



**YOUTH IN DISTRESS IN ISRAEL**



**Impact report 2021**

# A Few Opening Remarks

## ELEM's Vision

ELEM/Youth in Distress in Israel seeks to help vulnerable teens and young adults handle their situations, overcome risks and grow into citizens who contribute to themselves, their communities, and Israel.

ELEM/Youth in Distress in Israel was established 39 years ago. It is the country's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to treating and transforming the lives of at-risk youth.

Over the past year, ELEM's 285 staff members and 1,200 volunteers met 12,500 young people at youth centers, on social media, in shelters, and through mentorship for independent living. These youths span the entire risk spectrum, from crises typical of adolescence to the extreme end of the risk spectrum, including severe depression and suicidal tendencies.

In March 2020, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, all our lives changed. The closures, quarantines, and disconnection from regular frameworks led to worsening risk situations and distress among youth. However, we at ELEM continued to work on their behalf on all fronts to provide the support and stability they lacked.

After two years of dealing with COVID-19 and an escalating security situation, life is slowly returning to normal. Still, we are witnessing an entire generation of children and youth who have been cast aside from the normal social service agenda and suffer serious mental, emotional and social consequences.

Data we collected in the field in 2021 among teens and young adults served by ELEM indicates a two-fold increase in depression and anxiety, a two-fold and threefold increase in violence at home, on the street, and on the internet, a two-fold increase in eating disorders, and a 1.5-fold increase in self-harm compared to 2019.

**At ELEM, we will continue to work on behalf of these young people. To be there, see, listen to, assist, and not leave behind any young person needing help.**

Dear partners, we are happy to share that ELEM's

forward momentum continued in 2021. We expanded and deepened our work in identifying and assisting at-risk youth on social networks and in all activity areas. We established the Arab Community Field, that operates two dedicated outreach vans and two centers for young Arab women. We opened a new drop-in center in Nahariya; a greater number of our shelters offer 24/7 assistance; we established the first center dedicated to boys who have experienced sexual abuse; and we opened a unique project to assist young mothers at risk and more.

We view our close and fruitful partnership with the Ministry of Labor, Welfare, and Social Services as vitally important. This partnership deepened during the pandemic, and we thank the Ministry for their significant partnership and support. We also thank the Ministries of Education, Absorption, Health, and other government ministries for their support.

Cooperation with the business sector is vital to our activities and highlights the importance of mutual responsibility for creating a more equal society that cares for its weakest members. We are grateful to the corporations, donors, and partners for their support and involvement over the years and for the rapid mobilization of emergency funds during the pandemic.

We are deeply grateful to our staff and volunteers who give of themselves with dedication and commitment around the clock. During the pandemic, during the lockdowns, in wartime, and during normal times – in every situation – they are there for the young people, reaching out and providing strength and hope for a better future.

In this report, presented to the honorable President, Mr. Isaac Herzog, you will find critical facts and major trends concerning teens and young adults in distress in Israel and ELEM's activities in 2021.

Yours in friendship



**Shlomo Yanai**  
Chair



**Nava Barak**  
President of ELEM Israel



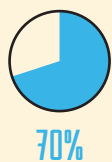
**Dana Avraham**  
CEO



**Lenore Ruben**  
President of ELEM USA

# About ELEM

## Risks Facing Youth in Israel



**Normative teens**  
Typical challenges  
of adolescence



**Slight risk**  
Difficulties,  
depression,  
alcohol and drug  
use



**Substantive risk**  
School dropout,  
depression, suicide  
ideation, alcohol and  
drug use



**High risk**  
Dissociation,  
roaming the streets,  
criminality, alcohol  
and drugs



**Life-threatening risk**  
Homelessness,  
prostitution,  
detachment  
from family and friends

More than 800,000 youth aged 12 to 18 live in Israel. One-quarter of them live in various situations of risk. In 2021, ELEM staff and volunteers met 12,500 youth and young adults for whom the organization is a safe place to turn. ELEM assists them with the goal of improving their lives and changing their current situations.

ELEM meets teens and young adults and assists them on the street, in youth centers, on social media, in shelters, and through mentorship for independent living. ELEM teams meet youth who are coping with a broad spectrum of distress, from personal crises typical of adolescence to more complex distress at the extreme end of the risk spectrum: depression; anxiety; violence at home, on the streets, or on the internet; sexual abuse; mental health crises; eating disorders; suicide ideation; drug and alcohol abuse; attrition; involvement in prostitution; runaways and homelessness, and a variety of other phenomena. ELEM has developed expertise in identifying the distress that characterizes these teens and young adults in Israel and in developing and operating appropriate responses for coping with these phenomena. ELEM teams work "at eye level" with a non-judgmental approach by relating to the unique needs of different population groups. ELEM currently operates 92 different programs in 42 cities and towns throughout Israel. Over the past two years, in light of the pandemic, distress among youth in Israel has worsened and become more extreme. ELEM has continued to reach every place where vulnerable youth are found to identify and assist them so that no young person is left behind.

The organization's 285 professionals work on the front lines, counseling and treating youth alongside 1,200 dedicated volunteers. ELEM's staff and volunteers go out into the field and meet youth where they are: on the streets, in parks, on social media, in the community, in schools, in discreet apartments, in hangout spots, and at parties.

משרד העבודה הרווחה  
והשירותים החברתיים  
חוסן חברתי לישראל



ELEM works in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare, including during the pandemic period. Many ELEM programs are conducted in collaboration with government ministries, local municipal authorities and philanthropic bodies.

