

Securing Inclusive Education Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

Cost-Effective Steps for Addressing Gaps Between Legislation and Implementation





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jordan has committed itself to protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and ensuring that they have the opportunity to access *inclusive* public education. In 2007, Jordan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, passed corresponding national legislation, and launched the National Disability Strategy.

Although the eight-year lifespan of the National Disability Strategy comes to an end in 2015, it has not yet achieved its goals; it has not translated Jordan's legislative commitments to persons with disabilities into a reality on the ground. As a result of the gap between legislation and implementation, students with disabilities are legally entitled to enroll in general public schools, but most public schools remain unprepared to meet the needs of these students.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCD) have indicated that the inability of most public schools to address the needs of students with disabilities stems from both insufficient budgetary allocations as well as the demographic strains put upon the education system by the influx of refugees.

Even though these concerns are very real, and the success of inclusive education is heavily reliant upon greater financial commitment from the government, important first steps can be made toward realizing inclusive education that do not require significantly increasing the current budget allocations to either the MoE or the HCD.

After reviewing the limitations of previous attempts to realize inclusive education over the past eight years, this paper provides recommendations for the MoE, the HCD and CSOs to take a first – and cost-effective – step toward inclusive education. The recommendations focus on:

Increasing Awareness:

- In cooperation with the MoE and the HCD, CSOs need to launch awareness campaigns regarding 1) disabilities, 2) the rights of persons with disabilities, 3) and the benefits of inclusive education.
- Society-wide awareness efforts need to be accompanied by more concentrated initiatives in schools, which should focus on normalizing disabilities, so that youth begin to understand disability as difference rather than abnormality.

Teacher Training:

- Increasing the capacity of teachers to deal with students with disabilities can be achieved in a cost-effective manner by distributing training videos to schools that focus on 1) teaching inclusive education pedagogies, 2) instructing students with different kinds of disabilities, and 3) highlighting effective adaptations to accommodate disabilities.

Assisting Teachers:

- Simple mechanisms can be set up to compensate for the insufficient numbers and capacities of teachers, such as a buddy system or a sponsorship program.

Accessibility Analysis:

- A limited number of accessible schools already exist and should be better utilized, but data regarding them is insufficient. Information about the current accessibility of schools needs to be collated and made available to the public.

Cooperation:

- The respective responsibilities of the HCD and the MoE need to be clarified, as insufficient coordination between the two is impeding their collective effectiveness.
- The MoE and the HCD need to better coordinate with CSOs focused on persons with disabilities to both benefit from on the ground expertise of the CSOs and ensure policies are better informed by the views of persons with disabilities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

In 2007 Jordan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In the same year that Jordan signed the CRPD (and in accordance with the Convention's requirement that it be translated into national legislation), Jordan also passed the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and launched its National Disability Strategy. Through these three documents, Jordan committed itself to holistically improving the situation of persons with disabilities and ensuring that they are able to enjoy and benefit from their rights.

As part of this overall goal, Jordan identified as a key objective the realization of inclusive education: an educational philosophy and practice that is predicated upon the precepts of social justice and promotes equal education opportunities for all students irrespective of the presence of disability. Inclusive education demands not only that students with disabilities benefit from their rights to education, but that they can also do so in an integrated environment where all students learn together.

After eight years of focus on the rights of persons with disabilities, the National Disability Strategy comes to an end in 2015. In taking stock of what has materialized on the ground, it is clear that even though significant progress has been accomplished for persons with disabilities' rights since the launch of the Strategy, little movement has been made toward the realization of inclusive education. Key legislation is in place, but most students with disabilities continue to rely on segregated day schools, residential schools, or special classes and resource rooms located within regular public schools. Dependent on these isolated atmospheres, persons with disabilities are effectively denied the ability to benefit from their rights to inclusive education.

Appreciating both the important legislative advancements that have thus far been achieved toward inclusive education as well as the dearth of available inclusive education opportunities, this paper examines the underlying reasons for the large disparities between policy and implementation and provides recommendations for helping to address them.

1.2 Methodology

Research for this paper was conducted over a two-month period at the start of 2015. It began with a period of desk research during which the research team reviewed 1) academic literature regarding inclusive education and education in Jordan, 2) reports from Jordanian CSOs and the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR), 3) reports produced by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and the United Nations (UN), 4)



Focus group at I Am a Human Society

Jordan's laws and regulations pertaining to education reform and the rights of persons with disabilities, 5) national strategies and policies related to the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and the Higher Council for Affairs of persons with Disabilities (HCD), and 6) international agreements and conventions regarding education rights and the rights of persons with disabilities.

From the findings of the preliminary desk research, the research team formulated plans for direct interviews and focus groups. In its interviews, the team spoke with different stakeholders including 1) key figures in the MoE and HCD, 2) directors of CSOs and political parties that work with and for persons with disabilities, 3) public school principals,



classroom teachers, and special education teachers, 4) and representatives of private educational institutions that cater to persons with disabilities. At the same time as the direct interviews were conducted, Identity Center convened three focus groups. The groups were held in Maan, Madaba, and Amman. The Maan and Madaba groups were held with teachers and students, and the focus group in Amman was facilitated by the CSO I am a Human Society for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and was attended by persons with disabilities.

Following its interviews and focus groups, Identity Center conducted a telephone survey through which it contacted a representative sample of 500 Jordanians. The phone survey was used to access a wider cross-section of Jordanian popular opinion, so that Identity Center could better understand Jordanian views regarding persons with disabilities and gauge their reaction to the paper's provisional recommendations.

Persons with disabilities who participated in the research for this paper emphasized that they have been excluded from conversations regarding their rights. In an effort to help compensate for their exclusion and begin to involve them in the conversation, this paper highlights the crucial input of persons with disabilities who participated in its research. To ensure that persons with disabilities are included in society and that their dignity and rights are protected, their voices must be heard.¹



Focus group in Madaba

1.3 Key Statistics

1.3.1 The Number of Primary Education Institutions in Jordan

Primary education in Jordan spans from grades one to ten. Education in these grades is compulsory for all Jordanians and free in public institutions. According to the DoS, there were 3,303 primary education institutions in Jordan during the 2012-2013 school year, of which 2,300 were public, 828 were private, 172 were administered by UNRWA, and 3 were under the supervision of other government institutions.²

1.3.2 The Number of Persons with Disabilities in Jordan

In the last Jordanian census, which was conducted in 2004, the government's Department of Statistics (DoS) calculated that there were 62,986 persons with disabilities in Jordan (of a total population of 5,103,639).³ As such, the census indicates that persons with disabilities accounted for only 1.23 percent of Jordan's population in 2004.

The HCD, according to its Planning and Research Director, Hussein Abu Farash, recently conducted field tests in Amman and Zarqa in cooperation with the DoS. The tests showed that persons with disabilities in those areas account for 13.12 percent of the population (a number that reflects the nationwide calculations of numerous international organizations), but Abu Farash stressed that only estimates of the total percentage in Jordan are possible at this point.⁴

¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice, Revised Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 205-206.

² Jordan Department of Statistics, "Jordan Statistical Yearbook, 2013," 151. http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_a/main/yearbook_2013.pdf

³ Jordan Department of Statistics, "Population and Housing Census, 2004." http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/

⁴ Identity Center, Interview with Hussein M. Abu Farash, Planning and Research Director of the Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, February 2, 2015.



