

# Inclusive Education in Occupied Palestinian Territories

Literature and Practice Review - March 2021

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This literature review is part of the project ‘Disability Under the Siege’, a programme bringing together a community of researchers, educational practitioners, cultural institutions, advocacy organisations and disability led groups in the UK and Middle East. The project aims to contribute to research efforts by providing intellectual and logistical resources that local practitioners need to transform education provision for children with disabilities in conflict-affected countries. The Disability Under Siege Network+ Grant Ref: AH/T005440/1 is funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council

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## Acronyms

<b>ATC</b>	Assistive Technology Centre
<b>BZU</b>	Birzeit University
<b>CHW</b>	Community Health/Disability Workers
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention of Rights of Persons with Disability
<b>CWD</b>	Children With Disabilities
<b>DPOs</b>	Disabled People's Rights
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GMR</b>	Great March of Return
<b>GUPD</b>	General Union of the Palestinian PWDs
<b>HCRPD</b>	Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disability(s)
<b>HWC</b>	Health Work Committees
<b>ICF</b>	International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health
<b>ICHR</b>	The Independent Commission for Human Rights
<b>ICPH</b>	Institute of Community and Public Health
<b>ICRPD</b>	International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability
<b>IE</b>	Inclusive Education
<b>IUG</b>	Islamic University Gaza
<b>MOE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MOH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MOSA</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs <sup>1</sup>
<b>MOSD</b>	Ministry of Social Development
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NRC</b>	Norwegian Refugee Council
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>oPt</b>	Occupied Palestinian Territory
<b>PA</b>	Palestinian Authority
<b>PCBS</b>	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
<b>PCWD</b>	Palestinian Children with Disabilities
<b>PDC</b>	Palestinian Disability Coalition

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Social Affairs was renamed as Ministry of Social Development by a presidential order on April 13<sup>th</sup> 2016. Therefore, we refer to it as MOSA whenever we discuss the 1999 law and MOSD when discussing the new 2019 draft law.



<b>PHC</b>	Primary Health Care
<b>PHEI</b>	Palestinian Higher Education Institutions
<b>PRCS</b>	Palestinian Red Crescent Society
<b>PWDs</b>	Person(s) with Disability/ies
<b>SDG</b>	Strategic Development Goals
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCRPD</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
<b>WB</b>	West Bank
<b>WG</b>	Washington Group
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



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# I Objectives and Methodology

## I.1 Literature Review Objectives

The objectives of this literature review include:

1. Providing a contextual overview (understanding) of education is provided to persons with disability (PWDs)<sup>2</sup> in the occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) in the face of ongoing and protracted warlike conditions so that we can better understand the issues related to policies, services and practices in relation to PWDs needs.
2. Analysing the main strategies and policies of the local education providers' stakeholders in Palestine.
3. Identifying key issues of concern related to access to education, mainly at school stage, including barriers (challenges) to inclusion and gaps in policies and research.
4. Sharing examples of good practice and stories of success at school and university levels.
5. Reviewing and proposing key recommendations.

## I.2 Literature Review Methodology

This report is based on a three-pronged methodology to achieve the objectives specified above:

1. Data analysis of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2017 Census and 2019 and 2020 data related to PWDs.
2. Desk review of existing literature and grey literature of about 40 (number to be finalised later) documents, reports, local and international empirical research studies about education provided to PWD, including Master & PhD dissertations in several Palestinian universities and the University of Birmingham. Written in English and Arabic, these documents and studies reviewed were prepared and published by key education providers and stakeholders in Palestine, including the Ministry of Education, UNRWA, universities, international donors, Palestinian and non-Palestinian education researchers.
3. Content analysis of the most recent *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022: An Elaboration of The Education Development Strategic Plan III (2014-2019)*, Ministry of Education and Higher Education and UNRWA inclusive Education Policy 2013, UNRW Disability Inclusion Annual Reports as well other disability related documents.

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<sup>2</sup> The use of 'people/persons with disabilities' is known as 'people first' language. It is the preference in many developing countries and the language used by the [UNCRPD](#).



## 2 Literature Review Findings

Quality education is widely acknowledged to be a human right for all children including children with disabilities (CWD) and helps them achieve their full potential, improves their lives and contributes to sustainable development as stated in UN SDG 4: Targets 4.5, 4.7 and 4.8. It is vital for CWDs to receive quality education which enables them to secure other rights throughout their lifetime, fostering better access to jobs, health and other services. For education to play this role as ‘an enabling right’, it must be of high quality, available equitably, built to tackle discrimination and allow each child to flourish according to their own talents and interests.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, providing quality education helps all young children and teenagers understand the world in which they live and become confident, innovative, questioning, thoughtful, and open-minded, to uphold human values that contribute positively to the development of society and the global community. One commonly agreed on approach that can lead to better quality education is adopting and implementing inclusive education systems which cater for the specific learning needs of all children including those with disabilities.

Governments and international aid agencies invest heavily in education to ensure that all children with and without disabilities have access to quality education, especially in conflict-affected areas. One of these countries is Palestine which has been under continued and prolonged Israeli military occupation for more than 5 decades. More than 5 million Palestinians live in three isolated areas: Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, known internationally as occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).

### 2.1 Overview of Education Under Occupation

Two main features distinguish the Palestinian context from any other context. First, only 50% of the Palestinian people live in their occupied homeland and 50% others have been forced to live in diaspora, most of them as refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. These 5 million Palestinians living in the oPt have been deprived of their country’s natural resources, freedom of movement and stability and subjected to daily violation of human rights stated in all international conventions and accords, including the right to get quality education in their homeland as Palestinians who cannot move from one of the 3 occupied territories to the other ones due to Israeli isolation and discriminatory practices against the Palestinians. Second, 42% of these 5 million Palestinians living in the oPt are UNRWA registered refugees in their homeland as they were forced to flee their villages and towns in 1948: 26% of these

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<sup>3</sup> Global Campaign for Education and Handicap International (2014) Equal Right, Equal Opportunity: Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities.  
[https://campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/Equal%20Right,%20Equal%20Opportunity\\_WEB.pdf](https://campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/Equal%20Right,%20Equal%20Opportunity_WEB.pdf)



Palestinian are living in refugee camps in the West Bank and 66% are living in 8 refugee camps in Gaza Strip.<sup>4</sup>

Living under Israeli military occupation and in refugee camps have created 3 modern educational system in Palestine provided by three sectors and three types of schools: public (government ) schools run by the Palestinian Authority (PA) – mainly the Ministry of Education (MoE)-, the United Nation Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools located in the refugee camps inside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (serving children from grade 1- 9 only) and the private sector mainly run by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs and other local charity organisations). These 3 providers run school education for about 1,300,000 Palestinian children aged 6-18 year. Enrolled in 3,037 primary and secondary schools and taught by about 70,000 teachers, these children attend government schools (65%), 25% in UNRWA schools and 10% in private schools.<sup>5</sup>

Education in this context of protracted crises makes the teaching and learning environment unsafe for Palestinian school children, especially for Palestinian CWD and prevents them from exercising their right to have safe access to quality education. For example, 50,000 Palestinian children enrolled in 183 schools Palestinian children who are living in “Area C” of the West Bank (fully controlled by Israel) lack safe access to education, and more than 1,700 children from 37 West Bank communities commute to schools more than 5km away”<sup>6</sup>. Another example about how Palestinian education is under not only siege but also attacks is illustrated through titles and headlines expressed by Europeans institutions. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC - an independent humanitarian organization) states this on its website: “[10 attacks on Palestinian education per month by Israeli authorities and settlers](#)” (Published 12. Nov 2020). In this press release, NRC states this illustrative quoted statement: “Israeli forces, private security guards, and settlers launched an average of 10 attacks per month on West Bank kindergarten and school students, staff and facilities between January 2018 and June 2020”.

