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## UNICEF Lebanon: Specialized Disability Organizations

### Introduction

UNICEF believes in the right of children with disabilities to be included in society and in inclusive quality education. The UNICEF Lebanon Country Office (LCO) committed in its Country Program Document to mainstream the needs of children and youth with disabilities across programme outcomes by following the twin track approach: mainstreaming disability across its programming and implementing targeted programming for Children with Disabilities (CWDs). The main objective of UNICEF's strategy is to ensure that barriers to inclusion of CWDs in society are tackled and that CWDs have equitable access to basic services and needs.

In addition to mainstreaming disability across its programming, and under targeted disability programming, the LCO has partnered with five specialized disability organizations since 2017. These specialized disability partners provide rehabilitation, special education and parental engagement services to 400 refugee children with moderate to severe disabilities. For children with milder disabilities, UNICEF works with non-formal education partners to ensure the inclusion of CWDs in non-formal education, and with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) to increase the accessibility of CWDs in the public schools through the MEHE inclusive pilot schools.

In 2021, UNICEF shifted its disability inclusion approach with specialized disability organizations by implementing more inclusive modalities. The new strategy's objective is to improve the access of children with moderate disabilities to inclusive learning. Specialized disability partners have a central role in this process, whereby they create a network of organizations in their regions working for the inclusion of CWDs in learning and society.

This document will present this new approach to disability inclusion, while showcasing its preliminary achievements and challenges. It will start with a short context on disability in Lebanon, moving to the UNICEF LCO disability inclusion strategy and new approach, then looking at its achievements and challenges that were collected from caregivers of CWDs, CWDs and specialized disability partners. Lastly, the document will outline next steps for 2022/2023 and the LCO's funding needs.



**900,000 persons with disabilities in Lebanon**



**150,000 children with disabilities in Lebanon**



**Multiple crises are increasing vulnerability of people and children with disabilities**

## Disability in Lebanon

The total number of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Lebanon is estimated at 900,000 for children and adults.<sup>1</sup> CWDs are estimated at 150,000 given the international expected benchmark disability rate of 2.5 per cent.<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank estimate that 5 per cent of children below the age of 14 have a disability, which is far higher than the figures under the Lebanese State's registration system. Unemployment is increasingly high and severe for persons with disabilities in Lebanon, with a recent study by ESCWA pointing out that over 86 per cent of persons with disabilities in Lebanon are unemployed (ESCWA, 2020). Finally, the stigmatization and segregation of persons with disabilities has led to a built environment which is inaccessible, UNESCO (2013) reporting that 95 per cent of buildings and facilities in Beirut do not have adequate disability accessibility measures.<sup>3</sup>

CWDs are among the most marginalized groups in Lebanon. Although the Law 220/2000 on Rights of Persons with Disabilities addresses the rights of PWDs to access proper education, rehabilitation services, employment, medical services, sports and public transport and stresses the right to political participation, most of its provisions are not being implemented.<sup>4</sup>

The absence of disability inclusion structures, and lack of access of people and children with disabilities to basic inclusive services, is one of the main reasons for the increased marginalization and vulnerability of PWDs in Lebanon. Inclusion of children with disabilities is also hindered by discriminatory attitudes and behaviors that are unfortunately prevalent in Lebanese society. Around 70 per cent and 25 per cent of UNICEF Knowledge Attitude and Practices (KAP, 2017) survey respondents thought that children with physical and intellectual disability, respectively, should be integrated into society and participate in the life of the community. This means that negative attitudes towards the inclusion of children with intellectual disability in particular are widespread.