However, the methods (derived from the methodology of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics) employed during the field tests, Abu Farash noted, will be employed by the DoS to determine the number of persons with disabilities in Jordan when it conducts surveys for its 2015 Census this November. Consequently, he believes that the numbers included in the new census, which will be released in 2016, will more closely reflect the numbers produced by the HCD.

1.3.3 The Enrollment Rate of Persons with Disabilities: Data Deficiencies

The National Disability Strategy, which was produced in 2007, states that 57 percent of Jordanian children with disabilities (5-14 years old) were enrolled in basic education at that time. The Strategy then set a benchmark target of 65 percent for 2009 and a final target of 80 percent for 2015. On the surface the baseline rate of inclusion seems very impressive and the Strategy's goals seem realistic and attainable.

In creating its baseline and targets, however, the Strategy relied upon the population statistics produced by the 2004 Census, which indicated that persons with disabilities only accounted for 1.23 percent of the Kingdom's population. Given that the HCD and INGOs now estimate that persons with disabilities account for at least 13 percent of Jordan's population, and accounting for population growth over the last decade, the number of children with disabilities enrolled in school at the launch of the Disability Strategy was likely less than 10 percent.

Neither the MoE nor the HCD (nor even the DoS) has up to date statistics regarding the number of students with disabilities currently enrolled in primary education. However, when the DoS carries out its new census later this year and incorporates the HCD's survey methodologies, it is likely to reveal a rate of enrollment that is substantially below the frequently quoted 97 or 98 percent.⁵

1.4 Diverging Definitions of Disabilities

1.4.1 Definitional Impact on Statistics

Along with diverging data collection methodologies and the continued unwillingness of many Jordanians to disclose the existence of disabilities because of social stigma, a lack of definitional consensus regarding what exactly constitutes disability has complicated statistics regarding persons with disabilities.⁶ National surveys and censuses have omitted references to some types of disability, such as learning disabilities (LDs) and behavioural disorders, and focused primarily on physical disabilities.⁷

1.4.2 Redefining Disability

In Jordan, the **Law on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (No. 31 of 2007)** defines a person with disabilities as "[a]ny person suffering from a permanent, partial or total impairment affecting any of his/her senses, or his/her physical, psychological or mental capabilities, to an extent that undermines his/her ability to learn, work or be rehabilitated, and in any way which renders him/her unable to meet his/her normal day-to-day requirements under circumstances similar to those of non disabled persons."⁸

According to this law's definition, disability describes an individual's personal limitations

⁵ According to UN Statistics, Jordan's primary NER was 97.1% for both sexes in 2012. See UN Statistics Division, "Millennium Development Goals Indicators, 2.1 Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education, Jordan [Last Updated July 7, 2014]." <<http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx>> Also see UNDP, "Jordan Poverty Reduction Strategy: Final Report," January 28, 2013.

⁶ Ali Alodat et al., "Inclusive Education within the Jordanian Legal Framework: Overview of Reality and Suggestions for Future," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* Vol. 4, No. 5 (2014): 220-226.

⁷ See Muna Hadidi, "Educational Programs for Children with Special Needs in Jordan," *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities* Vol. 23, No. 2 (1998): 147-154.

⁸ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *Law No. 31 for the Year 2007, Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Article (2) (1).



that result from his or her own physical or mental abilities. Understandings of disability, however, have begun to change recently, encouraging us to understand disability as a relationship between a person and his or her environment. This more nuanced definition of disability is manifest in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**. The Convention asserts that persons with disabilities “include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”⁹ The Convention also asks us to recognize that “disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers.”¹⁰

Reflecting the CRPD’s understanding of disability, **Jordan’s National Disability Strategy** defines disability as the “reduction in the ability to carry out daily activities, or the exercise of a right or a fundamental freedom on an equal basis with others, due to overlapping environmental, social or behavioral barriers in addition to visible physical impairment or invisible physical, emotional or intellectual impairment.”¹¹

While this paper employs the term “persons with disabilities,” it does so recognizing the inherent problems of this terminology. The paper uses the term because of its currently standard use, but it is important that vocabulary surrounding disability begins to change. With growing recognition of disability as a relationship between a person and his or her surroundings, more positive and accurate terms, such as “persons with complex needs” or “differently abled” need to replace our current lexicon.

2. LEGAL OVERVIEW

2.1 Jordan’s International Education Commitments to Persons with Disabilities

2.1.1 *Convention Against Discrimination in Education, 1960*¹²

- *Jordan ratified the Convention Against Discrimination in Education in 1976.*
- In laying out which forms of discrimination in education are forbidden, Article (1) of the Convention states, “[f]or the purposes of this Convention, the term ‘discrimination’ includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which” [...] “has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education and in particular:
 - (a) Of depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level;
 - (b) Of limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard;
 - (c) Subject to the provisions of Article 2 of this Convention, of establishing or maintaining separate educational systems or institutions for persons or groups of persons;¹³ or
 - (d) Of inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are in-compatible with the dignity of man.”

⁹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 24 January 2007, Article (1). <<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>>

¹⁰ *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Preamble Paragraph (e). See also World Health Organization, “Disabilities.” <<http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>>

¹¹ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *National Disability Strategy*, Amman, February 6, 2007. <<http://www.mindbank.info/item/551>>

¹² UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), *Convention Against Discrimination in Education*, 14 December 1960. <http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12949&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>

¹³ In relation to Article 1 (c), however, it should be noted that Article 2 (c) states, “[t]he establishment or maintenance of private educational institutions, if the object of the institutions is not to secure the exclusion of any group but to provide educational facilities in addition to those provided by the public authorities, if the institutions are conducted in accordance with that object, and if the education provided conforms with such standards as may be laid down or approved by the competent authorities, in particular for education of the same level.”

2.1.2 *Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989*¹⁴

- Jordan ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1990.
- Unlike preceding documents, the Convention *explicitly* states that disability is a distinction upon which discrimination is prohibited.
- Regarding the rights of persons with disabilities, the Convention states, “a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.”
- As such, it stipulates that state parties should, subject to available resources, provide “special care” for children with disabilities, and that this assistance “shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible.”
- In regard to the educational rights of persons with disabilities to primary education, the Convention obliges state parties to “recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.”

2.1.3 *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2006*¹⁵

- Jordan ratified the CRPD in 2007.
- The CRPD is the most significant international agreement regarding the rights of persons with disabilities, and serves as the basis for Jordan's National Disability Strategy.
- It is a very comprehensive human rights instrument, as it explicitly outlines a framework to ensure its obligations are implemented and take root.¹⁶
- It discusses a wide range of issues including education, employment, health, and social protection, discussing each issue in terms of availability, accessibility, adaptability and acceptability.
- In confirming persons with disabilities' right to inclusive education, the Convention asserts, “States Parties shall ensure:
 - i. Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
 - ii. Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
 - iii. Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
 - iv. Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;
 - v. Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.”

2.2 Jordan's National Education Policies for Persons with Disabilities

2.2.1 *The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 1952*¹⁷

- In 2011 the Constitution was amended, and two clauses regarding disabilities were inserted:
 - I. Article (6) Paragraph (5): “The law shall protect motherhood, childhood and the old-aged; and shall avail care for the youngsters and those with disabilities and protect

¹⁴ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Child*, November 20, 1989. <<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>>

¹⁵ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 24 January 2007, Article (1). <<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>>

¹⁶ Janet E. Lord and Michael Ashley Stein, “The Domestic Incorporation of Human Rights Law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,” Faculty Publications, Paper 665, 2008. <<http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/665>>

¹⁷ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *Constitution of Jordan with All the Amendments Thereto*, Publications of The House of Representatives, 2011. <http://www.representatives.jo/pdf/constitution_en.pdf>

them against abuse and exploitation.”