## ELEM by the numbers - 2021



**12,500**  
youth served



**1,200**  
volunteers



**285**  
staff  
members

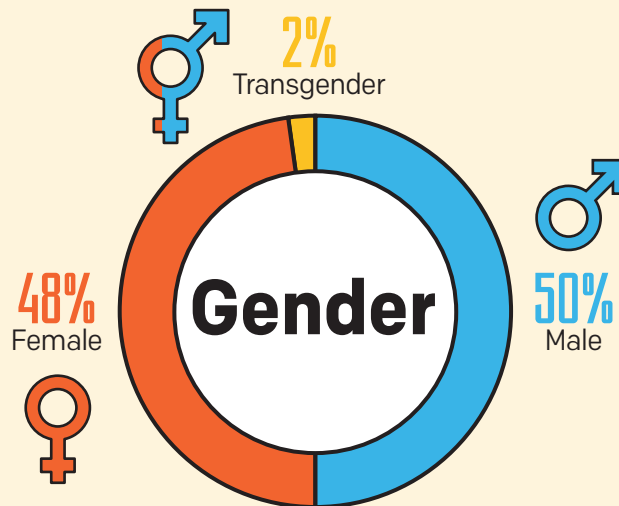


**92**  
programs

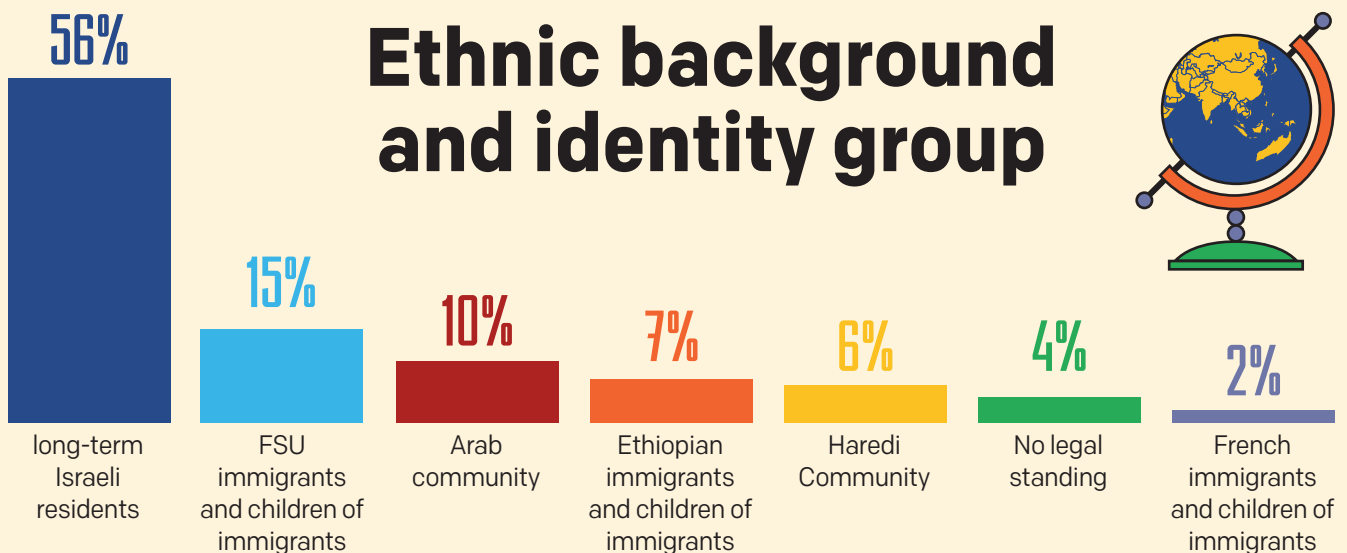


**42**  
cities and  
towns

# ELEM By The Numbers

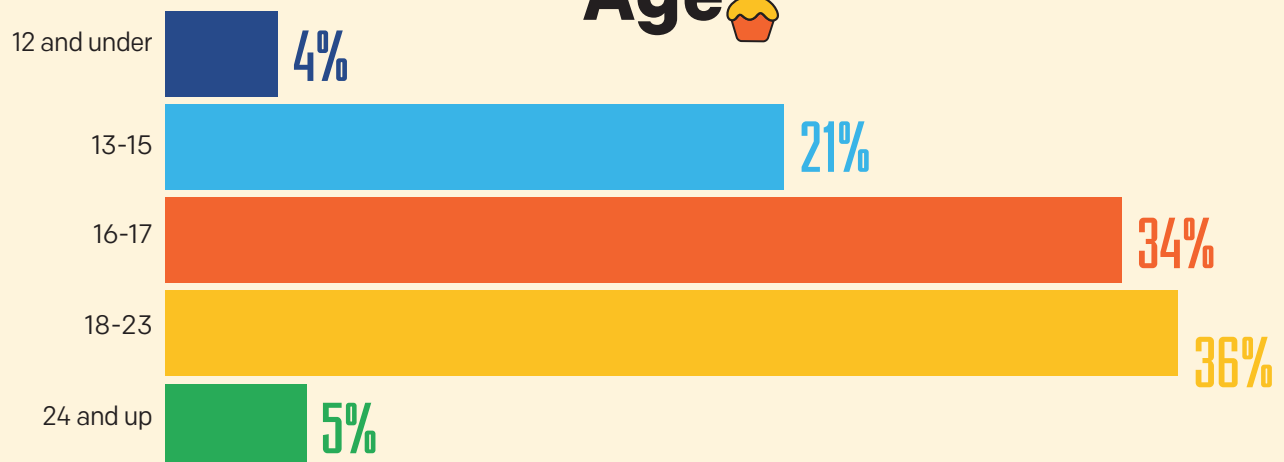


## Ethnic background and identity group

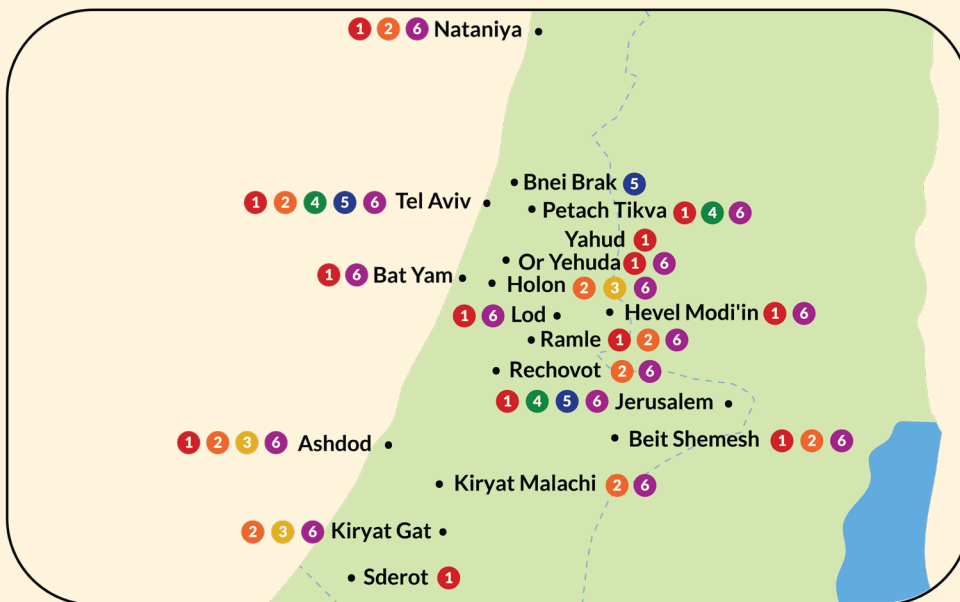
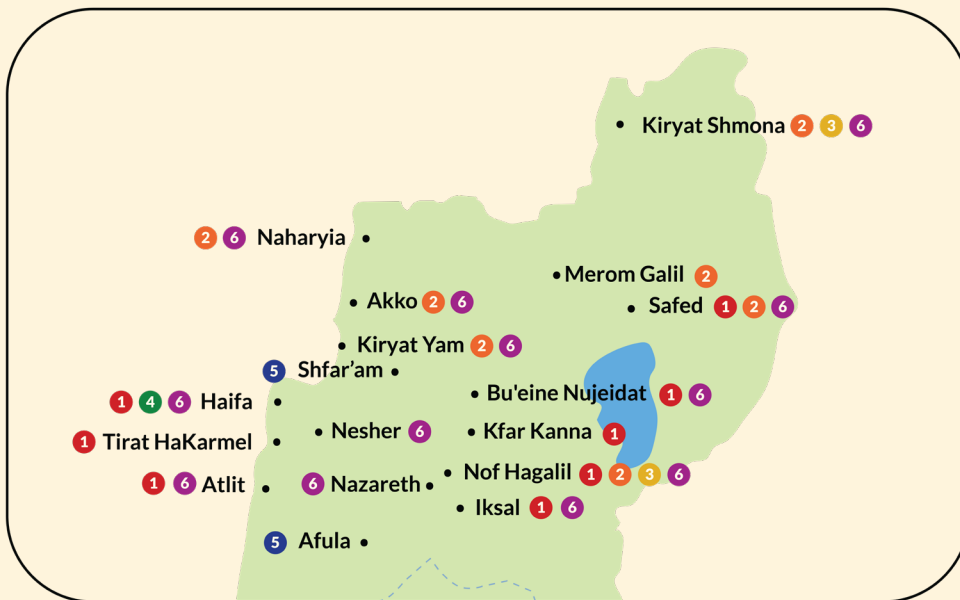


\*This division includes overlapping categories

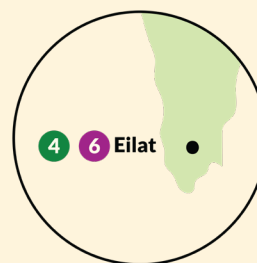
## Age 🎂







- 1 Outreach Vans
- 2 Youth Centers
- 3 Program on School Grounds
- 4 Fatal Risk Programs
- 5 Treatment of Sexual Violence
- 6 Independent Living



# Key Phenomena in 2021



In March 2020, everything changed drastically. With the outbreak of the pandemic and the initial waves of infection and lockdowns, the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the youth was clearly apparent to ELEM's staff – isolation, anxiety and depression, increased violence at home and on the street, more runaways and increased use of drugs and consumption of alcohol. Youths were crying out for help.

**In the data we collected, we see a two-fold increase in depression and anxiety, a two to three-fold increase in violence at home, on the street, and on the internet, double the number of eating disorders, and a 1.5-fold increase in self-harm among youth in comparison to 2019.**

This damage results from two years without stable frameworks and social interactions and will likely be long-lasting. Youth, who during the pandemic transitioned to communication almost exclusively on screens, have lost the ability to form face-to-face interpersonal relationships and the ability to show empathy.

Despite the pandemic's limitations, ELEM staff and volunteers continued to work in all arenas to provide youth with a stable framework and accessible connections. Youth who had not suffered from difficulties in the past turned to us for assistance, and risk became present in nearly every home in Israel. Simultaneously, the situation of at-risk youth suffering from distress during normal times became even more extreme.

More than two years have passed since COVID-19 entered our lives, but over the past year, we have witnessed the long-term consequences of the pandemic. Between the war abroad and the security situation in Israel, a generation of children and youth suffering from serious mental and emotional consequences have been pushed off the public agenda.

**In the data we collected over the past year, we saw a significant jump in the number of phenomena and risk**

**situations faced by teens and young adults who turned to ELEM for support and assistance. The situation of youth at risk, who suffer from distress during normal times, became more extreme and worsened during the past two years due to lockdowns, quarantines, and the transition to online and informal learning by schools.**

Youth who lived in dysfunctional homes or lacked a framework prior to the pandemic faced a decline in their mental health. One girl told us at that time: "Dying from COVID is dangerous and frightening, but children like us can die from staying at home."