Two other examples about the lack of safety and attacks on schools in Gaza can be illustrated through two headlines expressed by the British-based Guardian newspaper and a third headline by an American Institution covering one of the three Israeli wars launched on Gaza in 6 years (2008 -2014): “[Israeli strike on Gaza school kills 15 and leaves 200 wounded](#) (24 July 2014) and “[In Gaza, the schools are dying too](#)” (10 Jan 2009) under which the writers say:

“A new word emerged from the carnage in Gaza this week: "scholasticide" – the systematic destruction by Israeli forces of centres of education dear to Palestinian society, as the Ministry of Education was bombed, the infrastructure of teaching

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<sup>4</sup> PCBS: A brief on the status of Palestinian people at the end of 2019

<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3642>

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education (2019) Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019

<sup>6</sup> World Food Programme: State of Palestine Country Strategic Plan (2018–2022)

<https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/145e5a9ff07b43c59fbd4e4e5e7ac806/download/>





destroyed, and schools across the Gaza strip targeted for attack by the air, sea and ground offensives.”

Palestinian CWDs are the most affected by the crowded classes in the Gaza Strip where the class size average in both government and UNRWA-run schools is 41 students per class<sup>7</sup> compared to about 27 in the West Bank<sup>8</sup>. Adding to this class size crowdedness, approximately 70% of UNRWA schools and 63% government run schools operating on a double- or triple-shift system<sup>9</sup>, resulting in reduced hours in core subjects and foundation learning in schools lacking basic assistive and educational assistive devices to facilitate learning of Palestinian CWD.

Concerning **out-of-school children** in Palestine, a UNICEF report details 5 categories of barriers that independently and jointly bring about exclusion of Palestinian CWD from and within education: “the fragmented nature of preventive support services, the costs associated with schooling, administrative regulations and practices, and challenges with identifying children at risk of exclusion.”<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2 Analysis of Statistical Information

To deeply understand disability and how to address it effectively, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), (the official statistical institution of the State of Palestine), started publishing statistics and annual press releases about different issues, including PWD. On its well-designed, well-presented and easily searched bilingual website, the PCBS provides comprehensive, detailed and credible statistical figures that cover all fields including health, education, environment, culture and disability. Reviewing several reports and press releases published by the PCBS over the past 10 years or so has shown that the PCBS is keen to produce comprehensive and detailed statistics on disability. These statistics are highly needed for strategic planning, policy making and for adopting best practices.

Although 95.4% of Palestinian children are enrolled in basic education, adolescent boys and children with disabilities are vulnerable to dropping out of school where by “age 15, nearly 25% of boys and 7% of girls have dropped out of school, while 22.5% of boys and 30% of girls aged 6-15 years with a disability have never enrolled in school.”<sup>11</sup> About 10% of

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<sup>7</sup> MoE. (Dec 2019) Annual Education Statistical Book in Gaza Strip: Scholastic Year 2019/2020. <https://www.mohe.ps/home/category/reports/>

<sup>8</sup> Education Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019: School and Kindergarten Statistics <https://www.mohe.ps/home/category/reports/>

<sup>9</sup> Education Cluster Strategy: Palestine 2020 -2021. Available: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/education-cluster-strategy-palestine-2020-2021/>

<sup>10</sup>UNICEF (2018) Country of Palestine Country Report on Out-of-School Children. Available: <https://www.unicef.org/sop/reports/state-palestine-country-report-out-school-children>

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF (July 2018) State of Palestine Country Report on Out-of-School Children. **Available:** <https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/2566/file/SoP-OOSCIReport-July2018.pdf.pdf>



Palestinian children with disability (PCWD) <sup>12</sup> aged (5-17 years) are not currently enrolled in education. About 69% of this percentage and age are males 31% are females.

The PCBS survey (2020) indicate that more than one third of PCWD (37.6%), have not enrolled in education and have dropped out of it. The data also indicates that more than one fifth of individuals with disabilities left education due to environmental and material obstacles: 23.2% in the West Bank and 19.4% in the Gaza Strip.<sup>13</sup>

Illiteracy rates among (10 years+) PWD reaches 32% in 2017. There is a large gap in illiteracy rates between the sexes: 20% among males compared to 46% among females and between the West Bank (35%) and the Gaza Strip (29%) among PWD aged 10 years+.<sup>14</sup> However, the PCBS (2020) Census results show a decrease in the level of illiteracy rate from 33.4% in 2007 to 21.1 in 2017 among PCWD aged 10 years or more.<sup>15</sup>

One finding is lack of producing sufficiently detailed up-to-date data about PWD, specifically Palestinian CWD. For instance, searching the PCBS categories (topics) available on its data-rich website for recent disability statistics has shown only 3 files that none of which gives recent or detailed figures about the number of Palestinian CWD enrolled in government, UNRWA and private schools. The only reports found under the category of disability are

1. Disable Persons in the Palestinian Territory, Statistics Report Series - Population, Housing, and Establishment Census -1997
2. Disabled Individuals Survey, 2011 - Main Findings
3. Disabled Individual Census, Gaza Strip, 2012 - Main Findings

Another related finding is the key conflicting figures given by the PCBS about the real number of PWD. Here are some official statistics:

- “93 Thousand Persons with disabilities in Palestine...Persons with disabilities in Palestine constitute 2.1% of the total population; 48% in the West Bank and 52% in Gaza Strip according to the data of the Population, Housing and Establishments Census, 2017.” (PCBS. Published in: 03 /12 /2019)
- “The Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017 data indicated that 255,228 individuals in Palestine, have at least one difficulty (5.8% of the total population) (139,593 males and 115,635 females). In terms of type of disability, the

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<sup>12</sup> PCBS (3/12/2020). The International Day of Persons with Disabilities - Press Release. Available: [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs\\_2012/PressEn.aspx](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs_2012/PressEn.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> PCBS (July 2020). Women and Men in Palestine - Issues and Statistics, 2020 (in Arabic): <http://pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2528.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0dHAK33PgfruAgOgAkX60ecSHPWAGMosMOotGAaROGUwDPw-SXNNKEgz>

<sup>14</sup> PCBS (3/12/2019). The International Day of Persons with Disabilities - Press Release. Available: [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs\\_2012/PressEn.aspx](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs_2012/PressEn.aspx)

<sup>15</sup> PCBS (July 2020). Women and Men in Palestine - Issues and Statistics, 2020 (in Arabic)



difficulties in mobility and use of hands were the highest (127,773 individuals including 68,165 males and 59,608 females).” ([PCBS: On the occasion of the International Population Day 11/7/2018](#)) also the same figure (255,228) in Arabic is available here PCBS (July 2020). [Women and Men in Palestine - Issues and Statistics, 2020 p60](#)).