- II. Article (23) Paragraph (2, d): “[Labour legislation shall specify] special compensation to workers supporting families and in the cases of dismissal, illness, disability and emergencies arising out of work.”
- While neither of the above articles exhibits a rights-based approach or explicitly discusses education, Article (6) Paragraph (1) states, “Jordanians shall be equal before the law with no discrimination between them in rights and duties.” And Paragraph (3) of the same Article says, “the State shall ensure work and education within the limits of its possibilities, and shall ensure tranquility and equal opportunities to all Jordanians.”

2.2.2 Education Act No. 3, 1994¹⁸

- The main law addressing education in the Hashemite Kingdom is Act No. 3 of 1994. The act regulates education and explains Jordan’s educational philosophy, objectives, and policies, as well as the functions of the MoE. It also outlines regulations for school textbooks, curricula, and exams.
- The law does not explicitly mention the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive education.
- Disability is only mentioned in two of the act’s articles:
 - I. Article (5) Paragraph (f) states that educational institutions should provide programs for special education, advanced students, and students with special needs.
 - II. Article (41) Paragraph (a) indicates that the MoE should develop, within the limits of its capacities, programs for special education.

2.2.3 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (No. 31), 2007¹⁹

- In 2006, a special committee headed by Prince Raad Bin Zeid was tasked with reviewing the Disabled Persons Law of 1993 and ensuring that it reflected the provisions of the CRPD.²⁰ Law No. 31 consequently replaced the 1993 law.²¹
- Reflecting the CRPD’s definition of disability as a person’s relationship with society and the environment, the law stresses the need to adapt environments to the needs of persons with disabilities.
- In regard to inclusive primary education, the law requires the following of “parties concerned.”
 - I. Providing persons with disabilities with general education opportunities in accordance with their disability category through integration.
 - II. Adopting inclusive education programs between students with disabilities and their non-disabled counterparts and implementing these programs within the framework of educational institutions.
 - III. Making available reasonable accommodations that assist persons with disabilities to learn, communicate, receive training and enjoy mobility. Such tools should include braille methods, sign language for the deaf and other necessary equipment and tools.
 - IV. Carrying out educational diagnosis within the overall comprehensive diagnosis team to determine the nature of disability, its degree and requirements.
 - V. Creating qualified technical cadres for dealing with students with disabilities.
 - VI. Carrying out guidance, awareness and orientation programs for students with disabilities and their families.
 - VII. Providing modern techniques for educating students with disabilities in the public and private sectors, including teaching mathematics and computer skills.

¹⁸ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *Education Act No. 3 of 1994*.

¹⁹ <http://www.moe.gov.jo/Departments/DepartmentsMenuDetails.aspx?MenuID=324&DepartmentID=5>

²⁰ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

²¹ United Nations Economic and Social Council for Western Asia (ESCWA), “Mapping Inequity: Persons with Physical Disabilities in Jordan,” 2009.

http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/div_editor/Download.asp?table_name=divisions_other&field_name=ID&FileID=1194

²¹ In 1989, the Provisional Law for the Welfare of Disabled People (No. 34) was passed. In 1993 the provisional bill was passed, and the Welfare of Disabled Persons Law No. 12 (1993) was born.

- VIII. Making available methods of communication for persons with disabilities, including sign translators.

2.2.4 National Disability Strategy, 2007-2015²²

- In response to a 2006 Royal Decree by King Abdullah II, a special committee designed the National Disability Strategy, which was subsequently approved by King Abdullah II in 2007. The Strategy, which is implemented in two phases (2007-2010 and 2010-2015), is more comprehensive than the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Its key goals are the achievement of greater respect for the rights of persons with disabilities and the fostering of their integration in social, economic, and public life.
- To accomplish these goals, the Strategy identifies five key pillars of work, one of which is ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to inclusive education. To this end, it has outlined five key objectives:
 - I. Developing educational legislation reflecting the CRPD to ensure that students with disabilities have access to inclusive education in public schools.
 - II. Ensuring the existence of accessible school buildings that house appropriate educational programs to accommodate children with different types of disabilities from different regions of the Kingdom.
 - III. Revising school curricula to meet the needs of students with disabilities in accordance with their abilities and potentials through all levels of education.
 - IV. Fostering the institutional capacity of the Ministry so that it can enhance the training of all personnel and enable them to deal with students with all types of disabilities.
 - V. Restructuring the Special Education Directorate into the Special Education and Guidance Department and appointing staff specialized in all types of disabilities.

2.2.5 Education Reform for Knowledge Economy II (ERfKE II), 2009-2015²³

- ERfKE II, which began following the completion of ERfKE I (2003-2009), consists of five components designed to provide students who are enrolled in pre-tertiary education institutions with the requisite skills to participate in a knowledge economy.
- The fourth component of the program deals with Special Focus Program Development, of which special education constitutes sub-component 4.3. The goal of sub-component 4.3 is “to expand access to quality education programs and services relevant to students with special needs.”
- This subcomponent consists of 5 areas of intervention:
 - I. Review and update policies, regulations, procedures and practices.
 - II. Institutional development of central and field directorates.
 - III. Development and provision of quality learning programs, services and resources.
 - IV. Teacher training and awareness raising.
 - V. Updating and supplying of facilities and equipment.

3. IN SCHOOL, BUT NOT EDUCATED


3.1 The Implementation of Inclusive Education in Jordan

Despite Jordan’s legislative commitments to developing inclusive education, the idea remains at a nascent stage in the Kingdom.²⁴ Most students with disabilities continue to be taught in isolated settings in either segregated day schools, residential schools, special vocational schools, or in resource rooms and special classes in regular public

²² Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *National Disability Strategy*.

²³ World Bank, “Education Reform for Knowledge Economy II: Project Information Document (PID) Appraisal Stage, Report No.: AB4460, May 19, 2009. <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/2009/01/30/000104615_20090203101235/Rendered/PDF/JO010ERfKE0II01aisaI0Stage010Jan.28.pdf>

²⁴ Hamza Mahmoud Al Shoura and Aznan Che Ahmad, “Moving to Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Jordan: Rhetoric, Practice and Prospects,” *Global Journal of Advanced Research*, Vol. 2, No 1 (2015): 268.



schools.²⁵ A handful of private schools in the Kingdom, such as the International Community School (ICS), provide inclusive education opportunities to students with disabilities, but the cost of these elite institutions renders them inaccessible to most Jordanians.²⁶ For the majority of young persons with disabilities in Jordan, the only options are general public schools and special schools funded by the government – the latter of which do not provide inclusive education.