The multiple crises that Lebanon faced since 2020 have only increased the vulnerabilities of people and children with disabilities. The economic crisis impacted residents' purchasing power and their ability to provide for the extra cost of disability; whereas lockdowns increased the barriers CWDs face to access learning and needed rehabilitation services because of their online modalities. Being a refugee with disability residing in Lebanon is an additional layer of vulnerability as refugees do not have access to already decreasing services that the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) provides to Lebanese children. It is estimated that 30 per cent of refugees in Lebanon may have disabilities or demonstrate specific needs. 23 per cent of disabilities are 'unspecified' in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data.<sup>5</sup>

# UNICEF LCO Disability Inclusion Strategy

In the Country Programme Document 2017-2022, UNICEF committed “to work across programme outcomes to gather robust data and mainstream the needs of children and youth with disabilities, planning evidence-based specific interventions to address their needs”. As a general framework, the twin track approach is adopted: on the one hand, mainstreaming disability in regular programmes, with disability-specific measures that empower the children to address their specific needs. On the other hand, providing specialized services for children with moderate to severe disabilities, whom the regular programmes are not yet capacitated enough to accommodate. Integrated in and in parallel to these efforts, UNICEF continuously works on promoting positive attitudes and behaviours on inclusion through rolling out the Social and Behavioural Change (SBC) strategy as the creation of a more favourable enabling environment in communities is key to the success of any inclusive programme.

## 1. Approach with Specialized Disability Partners and Linkage with NFE and MEHE Pilot Schools

UNICEF has been working closely with its partners and the Government of Lebanon to ensure that CWDs have access to quality inclusive education (mild to moderate disabilities), or special education (non-inclusive) for children with moderate to severe disabilities.

For refugee children with moderate to severe disabilities, they are receiving, since 2017, an integrated package of special education (non-inclusive), rehabilitation and parental engagement services within specialized disability organizations. Four hundred refugee children are targeted on a yearly basis.

For children with mild to moderate disabilities, they receive inclusive education services from non-formal education UNICEF partners, or the MEHE’s pilot schools. UNICEF has been working closely with non-formal education partners to ensure the integration of children with mild to moderate disabilities in their services, in addition to working with the Lebanese government to strengthen education systems and capacities so girls and boys with disabilities have equal access to quality inclusive education. UNICEF supported MEHE’s implementation of the pilot inclusive<sup>6</sup> education project in 30 public schools which includes the provision of individual assistive devices to CWDs and specialized supplies kits for each inclusive school, which is being scaled up to an additional 60 schools in 2022-2023, in addition to the operationalization of 20 second shift schools.

## 2. Social and Behavioural Change (SBC) for Inclusion

SBC is an evidence-based, strategic, systematic and targeted approach which aims to create a conducive environment. UNICEF developed a cross-cutting Social and Behavioural Change strategy by first mapping out all discriminatory behaviors of different audiences, including children and parents of children with and without disability, service providers such as teachers, municipalities, governmental and non-governmental institutions - operating in different sectors (education, protection, health, social inclusion, WASH and Youth). Then, the strategy specifies desired behaviors and communication channels to show how can existing hindering attitudes and practices of different stakeholders can be transformed into positive ones to create enabling environment for inclusion. Indeed, specialized and non-formal education partners have an essential role in implementing the SBC strategy with children, caregivers and the whole community.

## 3. Parental Engagement Curriculum

UNICEF developed a Parental Engagement Curriculum and Facilitators Guide after identifying a need for a tailored approach for the context of Lebanon and the current gaps in disability-specific knowledge and skills for caregivers. This curriculum offers global considerations for disability inclusive parenting and encompasses a fully participatory approach.

The curriculum provides information for parents and caregivers of CWDs on how to advocate and promote children’s rights for inclusion, understand and enhance their development through early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence, use positive approaches to help CWD learn appropriate behaviors, to encourage independent life skills, to protect them from violence and for parents/caregivers to understand and manage their own emotions related to raising children with disabilities.

The core content includes positive communication with children and adolescents, understanding their developmental needs, employing positive discipline techniques and ensuring safe environments. The curriculum will be implemented in 2022 following a full-scale five days’ training.