This discrepancy leads to casting doubts on the low figures of PWD given by the PCBS (93,000) when compared with some international organisations figures. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that “About 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability or impairment” which WHO estimated earlier in the 1970 at about 10%. This global increase is attributed to several factors including conflict and improvements in the methodologies used to measure disability. [WORLD REPORT ON DISABILITY](#) (2011).

Applying this estimate to the Palestinian context, especially Gaza, and taking the population of the Palestinians in the oPt into account (5 millions+), the figure (**255,228**) is likely to be more acceptable, reaching to 5.1%. In fact, this figure /percentage could be much higher as indicated by [the Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017](#) data indicated in Arabic that the PWD represent about 6% of the total population: 7% in Gaza Strip and 5% in the West Bank. This higher percentage of disability in Gaza is mainly due to the wars launched against civilians, the 14-year tight and continued blockade imposed on Gaza and the Israeli policy of maiming<sup>16</sup> (shoot to amputate their legs in the peaceful Great March of Return demonstrations and the policy of “Break Their Bones” During the first Intifada (Dec 1987 – 1994).

If this approximate figure (255,288) as more realistic and that “About one fifth of persons with disabilities are children under the age of 18”<sup>17</sup> into account, then the oPt would have about **51,000** CWD under 18 years compared to about 18000 if the 93000 figure is valid and reliable. This invalidity becomes clearer when one finds that UNRWA, has **10,640** PCWD enrolled only in its schools, knowing that only 25% of all Palestinian children are enrolled in UNRWA schools in the oPt. This UNRWA figure is likely to be more recent as it was mentioned in a press release published 6 years ago:

In the current school year (2015-2016) there are approximately **10,640** persons (6,409 boys and 4,231 girls) with disabilities studying in UNRWA schools in Gaza. These students live with various major motor, fine motor, visual, hearing, health, speech and other impairments. Nonetheless, they are enthusiastic to learn and participate in traditional schooling.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Snounu, Yasmin; Smith, Phil & Bishop, Joe (2019) Disability, the Politics of Maiming, and Higher Education in Palestine. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Vol 39, No 2 DOI:10.18061/DSQ.V39I2.6381

<sup>17</sup> [PCBS Press release Published in:03 /12 /2019](#)

<sup>18</sup> UNRWA [Press Release Special Education in UNRWA schools: ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all](#) (23 February 2016)



In brief, due to continuous Israeli aggressive practices, the number of PCWD is increasing as the PCBS survey in 2011 found that 7% of the overall population of Palestine had a disability though “there is no accurately updated database recording information on children with disabilities.”<sup>19</sup>

### 2.3 Ministry of Education Literature

The Palestinian Authority (PA) Ministry of Education (MoE) published several Palestinian strategic plans that aim to improve the education services in general (Appendix I: List of Palestinian plans reviewed). It is essential to review these recent plans because the MoE is the major provider of mainstream school education in Palestine (65%) while the private and NGO sectors are the main providers of special education to PCWD. For example, the pre-primary education in Palestine is almost exclusively provided by the private and NGO sectors.<sup>20</sup> This review has led to more research related to PCWD (school level) compared to research on Palestinians students with disabilities at university level. It also has shown several international studies and reports discussing the policies, goals, activities, practices, challenges and suggestions adopted and proposed by the PA and MOE. The findings also demonstrate a general agreement and satisfaction about these recent plans but disagreement on the level of implementation of these plans and the level of concrete achievements on the ground. In other words, there has been an ongoing question about the extent these strategic plans and these prioritised policies have or can be practically translated into reality through concrete procedures, teacher training programmes, building and adapting infrastructure, etc. to serve all Palestinians with disability. Here is a brief discussion of these different arguments based on documents produced by the MoE and other local and international studies and reports.

Exploring the MoE’s website<sup>21</sup> has shown documents that include factual information about PCWD as well as several strategic plans and other documents that can be discussed here critically. One of the findings is the absence of any factual information about PCWD or without disabilities under Facts and Figures on the website menu. However after giving brief definitions of 7 types of disability (Blind Disability, Visual Impairment Disability, Deaf Disability, Hard of Hearing Disability, Articulation Disorders Disability, Physical Disability and Mental Disability), the latest Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019 (under Services on the MoE’s website) gives detailed tabulated information about 9,383 PCWD enrolled in public (governmental) schools: 6160 in WB & 3223 in GS. The types and percentages of these types of disabilities can be summarised in Diagram (1) below:

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<sup>19</sup> Alshakhshir, Rasha (2017). Inclusive Education in Palestine, a Journey for Everyone <https://www.childhoodexplorer.org/inclusive-education-in-palestine>

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF-State of Palestine (2016) Every child counts: understanding the needs and perspectives of children with disabilities in the State of Palestine. Available: [https://www.unicef.org/oPt/ODI\\_Report\\_01-06-2017\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/oPt/ODI_Report_01-06-2017_FINAL.pdf) [146-page report]

<sup>21</sup> MoE Website:<http://www.moehe.gov.ps/> \*

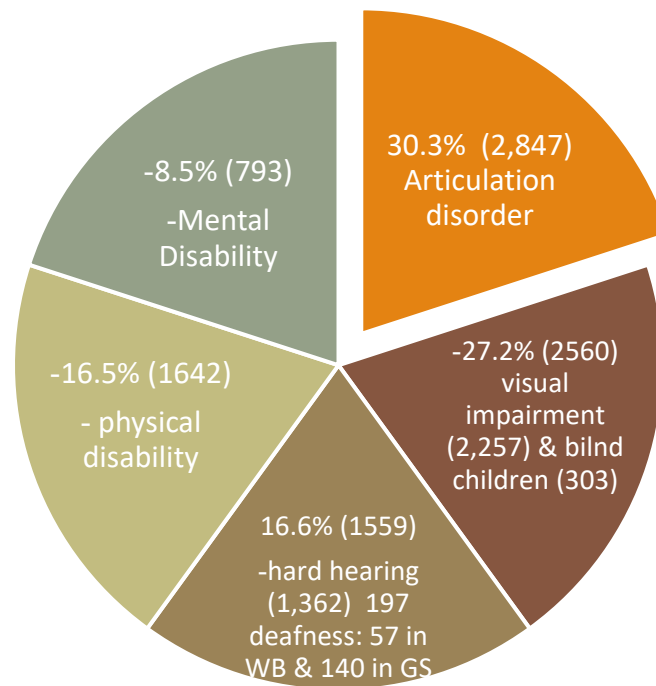


Figure 1. Distribution of PCWD in Governmental Schools by Type of Disability 2018/2019 (p65)

Several comments can be made about these figures. One is that is the highest rate of disability among these children is articulation disorder (30%) defined by the MoE as “Inability to produce sounds normally and intelligibly by adding, omitting, substitutions and deteriorations.”<sup>22</sup> The second highest rate is visual impairment children, defined as “The person who reads and writes only by using visual aids – not by glasses –as oculars, telescope, books with enlarged line.” Blind children defined as “The person who reads and writes only with Braille for reading and writing”<sup>23</sup> The main causes of these disabilities include “congenital/genetic, during pregnancy/delivery, illness, psychological/physical abuse, aging, work injury, traffic accident, other accidents, Israeli measures, wars, stress, or other.”<sup>24</sup>