The quality of special schools spans a wide spectrum,²⁷ and their limited capacities and geographical locations prevent some students – particularly those from rural areas of the Kingdom – from accessing them. Yet, despite these concerns, as well as the inability of special schools to provide inclusive education, these segregated institutions continue to represent the main strategy of the MoE for addressing the needs of students with disabilities. In an interview with Identity Center, Abir Shahatit, the Head of the Learning Disabilities Section in the Special Education Department of the MoE, stressed that inclusive education was a good idea, but admitted that it was more of an MoE policy focus for the future than for the present.²⁸

3.2 Inclusion in Schools Is Not Inclusive Education

Students who are unable to attend a special school or choose instead to enroll in a general public school are typically admitted into these institutions because of public schools' legal requirement to be inclusive. Once *included* in the school, however, students with disabilities are not provided with *inclusive* education. In interviews and focus groups with students with disabilities and public school teachers, participants stressed that even though many persons with disabilities are enrolled in general public schools, they can often do little more than sit in class, able neither to follow the teacher nor access the requisite additional instruction or materials that would enable them to understand the lessons.

Although students with disabilities in these situations technically enjoy the legal right to inclusive education (and continue to contribute to the impressive education statistics for which Jordan has been applauded), they are certainly not able to equally benefit from their educational rights or freedoms.²⁹

This unfortunate dynamic is widely recognized in Jordan. In a phone survey conducted for this paper with a representative sample of 500 Jordanians, only 15 percent of the participants indicated that they believed public education sufficiently meets the needs of students with disabilities.³⁰

Importance of Accessible Bathrooms

One recently graduated student from the Greater Amman Municipality told Identity Center that the only school that he could afford to go to contained no bathroom that he could access in his wheelchair. As such, the student had to return home every time he needed to use the bathroom.

²⁵ The MoE is responsible for the majority of education provision within its 3,694 public schools, but the MSD aids in the care to persons with mental disabilities. Of the 272 public and private institutions for special education available in Jordan, 27 are operated by the MSD. Of these 27 institutions, 17 are attended daily, 5 are day and night (institutional), and 5 are vocational. Out of remaining 245, 179 are Charitable NGOs, and 66 are private institutions that charge.

²⁶ Although the number of private institutions that provide inclusive education is limited, even fewer offer modified programs, rather than mere adaptation, to better allow the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

²⁷ Comments regarding the quality of instruction in special schools were very mixed. Some of the participants in our interviews and focus groups were satisfied with the quality of instruction they received in special schools, others noted that some teachers in their schools for blind and deaf students did not respectively know Braille or sign language.

²⁸ Identity Center, Interview with Abir Shahatit, Head of the Learning Disabilities Section in the Special Education Department of the Ministry of Education, February 24, 2015.

²⁹ For an explanation of the difference between possessing and enjoying rights, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, "All Justice is Social But It's Not All Social Justice," *Philosophia* Vol. 41 (2013): 384.

³⁰ When survey participants were asked, "Do you think that persons with disabilities are sufficiently catered to within the education system?" 60.26 percent answered in the negative, 15.38 answered in the positive, and 24.36 indicated that they were unsure.

3.3 Gaps Between Legislation and Implementation

3.3.1 School Buildings

When the National Disability Strategy was launched in 2007, it outlined several key “difficulties and challenges” that would be encountered in its efforts to guarantee inclusive education opportunities for persons with disabilities.³¹ The first challenge it listed was the inadequate accessibility of schools, particularly ones housed in rented buildings.³² In interviews with Identity Center, both the MoE and the HCD emphasized that improving the physical condition of public schools is a key pillar of their work and one of the first – and most important – steps toward enabling persons with disabilities to access inclusive education.

Despite the recognition of the centrality of improving building accessibility, teachers, students, and persons with disabilities that participated in Identity Center’s interviews and focus groups stressed that little tangible change in the accessibility of schools over the past eight years can be identified. When asked to provide examples of accessible schools, students with disabilities and CSOs focused on persons with disabilities could scarcely identify even one public school that was fully accessible. While these responses do not necessarily indicate a lack of infrastructural improvement, they highlight the limited impact that any improvements have had on their target audiences as well as the extreme lack of information regarding any improved accessibility to schools.³³

There is currently an absence of available data regarding both the number of accessible public schools as well as *which* schools are accessible. Neither the HCD nor the MoE have made information regarding the accessibility of schools publically available.³⁴

Not only is this information unavailable to the public, but it appears that the progress of school accessibility is not being monitored internally. Given that the HCD is responsible for monitoring the National Disability Strategy in general and that the MoE is tasked with implementing the Strategy vis-à-vis primary education, it would be expected that one of the entities is tracking long-term statistics regarding infrastructure improvement. Yet, when Identity Center asked the HCD how many accessible public schools were in the Kingdom, the HCD noted that the MoE probably collects these statistics. When the MoE was subsequently asked for the same data, they told us to consult with the HCD.

The Centrality of Heating

One university student in Amman noted that, while the lack of heating in his public schools was a problem that affected all students, it had a particularly negative impact on him when he was in school. Unable to use his legs, he stressed that when the classroom was cold he was unable to move around like the others to get warm. As a result, he would remain so cold that he could not concentrate on the lesson.

Appreciating the importance of heating, in 2015 His Majesty King Abdullah II directed the government to install central heating in all schools in the Kingdom.

Despite the unavailability of statistics, the HCD and MoE as well as other national and international stakeholders have renovated and built scores of schools since the launch of

³¹ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *National Disability Strategy*, Chapter 3.

³² In an Interview with the Identity Center on February 24, 2015, the Department of Planning at the Ministry of Education stated that in the 2013-2014 school year the MoE still relied on 893 rented buildings

³³ A simultaneous lack of perceived progress in the general education system was highlighted in our phone surveys. Despite the government’s decade long focus on increasing the quality of public education, when participants were asked, “Do you think the quality of public primary and secondary education has substantially improved in the last decade in Jordan?” 69.74 percent responded in the negative, 25 percent responded in the positive, and 5.26 percent indicated that they were unsure.

³⁴ It was noted that one employee had drawn up a map of all accessible schools in the Kingdom and presented it to the MoE, but that they were not interested in using it.



the National Disability Strategy. Nevertheless, according to students with disabilities and CSOs that work with individual cases of disability, buildings that are renovated – and even the completely new schools – are not always made fully accessible. Instead, many of the included accessibility features seem to be more cosmetic than practical.

Public school students with disabilities whom Identity Center interviewed affirmed that often when school buildings are renovated, only surface changes are made. They noted that despite the fact that their schools have, for instance, had wheelchair ramps installed in the last eight years, they are frequently located so close to parking spaces that the ramps are rendered useless. Likewise, even if their schools have received accessible bathrooms, the bathrooms are often unmaintained – or even used as the schools' storage spaces.

3.3.2 Teachers

Alongside the poor physical accessibility of public schools, the National Disability Strategy also directed attention toward several instructional inadequacies: 1) “[i]nadequacy of educational programs in dealing with students with intellectual and learning disabilities,” 2) “[i]nadequacy of university graduates holding Bachelors’ degrees in dealing with persons with disabilities particularly in area of sign language and Braille instruction,” and 3) the “[s]hortage and brain drain of personnel qualified in the area of disability.”³⁵

Reflecting these concerns, the HCD identified instructional shortcomings as a policy priority and subsequently signed memoranda of understanding and agreements with other ministries and organizations to implement training programs. Yet, despite the fact that the Strategy comes to an end this year, only a few of these programs have thus far been implemented and they have reached only a very limited audience.

In an interview with the Identity Center, the Head of the Learning Disabilities Section of the MoE stated that training for inclusive education is still in the embryonic stages.³⁶ While noting that some training has been implemented both in cooperation with the HCD and other organizations (although the number of teachers trained – like buildings renovated – are not available), Shahitat stressed that her department planned to significantly expand training in the future. She further indicated that her section had recently asked the Training Department to design materials for inclusive education, but the response she received was that they were not yet ready.