**The COVID-19 pandemic is disappearing from our daily lives, but today, two years after the initial outbreak, we are witnessing its ongoing damage.**

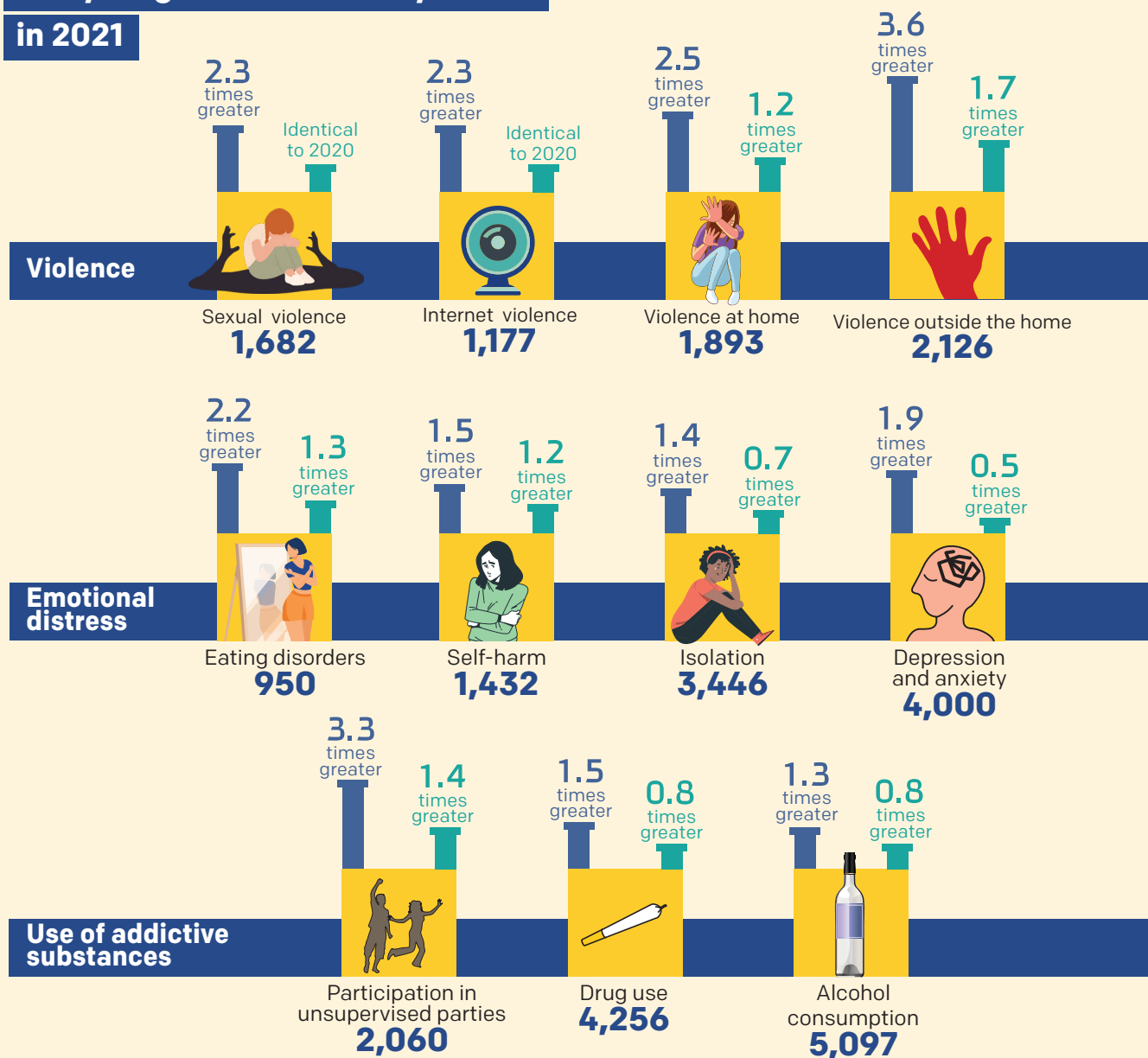
The isolation, disconnection, and lack of stability became more difficult without a stable framework for such an extended period. Teens, who have transitioned to communicating almost exclusively through screens, have lost their ability to form interpersonal connections, face-to-face, with their peers. In addition, they lacked significant adults who see them. The escalation in the security situation, which reached its peak in Operation Guardians of the Walls in May 2021, and the increasing tensions on the streets between different sectors of society, exacerbated the difficulties experienced by youth on the margins of society. The encounters between different marginal populations became more complex and extreme. As a result, we saw an increase in the number of youth we assist who were taking part in violence on the streets (3.6 times higher in 2021 than in 2019 before the pandemic), violence at home (2.5 times higher), online violence (2.3 times higher), depression and anxiety (2 times higher), use of drugs and alcohol consumption (1.3 times higher), eating disorders (2.2 times higher), and self-harm (1.5 times higher).

In the past year, we have witnessed further extremes in these phenomena. **Not only are there greater numbers of these phenomena, but the seriousness of the phenomena has also intensified.**

## Key phenomena among teens and young adults served by ELEM

in 2021

■ In comparison to 2020  
■ In comparison to 2019



For example, the level of violence on the streets among youth has increased significantly. The violence is more extreme than in the past. On the streets, there is a consistent increase in attacks, cruelty, and vandalism. We are experiencing a loss of all restraint.

This year we are also seeing a significant worsening in eating disorders and negative body image. Presumably, the source of this phenomenon is the countless hours that teen boys and girls saw themselves on camera on Zoom during lessons and the increased time spent on social networks where success is measured by beauty, wealth, and thinness.

We at ELEM will continue to work on behalf of these youth. To be there for them, see them, listen to them, guide and mediate, and assist them. **We will not leave any young person to cope alone.**

The long-term emotional and mental health

consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the exacerbation of other significant stressors have resulted in the need for more support and assistance for a greater number of youth, and more staff, which requires increased resources for more intensive professional training.

**The damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is enormous, and our society must work together to support all our children.** We need to support and care for them, provide tools, set boundaries, and strengthen formal and informal support as parents, educators, and in an inclusive way, as a society. Only through the integration and cooperation of the education, health and welfare systems and by joining forces can we provide youth with the best possible care.

# 4,433\*

Total teens and young adults served

Street work at ELEM is comprised of identification and intervention teams that reach youth on their turf -- on the streets, on social networks, in parks, in hangout spots, and more. The teams make meaningful connections with the teens by building trust, acting as liaisons, referring to treatment agencies, and conducting emergency crisis interventions.

The unique encounters between the staff and volunteers and youth who wander the streets and the internet can create meaningful change in these teens' lives. The exchanges expose them to alternative approaches and thoughts, making it possible for them to begin to dream, aspire, and discover. In addition, street work helps youth access services that can assist them in coping with their distress.

Outreach vans operate in **24** cities and towns among diverse populations throughout Israel: in urban and rural areas, in Jewish and Arab communities, among secular and religious communities, among immigrants and native-born Israelis, and in the periphery and metropolitan cities.

## Consequences of the pandemic and key phenomena in street work

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected ELEM's work on the streets. There was a drastic decrease in the age of teens who met with the outreach van teams. Also, work patterns changed since some of the regular locations where the outreach vans operate emptied out, while others had practically double the number of youths. Simultaneously, the restrictions and guidelines from the pandemic eroded young people's ability to trust the adult world and increased the difficulty many young people experience in trying to create new connections with their peers.

The pandemic also brought a significant increase in the level of violence on the streets, with reports of increases in incidents of serious violence and aggression. Over the past year, many teens began carrying weapons. In addition, the Outreach Vans' teams reported a steep increase this year in reports of depression, mental health

disorders, and the use of mind-altering substances (drugs and alcohol). There was also an increase in reports of teens staying in hangout spaces and abandoned buildings and a drastic increase in the number of teens dropping out of educational frameworks. This was especially the case for those who had difficulty learning before the pandemic and did not return to the classroom when schools reopened.

During the pandemic, the arena that has taken up increasingly greater space in the lives of teens is online. The internet has become the new "street," and many of the teens' social activities take place there, which means that young people are found less on the physical streets and more on the internet, where they are exposed to various dangers. For this reason, ELEM made a decision to increase the presence of street work teams on the internet, with an emphasis on processes for identifying and connecting with youth at risk on the internet, mainly among at-risk teenage girls.

Other major events that impacted ELEM's street work in 2021:

- The Meron Disaster – During the Lag B'Omer celebrations in Meron, the street work division sets up an onsite space designed to reduce emotional and mental harm among teens and young adults participating in the event. As the disaster began to unfold, ELEM teams at the site assisted with treating the wounded, directing the crowds, and providing emotional and mental health aid to help process the trauma. In the weeks following the disaster, we accompanied the teens and young adults and the field teams who continued to cope with the mental health consequences of the event.
- Operation Guardians of the Walls – During the operation and afterward, we experienced violent acts by youth and young adults served by ELEM outreach vans in several mixed cities. ELEM teams worked to reduce tensions and calm youth during the operation and during the aftermath.