Another comment is related to the deaf children where only 57 children joined public schools in the West Bank but 140 children in Gaza Strip. In reality, Gaza’s encouraging enrolment figures is mainly due to absence of any public secondary schools in the West Bank and is also due to founding the first and only public secondary school for deaf in Gaza in 2011 (by Gaza MoE). More than 160 students enrolled in Mustafa Sadeq Rafee Secondary School for the Deaf in the first year it opened (2011). Another reason could be that most public schools and teachers in the West Bank are not “prepared to integrate children with hearing loss.” Suheir,

<sup>22</sup> MoE (2019) Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019 (p7) <http://www.moehe.gov.ps/services/statistics>

<sup>23</sup> MoE (2019) Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019 (p7) <http://www.moehe.gov.ps/services/statistics>

<sup>24</sup> State of Palestine: Characteristics of Individuals with Disabilities based on the 2017 Census. Available: <https://spriglobal.org/portfolio/sopdisabilities/>



director of the rehabilitation department at the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and heads one of 11 NGO-run deaf school in the West Bank.<sup>25</sup>

Most of those 160 deaf students who successfully completed secondary school were admitted to the Islamic University of Gaza as the first cohort to join a Palestinian higher education institution in 2014. The author of this article led the efforts creating two diplomas in graphic design and mobile maintenance for about 120 deaf students in 2014.

An important comment is the absence of any figure about the number of PCWD enrolled in UNRWA and private/ special schools in a similar way as described in Diagram (1) above though some detailed information was given about the percentage distribution of schools by availability of toilet facilities and stairs for PCWD. Concerning these 2 infrastructure services, several surprising figures were given as summarised in Table (1) below.

	Toilet facilities for disabled school children				Stairs (accessible) for disabled school children			
	All schools	Gov't	UNRWA	Private	All schools	Gov't	UNRWA	Private
Palestine	60%	65%	73%	20.8%	55.4%	57.7%	75.1%	25.9%
West Bank	55.7%	62.5%	62.5%	20.1%	46.8%	50.9%	53.1%	24.3%
Gaza	73.3%	77.3%	76.6%	25.9%	82.2%	87.8%	82.8%	37%

Table 1. Percentage distribution of schools by availability of toilet and stairs for PCWD<sup>26</sup>

Table 1 shows that about 40% and 44.6% of all (3,037) Palestinian public, UNRWA and private schools lack accessible toilet and stairs (ramps) respectively. Comparing the percentages of the availability of these 2 facilities in public and UNRWA schools shows similar percentages but comparing the number of schools with these 2 facilities in Gaza Strip and the West Bank is in favour of the former area.

Additionally, these main statistics summarised in Diagram 1 and Table 1 and other facts included in the MoE Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019 surveyed indicate that the focus of the MoE is mainly on adapting 2 environmental facilities (stairs and toilets) but no other key figures or information were revealed about other facilities such as classrooms, seats, transportation, teacher training, curriculum adapted, etc. Moreover, due to Palestinian division, these figures does not reflect reality in Gaza Strip as “six schools in Gaza enrol 1,700 deaf or hard of hearing

<sup>25</sup> Brown, Jonathan (1 April 2015) Deaf in Palestine: Society outstrips government policy. Available: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/deaf-palestine-society-outstrips-government-policy>

<sup>26</sup> MoE (2019) Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019.



students, which amounts to nearly half as many schools enrolling twice as many students as in the West Bank.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet there are signs of hope for deaf/hard of hearing students in the West Bank as Al Amal Association for the Deaf was set to open the first high school for the deaf in the West Bank by spring 2019, but as of 2021 this school has not been opened.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.4 Promotion of Inclusive Education and Teacher Education

In 1994, the MoE adopted the Education for All initiative and in 1997 adopted “Inclusive Education” as an approach to care of all students, including PCWD. Yet, it took the MoE 10 years to produce the first and last Teacher Education Strategy in Palestine in 2008 which has not been updated since then. The 50-page Teacher Education Strategy in Palestine does not mention “inclusive education” literally though it focusses on special education which was mentioned 10 times and also focusses on the importance of preparing and qualifying special education teachers through creating new special education programmes at the BA or MA levels at any of the Palestinian higher education institutions (PHEIs). Yet as said above, almost all PHEIs do not offer any quality academic programme in inclusive education or inclusion and special educational needs such as the ones offered by the University of Birmingham: Inclusion and Special Educational Needs: MEd/ Postgraduate Diploma/ Postgraduate Certificate.

However, there are clear inconsistencies with the MoE adoption of the Education for All initiative and Inclusive Education approach. Several key documents produced by the MoE ignored inclusive education and there is not even a single mention of it. One example is the document entitled “Professional Standards for the New Teacher”<sup>29</sup>. A similar document is the Teacher Professional Standards (2012) which referred to the words “inclusive education” only once and nothing about children with disabilities is mentioned.<sup>30</sup> Another example is the document entitled “Distinguished Teacher for Quality Education: Towards Outstanding Teachers for Innovation, Reflection and Leadership”<sup>31</sup>. This document was published the MoE in collaboration and partnership with both UNESCO and EU. The document seems to have a pedagogically interesting and relevant title, it mentions nothing about inclusive education or PCWD<sup>32</sup>. A bitter fact is that although more than 50 Palestinian teaching practitioners, planners, researchers, educators, teacher trainers, education experts presented (in this conference) on 4 themes including pre-service teacher preparation and qualifying teachers during the service, no word related to disability, inclusive education or special education was found in this 80-page document. This reality is inconsistent with the MoE adoption to the Education for All initiative in 1994 and ‘adoption’ of inclusive education in 1997. This indicates

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<sup>27</sup> Brown, Jonathan (1 April 2015) Deaf in Palestine: Society outstrips government policy. Available: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/deaf-palestine-society-outstrips-government-policy>

<sup>28</sup> Al-Monitor (Nov 30, 2018) New school raises hopes of higher education for West Bank’s hearing-impaired. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/11/high-school-for-deaf-in-west-bank.html#ixzz6jjlTxGcz>

<sup>29</sup> MoE <http://www.moehe.gov.ps/general-education/general-education/Brochures-and-Studies>

<sup>30</sup> MoE <http://www.moehe.gov.ps/general-education/general-education/Brochures-and-Studies>

<sup>31</sup> MoE <http://www.moehe.gov.ps/general-education/general-education/Brochures-and-Studies>

<sup>32</sup> MoE (2015) Palestine Inclusive Education Policy (p1): <https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/English%20-%20IE%20Policy.pdf>



a wide gap between theories and practice and between planning and practice which necessitates holding such national conferences on disability and inclusive education.

Only in 2015, the Palestine Inclusive Education Policy was developed and published. It is hoped that this policy practically advocates “making changes to policies, resource allocation, teaching practices, curricula, assessment, infrastructure, etc, so that education/schools become flexible and able to adapt to the needs of every learner”<sup>33</sup>. This policy contains ten relevant goals, summarised in Appendix II.

## 2.5 Ministry of Education Strategic Plans and Policies

One of the key documents available on the MoE’s website is the 250-page Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022 <sup>34</sup> which adopted inclusive education goals and policies in line with SDG 4 on Quality Education and its two related targets 4.5 and 4.8:

- **Target 4.5:** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people and children in vulnerable situations.
- **Target 4.8:** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

Both of these adopted targets clearly aim to ensure equal access to all levels of quality education for the persons with disabilities in well-built and upgraded education facilities in safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for them.