In interviews and focus groups with public school principals and teachers, the interviewees emphasized that teachers have thus far received insufficient training to accommodate persons with disabilities. Not required to take an education degree to teach, most teachers only undergo a short training period following the completion of their bachelors’ degrees before standing in front of a classroom. Within this short training period, very limited – if any – time is devoted to building teachers’ capacities to teach students with disabilities or manage inclusive education environments.³⁷ Lacking any focus on students with disabilities in their training, most teachers who participated in our research affirmed that they felt unprepared to teach in inclusive settings.³⁸

³⁵ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *National Disability Strategy*, Chapter 3.

³⁶ Identity Center, Interview with Abir Shahatit.

³⁷ Muna Amr, “Teacher Education for Inclusive Education in the Arab world: The Case of Jordan,” *Prospects* Vol. 41, No. 3 (2011) 399-413; Kristen Roggemann and Manar Shukri, “Active-Learning Pedagogies as a Reform Initiative: The case of Jordan,” Washington, DC: American Institute of Research, January 22, 2010 <<http://www.equip123.net/docs/E1-ActiveLearningPedagogy-Jordan.pdf>>; and Jamal al Khatib, “A Survey of General Education Teachers’ Knowledge of Learning Disabilities in Jordan,” *International Journal of Special Education* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2007): 72-76.

³⁸ A widespread belief that Jordanian teachers are inadequately trained was highlighted in the phone survey conducted for this paper. When participants were asked, “Do you think teachers in public schools receive sufficient training?” 80.77 percent answered in the negative, 12.82 percent answered in the positive, and 6.41 percent indicated that they were unsure.



After their pre-service training teachers receive only minimal on-the-job training.³⁹ Although some principals noted that this deficiency resulted from a general unwillingness amongst teachers to attend courses in the evening after a full day of teaching, several teachers complained that very few courses were offered to them. They asserted that when training was available, insufficient notice is usually given, which consequently prevents the teachers from being able to attend.

Having received insufficient training in special education, many teachers simply treat students with disabilities in their classes in the same manner as they treat other students, providing them with no special resources or assistance. Public school students (both with and without disabilities) who participated in our focus groups maintained that teachers and principals rarely make even simple – and inexpensive – modifications within schools to accommodate students with disabilities. For instance, one student with visual impairments reported that even though he must be close to the board in order to see what is written, teachers frequently overlook his needs and make little effort to ensure this arrangement. Likewise, several participants with disabilities that affect their mobility asserted that concessions are rarely made to ensure that they can easily access their classes. They stated that in schools where ramps or elevators are unavailable, the administration nevertheless regularly locates their classes on the first or second levels and usually refuses to move them to an accessible location on the ground floor to enable wheelchair access.

Despite the fact that the National Disability Strategy identified the “[i]nflexibility and lack of adaption of curricula to individual and collective needs of students with disabilities” as a key impediment to inclusive education, little seems to have since changed in the last eight years.⁴⁰

3.3.3 Resource Rooms

Representatives of the MoE and the HCD asserted that resource rooms in public schools function as a key means of ensuring that students with disabilities can access the requisite assistance that is unavailable in regular classrooms and, therefore, represent a key tool for the effective implementation of inclusive education. According to the MoE, there are approximately 860 resource rooms currently available in Jordan’s public schools.⁴¹ Given that Jordan has 3,694 public schools in operation during the 2014-2015 school year, roughly one quarter of public schools currently have resource rooms.⁴² This represents a significant numerical improvement from the start of the Strategy, but the quality of the resource rooms has not kept pace with quantitative improvements. Not only are the available staff and resources insufficient, but so too are the existing mechanisms of diagnosis and follow-up. As a result, rather than being used as a tool for inclusive education, the rooms are being used as spaces to send students whom classroom teachers cannot control.

Diagnosis

Jordan has faced significant criticism for its inadequate diagnosis methods in schools. Before the launch of the Strategy, diagnosis was left in the hands of classroom and resource room teachers or was determined by a medical examination.⁴³ Jordan’s diagnostic shortcomings were noted in the National Disability Strategy, which stated that


³⁹ See, eg., Hamza Mahmoud Al Shoura and Aznan Che Ahmad, “Review of Special Education Programs in Jordan: Current Practices, Challenges, and Prospects,” *Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation* Vol 15. Nos. 3-4 (2014): 24-42.

⁴⁰ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *National Disability Strategy*, Chapter 3.

⁴¹ Identity Center, Interview with Abir Shahatit.

⁴² Identity Center, Interview with Department of Planning of the Ministry of Education, February 24, 2015.

⁴³ Sameer Abu Shams and Alaa Nazzal, “Equal Opportunities for Education: The situation for Young Persons with Disabilities in Jordan,” *UNESCO and Handicap International*, 2013; ESCWA, “Mapping Inequity: Persons with Physical Disabilities in Jordan,” and Mayada Al-Natour et al., “Current Practices and Obstacles,” *International Journal of Special Education* Vol. 23, No. 2 (2008): 68-74.



there were “[d]efficiencies in the early detection system and diagnostic services.”⁴⁴ In working to improve the quality of diagnosis, the Head of the Learning Disabilities Section of the MoE emphasized that the process is much different now. She explained that when a student is referred to a resource room for special assistance, a letter is sent to the MoE and (with the approval of the student’s parents) he or she is subsequently sent for a medical and psychological evaluation. In some cases, she stated, the Ministry will make field visits to determine the needs of the student.⁴⁵

This procedure displays marked improvement from the previous reliance on teacher diagnoses, but classroom and resource room teachers said that the new process rarely occurs. They maintained that despite the MoE’s efforts to improve diagnosis, students are referred to resource rooms by teachers, and the resource room teachers subsequently assume the responsibility of diagnosis without overview or follow-up. Resource room teachers who participated in focus groups argued that they have insufficient knowledge to make such decisions, but that practical necessity mandates them the responsibility. They also complained that classroom teachers frequently refer students who are simply disruptive in class or performing poorly to resource rooms. This dynamic, they stated, results in resource rooms that are over crowded and mostly contain students who have no disabilities.

Follow-Up

The Head of the Learning Disabilities Section of the MoE explained that while the Ministry cannot visit all of the schools itself because of limited staff capacity, its local directories follow-up and monitor resource rooms in their respective regions of responsibility.⁴⁶ Through these follow-ups the individualized education programs, which resource room teachers are supposed to design for each student, are reviewed and approved.

Resource room teachers stated that because of the high number of students for whom they are responsible, they are frequently unable to create individualized education programs (IEPs).⁴⁷ Moreover, they noted that they are rarely visited by the MoE or its local directories and that IEPs are seldom asked for. The inability of the directories to perform this monitoring role is understandable given their very limited staffing and the large number of resource rooms for which each directory is responsible. Thus, although the number of available resource rooms has expanded since the start of the Strategy, their quality as well as their usefulness for aiding in the introduction of inclusive education remains limited.

Resource Room Teachers

Since 1980 there have been profound improvements in the field of special education training in the Kingdom. The University of Jordan began to offer a two-year special education diploma in 1980 and by the early 1990s offered MAs and PhDs in the same field.⁴⁸ Several institutions in Jordan now offer diplomas, BAs, MAs, and PhDs in special education.

