the how, including methods, values, and internal organizational culture, is often foregrounded as the starting point for meaningful work, shaping what is ultimately pursued. For LegacyGen professionals, the what, the tangible outputs or outcomes of peacebuilding,

Rather than individual disagreement, these generational differences reflect contrasting logics of change, rooted in lived experience, professional positioning, and broader political conditions.

is often the initial focus, with processes considered in service of delivering results. Both perspectives value process and impact, but prioritize them differently, and a number of intergenerational tensions reflect this difference in orientation.

Organizational Implications

Rather than individual disagreement, these generational differences reflect contrasting logics of change, rooted in lived experience, professional positioning, and broader political conditions. These differences should be understood not as anomalies but as part of broader organizational adaptation processes.

4. Conceptual Frameworks for Intergenerational Collaboration in Peace Work

To address **intergenerational tensions** effectively, we identified several guiding frameworks that highlight some challenges and provide ways to think about them. **These frameworks can help peace organizations navigate differing approaches without forcing an either/or choice, supporting organizational resilience and adaptability:**

Broader Peace Framework: Peace organizations benefit from broad, inclusive approaches that integrate various types of peace—negative peace (absence of violence), positive peace (supportive social relations), and structural peace (justice-oriented social order)—into a broader vision. While LegacyGen and NextGen professionals are working on

projects touching on all three types of peace, NextGen places a stronger emphasis on structural peace, while LegacyGen places a stronger emphasis on positive peace, alongside their other peacebuilding efforts. **Recognizing that different approaches are all part of a broader peacebuilding ecosystem holds value.** Much of the current resources allocated toward ongoing peace programming focus on positive peace; finding ways to further integrate structural peace efforts could more effectively integrate NextGen professionals.

Both/And Approach: This framework promotes strategic flexibility and generational collaboration by encouraging the integration of different, parallel, and sometimes overlapping approaches, rather than a single unified approach. It includes multi-level efforts (e.g., local, national, regional, or international) and multi-method approaches that reflect diverse entry points into peacebuilding—whether relational (focused on trust and community), material (focused on projects and deliverables), or political (focused on advocacy or systemic change)—all contributing toward a broader shared goal. **Instead of prioritizing one over the other, organizations can adopt a both/and approach where these perspectives complement and strengthen each other. This approach does not mandate an equal division of time and resources, but it can provide a framework for thinking about how, if one approach receives minimal attention and effort in a particular**

program, it can later obtain more resources in another one.

Critical Reflexivity: Reflective practices ensure that peace work remains relevant and adaptive. Organizations can establish structured practices that allow both generations to assess what is no longer effective, inviting internal critique and supporting experimental, higher-risk initiatives. NextGen professionals often advocate for taking time to critically reflect on established practices and are inclined to introduce fresh perspectives that challenge the status quo. **Regular feedback loops—where intergenerational teams reflect on project successes and challenges—can foster this reflexive approach, empowering NextGen professionals to propose new strategies while benefiting from the experience of LegacyGen leaders.**

These frameworks collectively support intergenerational collaboration by providing flexible, adaptive models that address current tensions and ensure the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.

5. Key Strategies for Integrating NextGen Professionals

The effective integration of NextGen professionals is essential for the long-

term sustainability of peacebuilding work. Based on our research, drawing on insights of leaders in the field, the following strategies emerged for fostering engagement, resilience, and meaningful collaboration across generations:

Prioritize Intergenerational Integration: Addressing intergenerational dynamics should be a core part of an organization's mission, not an afterthought. Many

When these strategies are grounded in mutual respect, flexibility, and shared vision, they open new pathways for creative problem-solving that neither generation could achieve alone.

peacebuilding organizations are focused on immediate programmatic needs without allocating time or resources for internal processes that support generational renewal. Similarly, donor models often fail to invest in leadership development or in the internal work needed to navigate generational transition. **Prioritizing intergenerational engagement now strengthens organizational resilience and lays the groundwork for future collaboration.**

Foster Innovation Through

Intergenerational Synergy: Innovation in peacebuilding often emerges not only from collaboration across generations but also from supporting distinct contributions that each generation brings. Organizations can foster innovation by both enabling NextGen professionals to pursue approaches that may look different—more political, grassroots, or experimental—and by creating intentional structures for intergenerational collaboration. When these strategies are grounded in mutual respect, flexibility, and shared vision, they open new pathways for creative problem-solving that neither generation could achieve alone.

Ensure Compensation and Recognition:

Compensation and public recognition are key to retaining NextGen professionals. Financial support, visible roles in events and publications, and acknowledgment of contributions signal that their work is valued. At the same time, some participants, especially Palestinians and professionals from the broader region, noted that public recognition can carry social and political risks. Flexible approaches that accommodate different needs and sensitivities are essential.

Sustain Long-Term Engagement:

One-off projects and disconnected touchpoints can lead to burnout and disengagement. To build lasting relationships with NextGen professionals, organizations can offer structured, recurring opportunities for involvement across multiple years and

initiatives. This includes meaningful roles not just as implementers, but as co-creators and thought-partners in establishing the future vision of the field. Consistent engagement fosters deeper connections, strengthens networks, and supports institutional memory, ensuring that organizational values, partnerships, and accumulated experience are retained and shared over time.

Develop NextGen Leadership Pipelines:

To ensure long-term sustainability and generational renewal, organizations can build clear pathways for NextGen professionals to grow into leadership roles. This includes investing in mentorship structures, skill-building opportunities, and gradual transitions of responsibility that allow younger professionals to gain experience and visibility over time. Participants highlighted the need for extended leadership development processes, rather than abrupt handovers, and for spaces where LegacyGen leaders can support, guide, and gradually step back, still offering their institutional wisdom. Formalizing these pathways can help cultivate confidence and continuity.

These strategies provide a foundation for integrating NextGen professionals in ways that respect both generational contributions and long-term organizational goals.

6. About the Research

This white paper is based on insights gathered through interviews and focus groups with over 100 professionals in peacebuilding and environmental diplomacy work. It includes participants in the Arava Institute and the broader peacebuilding network of professionals, most of whom have a minimum of five years and up to over thirty years of experience in the field. NextGen largely represents those between the ages of 25 and 45, with most LegacyGen interviewees in their 50s and older. Our sample includes 32 percent Israelis, 47 percent Palestinians, and 21 percent individuals from the broader region, including Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Gender representation is nearly equal, with 51% male and 49% female participants. This diverse demographic distribution reflects a broad spectrum of perspectives across the peacebuilding community.





7. Conclusion

As the region faces increasing instability and new challenges, it is clear that peacebuilding and environmental diplomacy require innovative solutions driven by intergenerational collaboration. By embracing the unique strengths of both NextGen and LegacyGen professionals, organizations can develop more adaptive and forward-thinking strategies for cross-communal and cross-border cooperation. While not every organization may experience these dynamics in the same way or be positioned to name them directly, the reflections shared offer a valuable lens. We invite readers to consider what resonates in their context and to use these insights as a starting point for reflection, adaptation, and deeper intergenerational engagement. Supporting collaboration across generations offers a tangible way to strengthen the continuity, relevance, and long-term effectiveness of peace work.

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