#### 4. New Approach with Specialized Disability Organizations

UNICEF adapted its strategy with specialized disability organizations in 2021, whereby it incorporates more inclusive modalities of implementation with specialized disability partners. The aim of the new strategy is for specialized disability organizations to create a network of organizations working in their regions for the inclusion of CWDs in learning and society.

Instead of having children with moderate to severe disabilities receiving special non-inclusive education, the specialized disability organizations would build networks with formal public or private schools and non-formal education organizations, to ensure that children with moderate disabilities are partially or fully integrated in inclusive learning, while still receiving rehabilitation services at the specialized disability organization.

The specialized disability organization, with the support of UNICEF, would have a central role in pushing formal schools and non-formal education organizations to integrate children with more moderate to severe disabilities in inclusive learning. They would work with the schools, teachers, caregivers, and the whole community to showcase that children with moderate disabilities can be integrated in inclusive learning. Likewise, the approach is to have specialized disability organization ultimately become resource centers who have the specialty and capacity to support in inclusive learning within the school environment.

UNICEF adapted its strategy with disability organizations in 2021 to incorporate more inclusive modalities of implementation

The specialized disability organization will have a central role in pushing formal schools and NFE organizations to integrate children with moderate to severe disabilities



# Achievements

## 1. Selection of specialized disability partners

The current UNICEF specialized disability partners of 2021/2022 went through a rigorous selection process, whereby an evaluation committee, consisting of UNICEF staff, assessed the submissions and selected organizations based on their inclusive implementation strategies and their expertise in providing services to children with moderate and severe disabilities. The selected Organizations are FISTA, National Rehabilitation and Development Center (NRDC), Orphan Welfare Society (OWS), Humanity Inclusion (HI) and Youth Association for the Blind (YAB).

## 2. Disability Inclusion Assessment

To increase the capacities of specialized disability organizations on disability inclusion, YAB, with extensive expertise in the inclusive school model and its implementation, assessed and put in place a capacity building plan for the specialized disability and non-formal education partners. The objective is for specialized organizations to have the needed skills and knowledge to be leaders in their regions on disability inclusion, leading to the integration of children with moderate disabilities in inclusive learning. The assessment was conducted in 2021 and the training took place in January and February 2022.

## 3. Full inclusion of children with disabilities in inclusive learning

Until December 2021, 486 (39 per cent girls) refugee CWDs are receiving education, rehabilitation and parental engagement services from the five specialized disability partners. As an immediate impact of the newly adapted disability strategy, and due to close coordination and follow up from specialized partners, out of the 486 CWDs, 53 children (mostly with severe to moderate disabilities) **were integrated fully, as of January 2022, in formal and non-formal inclusive education**, while still receiving rehabilitation services from specialized organizations. This integration is led by the specialized partners who are working closely with teachers, school personnel and caregivers.

Positive impact on CWDs' wellbeing who were integrated in inclusive education was directly noticed by specialized organizations, caregivers and children. Caregivers saw an increase in the self-esteem of their children and improvement of their capacities. Some **children reported being happier to go to the center (specialized partner) and the school**, and partners have seen CWDs becoming more playful, expressive of their needs and less aggressive with peers. **One 13-year-old Syrian boy, who cannot see, and who has never been to school, expressed his immense joy to be going to school next year.** He is currently being prepped to be integrated in formal education in the 2022/2023 scholastic year.