Teachers trained in special education, however, primarily find employment in special schools, not general public schools. The MoE does not require resource room teachers to have special education degrees. Instead, resource rooms are primarily staffed by teachers with math and Arabic degrees who have received either a diploma or limited training in special needs education.⁴⁹ As a result of these practices, the shortage of

⁴⁴ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *National Disability Strategy*, Chapter 3.

⁴⁵ Identity Center, Interview with Abir Shahatit.

⁴⁶ Identity Center, Interview with Abir Shahatit.

⁴⁷ While each resource room is supposed to have at least two teachers, our research team noted that resource rooms are often only staffed with one teacher. This was a finding confirmed by both resource room teachers with whom we spoke, and Abir Shahatit lamented that it was sometimes the case.

⁴⁸ Al Shoura and Ahmad, “Review of Special Education Programs in Jordan,” 35.

⁴⁹ Identity Center, Interview with Abir Shahatit.



trained special education teachers that was identified as a key difficulty at the start of the National Disability Strategy continues to constitute an ongoing issue.

The MoE's focus on hiring Math and Arabic teachers instead of special education teachers indicates that the MoE has not prepared the rooms to cater to persons with disabilities; instead, the MoE has staffed resource rooms to assist students with minor learning disabilities and students who have simply fallen behind in their classes. Despite these foci, however, students with a wide array of disabilities are nonetheless sent to resource rooms. Because the teachers are not sufficiently trained to deal with them, students with disabilities frequently face a similar situation in resource rooms to what they experience in their regular classrooms.

Resource Rooms Without Resources

Students with disabilities, public school principals, and resource room teachers all noted that resource rooms are typically inadequately equipped to accommodate students with disabilities. The MoE noted that recent influxes of refugees and the consequent pressures put on the Ministry and its limited budget mean that there are insufficient resources for “normal” students – let alone students with disabilities.⁵⁰ Leaving aside the problematic nature of this prioritization, the limitations have encouraged classroom teachers to refer students to the inadequately staffed and supplied resource rooms. For many students with disabilities, therefore, resource rooms function more as daycares than spaces for education.

4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH

4.1 Looking Beyond Legislative Reform

Aware of the large disparity between what is stipulated in the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and what has actually been implemented since the launch of the National Disability Strategy, the HCD is now preparing to amend the law.⁵¹ The changes are designed to address the ambiguities and oversights contained in the law, and thereby ensure that it is clearer and easier to enforce.

These reforms are crucial, as the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is vague and leaves significant room for multiple interpretations. For instance, whereas the law ostensibly requires schools to ensure accessibility, it stipulates that these improvements are *only* required “wherever possible.”⁵² The myriad qualifying statements of this nature need to be removed so that 1) a clear obligation is required, 2) the authority responsible for implementing the requirement is explicitly stated, and 3) the penalty for failing to implement is clear and easy to enforce.

The HCD's reforms will hopefully tackle many of these acute problems in its upcoming reforms. However, even if all of the issues are addressed in the new amendments, the legislative changes by themselves will prove insufficient to ensure that persons with disabilities are equally able to benefit from their rights to inclusive education. As the previous section highlighted, many of the current shortcomings of inclusive education are not a result of the law, but how the recommended strategies are being interpreted and/or implemented.

4.2 Social Change Alongside Legislative Change

As is often the case with human rights work in diverse contexts, at both national and international levels, Jordan's efforts toward realizing inclusive education have focused

⁵⁰ Participants in the phone survey conducted for this paper also indicated a strong belief that insufficient resources were available in schools. Of the 500 people polled, 81 percent indicated that schools are not equipped with adequate learning materials.

⁵¹ Identity Center, Interview with Hussein M. Abu Farash.

⁵² Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Article (4)(e)



almost exclusively on legislative change. As a result of this narrow focus, attention has hitherto been diverted from other important avenues of work that are essential to the social transformation that is required to ensure that laws actually make a difference.

In tandem with the national legislative changes that are necessary to guarantee international human rights standards at a national level, significant work on social transformation is also essential. Mechanisms of socialization are often ignored in international law and human rights reform, and they have thus far received only marginal attention in Jordan, but they are no less effective and important than legal mechanisms.⁵³

Guaranteeing that persons with disabilities in Jordan can equally benefit from their rights requires that there is greater appreciation for the values of social justice as well as a better understanding of social justice as an evolving concept that obliges us to reexamine our morals, our identities, and the boundaries of our society.⁵⁴ If this process is not applied to how persons with disabilities are viewed, their rights will continue to be seen to be less important than those of people without disabilities

A shift must occur, moving our understanding of disability as a medical problem that requires charity to a more nuanced conception of disability as a complex relationship between a person's body and features on the one hand, and the society and environment in which he or she lives on the other. In this sense, disability does not require society's charity, but its help to empower all people by removing social and environmental barriers. It is not through the continued supply of charity that a person with disabilities is able to flourish, but through greater respect for his or her rights as a person.

4.3 Starting with Stigma: The Problem Not Addressed by Legislation

Despite the inclusion of socialization as an objective of the National Disability Strategy, few programs in this direction have been undertaken since the Strategy's launch.⁵⁵ In the focus groups convened for this paper, persons with disabilities and CSOs working with persons with disabilities emphasized that social acceptance (especially of physical disabilities) has started to slowly improve in Jordan over the last decade, but noted that persons with disabilities still face severe discrimination. Even though the belief that persons with disabilities are "aliens"⁵⁶ may have become less prevalent, persons with disabilities are still regularly treated as subjects of charity rather than as independent persons.


This distinction is crucial. If Jordanians continue to see persons with disabilities as recipients of charity rather than productive holders of rights, they will not push for education rights for persons with disabilities, let alone their rights to inclusive education. Before legislation can be effective, Jordanians need to believe that persons with disabilities have a right to inclusive education, that they will benefit from such an education, and that society will also benefit when the disabled are able to become full participants in education. This belief, however, is not yet widespread. In the phone survey conducted for this paper, only half of the 500 Jordanians who participated expressed their support for inclusive education for persons with disabilities. Moreover, the survey

⁵³ Lord and Stein, "The Domestic Incorporation of Human Rights Law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities."

⁵⁴ For discussion of social justice as a dynamic concept, see E.J. Karmel et al., "Social Justice in Jordan," Identity Center, 2014, 14-17. <<http://identity-center.org/en/node/386>>

⁵⁵ The National Disability Strategy notes that one of the key problems its implementation faces is "[c]ultural and traditional behavioural patterns that negatively impact persons with disabilities and their families and contribute to their suffering." See Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, *National Disability Strategy*, Chapter 5.

⁵⁶ "Aliens" is a term that was used by a number of interview and focus group participants with disabilities to explain the way in which, they felt, society viewed persons with disabilities in the past.



also indicated that there remains greater support for educating persons with disabilities in segregated, rather than inclusive environments.⁵⁷

Continued discrimination against persons with disabilities impedes their access to inclusive education at two levels. Firstly, and more intuitively, it results in significant resistance from students and parents regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the same classes as students without disabilities. Secondly, the widespread opposition to inclusive education impacts the views of educators, encouraging them to resist legislative efforts to guarantee the education rights of persons with disabilities.