\* Not including one-time identifications

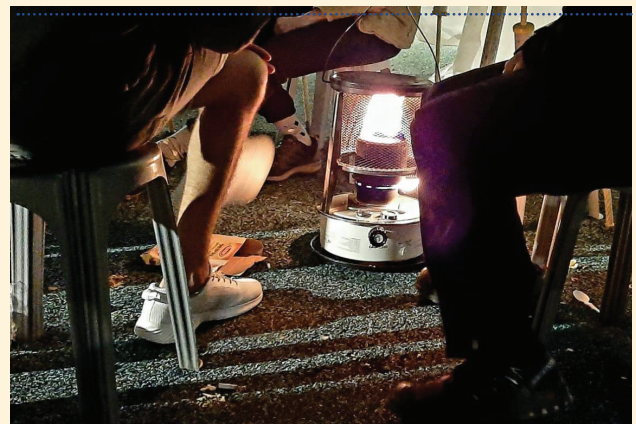


## Key achievements in 2021

- Expanded and deepened our work in identifying youth at risk on social networks with five dedicated teams that conduct identification work and interventions online.
- Initiated the first Outreach Vans in the Arab community. Currently, there are new outreach vans in **5** Arab towns as part of ELEM's new Arab Community Field.
- With the conclusion of the *Ateret Tiferet* project, a unique project that supports and accompanies young Haredi women, the model was adopted by 3 local municipalities.
- Operation of **60** nights of outreach van activities in **47** towns and cities through the Ministry of Welfare's We See You project.
- Acquisition of **15** new outreach vans.
- ELEM's Good People project, which assists young people who experience mental and emotional distress after using mind-altering substances during parties, participated in an inter-ministry professional committee. The group evaluated the activities needed to minimize harm among those who attend these outdoor parties. The committee is a cooperative effort of the Ministries of Education, Welfare, and Internal Security.

**"I was very suicidal; I was depressed. Without ELEM, without the outreach van, without this weekly talk, I don't think I would still be here."**

D., a teen girl at an ELEM outreach van



# Drop-in Centers

National Director: Keren Naor

# 2,089

Teens and young adults served

ELEM's drop-in centers are located in cities across Israel and operate throughout the week in the afternoon and evening hours. The spaces provide youth with a safe place to make healthy connections with their peers and with at least one significant adult. In addition, the drop-in centers provide support and assistance for a variety of difficult and challenging situations.

Teen boys and girls who choose to come to one of the drop-in centers enjoy an array of empowering activities, individual and group conversations, acceptance, and a sense of belonging and connection. They also receive tools for coping with high-risk situations, emotional crises, and experiences typical of adolescence.

There are **16** drop-in centers throughout the country. Some are multicultural centers geared toward teens from immigrant families. The Drop-in Centers Field also operates **7** drop-in support centers in schools in different cities.

## Consequences of the pandemic and key phenomena at the drop-in centers

The impact of the pandemic on the operations of the drop-in centers was felt not only in the increase in the type of distress but also in their frequency, the younger age of youth exhibiting risky behavior, and in the intensity and severity of distress. At the end of each COVID lockdown, we saw teens who in the past were not considered at-risk, exhibiting risk symptoms and difficulty in returning to routine and formal frameworks. The situation worsened from one lockdown to the next. Youth who were defined as being at low to medium risk before the pandemic deteriorated to serious situations that characterize extreme risk.

Over the past year, there has been a significant increase in the number and severity of incidents of physical violence among youth at the centers, along with an increase in vandalism and wandering the streets. ELEM also witnessed an increase in the number of youth involved with criminal acts, theft, drug use, and encounters with

the police, who had to deal with youth carrying sticks, pepper spray, and spikes.

In addition, there was an increase in the number of teen boys and girls in the drop-in centers who experienced mental health crises and suffered from eating disorders and body image issues. Many teen boys and girls spoke about isolation and boredom throughout the day, and some did not return to school on a regular basis. In some of the centers over the past year, there were discussions about death and suicide that impacted the atmosphere and aroused vigilance among the staff and volunteers. The drop-in centers also saw an alarming increase in reports of sexual abuse at home and in the community. Each report was addressed as needed.

In the past year, we saw a decrease in the age of the teen boys and girls visiting the youth centers, which testifies to a greater degree of distress among youth. In the past, the lowest threshold was ages 14 -15. In 2021, teens aged 11-12 sought support at the centers and received guidance and treatment.





## Key achievements in 2021

- Strengthened the process of scouting youth at risk on the street, an activity that intensified over the past year in the shadow of the pandemic. Currently, 8 of the youth centers conduct outreach on the street to identify at-risk youth.
- 7 centers successfully operated in schools to provide a support system across the country.
- The program operated in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the local municipal authorities and was expanded this year with the goal of preventing students from dropping out of school.
- Opened 3 new drop-in centers. This year a new youth center was opened in Nahariya, supported by the municipality, thanks to broad infrastructure work with the local authority and partners. In addition, 2 new youth centers will soon open in Beit Shemesh, a center for teen girls and a center for teen boys, initiating work with this Haredi community.
- Established innovative groups and models. ELEM launched a group for alumni from the Safed youth center to assist them with life issues, such as employment and various emotional issues. We also created an innovative group model in Merom Galil that provides a social-emotional support space in a rural setting. Additionally, in cooperation with Beit HaOleh, ELEM opened a learning center at the Holon drop-in center for Hebrew study and to help close educational gaps.
- During Operation Guardians of the Walls, ELEM teams in mixed cities that suffered from a severe security escalation operated around the clock. Their goal was to locate the youth in ELEM programs and support them during this difficult and unstable period and also to care for their physical and emotional well-being. A year has passed, but the teams continue to work intensively, counseling and supporting youth on issues related to violence prevention, identity-based conflict, and multiculturalism.

**"During the pandemic I felt that I needed to pick up the shards, now I need to pick up the smithereens"**

G., age 16, teenage girl served by one of ELEM's drop-in centers



# 822

Teens and young adults served

The Extreme Risk Field at ELEM provides services to teens and young adults at the extreme end of the risk spectrum. Most of them are excluded from society and survive through prostitution, homelessness, criminal activity, addiction, and other highly precarious means. Most of them suffer from complex post-trauma due to abuse, neglect and violence they suffered in childhood and the present. Extreme risk centers serve as a home for them, a protective space that responds to their basic needs and enables them to rest from life on the streets and from various extreme situations. They can take a breath, eat and get adequate sleep, and gradually begin to rehabilitate their lives.

Extreme Risk teams assist teens and young adults in these situations receive an emergency first response to reduce harm. This includes shelter, clothing, and a hot meal. This creates a positive connection with an adult, which is especially meaningful for these young people, most of whom have never felt that they have anyone to rely on or that there is anyone who cares about their well-being. ELEM also helps with procuring benefits, assistance, and guidance regarding employment options, and assistance with finding optimal safe housing. This assistance is provided without pre-conditions, judgment of the youth, or desire to change them, and also with the understanding that this is a long-term process that requires restoring faith in the system and creating change at a pace and in a manner dictated by the young person.

The Extreme Risk Field currently operates 8 centers around the country, 7 in cooperation and with funding from the Ministry of Welfare and the local authorities. Some operate 24/7, and some offer shelter on certain days of the week.



## Consequences of the pandemic and key phenomena in ELEM's Extreme Risk work

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns, there was an intense feeling of helplessness among youth at extreme risk. The street where they lived or hung out prior to the pandemic became the last place where they could be, while the mandate to stay at home didn't consider those who have no safe home or no home at all.

During the first lockdown, we saw a slight decrease in prostitution, which stemmed from the young people's desire to protect their health. At the same time, we saw increased rates of depression, anxiety, and self-harm (some especially severe) among youth at extreme risk. Those who stayed at home reported an increased number of incidents of violence, sexual abuse, eating disorders, and other types of distress that are symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder from childhood, combined with the distress caused by the pandemic.

This year we saw new phenomena among youth at extreme risk. Sexual exploitation using the internet has grown due to the increase of time spent on social media platforms during the pandemic, and the scope of new opportunities for sexual exploitation on the internet has accelerated. This includes apps that can be used to send nude photos/videos, apps that offer personal photos and content for a fee, and distribution of sex videos on the internet. This increased the work of ELEM's Extreme Risk teams to identify sexual exploitation on the internet.