## 4. Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours on inclusion

Each partner is technically supported to design and implements a set of initiatives that tackle context-specific relevant barriers and behaviors. **So far, around 250,000 people have been engaged/reached through these SBC activities with key messages on inclusion with partners using many innovative tools**, especially during COVID-19. All the implemented activities were selected to be showcased in the International SBC Summit and were also showcased in the global workshop to end stigma on disability under the title of "effective activities using the socio-environmental model to end stigma". Below are some examples of tools and activities implemented by partners:

- Inclusion: Include children with disabilities in summer camp, scouts, sports club, and recreational activities. This includes providing capacity building to service providers and working with children and their parents to ensure an enabling environment.
- Community engagement: Map and engage key stakeholders in the area to co-develop and implement community-based plans for inclusion. An example of an initiative is to develop with the community an inclusive public garden.
- Social Mobilization: Launch a competition between universities on producing the best video on inclusion, conduct disability rights street parades, include pictures of people with disability on popular social media pages.
- Edutainment: Develop and perform theater play on inclusion, conduct storytelling on children's book on disability, equip a mobile van with characters and songs on inclusion to move through neighborhoods during COVID-19.

An impact evaluation was launched to measure the change in attitudes of caregivers and their children and professionals with regards to the social inclusion of children with disability before and after each SBCC activity (of three of the 4 implementing partners) and it is expected to be finalized in July 2022. The results will be used to enhance programming.

## 5. Parental engagement curriculum

**The Parental Engagement curriculum for Parents of Children with Disabilities is meant to be an open resource and fully accessible to be used by all organizations locally and internationally.** The curriculum was developed in a participatory approach ensuring to meet the needs and voices of the represented communities. It was validated through a series of discussions, reviews, and validations by the Inclusive Education team at UNICEF and a team of specialists from UNICEF headquarters in New York. Likewise, validation workshops took place with NFE partners, organizations of PWDs within the Lebanese context and input provided was incorporated into the curriculum and the facilitator's guide.

Facilitators of parental engagement sessions are now equipped with the knowledge of strategies and approaches to engage parents and caregivers of children with disabilities; and to provide tools and resources to strengthen the capacity and advocacy. The curriculum is also available in English and Arabic. In September 2021, 47 facilitators, social workers, trainers, inclusion officers, program managers of 18 UNICEF partner NFE and Disability organizations attended a three-day training on the Curriculum. In March 2022, UNICEF began rolling out a full-scale five-day training with over 30 education and child protection implementing partners, will be followed by one-on-one coaching in 2022.

## 6. Mainstreaming of CP, GBV and gender within specialized UNICEF disability partners

All specialized disability partners' staff were trained on gender, GBV and CP safe identification and referrals. Boys and girls with disabilities are at a higher risk of GBV; therefore, staff working with girls with disabilities in specialized disability organizations are aware of what gender and GBV are and how they can safely refer them safely to GBV services.

## 7. Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Haddi, Social Assistance Program

In November 2021, 1,688 children with disability receiving services from the 5 specialized disability organizations were included in UNICEF's new social assistance program for children, Haddi (meaning "next to me" in Arabic). It provides a child grant in the form of a monthly USD cash transfer, linked to necessary services, to help households in raising their children. Families with one child identified receive US\$40 per month, US\$60 for two children and US\$80 for three children or more identified. Prior to Haddi, and since June 2020, 1,016 CWDs receiving services from specialized disability organization were included in cash assistance under the Child-wellbeing package (assistance in Lebanese pounds).

## 8. Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Cash for Education Programme

UNICEF's 'Cash for Education Programme' provides non-Lebanese (primarily Syrian refugee) children enrolled in several grades in second shift public schools, including all children with disabilities enrolled in any grade, with a monthly cash transfer of US\$20, for 5 months covering February to June 2022. The cash assistance will support families of eligible children to cover indirect costs of education (such as transportation and daily allowances) to increase attendance and retention in formal education. Of the target of 85,000 children, an estimated 5,100 CWDs (6 per cent) will be included in the programme. Guidance notes to identify children with disabilities in second shift public schools and subsequently support their cash for education programme registration were shared with relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, school directors, and UNICEF's implementing partners. The projected role of specialized disability organizations will be to support the follow-up on children with disabilities that are absent from school, along with referrals to additional support services.