4.3.1 The Resistance of Society to Inclusive Education

With the presence of a culture of shame and social stigma surrounding disability, parents often prove unwilling to disclose the presence of disability within their families. Research participants who work for CSOs focused on the rights of persons with disabilities noted that the practice of hiding youth with disabilities remains extremely prevalent in rural areas of the Kingdom, and that it is especially common for girls with disabilities. Similarly, rather than sending a child with disabilities to a general or special school, many parents instead opt to send him or her to an institution at which he or she resides fulltime. A representative of the MSD noted that this practice is so common that the five institutions under the Ministry's mandate that offer day and night care are now filled beyond their capacities.⁵⁸

Students and teachers from rural areas who participated in our research described several reasons why children with disabilities are regularly hidden or sent away. While shame plays a large role, they also explained that parents fear that their *other* children (particularly daughters) will not be able to get married if they have a sibling with a disability. It was also noted that many parents refuse to register a child with disabilities in school for fear that they will have to pay higher fees for his or her education.

In urban areas of the Kingdom the practice of hiding or sending away children with disabilities is not as common. Yet, many parents nonetheless remain unwilling to enroll children with disabilities in school because they do not believe that the associated costs are justified. With little faith in the potential of a child with disabilities, many parents refuse to invest in his or her education.

The opposition of parents of children without disabilities to inclusive education was also widely noted in interviews and focus groups. Public and private school principals indicated that parents of children without disabilities frequently object to their sons or daughters being placed in classrooms that have students with disabilities (or a class that has *too many* students with disabilities). These objections are a direct result of a lack of awareness regarding disability, which has encouraged some parents – and their children – to view disability as a disease that can be spread to “normal” people.

Students without disabilities who participated in our focus groups indicated differing levels of support for the idea of inclusive education. While some students maintained that they welcomed students with disabilities in their schools, others stated that if these students do receive an education, this process should occur in a different institution. Most students, however, fell somewhere between these two views, asserting that they had no problem with having some kinds of disabilities in their classes (usually physical), but were opposed to other kinds (usually mental).

⁵⁷ When participants were asked, “Do you think that students with disabilities should be taught in public schools with all other students?” 50 percent answered in the affirmative, 39.74 percent answered in the negative, and 10.25 percent indicated that they were unsure. When participants were asked, “Do you think that students with disabilities should be taught in segregated, publically funded schools?” 58.44 percent answered in the positive, 28.57 answered in the negative, and 12.99 indicated that they were unsure.

⁵⁸ Identity Center, Interview with anonymous employee of MSD, February 3, 2015.

4.3.2 The Resistance of Educators to Inclusive Education

The lack of belief in the potential of persons with disabilities and their rights to inclusive education also affects the way educators approach inclusive learning environments. Students with disabilities in the focus groups indicated that not only do their peers often treat them very poorly, but also that most teachers do very little to prevent this behaviour. In fact, numerous persons with disabilities noted that teachers often treat students with disabilities just as badly, giving them negative nicknames, keeping their distance from them, or completely neglecting them as burdens on the classroom.

The unwillingness of many teachers to either include students with disabilities or encourage other students to treat them well constitutes a key impediment to realizing inclusive education environments. Without the buy-in of teachers, inclusive education will not become a reality. But, as with social acceptance of disability, this buy-in has not yet been secured because of a lack of awareness and understanding. Extant research has indicated that the concept of inclusive education is not clearly understood by either Jordanians or Jordanian educators.⁵⁹ These findings were reinforced by Identity Center's focus groups and interviews. Many teachers who participated in our research either admitted that they did not really understand what inclusive education means, or else they explained the idea as the mere enrollment of all students in the same institution.

This lack of understanding is not surprising, given that the MoE neither provides them with any training, nor focuses on developing inclusive education institutions. In fact, the MoE itself appears unconvinced of the benefits of inclusive education, for it continues to concentrate its special education efforts in isolated special schools, employing the majority of special education teachers in these institutions rather than general public schools.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Inclusive education is not cheap; it requires modern facilities and large staffs. The Jordanian government has thus far proven unwilling to devote the necessary funds to realize inclusive education. What it has hitherto allocated to the HCD and the MoE is insufficient, and, in turn, what the MoE has devoted to its Special Education Department is similarly inadequate.⁶⁰ As a result of these budget restrictions, the pace and effectiveness of inclusive education efforts have been limited.

Yet, even though the government needs to devote greater resources to inclusive education (and education in general),⁶¹ there is work that can be done within the current budget constraints to ensure that there is sufficient awareness and buy-in to facilitate further developments once a greater budget is allocated. The following recommendations focus on cost-effective measures to help Jordan lay a solid foundation upon which to build an effective system of inclusive education.

⁵⁹ Al Shoura and Ahmad, "Moving to Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Jordan;" Bashir Abu-Hamour and Hanan Al-Hmouz, "Special Education in Jordan," *European Journal of Special Needs Education* Vol. 29, No. 1 (2013):105-115; and J. Al-Khateeb, and F. Al-Khateeb, "Educating Students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities in Jordan," *Journal of the International Association of Special Education* Vol. 8, No. 1 (2008): 109-116.

⁶⁰ In the 2014 General Budget, the MoE was allotted 903,529,000 JOD. Of this, 4,225,000 JOD was allocated to special education. In the same budget, the HCD was allocated 4,066,000 JOD. See General Budget Department of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, "General Budget, 2014." <<http://www.gbd.gov.jo/gbd/content/budget/MD/ar/2014/2.pdf>>

⁶¹ The focus groups and phone surveys both indicated that there is little support for raising public school fees to improve the quality of public education. When phone survey participants were asked, "Would you support a small increase in your taxes or fees to improve the quality of public education across Jordan?" 58.97 percent answered in the negative, 35.9 percent answered in the positive, and 5.13 percent indicated that they were unsure. Most focus group participants stated that they would support it in theory, but because they do not trust the government's use of public funds, they do not support any tax or fee increases.




5.1 Awareness Building

5.1.1 National Awareness Campaigns

- ❖ CSOs (preferably in partnership with the MoE or the HCD) need to launch awareness campaigns about the rights of persons with disabilities.
- ❖ Some programs, such as the HCD's "Different Abilities," have already been launched, but the expanse of the programs needs to be much greater.
- ❖ To enlarge the impact of these programs, the MoE and the HCD need to better coordinate with actors already working towards the rights of persons with disabilities. There are a number of CSOs on the ground who have the requisite expertise and will to launch these campaigns.
- ❖ The awareness campaigns should focus on the following objectives:
 - Fostering an understanding of disability as a relationship with one's environment rather than inherent to the person.
 - Explaining the rights of persons with disabilities.
 - Portraying persons with disabilities as active members of, rather than burdens upon, society.
 - Providing a more positive and inclusive vocabulary through which to discuss persons with disabilities.
 - Highlighting inclusive education's merits for students with and without disabilities.
 - Promoting success stories of persons with disabilities who can serve as role models for other persons with disabilities. There are strong members of Jordanian society who have disabilities and also possess the determination and energy to be involved in these campaigns. They can share their own success stories to highlight the potential of persons with disabilities.
- ❖ While this paper has continued to employ the term "persons with disabilities," this diction is problematic in itself. This paper has (perhaps hypocritically) used the term because of its currently standard use, but it is important that vocabulary surrounding disability begins to change. Recognizing that disability is a relationship between a person and his or her surroundings, more positive terms such as "persons with complex needs" or "differently abled," could prove more beneficial for enhancing societal understanding and acceptance of disability.