Though this Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022 presented 21 suggestions to improve the implementation of development policies, and goals of education, only the last suggestion was directly related to disability in general terms, i.e. without specifying what practical steps would be taken to lead to positive change on the ground such as details of teacher training, curriculum adaptation, infrastructure, etc.:

Adopting a policy which stresses the right of students with special needs to education by creating an inclusive and equal environment for these students (both males and females). This aims to (1) achieve the principle of equality and justice to all students; (2) increase the percentage of access of students with disability to education (so far below 33% according to the same source); (3) reduce illiteracy rate in the Gaza Strip (estimated at 53% according to the

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<sup>33</sup> Palestine Inclusive Education Policy: <https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/English%20-%20IE%20Policy.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education: Education Development Strategic Plan 2008-2012 and Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022. <http://www.moehe.gov.ps/>





Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics of 2011); and *opening new majors in the field of special education for students at universities [italics mine]*.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, this Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022 shows written commitment to prioritising “quality and inclusive education for all” in line with the Palestinian National Policy Agenda 2017-2022. Yet, only 4 times it mentions the approach of inclusive education to schooling on different pages (101, 117, 121 & 224) where the last 2 were quoted as part of the priorities of the Palestinian National Policy Agenda 2017-2022.

Moreover, the implementation of these adopted policies, goals and education programmes to enhance the quality of education infrastructure and services delivered to PWD “may be achieved in cooperation with international institutions, especially the UNICEF and the UNESCO, the private sector, and civil society institutions concerned with early childhood.” (p111)

Finally, what could not be found in these documents reviewed is lack of developing effective monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the implementation of these policies and goals on inclusive education. More discussion about inclusive education will be discussed below.

## **2.6 Palestinian Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs)**

Examining the Palestinian Mid-Term Strategy for Higher Education Sector (2010, 2011-2013) shows complete absence of stating any goals or steps or even mentioning terms or words related to educating PCWD or special / inclusive education. In spite of adopting the Education for All initiative in 1994 and inclusive education in 1997, the MoE developed and published Palestine Inclusive Education Policy in late 2015. This policy document stated that PHEIs cooperate with the MoE to “ensure that child development, early intervention, inclusive education and the provision of support to students with specific access and learning needs are integrated into all core teacher education programmes/courses.”<sup>36</sup> (p18)

The importance of achieving inclusion and equality at all educational levels, including higher education level, was clearly stated in the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022 to overcome “all forms of exclusion, marginalization, inequity and inequality related to teaching and learning opportunities. . . . [and] to ensure that no person is deprived of a dearth of studies on disability in PHEIs. This finding is confirmed by a recent study conducted by Snounu, Smith & Bishop (2019). There is also little data on disabled students in PHEI and the centres that serve the interests and needs of these students. For example, IUG Arabic and English websites lack basic information to and about these students.

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<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022. (PI06)  
<http://www.moehe.gov.ps/>

<sup>36</sup> MoE (2015) Palestine Inclusive Education Policy: <https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/English%20-%20IE%20Policy.pdf> (p18)



Concerning practices of inclusive education in PHEIs, Palestinian professors and administrators in many PHEIs have been adhering to the values of ethics of care<sup>37</sup>. In this context, several PHEIs have been working to support and include disabled students. Birzeit University (BZU), in the West Bank, and the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG), in Gaza Strip, have been pioneers in giving students with mobility, vision and hearing disability opportunities to complete their higher education. As a former student at BZU in the early 1980s, I used to read stories, novels and textbooks and audio-record them (on cassettes) to 2 of my female colleagues in the English language department<sup>38</sup>. Both universities have educated, graduated and empowered hundreds of special needs students. For instance, currently there are 154 students with vision disability (89), mobility disability (48) and completely deaf students (17). These students are enrolled in several faculties: IT, science, education, Commerce, Arts, and Sharia and Law<sup>39</sup>. More than 500 students with disability graduated from IUG over the past 2 decades or so. Currently there are 46 special needs students enrolled at BZU: mobility impaired (20), visual impairment (19), hearing impairment (3), multiple impairments (2) and disorders (2).<sup>40</sup>

Both universities also contribute actively in creating awareness and advocating the rights and meeting the needs of PWD. For instance, one of the recent activities BZU organised was “Researchers and experts delve into disabilities rights bill in law institute workshop”<sup>41</sup> in which more than 80 representatives of Palestinian disability rights organizations in the West Bank and Gaza “discussed the preliminary draft of the law by decree on the rights of people with disabilities in two workshops held by BZU Institute of Law Such academic activities (including workshops, conferences, seminars, etc) not only support PWD but also contribute to changing negative views on disability. BZU has gone beyond changing attitudes and practices and contributed in developing “The National Strategic Plan of the Disability Sector in the Occupied Palestinian Territories for the Supreme Council of the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities” in 2012.

Defying barriers to disability, IUG has proved to be a leading PHEI concerning offering support, education and facilities to three main types of disabilities. In 2000, IUG established an Assistive Technology Centre (ATC) in order not to leave any blind or visually impaired student behind. Since then, this centre continues to develop its academic and social services and currently it

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<sup>37</sup>Price 2011 in Snounu, Yasmin (2019). Defying exclusionary democracy through resilience in Palestinian higher education. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 2(3), 61-78.

[https://www.academia.edu/41276150/Defying\\_Exclusionary\\_Democracy\\_through\\_Resilience\\_in\\_Palestinian\\_Higher\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/41276150/Defying_Exclusionary_Democracy_through_Resilience_in_Palestinian_Higher_Education)

<sup>38</sup> Note: This supportive activity was part of a patriotic/community duty /obligation that every student at BZU should do to graduate after serving 120 voluntary working hours in different fields.

<sup>39</sup> Received by email from Bahaa Sirhan, Director of IUG Disability Services Centre <http://dsc.iugaza.edu.ps/en/> (date received 27 Jan, 2021)

<sup>40</sup> BZU (2021). Special needs students at Birzeit University. Available:

<https://www.birzeit.edu/en/about/president-office/vps/vp-academic/committee-persons-special-needs/special-needs-students>

<sup>41</sup> BZU (28 Jan 2019) Researchers and experts delve into disabilities rights bill in law institute workshop

<https://www.birzeit.edu/en/news/researchers-and-experts-delve-disabilities-rights-bill-law-institute-workshop>



is called Disability Services Centre<sup>42</sup>. After the Israeli wars on Gaza in 2008-9, hundreds of Palestinian women and men became disabled overnight as a result of bombing houses while families at home. Trying to create an enabling environment for PWD that supports their social integration as productive members of the Gaza community, IUG established a second active centre called Irada Centre for Rehabilitation and Vocational Training of People with Disability (mainly physical)<sup>43</sup> to provide them with training and practical professional skills in order to integrate them into the labour market, and enhance their opportunities in getting work, particularly in the technical and vocational training sector. In 2014/5, IUG launched the first Palestinian academic program for deaf students to have access to 2 university professional diplomas in Creative Design Technology and Computer and Smart Devices Maintenance.

These institutionalised inclusive practices of most PHEIs reveals a spirit of resilience and commitment to promoting the rights and needs of PWD to have access to higher education which can be capitalised on and invested for strengthening the implementation of inclusive practices not only at all educational levels (including from preschool education), but also in all sectors levels and aspects of life, including employability.

