

Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease and Surveillance

Search For Common Ground - Jerusalem

INTRODUCTION

Search for Common Ground (Search) has facilitated MECIDS since its founding in 2002. MECIDS is a trilateral, non-official organization formed by leading public health officials from Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Jordan, in addition to academic experts in the region and internationally. By building trust and mutual professional respect between individuals and institutions, MECIDS works towards peace at the socio-political level by offering a working model of effective cross-border cooperation, even during conflict.

WHAT DOES MECIDS DO?

MECIDS mission is ***to promote long-term health, stability, and security in the region.***

MECIDS provides a framework for participating public health officials and academics to share information and data about disease patterns, and coordinate swift cross-border responses in the event of an outbreak. With its administrative secretariat in Jerusalem, and its scientific secretariat in Amman, MECIDS is able to connect and collaborate with wide range of regional academic institutions, national centers for disease control, and health ministries.

In line with its mission, MECIDS organizes regular **multinational training courses**; **collaborative research**; and **coordination meetings** and workshops. In the past, MECIDS worked to contain diseases such as **H1N1**, **salmonella**, and **MERS-CoV**. In this way, MECIDS is able to successfully monitor, prevent, and respond to health risks across the three countries and broader region.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

With the generous support of the **European Union's Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace Building**, MECIDS coordinated a rapid response to SARS-CoV-19 (i.e., COVID-19). In 17 months, ***Enabling Effective and Conflict-Sensitive Responses to COVID-19 to Preserve Social Cohesion in Fragile Contexts in the Middle East*** mitigated harmful effects of the COVID-19 crisis on social cohesion, stability, and ongoing conflict prevention efforts. The initiative improved individual and institutional cooperation among the Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian public health sectors on their emergency COVID-19 response:

- **12 virtual lectures**, seminars, and awareness sessions;
- Training **24 lab technicians and infectious disease researchers** on Search's flagship Common Ground Approach;
- Training **20 practitioners** on COVID-19's epidemiology and lab aspects; and
- **1 co-authored scientific article.**

Thru these activities, MECIDS strengthened cross-border trust and respect in the face of long-standing conflict.

"With Israel on the one hand, and Jordan and the Palestinian Authority on the other, belonging to different administrative regions under the World Health Organisation, MECIDS has emerged as a unique mechanism for cross-border collaboration."

Board Member,
MECIDS

"MECIDS is a ready made prime example of the type of initiative that can work in the Middle East. You could not have a worse political situation but Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority are working together."

Tamer Rabie,
World Bank, Lead
Health Specialist

EMERGENCY VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Search convened 10 monthly virtual meetings with Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian public health officials, including ministerial advisors, researchers, and infectious disease experts. Each meeting allowed participants to exchange information, and data, in an effort to improve their country's respective response to COVID-19.

COMMON GROUND APPROACH TRAININGS

Search trained 8 lab technicians and infectious diseases researchers from each country in Search's flagship curriculum. This training strengthened participant skills and knowledge in non-adversarial communication, active listening, and empathy. After the training, participants were able to engage across dividing lines over common interests.

MECIDS CUSTOM TRAINING

Search and MECIDS Board Members designed a custom training on the epidemiology and laboratory procedures for COVID-19. A total of 20 participants attended the trainings, representing Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian public health surveillance and laboratory teams. The training included a series of lectures, and seminars, focusing on:

- Use of serological tools for the assessment of immunity;
- Sero-epidemiological studies of infection among health care workers before and after immunization; and
- Laboratory methods for detection.

MECIDS SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE

MECIDS Board Members co-authored an article about the experience of COVID-19 in the region. The article builds on the board members' abilities to share information, and conduct collaborative analysis. The article is pending publication in a refereed, academic journal.

CONTACT

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