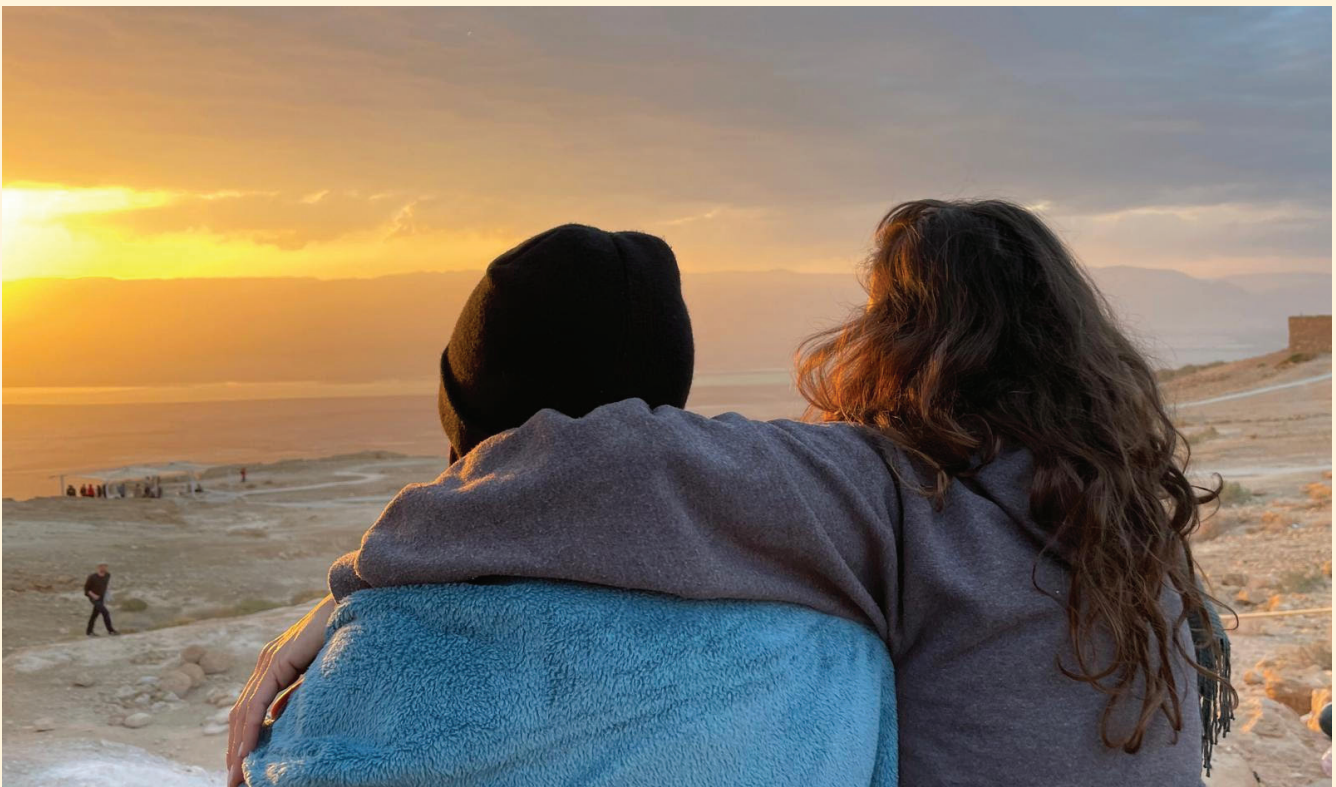
## Key achievements in 2021

- Transitioned to providing 24/7 service in treatment centers for sexually exploited youth in Haifa and Petach Tikva to provide a broad-scope shelter solution for sexually exploited young people, beginning during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This required doubling the number of employees in these centers.
- Established neWish, an employment initiative operated by young women from the Alma program. neWish is an online store for secondhand baby clothes. It allows young women to develop, support, and empower themselves as independent, working women making a positive contribution to society.
- Launched the new.story project in cooperation with *A Real Home*. Based on digital footprints, the project automatically identifies on the internet young men and women who have suffered sexual abuse at home. The project includes 9 staff members from the data field.
- The Heart program in Eilat transitioned to working 5 days a week and offered mentoring to the program's young mothers and alumni.
- Staff, volunteers and young people in the field continued to speak in front of Knesset committees, advance innovative public programs, and participate in roundtables and coalitions of organizations in the fight against commercial prostitution and other social ills.



**"I arrived at ELEM as a teen girl whose entire life revolved around lies, fear, and defensiveness. I came through the doorway, and they immediately accepted me with a smile from ear to ear, with eyes full of expectation to get to know and love me. Me, a girl who had been thrown out of and dropped out of every possible framework."**

L., young woman at Halev 24/7



# 3,065

Teens and young adults served

ELEM Digital is the organization's tool for approaching at-risk youth on social networks. ELEM Digital provides anonymous mental health assistance and support on the internet to teens and young adults in distress by:

- Making contact, identifying, mediating, and providing intervention responses for at-risk youth on social networks.
- Developing creative ideas that support the promotion of digital innovation and the capacity to provide new solutions for youth at risk in the virtual space.

ELEM's online interfaces include:

- A Y-ELEM chat and WhatsApp.
- Proactive identification on the internet using advanced technology for monitoring and locating youth in distress on social networks, and intervention and assistance as needed.
- Facebook and Instagram accounts, including presence on Messenger.
- *Fireflies* – a closed Facebook group for teen girls.
- Posting replies on group forums and replying to personal emails. In addition, the ELEM Digital Field deals with supporting and implementing digital transformation in the organization's data systems.

## Consequences of the pandemic and key phenomena in ELEM digital

Alongside the familiar issues of adolescence across the spectrum of crises and hardships, it was evident that social distancing due to the pandemic led to an increase in youth being treated by ELEM Digital, who mostly turned to us due to feelings of isolation, depression, anxiety and social anxiety. In all of the spaces in which ELEM operates online, the conversations included coping with violence at home, family difficulties, strong feelings of isolation, and coping with the personal crises these teens and young adults faced.

Preoccupation with personal appearance and weight, alongside an increase in eating disorders among adolescents, was also evident to ELEM Digital on the internet, mainly in identification work where many posts

were found on these topics. This led to intervention and assistance by professionals in the field. We saw that the difficulties adolescents faced in coping with others looking at them online, mainly during periods of distance learning through Zoom, led to increasing levels of self-criticism, social difficulties, and eating disorders.

Other issues that arose this year in conversations with youth on social media were the need for a personal private space, difficulties with the lack of privacy at home, and exposure to family issues that they had not been exposed to before the pandemic, such as economic uncertainty, complex relationships between parents, and more.

While online, we recognized growing anxiety among youth due to social encounters. The teens expressed concern over diminishing and lacking social skills and tools, alongside a fear of reentering the real world. Accordingly, we have seen some teens avoid the outside world over the past year, isolate at home, and have difficulty leaving the house and initiating social encounters. These issues continued even after the lockdowns ended, and it was possible to return to regular routines.

## Key achievements in 2021

- In 2021, the number of adolescents identified on social networks increased, with 1,700 identifications on the internet made by ELEM Digital.
- 3,065 teens and young adults turned to ELEM's chat for support, assistance, and guidance.
- With the need for spaces where youth could gather during the pandemic, there was a 17% increase in the number of teen girls and young women in the closed Fireflies Facebook group, which provides a space for dialogue about the issues they face.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences on youth, the ELEM Digital team held 14 internal and external courses and training sessions on how to operate in the digital sphere, including online identification, location, and intervention.
- In the past year, ELEM Digital convened a forum of ELEM staff and other organizations to identify and support youth at risk on the internet.

**" In one of the Bible lessons on Zoom, I saw myself and was disgusted. Since then, I don't participate in classes with my camera on. I keep getting marked absent, but I don't care; no one is going to see me like that anymore. Fat, cow. "**

S., a teen girl in ELEM Digital



# 214

Teens and young adults served

In 2021, a new field was born at ELEM. The Arab Community Field was established this year to expand and improve the organization's services among teens and young adults in the Arab community. The Arab Community Field operates on two main fronts:

1. Establishing and expanding new services for vulnerable youth in the Arab community.
2. Accompanying existing programs within ELEM that provide services in the Arab community.

In addition, the Arab Community Field at ELEM is responsible for formulating culturally appropriate methods and promoting policy change in the area of at-risk youth in the Arab community through developing and establishing multi-sectoral partnerships.

## Key achievements in 2021

- Initiating street outreach work in 5 Arab towns in Northern Israel, with a plan for further expansion in 2022.
- Establishing 2 Nur centers for teen girls and young women in Arab towns – Ramle and Majd al-Krum.
- As part of the Ministry of Welfare's We See You initiative, a collaborative effort of ELEM's Street Work Field and



several other organizations, ELEM operated in 14 Arab towns in the north of Israel, in central Israel, and in East Jerusalem.

- With the establishment of the Arab Community Field, ELEM assembled professional leadership for the field. We initiated a forum of civil society organizations on the topic of at-risk youth in Arab society.