5.1.2 Student Outreach

- ❖ Alongside the general awareness campaign, accompanying work needs to be done in schools to more effectively reach young Jordanians. These efforts need to focus on normalizing disabilities within schools, so that youth begin to understand disability as difference, rather than abnormality.
- ❖ This can be accomplished through activities in the school that showcase persons with disabilities without negatively portraying their disability. These activities could include:
 - Organizing presentations that discuss disability or are given by persons with disabilities.
 - Screening videos that include persons with disabilities.
 - Showing plays in schools that normalize disability. (There are already a handful of theatre groups in Jordan, such as al Balad Theater, who focus on social justice and are eager to get involved in projects of this nature).
- ❖ Schools can also help to normalize disability by providing inclusive textbooks and learning materials. Thousands of work sheets are printed each year that include pictures of people.



These graphics could easily (and cost-effectively) be adjusted to include persons with disabilities.

- ❖ A more positive understanding of disability and a more inclusive environment can be created by removing the stigma associated with extra help and trips to the resource room. Resource rooms should be given a positive name such as “Learning Centers” and they should serve both students with disabilities as well as advanced students.

5.2 Accessibility Analysis

- ❖ Building new schools and renovating existing buildings is expensive. While the pace at which these developments can occur is limited, information regarding the location of schools that have already been made accessible needs to be available, so that these accomplishments can be exploited to their full potential.
- ❖ This will first require a comprehensive analysis of the accessibility of all public and private schools in Jordan. This can either be undertaken by the MoE or the HCD, or by a network of CSOs and/or INGOS.
- ❖ Once the information has been collected, the MoE and the HCD need to ensure that the information is made publically available, especially to students with disabilities and their parents.
- ❖ The list of different schools and accessibilities should be put on the MoE’s website so that it is easily accessible by parents. The online platform could also be used as another means of disseminating information about disabilities, so that parents have a means of accessing the information anonymously and without fear of social stigmas.

5.3 Non-Teacher Assistance

Even though the MoE and, in particular, the Special Education Department, is allocated a very limited budget that cannot cover the costs of employing more teachers or supplying more resources, simple systems can be used in schools to help solve these problems. The following two examples reflect recommendations that were repeatedly suggested by persons with disabilities who participated in our research:

5.3.1 Buddy System

- ❖ Each school could set up a system whereby advanced students (who also receive insufficient attention to develop their talents) and students with disabilities are given the opportunity to join a buddy program. The advanced student would volunteer to help the student to overcome issues that he or she might face in the school due to insufficient resources.
- ❖ The program would help the student with disabilities to complete his or her studies and the interaction with his or her buddy and other students would also increase his or her confidence. It would help the advanced student, on the other hand, to nurture an increased understanding of difference and tolerance.
- ❖ Given that the Learning Disabilities Section and the Gifted Students Section are both located within the Special Education Department of the MoE, this program could be coordinated out of this department.

5.3.2 Sponsorship Program

- ❖ Reflecting on existing programs whereby a citizen can sponsor an orphan and help pay for his or her education, a similar program could be set up to sponsor the education of persons with disabilities who cannot afford the requisite costs of education.

- ❖ persons with disabilities can access free public education, so they do not require funding for tuition. Instead, appropriate funding could be allocated to ensure that the student has access to:
 - Transportation to and from school: a potentially costly issue, especially in rural areas of the Kingdom.
 - Special learning resources that cannot be provided by the school.
 - Special education assistance within the public school.
- ❖ Sponsorships could be organized through the MoE, CSOs, and *zakat* funds.

5.4 Teacher Trainings

5.4.1 Training Videos

- ❖ The provision of comprehensive training sessions regarding inclusive education across the Kingdom is beyond the limits of current budget allocations. Training videos, however, offer a cost-effective alternative.
- ❖ Al Karak Association for Physical Disabilities created a training video to teach doctors and nurses how to communicate with deaf patients based on a training program the organization implemented in Al Karak Public Hospital. This video can serve as an effective model that can be adapted for teacher training. (Zuhair Shurafa, the Director of Al Karak Association for Physical Disabilities and the General Secretary of the Equality Party indicated a willingness to replicate the project for schools if the requisite funds could be located).
- ❖ The training videos would focus on:
 - Teaching inclusive education pedagogies that include strategies for differentiated instruction.
 - Instructing students with different kinds of disabilities.
 - Demonstrating to teachers and school administrations how simple adaptations can be made in schools to facilitate students with disabilities.


5.4.2 Teacher Training: Where the Money Eventually Needs to Be Spent

- ❖ The long-term success of inclusive education in Jordan will depend on the quality of training and professional development that teachers receive. The budget allocation for the MoE needs to expand well beyond its current level and the contribution to the Special Education Department raised significantly.
- ❖ This funding is crucial to ensure that all education stakeholders are provided with sufficient training and awareness regarding inclusive education to ensure their buy-in.
- ❖ Training needs to occur at all levels. The HCD needs to train the entire MoE, not just the Special Education Department. In turn, the MoE needs to guarantee that school principals, administrations, and counsellors sufficiently understand inclusive education and appreciate its benefits. Comprehensive training then needs to be provided to teachers.
- ❖ Pre-service training for teachers needs to be extended to include a vastly enlarged section on inclusive education. Similarly, professional development courses need to be offered with greater frequency and scope so that teachers remain aware of up to date methods for achieving successful inclusive environments.

5.5 Coordination

5.5.1 Inter-Governmental Coordination

- ❖ Insufficient coordination between the relevant government authorities (namely the MoE and the HCD) impeded the effective implementation of the National Disability Strategy.



The roles and responsibilities of the different bodies must be clarified so that responsibilities cannot fall between the cracks or be pawned off to other departments.

- ❖ With the HCD mandated the sole legislative responsibility to monitor the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, other concerned ministries have been inclined to overlook their obligations for implementing inclusive education. This problem is particularly acute because the HCD currently understands its role to be confined to legislation and *supporting* the implementation of legislation and mainstreaming.⁶²
- ❖ Responsibility gaps need to be filled. A central body responsible for acting on all issues related to persons with disabilities needs to exist. While many stakeholders previously believed that the HCD would assume this mantle, these hopes have not thus far been realized. If the HCD is not going to perform this role, a separate body needs to be tasked as the contact point for persons with disabilities.
- ❖ To facilitate improved coordination, a representative of the HCD should be housed inside the Special Education Department of the MoE. The representation of the HCD in the MoE would guarantee not only that its policies are translated into programs, but that the success of the Strategy is more effectively monitored.

5.5.2 Government-CSO Cooperation

- ❖ A great number of experienced CSOs working with persons with disabilities already exist in Jordan. They represent an extremely effective platform through which the MoE and the HCD could better reflect the opinions of persons with disabilities in their policies and programs. As per the conditions of the CRPD, the HCD has employees with disabilities who are involved in the creation, implementation, and monitoring of the National Disability Strategy. This is a very important step, but the effectiveness of both the HCD and the MoE would be increased by better understanding the views of CSOs working on the ground.
- ❖ The single largest demand of persons with disabilities who participated in the research for this paper was that they be treated as active members of society and included in policy decisions.
- ❖ CSOs focused on persons with disabilities unanimously stated that the MoE and the HCD are usually extremely unreceptive to coordination or to input from them.
- ❖ The Jordanian Coalition for Disabilities consists of 31 organizations working with disabilities and represents an extremely effective body with which the government could better coordinate the development and implementation of its policies.

⁶² Identity Center, Interview with Hussein M. Abu Farash.