



# Disability-Inclusive Education in Jordan

**‘My son is 10 years old and he has never been to school. But he is eager to learn. I hope someday he can go to school and learn how to read and write...’**

–Jordanian mother of a child with cerebral palsy in Zarqa Governorate, Jordan

## 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<sup>1</sup>. The Ministry of Education in Jordan<sup>2</sup> defines inclusive education for children with disabilities as the process of ensuring their right to access, attend, participate, and succeed in their mainstream local schools, by removing barriers to learning and participation.

## Situation in Jordan

### How many children with disabilities live in Jordan?

The Department of Statistics highlights that in 2019, there are around 2.4 million children aged 5-14 in Jordan<sup>3</sup>. According to the 2015 General Population and Housing Census<sup>4</sup>, 11% (around 264,000) of the total population in Jordan aged 5 and above have disabilities.

### How many of children with disabilities have access to education?

Statistics from the Ministry of Education<sup>5</sup> and Ministry of Social Development combined show that for the academic year 2018/2019, only 1.9% (27,694) of the total 1.4 million children enrolled in primary education are children with disabilities. The Department of Statistics (2019) confirms that 79% of persons with disabilities of school age are excluded from any form of education.

More in general, according to UNICEF (2020)<sup>6</sup>, there are 112,016 children aged 6-to-15 who are out of school in Jordan. Rates are higher for children of non-Jordanian nationalities: 50,600 Syrian children are out of school (as compared to 39,800 Jordanians and 21,500 for other nationalities). However, this report does not include disaggregated data on out-of-school children with disabilities.

The situation of Syrian refugees requires specific attention: within this group, a significant percentage (22.9%) of children aged 2 years and above have disabilities. Furthermore, Syrian refugee children with disabilities of primary school age in Jordan are less likely to attend school than their peers without disabilities, and then children with disabilities of other nationalities. Boys with disabilities are more likely to never enrol in school and less likely to attend education regularly. Whilst further research is needed to understand all causal factors, greater exposure to bullying, parental expectations for boys to be at work and earning, and stronger negative stigma towards boys with disabilities are important factors causing school drop outs.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 1. 4-year-old child enrolled in early learning under the Preschool Inclusive Education project in Zarqa governorate, Jordan, March 2022©HI/ Saif Khlaifat.

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

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education & Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2020). 10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education. [the\\_10-year\\_strategy\\_for\\_inclusive\\_education.pdf \(moe.gov.jo\)](https://moe.gov.jo/the_10-year_strategy_for_inclusive_education.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Calculations are based on this interactive database of the Department of Statistics: [PxWeb - Select table \(dos.gov.jo\)](https://dos.gov.jo/PxWeb-Select-table). Of the 2.4 million, around 1.3 million are aged 5-9, while around 1.1 million are aged 10-14.

<sup>4</sup> This rate covers individuals who suffer from any degree of functional difficulties (simple to the absolute, inability to perform). More information here: [Main\\_Result.pdf \(dos.gov.jo\)](https://dos.gov.jo/Main_Result.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education (2018). Education Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022. [ESP\\_English.pdf \(unesco.org\)](https://unesco.org/ESP_English.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF & Ministry of Education (2020). Jordan Country Report on Out-Of-School Children. Retrieved from: [Jordan\\_Country\\_Report\\_on\\_Out-of-School\\_Children | UNICEF Jordan](https://unesco.org/Jordan_Country_Report_on_Out-of-School_Children_UNICEF_Jordan).

<sup>7</sup> HI and iMMAP (2018). Removing Barriers: The Path towards Inclusive Access: Disability Assessment among Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. Jordan Report. July 2018. [Available at Humanitarian Data Exchange website with dataset](https://data.humdata.org/).

## Disability-inclusive education policies in Jordan

As a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Jordan 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 2017, Articles 17 & 18:**
  - Stresses the responsibility of the government to provide educational opportunities for persons with disabilities with reasonable accommodations.
- **10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education of 2020:**
  - Envisions that by 2031, the percentage of school-aged children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools reaches 10% of the total number of school-aged children with disabilities, while providing them with all the requirements for inclusive education.
- **2018-2022 Education Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education:**
  - Advocates to increase access to education for all children with disabilities including refugees.

**'I brought my child to a school one time to register him but the principal rejected her because of her disability.'**

–Syrian father of a child with disabilities in Mafraq Governorate, Jordan

### Which barriers restrict children with disabilities' access and stay in education?<sup>8</sup>

**There is limited data and evidence** on the situation of children with disabilities in accessing inclusive education, and on how gender and disability intersect. Data on out-of-school children with disabilities are scarce. As a result, although progress has been made towards inclusion, children with disabilities often remain invisible in the national education system.

**Prevailing negative attitudes** of families and communities towards disability result in poor recognition of the importance of education of children with disabilities. This is exacerbated by households' poverty, in particular amongst Syrian refugees. Stigma and discrimination perpetuate violence and bullying against children with disabilities, as well as segregation of children with disabilities in the education system, where they are educated in separated settings, with low expectations and limited resources.

**The education system lacks capacity** to welcome and support children with disabilities in mainstream education: lack of teachers' preparation on inclusive education strategies, inaccessible and rigid curricula, and inaccessible physical and virtual learning environments are crucial barriers.

Between March 2020 and August 2021, all schools across Jordan have been closed several times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This continues to affect around 2.37 million students<sup>9</sup>. While early levels of

education reopened in January 2021, they had to be closed again a few weeks later to mitigate the increasing number of COVID-19 infections in the country. As of April 2022, schools have reopened but had to close again with an extended winter break and remote learning modalities continue to be in place to ensure continuity of learning. Analysis from the partners of the Education Sector Working Group in Jordan stresses the significant challenge of learning loss and the expected spike in drop-out rates, especially amongst the marginalized learners, when schools will fully reopen.

## Recommendations

Building on the 10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education of the Ministry of Education in Jordan, HI calls on international cooperation donors, relevant governmental branches and other educational stakeholders in Jordan to prioritize disability-inclusive education, at all levels of interventions:

### At the policy level:

- By supporting the Ministry of Education in fulfilling its commitment to disability-inclusive education, and investing human and financial resources to implement action plans in alignment with strategies. This includes a focus on inclusive education at all stages, from early childhood development through to secondary level.

### At the family level:

- By strengthening parental and family support, by raising awareness of parents and family members on the importance of education of children with disabilities, and by providing opportunities for households' economic independence.

<sup>8</sup> Information here are summary of the findings of HI Jordan's internal desk review on barriers of children with disabilities to access inclusive education.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR/UNICEF/WFP Multi-Sectoral Rapid Needs Assessment on COVID19.

### At the community level:

- By enhancing understanding and capacities of local communities to promote disability-inclusive education through communication campaigns, advocacy, and awareness raising activities.

### At the service level:

- By increasing capacities of mainstream schools to welcome and adequately support children with disabilities, through better prepared teachers and staff, adapted curricula and learning tools, as well as through collaboration with interconnected services (including early childhood development, WASH, health and rehabilitation, transport, and protection).



Figure 2. 4-year-old child interacting with her classmates after enrolling in early learning under the Preschool Inclusive Education project in Zarqa governorate, Jordan, March 2022©HI/ Saif Khlaifat.