# Employment and Independent Living

National Director: Tami Nahmias

# 1,106

Teens and young adults served

- ELEM's Employment and Independent Living Field works to provide teens and young adults at risk with tools and skills to manage independent living. These young people are mainly cut off from family, social, and therapeutic support systems, and most of them are forced to survive in the world without resources. ELEM supports them in their early adult life as they gain experience in finding employment, developing skills for independent living, accessing benefits, finding a community, dealing with health issues, enlisting in the military or national service, and educational opportunities.

The employment field is comprised of several programs, including:

- From Dependence to Independence: A counseling and personal mentorship program for graduates of the Youth Authority Residential Programs who have been living in frameworks outside of their homes and are required to cope with the challenges of independent living post-graduation. They receive tools and skills for building independent lives through personal mentorship over the course of two years. The program operates in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare.
- The Young Mothers Program: Provides a variety of services for young mothers at risk to assist them with integrating into society and reducing situations of exclusion and neglect of the young women and their children.
- The Activist Communities: For young women aged 18-30, alums of ELEM, or young adults with similar backgrounds who want to change the reality of their lives and impact society through acquiring skills and tools for activism.
- The ELEM Financial Program: Conducted in cooperation with Bank HaPoalim. In this program, at-risk teens and young adults receive guidance from volunteers to learn about optimal economic and financial management.
- The Ma'atefet Program: Accompanies at-risk young adults who choose to volunteer for national service (Sherut Leumi).
- Employment Promotion projects: Our Partners for the Way and Onsite Training programs, in cooperation with Bank HaPoalim and the business sector,

integrate at-risk youth into the world of employment. In these programs, vulnerable young men and women receive professional training at businesses and real opportunities to integrate into the company and the field.

## Consequences of the pandemic and key phenomena in ELEM's employment and independent living programs

In 2021, there was an increase in the number of cases in which we assisted young adults from the employment programs in coping with depression, anxiety, stress, isolation, social distancing, lack of stable routine, and economic instability. The pandemic and Operation Guardians of the Walls further worsened these phenomena. In addition, there was an increase in reports of self-harm, use of drugs and alcohol, incidents of violence in the family, and increased post-traumatic symptoms that existed before the pandemic but worsened over the past two years.

The economic situation of young adults was severely affected following the COVID-19 crisis. Among young people in the Arab community, it was even more extreme. Some workplaces closed, the leave-without-pay model slowed the rate of return to work, and many young people remained unemployed and went into debt. The fact that many lacked economic and family backing was evident in their difficulty meeting essential payments. As a result, some youth were forced to return to dangerous survival strategies, such as living on the streets, partaking in commercial prostitution, dealing with the gray market, and more.

We've seen that the pandemic deepened the challenges faced by the young mothers we served, including challenges with poverty, integrating into the workforce, and exacerbated family violence.

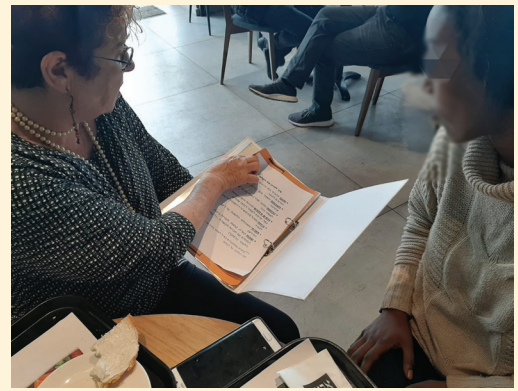
Among the young adults we serve in the Arab community, we've seen great distress where housing was concerned. The lack of basic housing and family backing constitute a barrier to development in other areas of life, such as employment, military service, education, and integration into the community. Some were forced to return home to the communities where they grew up, which is usually not an optimal environment.





## Key achievements in 2021

- Developed a program to promote responses and policies for young mothers in dangerous situations. In the program, approximately 150 young mothers currently receive mentorship and support. Simultaneously, we established an intersectoral coalition to promote policies to support young mothers, in which ELEM is presently positioned as the leading organization assisting young mothers at risk.
- 100 young men and women received mentorship in 2021 as part of expanding ELEM Financial. We've also enlisted multiple new volunteers for the program.
- The Ma'atefet program was expanded to additional populations, including the Arab and the Haredi communities.
- In 2021, more than 20 young women were members of ELEM's Activist Communities, which gained momentum that year, developing and leading social initiatives that included: a clothing donation initiative, an initiative providing personal hygiene products for young women living on the streets; and an effort to collect mobile phones for teens and young adults living on the streets.



**"The mentorship from Z. was really meaningful for me because the process that she and I went through taught me life skills connected to financial management. I became more calculated with my money and more responsible."**

T., a young woman who received mentorship from ELEM Financial

## Training Department

National Director: Khalil Homeidi

The training department is responsible for developing professional knowledge, training staff, conceptualizing organizational knowledge, and making the information accessible to the organization's staff.

The department is comprised of 8 clinical supervisors who provide clinical training to all of ELEM's programs to support the professional staff in their development and learning process and expand and improve methodologies.

In addition to clinical training offered to teams on a weekly basis, the department assisted with providing professional development programs on many topics during the year, including clinical supervision skills, sexual abuse, and group work. The department also worked on writing and conceptualizing the intervention model for ELEM's staff in the different fields of work.

## External Training

National Director: Khalil Homeidi

As an organization working for nearly 40 years with vulnerable teens and young adults, ELEM has extensive, cutting-edge professional knowledge and a reputation as a pioneering organization. Through unmediated encounters with a wide diversity of youth across the risk spectrum, on the streets, in the different centers, and in therapeutic environments, ELEM's professional staff have developed a deep familiarity with various target populations and have developed innovative and creative work methods.

ELEM provides professional training led by ELEM staff, professionals in the fields of therapy and education, including social work, criminology, psychology, and

more, who have accumulated vast experience in working with teens and young people in situations of risk and distress. Training sessions, lectures, workshops, study days, and seminars are offered for social, academic, and government bodies, study delegations, and training overseas and in Israel.

In 2021, ELEM provided approximately 200 hours of professional training to different organizations on a variety of topics, including locating at-risk youth on the street and on the internet; sexual abuse; working with minors in prostitution; multicultural work; intervention in informal spaces; and the use of mind-altering substances among youth.

699

Teens and young adults served

The Sexual Violence Field at ELEM provides treatment for children and youth aged 5-18 who have survived sexual assault and those involved in inappropriate, harmful sexual behavior. We treat both the victims and the offenders.

ELEM operates two treatment centers for sexual abuse by minors in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare. One center is in Tel Aviv, with branches in Bat Yam and Jaffa, and the second is in Afula, with branches in Shefaram, Migdal Haemek, and Yokneam. In addition, this year, we opened the first treatment center of its kind, located in Jerusalem, for boys ages 13-18 who have been sexually abused. The centers offer individual therapy, counseling for parents, family therapy, and assessments. Treatment is conducted in accordance with the nature of the abuse, the ability of the youth to process trauma, age, and their emotional world.

ELEM's group therapy program for teen boys who sexually abuse operates 30 therapy groups throughout the country in collaboration with the Probation Services and the Youth Authority. The goal of the treatment, which lasts at least a year and a half, is to help lower the chance of the boys committing additional offenses, thus preventing additional victims. ELEM also assists youth in integrating back into society.

In addition to these programs, ELEM holds courses and training sessions for professional organizations, treatment institutions, and government ministries on various subjects related to sexual violence.

## Consequences of the pandemic

### and key phenomena in ELEM's

### Sexual Abuse Field

Close to half of the sexual abuse of minors happens by a family member within the home. The COVID-19 crisis and the lockdowns forced children and youth to spend extended periods at home, sometimes with their abusers, without the ability to maintain their physical and emotional safety. During the lockdowns, we saw an increase in abuse within the family, mainly between siblings, inside the home.

Also during this time, boys who sexually abused others and were in the process of positive rehabilitation were

under additional stress, which delayed their rehabilitation and worsened their situations. Some of them committed additional offenses. ELEM's ability to provide treatment, particularly in person, was harmed by the pandemic. Stable, ongoing treatment relationships, which are so crucial for trauma treatment, were lacking during COVID. Despite this, the therapists providing treatment did everything possible to preserve stability. They insisted on continuing treatment and did not give up on any of the youth. For this reason, very few children and youth dropped out of treatment.

Over the past year, we were exposed to more incidents of sexual abuse that took place when a group of boys, usually older, severely sexually exploited a girl who was younger and weaker than them. Some of these incidents were publicized in the media, and many of these youths came to ELEM for treatment.

In addition, over the past year, there's been more exposure to the issue of sexual violence towards boys. An increase in public awareness and social discourse about the abuse of boys, teens, and men resulted in more requests for help from boys who have been abused at a younger age. ELEM developed deeper professional expertise in this area. We established a dedicated center in Jerusalem for treating boys who have been abused, and we aspire to lead change on this topic among professionals and the broader public.