## 2.7 Inclusive Education in UNRWA

The second main provider of education in Palestine is UNRWA which is responsible for 25% of all schools in Palestine, mainly in the Gaza Strip where the percentage of refugees is about 70% of the total population living in Gaza (2,250 million). The UNRWA produced several documents that support inclusive education in UNRWA-run schools. One of these key documents is UNRWA Inclusive Education Policy published in 2013.<sup>44</sup> Inclusive education is seen as an “evolving concept” and an open-ended dynamic and gradual process that does not happen overnight. It is also perceived as a process that intends to ensure “inclusive programming and services through constant research, capacity building, identification and sharing of innovative and good practices.” (P14)<sup>45</sup>

## 3 International Reports and Empirical Research Studies

One of the key concerns related to providing quality inclusive education to Palestinian CWD, is not to leave any child behind because “Education is the right of every child. It empowers children to thrive. It helps promote greater civic engagement and peaceful communities.”<sup>46</sup> The implementation of the plans and activities of the 3 education providers in Palestine (MoE, UNRWA and local charity NGOs /private sector) depend on obtaining fund from international institutions/ donors. For example, an Education Cluster Strategy: Palestine 2020 -2021 was

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<sup>42</sup> IUG Disability Services Centre <http://dsc.iugaza.edu.ps/en/>

<sup>43</sup> IUG Irada Center for Rehabilitation and Vocational Training of People with Disability <http://csced.iugaza.edu.ps/>

<sup>44</sup> UNRWA Inclusive Education Policy (2013) <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/strategy-policy/inclusive-education-policy-brief>

<sup>45</sup> UNRWA Disability Inclusion Annual Report (2019) [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/inclusive\\_education\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/inclusive_education_factsheet.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> UNICEF Country of Palestine. Available: <https://www.unicef.org/sop/reports/state-palestine-country-report-out-school-children>



recently developed and co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children. It involves all key education stakeholders in the oPt, including the MoE, UNRWA, UNOCHA, Save the Children, World Vision, Action Against Hunger, Afkar organization and the education cluster team.<sup>47</sup> Many of these stakeholders and academic researchers' conducted/published studies, reports and documents that discussed disability in Palestine. Most of these studies focus on school education for CWD and few discussed disabilities in PHEIs. The focus of these studies is PWD's needs, services offered, practices, attitudes, success stories, challenges/ gaps, recommendations and research and actions to be taken to ensure equitable and quality education for all PWD.

#### 4 Analysis of Adoption of Inclusive Education Approaches

Of the key issues discussed extensively in local and international studies concerned with educating CWD is the adoption of inclusive education (IE) in line with SDG 4 on Quality Education and its 2 related targets 4.5 and 4.8 stated above. Being fundamental to achieving better quality, IE represents an ethical commitment to values of giving equal rights and equal opportunities to all children to be included in schools and to participate in all learning and social activities regardless of their abilities (Global Campaign for Education and Handicap International, 2014<sup>48</sup>; Alshakhshir, 2017)<sup>49</sup> Hence, it is vital to expand IE practices to all schools and make it mandatory for all Palestinian schools and universities (Karlsson, 2004)<sup>50</sup>.

Implementing IE requires taking several key practical measures. One of these vital measures is promoting school administrators and teachers' awareness, perspectives and attitudes and also to develop and update their pedagogical capacity in teaching and assessment. In this context Jaradat (2010)<sup>51</sup> investigated the Palestinian experience in integrating children with physical and mobility disability in government schools and found 2 conflicting attitudes among school administration as well as several concerns among some teachers about the lack of success of this inclusion policy due to being concerned about taking responsibility for students who suffer from muscular dystrophy, entering and leaving their classes and schools and in the break. This indicates the importance of considering how to enhance and reinforce teachers'

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<sup>47</sup> Education Cluster Strategy: Palestine 2020 -2021. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/education-cluster-strategy-palestine-2020-2021/>

<sup>48</sup> Global Campaign for Education and Handicap International (2014) Equal Right, Equal Opportunity: Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities. [https://campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/Equal%20Right,%20Equal%20Opportunity\\_WEB.pdf](https://campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/Equal%20Right,%20Equal%20Opportunity_WEB.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Alshakhshir, Rasha (2017) Inclusive Education in Palestine, a Journey for Everyone. <https://www.childhoodexplorer.org/inclusive-education-in-palestine>

<sup>50</sup> Karlsson, Pia (2004) Towards Inclusive Education for All in Palestine: A follow-up study of Inclusive Education Project, Ministry of Education Final report. Available: <https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/ngo-evaluations/2009/towards-inclusive-education-for-all-in-palestine/>

<sup>51</sup> Jaradat, I. (2014). The Palestinian experience in integrating children with physical and mobility disability in government schools [Altajriba Alfalistinia fi damage thawi aleaqah aljasadiya wa alharakiya fi almadrassa alhukomiya]. *Psychological and Educational Studies*, 4, 19-42. <https://dspace.univ-ouargla.dz/jspui/bitstream/123456789/7104/1/P0402.pdf>



perceptions and awareness “from a positive and common-sense perspective” (Abu-Heran, et al 2014)<sup>52</sup> to more ethical attitude and professional practices. It also necessitates conducting more field-based research to explore the strengths and weaknesses of using IE in Palestinian schools as well as conducting more experimental comparative studies with Arab and non-Arab countries. (Jaradat, 2010)<sup>53</sup>.

There is an important need to build specialized understanding of disability and pedagogical capacity of teachers to competently deal with and teach Palestinian children according to the type of disability these children have. For example, it is difficult to introduce enabling practices for children with autism without a full understanding of autism and without replacing current traditional teacher-centred teaching approaches and assessment methods and techniques. (Ashbee, 2015)<sup>54</sup>

In brief, to ensure equitable and quality IE and to promote the realization of the SDGs for all PWD, here is a list of nine actions recommended in a UN extensive 365-report<sup>55</sup> prepared by over 200 experts from UN agencies, research institutions, organisations of persons with disabilities and other international institutions:

1. Strengthen national policies and the legal system to ensure access to quality education for all persons with disabilities.
2. Build the capacity of policymakers as well as other decision makers at the community and national levels to enhance their knowledge on disability inclusion in education.
3. Make schools and educational facilities accessible by creating an enabling environment for students with disabilities and by making physical and virtual environments accessible.
4. Provide training to teachers and other education specialists to gain knowledge and experience in inclusive education for persons with disabilities.
5. Adopt a learner-centred pedagogy which acknowledges that everyone has unique needs that can be accommodated through a continuum of teaching approaches.
6. Engage civil society and local communities in inclusive education.

