

Disability-Inclusive Education in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt): West Bank & Gaza

'Being in school makes me feel that education is really for everyone including for myself.'

– Islam, 14-year old girl with hearing impairment from Rafah City, Gaza.

What is inclusive education?

UNESCO defines inclusive education as a transformative process that ensures full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all children, young people, and adults, respecting and valuing diversity, and eliminating all forms of discrimination in and through education.⁽¹⁾

Inclusive education acknowledges that learners, including children with disabilities, face numerous barriers to access and thrive in education both within and outside the education system. To achieve inclusive education, these barriers must be comprehensively addressed and the education system needs to be transformed to become flexible and responsive to the needs of every learner.⁽²⁾



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Situation in oPt

How many children with disabilities are there in West Bank and Gaza?

The 2017 Population, Housing, and Establishments Census⁽³⁾ highlights that the number of persons aged 0-14 years in Palestine is 1.8 million or 38.9% of the total population. Furthermore, according to the census, there are 92,710 persons with disabilities in the country (44,570 in the West

Bank and 48,140 in Gaza Strip), giving a disability prevalence rate of 2.1%.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS, 2020)⁽⁴⁾ estimated that 15% of primary school aged children (5-17 years) have disabilities: 17% in the West Bank and about 13% in Gaza Strip.

How many of children with disabilities have access to education?

According to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the number of children with disabilities enrolled in grades 1-10 in government schools during the 2015-2016 school year was 4,823 in the West Bank and 2,006 in the Gaza Strip. In 2020, the number of children with disabilities in Gaza has increased to 3,254 (1,907 boys, 1,347 girls); in West Bank, the enrolment number in 2019 has gone to 6,135. However, data also show that about 46% of children with disabilities aged 6 to 17 years are not enrolled in education. These rates varied between 51% in West Bank and 43% in Gaza Strip.⁽⁵⁾

According to UNICEF (2018),⁽⁶⁾ an estimated 32.5% of those with disabilities among 6-9 year old children are out of school compared to 0.9% of their peers without disabilities. A higher percentage of 6-9 year old children with disabilities are out of school in the Gaza Strip (45.2%) compared to their peers in the West Bank (27.7%). Gender inequalities are significant: 36.6% of 10-15 year old girls with disabilities are out of school, compared to 26.3% of boys with disabilities in the same age-group.



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1. Definition adopted from the Cali Commitment, Outcome Document of the 2019 UNESCO International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education.

2. Ministry of Education (2015), Palestine Inclusive Education Policy 2015. <https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/English%20-%20IE%20Policy.pdf>

3. More information here: www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs_2012/Publications.aspx, <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2383.pdf>.

4. More information here: [PCBS | PCBS: The International Day of Persons with Disabilities](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/PCBS-The%20International%20Day%20of%20Persons%20with%20Disabilities) on December 3rd, 2020.

5. More information here: <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3602>.

6. UNICEF (2018). [State of Palestine Country Report on Out-Of-School Children. OOSC Study.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/palestine/State%20of%20Palestine%20Country%20Report%20on%20Out-Of-School%20Children%20OOSC%20Study.pdf) (unicef.org).

Disability-inclusive education policies in oPt

As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the oPt commits to promoting disability-inclusive education (Article 24). Its commitment has been translated into a number of national policy documents such as:

- **The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 1994, Article 10:**
 - It ensures that persons with disabilities benefit from equal opportunities for enrollment in pedagogic and education institutions including universities.
- **The 5-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education of 2017:**
 - It envisions a safe, inclusive and equitable enrolment in the education sector at all levels of the system.

'I am not trained on how to teach a child with disability. I feel anxious and I do not know what to do when a child with disability enrolls in my class.'

– Mainstream school teacher in West Bank during a teacher training session organized by Humanity & Inclusion in oPt.

What barriers restrict children with disabilities' access to and stay in school?⁽⁷⁾

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and harmful cultural beliefs negatively affect the access of children with disabilities to school. For example, in a study conducted by Humanity & Inclusion (HI) in oPt, 70% of the interviewed parents are concerned that girls and boys with disabilities are more exposed to sexual abuse when they are away from home. As a result, parents decide not to send their children to school. Furthermore, 50% of parents surveyed express that they would be ready to marry off their daughters with disabilities under 16 years old. Child marriage significantly lowers the chances of girls with disabilities to continue accessing education.

Inaccessible infrastructure, including unsafe or inaccessible transportation services, prevent children with disabilities from being in school. Robust literature⁽⁸⁾ highlights that schools with inaccessible Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, including toilets, contribute to children with disabilities' drop-out of school.

Lack of preparation of mainstream school teachers to promote disability and gender-inclusive teaching practices remain a significant challenge. Experiences from HI's inclusive education project in Palestine stress that mainstream teachers often

have very limited skills and capabilities to teach and support children with disabilities in their classrooms. This leads to significant drop-out rates amongst children with disabilities or to inadequate learning opportunities and limited progress when they are in school.

Recommendations

Building on the 5-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in oPt, HI calls on financial and technical partners to prioritize disability-inclusive education, at all different levels of intervention:

- **Policy level:** Enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to develop, review, and implement education policies and strategies that respond to the needs of girls and boys with disabilities. This includes a focus on ensuring national teacher training curriculums for pre-service teachers include a focus on inclusive education.
- **Family & community level:** Address harmful cultural beliefs leading to stigma and discrimination of children with disabilities, through awareness raising, advocacy, and communication campaigns.
- **Service level:** Improve teacher training and coaching on inclusive education, develop flexible curricula, and improve infrastructure to make schools inclusive for children with disabilities. At the same time, improve connected services like WASH facilities, transportation, health and rehabilitation, and protection.

7. Information here are summary of the findings of HI Palestine's Study on Gender Equality in Education in Palestine published in April 2021. However, some information were taken from other sources as part of an internal desk review process, including data collected from the current inclusive education project of HI in Palestine.

8. One of them is from UNICEF Palestine: [WASH: water, sanitation and hygiene | UNICEF State of Palestine](https://www.unicef.org/palestine/wash-water-sanitation-and-hygiene).