Another occurrence that came up repeatedly this year is sexual exploitation on the internet, with an increase in incidents. ELEM had requests for treatment for sexual exploitation in the virtual space, resulting from the distribution of videos or photos of a sexual nature, photo editing, sending abusive sexual messages, photographing and distributing photographs of intimate areas, writing humiliating and sexist comments, and more. These are all expressions of sexual violence on the internet that we encountered this year. We are honing our expertise in this field and professionalizing our approach to treatment accordingly.

## Key achievements in 2021

- Opened **2** new centers in the Sexual Violence Field: The first center in the country for boys who have experienced sexual abuse, which is located in Jerusalem, and a new center in South Tel Aviv. The center in Tel Aviv opened just before the outbreak of the pandemic. As a result of the COVID limitations and restrictions, the center made progress only in the last year in developing treatment methods and professionalization. It succeeded in reaching unique populations, such as the refugee population in the south of the city.
- Established *Comfort Space - Ohel Nechama*: An

activist project in cooperation with other organizations that provided a safe space for discussion around the topic of sexual abuse for five days in Jerusalem was visited by **over 500** people. The project was formed with the goal of providing a response to the intense and difficult feelings that arose following multiple incidents of sexual abuse that were exposed in the Haredi community and in general. The project received a lot of attention and support.

- Expanded operations in communities where traditionally existing services are not fully utilized: **60** youth beneficiaries in the Haredi community (mainly in B'nei Brak), **50** beneficiaries in the Arab community (mainly in Northern Israel), and **20** beneficiaries in the immigrant population (mainly in South Tel Aviv).
- The Sexual Violence Field is based on extensive clinical experience gained over the years, and 2021 was a groundbreaking year for bringing this expertise to many professionals both within and outside of ELEM through courses and training.



**"The Comfort Space was very healing for me. It's a place to go when you feel overwhelmed, where other people are going through similar things. You see that we are okay, that there is hope, and that it's possible to be optimistic."**

G., a young woman who came to Comfort Space

## ELEM: Working for Social Change

In 2021, ELEM continued to work on legislation and policy change. We've integrated staff members and young adults from the organization in Knesset committees, roundtables, and organizational coalitions, including:

- The Special Committee for Issues of Addictions, Drugs, and Challenges to Youth in Israel (on various topics related to coping with the pandemic)
- The Subcommittee for the Fight Against Trafficking Women into Prostitution
- The Committee to Promote Women's Issues
- The Special Committee for the Rights of the Child
- Promoted the "Housing First" program
- The Forum of Employment Organizations
- Implemented the Berliner Committee report for establishing designated departments for sex crimes in the municipalities
- Took part in the fight to save the nonprofit sector during the pandemic crisis as part of the "Civic Leadership" organization
- Established the *Comfort Space* project in Jerusalem to provide a safe space and strengthen dialogue about sexual abuse following multiple revelations of sexual abuse in the Haredi community and in general public.

In addition, the organization enlisted hundreds of ELEM

staff and volunteers, teens and young adults, in national efforts throughout the year around sexual violence and violence against women, issues that frequently reoccur in public discourse when new incidents are exposed.





# Human Capital: Volunteers and Human Resources at ELEM

Despite the many challenges ELEM volunteers and staff faced due to COVID, most not only remained dedicated to ELEM but went above and beyond in their work during this difficult time. The past two years showed that the human capital at ELEM is the organization's driving force and backbone.

## Volunteers

National Director: Rutie Levite

**1,200**  
Volunteers

Volunteerism is the core of ELEM's work with youth. ELEM believes that all citizens should take an active role in the care of its vulnerable members of society. As such, ELEM sees volunteers as the creative, operating, and motivating force of every program. This means that without volunteers, our programs would cease to exist. ELEM's volunteer department is responsible for developing, recruiting, training, and mentoring the organization's volunteers within the community, at the centers and local programs, and on a national level.

In the past year, ELEM created many volunteer initiatives in collaboration with businesses. These included Bank HaPoalim, Amdocs, Microsoft, Unilever, Electra, Bezeq, Adama, HSBC, HP Indigo, and other companies. The variety of collaborations promoted employment, provided mentoring and equipment donations and space for conferences, and more. In addition, we collaborated in organizing special events such as Good Deeds Day and similar events.

Various ELEM fields held events throughout the year to recognize and empower volunteers. The events provided professional skills, strengthened the sense of community among volunteers, and expressed gratitude and recognition for their important contributions.



## Human resources

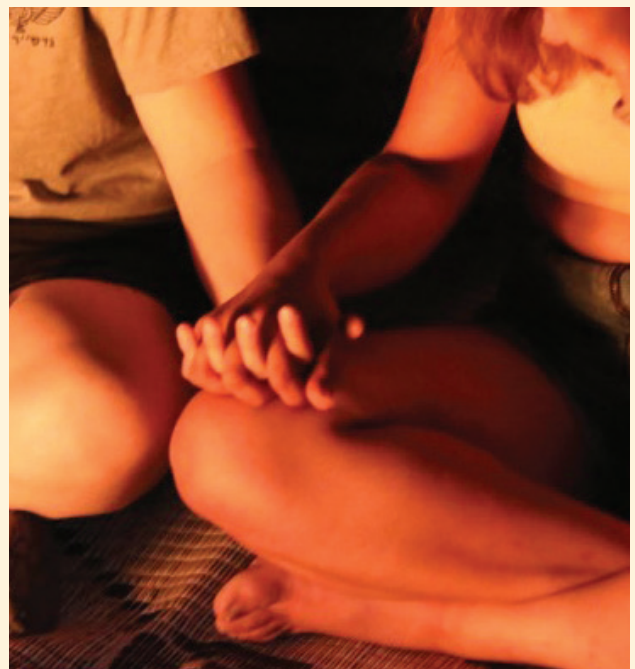
National Director: Leah Present Adler

**285**  
Employees

In Israel, ELEM has 285 employees from diverse professional backgrounds, including social work, education, psychology, criminology, and more.

The ELEM professional staff comes from all geographic locations and cultures in Israeli society – the periphery, central Israel, the Arab community, and the Haredi community, among others. ELEM promotes equality. Approximately 75% of the staff are women, and its executive director, president, and most managers are women.

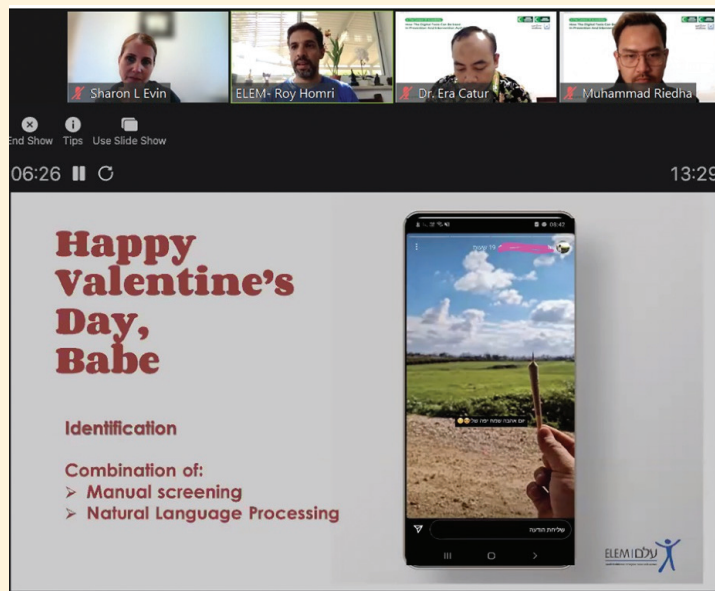
There were many challenges in the area of human resources in 2021. Many staff and their families were subject to multiple quarantines, and many worked from home. The human resources department faced isolation, burnout, alienation, and uncertainty during the year. The department supported employees who were ill, maintained ongoing communications, and conducted training for senior managers on how to manage remotely.





# ELEM in the International Arena

In 2021, ELEM continued to operate as an advisory organization to the United Nations on issues concerning vulnerable, troubled and at-risk youth. ELEM is the only organization from Israel in the field of at-risk youth that received this unique international recognition. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, ELEM has presented at three UN conferences dealing with drug abuse and youth. These conferences were in collaboration with the Enosh organization and the Green Crescent organization in Turkey and Indonesia. In addition, ELEM participated in an event with the America-Israel Friendship League on the topic of homelessness. ELEM's work in the international arena allows the organization to consult on developments and trends in the field of youth at risk, work side by side with other professional organizations around the world, and to help ensure that assistance for youth in distress is on the international agenda.