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<sup>52</sup> ABU-HERAN, N.; ABUKHAYRAN, A.; DOMINGO, J.; & PÉREZ-GARCÍA (2014) Perceptions and Expectations of Palestinian Teachers towards Inclusive Education in Bethlehem District. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology* 12(2):461-482. DOI: [10.14204/ejrep.33.14010](https://doi.org/10.14204/ejrep.33.14010) [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286647393\\_Perceptions\\_and\\_expectations\\_of\\_Palestinian\\_teachers\\_towards\\_inclusive\\_education\\_in\\_Bethlehem\\_district](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286647393_Perceptions_and_expectations_of_Palestinian_teachers_towards_inclusive_education_in_Bethlehem_district)

<sup>53</sup> Jaradat, I. (2014). The Palestinian experience in integrating children with physical and mobility disability in government schools [Altajriba Alfalistinia fi damage thawi aleaqah aljasadiya wa alharakiya fi almadrasa alhukomiya]. *Psychological and Educational Studies*, 4, 19-42. <https://dspace.univ-ouargla.dz/jspui/bitstream/123456789/7104/1/P0402.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Ashbee, Elaine (2015) Educational inclusion for children with autism in Palestine. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, UK. [https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/6546/5/Ashbee16PhD\\_Final.pdf](https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/6546/5/Ashbee16PhD_Final.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2018) Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities. (p6-7) <https://social.un.org/publications/UN-Flagship-Report-Disability-Final.pdf>



7. Establish monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the implementation of policies and laws on inclusive education.
8. Improve national collection and disaggregation of education indicators by disability.
9. Explore online and smartphone crowdsourcing applications to obtain bottom-up information on the accessibility of schools for persons with disabilities.

These actions can be used as contextualised guiding criteria to identify several significant gaps and challenges to be discussed below.

## 5 Key Challenges Identified

Providing quality IE to PCWD face many significant challenges and gaps that should be addressed gradually and comprehensively. These challenges have been identified in several local and international studies and assessment reports. These gaps are related to different levels: legal policy and senior decision makers, and implementation level. Despite some strategic policies and commitment to PCWD, there are several gaps related to policies and decision making and listed below. This list is an outcome of surveying local and international documents.

1. Lack of unified specific criteria and mechanism for identification of PWD and their needs in Palestine.
2. Absence of specifying practical and context-based measures and detailed actions in MoE's strategic plans to implement detailed quality inclusive education actions and effectively monitor their implementation in schools and universities.
3. Lack of detailed specifications of all infrastructure preparations, assistive learning tools and equipment as well as services to be developed and provided to PCWD in most schools especially in public schools in WB.
4. Lack of regular update of all types of disability figures in all education levels: preschool, school, higher education.
5. Lack of allocating specific basic budget for enabling and educating PWD and working getting more fund from local and international donors.

At the implementation level, the World Bank report provides comprehensive assessment of the situation and services offered to Palestinians with Disabilities (PWD) on disability in Palestine. The report (2016: p4-5)<sup>56</sup> identified four significant gaps as follows:

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<sup>56</sup> The World Bank (2016). West Bank and Gaza. Disability in the Palestinian Territories. Assessing Situation and Services of People with Disabilities. Available: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/501421472239948627/pdf/WBG-Disability-Study-Final-DRAFT-for-Transmission-Oct-31.pdf>



1 Availability, specifically:

- Significant gaps in addressing hearing, intellectual, and severe disabilities
- Availability of mobility and support devices, which is least addressed by all stakeholders but most critical for social and economic independence.
- Most available services (mainstream services, support services, and specialized services) do not address the diversity of needs (that is, age, gender, type of impairment);
- Available services are unequally distributed between cities and villages/camps and between West Bank and Gaza;
- Sustainability of many of the available services is in jeopardy since most are operated by NGOs without a clear national regulatory framework and dependence on donor funding; and
- Availability of support services is the greatest unmet need.

2 Accessibility:

- Lack of physical access to relevant infrastructure remains a key barrier for PWD in accessing services.
- Inaccessible transport (public and private) is most frequently cited by PWD as a key cause for limited opportunities to reach required services.
- Complicated and nontransparent eligibility criteria and access procedures (for example, medical assessment, and referral mechanism) reduce PWD's access to available services.
- The absence of accessible information on available services (for example, in Braille, easy reading, and sign language) minimizes their effective usage.

3 Affordability:

- Many specialized and most support services for PWD are provided by NGOs and the private sector, which incurs high fees/costs for PWD. Disability-related extra costs (for example, transport) are often high and there is no system in place to address these expenses.

4 Accountability:

- Decision makers and service providers alike are seldom aware of rules and regulations and often do not feel subject to accountability. Few, if any, service providers have regulations that oblige them to consult users and collect their feedback. PWD and/or their representative organizations are seldom actively involved in monitoring or evaluating these services.
- There is a lack of official and efficient monitoring and evaluation procedures from local and central authorities. Few of the participating service providers have an anonymous and accessible complaint and appeal system. Even when such a system exists, users and staff indicate that it has to be improved to make it more accountable.



The UNRWA kept producing several awareness and practice documents, including Disability Toolkit (2013)<sup>57</sup>, Disability in Perspective<sup>58</sup>, Disability inclusion guidelines (2017)<sup>59</sup>, Inclusive education fact sheet (2018)<sup>60</sup>, press releases giving examples of quality comprehensive services offered to PCWD<sup>61</sup>, and most importantly is disseminating 20-page annual reports regularly over the past three years (2018<sup>62</sup>, 2019<sup>63</sup>, 2020<sup>64</sup>). Each of these reports cover three disability aspects: main actions undertaken annually, challenges and opportunities. Some of the key challenges outlined in these three reports will be briefly discussed later.

1. Lack of special education skilled/capable teachers, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when for example, most regular teachers found it difficult to include children with disabilities in remote learning activities due to lack of capacity to adapt and/or to implement adapted curricula.
2. Lack of staff capacity building and productive coordination at the field level.
3. Negative attitude and perceptions towards capacities of persons with disabilities and lack understanding about their rights to access mainstream services on an equal and meaningful way.
4. Lack of unified criteria or mechanism for identification of PWD and their needs.
5. Low participation of PWD in mainstream services due to “lack of expertise and resources to ensure accessibility in these consultation mechanisms –i.e. sign language interpreters, invitation done in accessible formats, physical accessibility of meeting venues, support with transport etc.” (2019: P9).
6. Lack of financial resources causing a significant drop in the provision of assistive devices, including eye glasses and hearing aids and accessibility of the buildings.
7. “Inaccessible physical environment and communication: [UNRWA] does not generally make information available in formats accessible to persons with different types of disabilities. The focus is still largely on physical accessibility, while accessible communication such as health information and education are seldom prioritised.” (p 14)

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<sup>57</sup> Disability Toolkit (2013)

<https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/disability%202/DISABILITY%20TOOLKIT%20English.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Disability in perspective (2013) <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/disability-perspective>

<sup>59</sup> Disability inclusion guidelines (2017)

[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/disability\\_inclusion\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/disability_inclusion_guidelines.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> Inclusive education fact sheet (2018)

[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/inclusive\\_education\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/inclusive_education_factsheet.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Press Releases: Special Education in UNRWA schools: ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Available: <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/special-education-unrwa-schools-ensuring-inclusive-and-equitable-quality>

<sup>62</sup> UNRWA Disability Inclusion Annual Report (2018): <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/strategy-policy/disability-inclusion-annual-report-2018>

<sup>63</sup> UNRWA Disability Inclusion Annual Report (2019)

[https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/inclusive\\_education\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/inclusive_education_factsheet.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> UNRWA. Disability Inclusion Annual Report (2020) <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/disability-inclusion-annual-report-2020>





8. Inadequate partnerships/network and community engagement to exchange expertise/resources on disability inclusion such as sign language interpretation services and Braille materials.
9. Disability (especially mental health conditions) stigma and discrimination at community, household and staff levels who still have negative attitudes towards PWD.
10. Non-availability or unreliability of disability-disaggregated data causing inadequate address of the needs, priorities and rights of PWD.
11. Scarce and/or non-affordable assistive technology Assistive technology. Even when it is available, the regular teachers cannot use it, thereby limiting learners' access to remote learning, communication and information, as observed during the COVID-19 crisis.
12. Inadequate internal and external collaborations and partnerships, particularly with inter (national) non-governmental organizations and other UN agencies.