## Leadership

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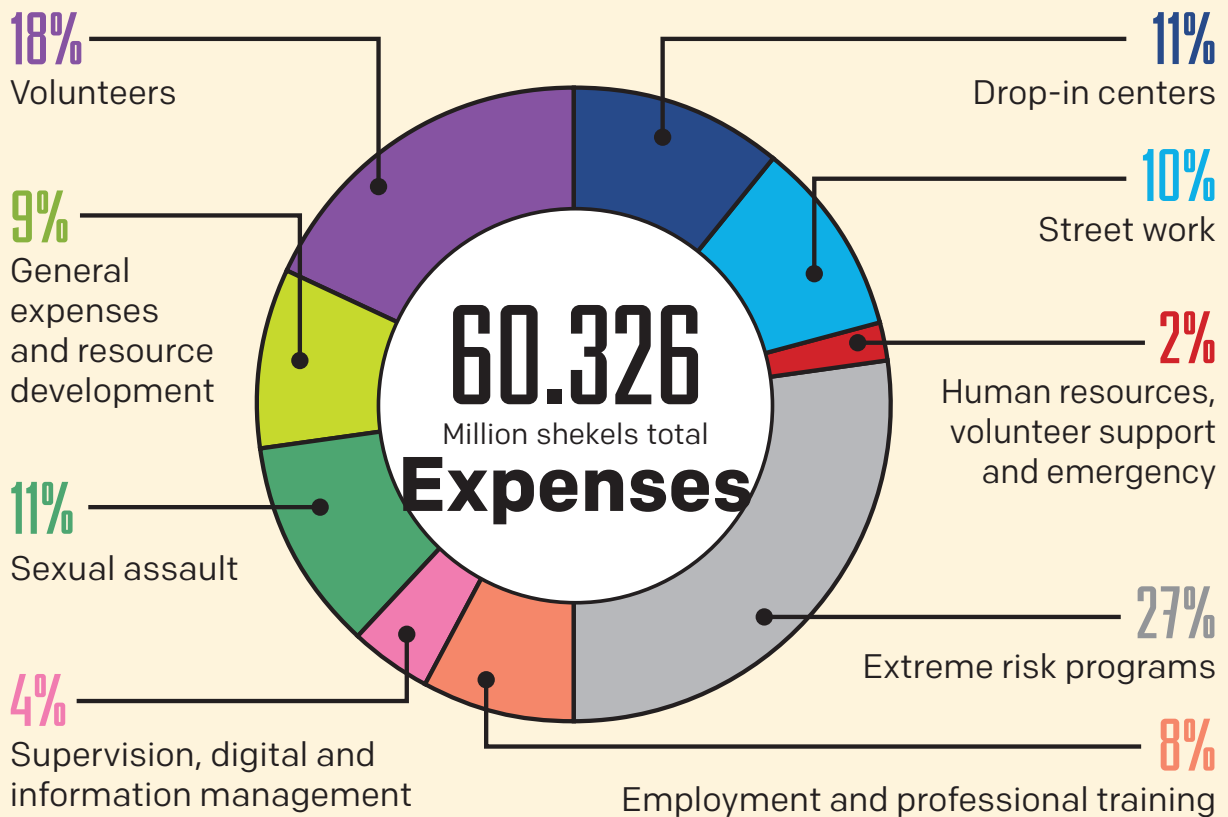
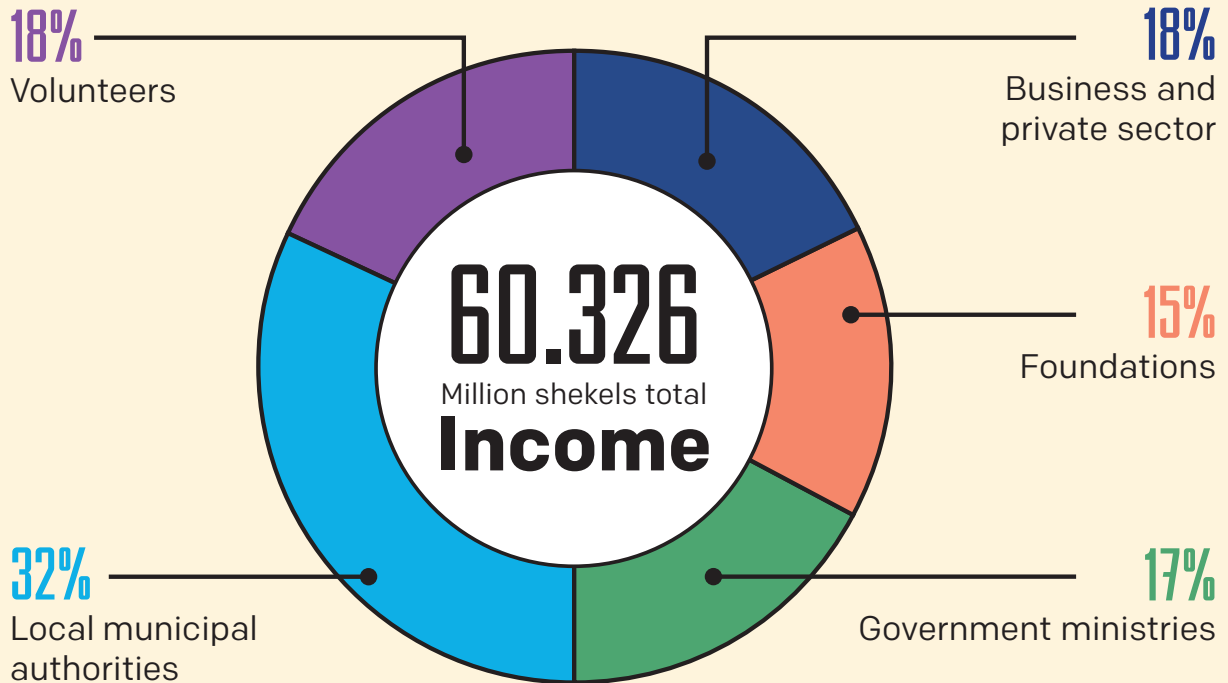
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### Team

Liora Attias- Chief Operating Officer  
 Chen Drachman- Manager of Communications  
 Scott Harkey- Development Officer  
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 Miriam Wazeter- Grants and Research Analyst  
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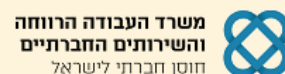
# ELEM ANNUAL BUDGET



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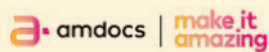


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The Or Yehuda outreach van was "adopted" by Nova Ltd.



Unilever staffers at ELEM drop-in centers on "Good Deeds Day."



Israel President Isaac Herzog and his wife Michal, lighting Hannuka candles with ELEM beneficiaries in Jerusalem.



Social Services Minister Meir Cohen visiting ELEM's The Heart (Halev) 24/7 center with director general Avigdor Kaplan, deputy director general Avi Motola, the ministry's Greater Tel Aviv district manager Limor Bar Tal and Tel Aviv city hall's Minister of Welfare director Sharon Melamed.



ELEM executive director Dana Avraham, national director of extreme risk Maya Baron and regional supervisor of extreme risk Hadas Gol presenting comedian Orna Banai with a gift after her performance at the field's volunteer appreciation event at Amdocs headquarters.



ELEM presenting our COVID-19 report to former President Reuven Rivlin.



An ELEM staffer and beneficiary from our program treating minors in prostitution, speaking to a Knesset committee on the subject of teenage mental health hospitalizations.



ELEM Chair Shlomo Yanai at ELEM's annual fundraising event.



From left: Welfare Ministry Director General Avigdor Kaplan, Minister Meir Cohen and Deputy Director Avi Motola visiting ELEM's The Heart (Halev) 24/7 drop-in center for homeless youth.



Electra Consumer Goods staffers challenged the teenage beneficiaries of ELEM's Rehovot drop-in center to a game of soccer.





President Isaac Herzog and his wife Michal lighting Hannukah candles with ELEM beneficiaries.



Adv. Zvika Agmon, ELEM Chair Shlomo Yanai and Bank Hapoalim Chair Ruben Krupik



ELEM's "Outstanding Achievement" awards ceremony at our annual fundraising event: former Executive Director Inbal Dor Kerbel, ELEM President Nava Barak, Bank Hapoalim social banking head Naama Halevi-Peer, Adv. Zvika Agmon and ELEM Chair Shlomo Yanai



Delek Automotive CEO Gil Agmon with then-ELEM Executive Director Inbal Dor Kerbel and ELEM President Nava Barak



Industrialist Dan Propper with wife Suzy



Adv. Zvika Agmon receiving ELEM's Lifetime Achievement Award at the organization's annual fundraising event.



Staff and volunteers of ELEM's "Real Home" project hosting a Passover dinner including ELEM Executive Director Dana Avraham, President Nava Barak and National Director of Extreme Risk Maya Baron.



Popstar Ivri Lider performing with ELEM beneficiary Hadas at ELEM's annual fundraising event.

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**YOUTH IN DISTRESS IN ISRAEL**

**ELEM/Youth in Distress in Israel**

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