## 6 Recommendations for Further Research

Several recommendations for further research have emerged as a result of surveying many studies and reports on disability in Palestine. Here are key recommendations that should be conducted quality research using a variety of research types focusing mainly on empirical, experimental, case-based, evidence-based research and action research:

1. More research is needed to understand, explore and direct/ affect not only the public opinion (local community) in Palestine but also legislators, policy makers, educators, teachers and families of PCWD through increasing their awareness, reinforcing their cultural/ ideological values and ethical beliefs, and changing their perception, attitudes and practices with PWD. These studies should be applied to a larger scale Palestinian population living in urban and rural areas as well as Palestinian refugee camps.
2. There should be focus on investigating a variety of experiences and promising practices of inclusive education that cover all education levels starting from pre-school, primary and secondary school with more focus on disability in Palestinian higher education as there is little research done on this level. It is advisable for these studies to focus more on learners who have hearing, intellectual or severe disabilities because these areas have not received equal attention and investigation as other types of disability. In her PhD, Ashbee (2015)<sup>65</sup> strongly recommends conducting studies on Palestinian children with autism as there a scarce research on them.

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<sup>65</sup> Ashbee, Elaine (2015) Educational inclusion for children with autism in Palestine. PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, UK. [https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/6546/5/Ashbee16PhD\\_Final.pdf](https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/6546/5/Ashbee16PhD_Final.pdf)



3. To ensure maximum benefits and strategic impact of all funded projects and programmes implemented in Palestine, it is necessary to conduct research on every training and capacity building programme implemented. Such practice creates a culture of capacity building oriented research. This capacity building based research should include any pre-service and in-service training of teachers, teacher educators, supervisors, headmasters and all other practitioners and also parents and community members. Such research is likely to have long term impact on the quality of education and services offered to PWD due to the fact that most of the services offered to PWD is provided through locally or internationally funded initiatives and projects.
4. As most studies discussed the importance of empowering and supporting PCWD through achieving quality inclusive education, it would also be more effective to investigate how different fields can best be learned by PCWD. To be more specific, more varied research should be conducted on how science, math, language, social sciences, arts, etc. can best be learned by blind, deaf and learners with learning difficulties and in accordance with each individualized learning styles disability type. This research should covers all components of the teaching learning process, especially learning and teaching styles, Palestinian curriculum and assessment process. For example, the researcher of this study stimulates and creates ethical obligation among his students enrolled in a master programme in applied linguistics at the Islamic University of Gaza to do their dissertations on teaching English to children with disabilities. In 2019, he supervised one student on her dissertation<sup>66</sup> on teaching reading to Palestinian deaf secondary school learners in the only secondary school for deaf not only in Gaza but in all Palestine (to date) and was the external examiner to another student who worked attitudes and achievements of visually-impaired students enrolled in special and inclusive secondary schools.<sup>67</sup>
5. Covid-19 crisis has globally proved that technology is vital for keeping the process of teaching and learning continuing whether through blended learning (using technology as an enhancing tools) or through online learning (using synchronous or asynchronous learning). As Palestine is considered a context of contracted crises and challenges, it is recommended to conduct research on how technology can best be used to enhance the teaching and learning of children with different disabilities, especially those with multiple disabilities. These studies should also focus on how technologies can facilitate quality individualised assessment.
6. To create a sustainable impact of qualifying teachers in inclusive education, further research on the quality of all pre-service teacher education programmes (mainly

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<sup>66</sup> Diana Yehya Abu Khaled (2019) Investigating English Reading Difficulties Facing Palestinian Deaf Secondary School Learners in the Gaza Strip. MA Dissertation, Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine. Available: <https://library.iugaza.edu.ps/thesis/126654.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Al-Farra, Amaal Kamal (2019) Palestinian Visually-Impaired Students (VISs) in Special and Inclusive EFL Secondary Schools: Attitudes and Achievements. MA Dissertation, Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine. Available: [https://library.iugaza.edu.ps/book\\_details.aspx?edition\\_no=139008](https://library.iugaza.edu.ps/book_details.aspx?edition_no=139008)



Bachelor) should be conducted. These programmes should be studied to examine to what extent these programmes produce teachers capable to develop inclusive education in kindergartens and mainstream schools to enhance the quality of education delivered to PCW. A related recommendation to include research activities in any education proposal submitted for supporting inclusive education and any proposal serving the interests and needs of PWD.

These recommendations can be achieved through creating a professional interest and ethical obligation among many master and doctorate students enrolled in postgraduate programmes in the faculties of education in most PHEIs. The seeds of such research on disability can be planted early in the minds and hearts of tens of thousands of students (pre-service teachers) enrolled in the undergraduate programmes at the faculties of education in all PHEIs who are likely to be teachers and parents. They can also be achieved through collaborative and team work among Palestinian researchers from Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza Strip and also between them and other regional and international researchers. They can also conduct comparative research to exchange experiences and practices as done by some Palestinian academic in An-Najah National University and Norwegian academics.<sup>68</sup> This collaborative research widens dissemination of research results and improves the quality of education and services delivered to PWD.

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<sup>68</sup> Gustafsson, Erni; Alawi, Nabil & Andersen, Per Normann (2019) University students' attitudes toward the physically disabled in Palestine and Norway: a multidimensional, comparative and quantitative study. An - Najah Univ. J. Res. (Humanities). Vol. 33(11), 2019. Available: [https://journals.najah.edu/media/journals/full\\_texts/6\\_JGVesPw.pdf](https://journals.najah.edu/media/journals/full_texts/6_JGVesPw.pdf)



## Appendix I: List of MoE's Documents

1. MoE Website: <http://www.moehe.gov.ps/>  
<http://www.moehe.gov.ps/moehe/factsandfigures>
2. Education development strategic plan 2008-2012
3. Education Sector and Cross-Sector Strategy 2011 – 2013
4. Mid-Term Strategy for Higher Education Sector (2010, 2011-2013)
5. Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022. <http://www.moehe.gov.ps/>
6. The National Strategic Plan of the Disability Sector in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Prepared by: Development Studies Centre - Birzeit University August 2012
7. The five-year strategic plan for education - Gaza - 2014 -2019
8. The initial report of the State of Palestine on the "Rights of Persons with Disabilities"  
"التقرير الاولي لدولة فلسطين الخاص باتفاقية "حقوق الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة"
9. Teacher Education Strategy in Palestine 2008
10. The Palestinian National Policy Agenda 2017-2022
11. Monitoring and Evaluation Report 2017  
<http://www.moehe.gov.ps/moehe/plansandstrategies>
12. قرار بقانون رقم ( ) لسنة 2017 – بشأن التربية والتعليم العام -  
<http://www.moehe.gov.ps/moehe/ministerialsystemsandregulations>



## Appendix II: Goals of Palestine Inclusive Policy