## Challenges

Specialized partners face several barriers in the quest to integrate children with moderate to severe disabilities in inclusive education. First, attitudes and perceptions of school personnel, caregivers and the community discourage inclusion of CWDs in formal education, especially for children with intellectual disability. This is due to the perception that CWDs would benefit more if provided with learning adapted for their needs, which would protect them from the bullying of children without disabilities.

Second, the multiple crisis that Lebanon faced is limiting the capacities of formal schools in accepting new children or CWDs and have limited capacities to remove barriers and work on improving their systems to be inclusive. This is due to the economic crisis and the limited human resources (some schoolteachers left due to low salaries) that are affecting schools' capacities tremendously.

Third, the economic crisis and lack of commitment to disability inclusion as a right for all PWDs from the Lebanese state, resulting in the gap in implementation of law 220/2000, have a negative impact on disability inclusion structures and advocacy in this regard.

## Next steps and funding needs

### 2022 to 2023 approach

UNICEF in Lebanon is planning to continue its disability inclusive approach in 2022/23 for 500 children with moderate and severe disabilities to have access to special or inclusive education, rehabilitation and parental engagement services. **Without these services, children with moderate to severe disabilities will stay at home increasing their protection risks and would not be able to realize their basic rights to education, protection, health, play and community participation.**

Likewise, in efforts to ensure accessibility, an assistive technology/devices/mobility aids component will be added as a critical bridge to allowing CWDs integrate in mainstream education. Focusing on organizational capacity, specialized organizations are to adapt and implement an Inclusive education policy within their organization that will govern the nature of their programs and guide the culture internally to promote meaningful participation.

**The inclusive modality of implementation will be strengthened** by ensuring that the network of specialized disability partners continues its advocacy and work with formal schools and non-formal education organizations, and with the whole community, to integrate children with moderate disabilities in inclusive education, and puts in place structures for this integration to be sustainable.

Given the prevailing negative attitudes and behaviors around disability and inclusion, **the creation of a favorable enabling environment in communities is key to the success of any inclusive program.** An SBC component should be incorporated in the programs of both Specialized partners and NFE partners. That is to ensure that individual, social and behavioral barriers are systematically assessed and countered in both the school community setting. To complement the work of specialized services, and non-formal education, an SBC partnership is to be established to focus on social changes and address social barriers and social norms.

**Efforts to mainstream GBV within specialized disability organizations would continue to tackle additional risks girls with disabilities are subjected to.** Moreover, the work of specialized disability organizations will tackle specific barriers and needs that girls with disabilities face in society and to reach services. On the other side, specialized disability organizations are trained to refer children with disabilities at risk of child labor, violence, and child marriage to adequate child protection services. Noting that CP and GBV partners will be trained on inclusion of children with disabilities in CP and GBV programs. Moreover, CP and GBV partners will be trained on inclusion core concepts and best practices using guidance developed by WRC in 2018.

**Parental Engagement sessions are to continue as a critical component of the integrated package of services provided to children.** All UNICEF implementing partners working on disability inclusion, will be required to adapt the UNICEF developed Parental Engagement Curriculum for Parents of Children with Disabilities to provide parents with the specialized content targeting their specific needs, that are not met through general parental engagement programs.

### Sustainability

**Twenty per cent of the targeted children will receive assistive devices,** ensuring an adequate support system is put in place to promote disability inclusive learning and every child's right to mainstream education. The program will be aligned with the academic year allowing for formal and non-formal educational pathways to be identified correspondently.

In addition, **capacity building will continue for all partners, led by a National NGO that will head a consortium of consultants that are specialized in a specific disability type** (visual, hearing, physical and learning). This local NGO will be able to provide the technical support at the child level, ensuring quality and effective disability inclusion for all education and specialized disability implementing partners. This unique approach targets an identified implementation gap related to barriers for integration of children with moderate to severe disability in inclusive education.

This approach will support specialized disability organizations to shift their mindset and mode of implementation to become resource centers that support in the inclusion of children with disabilities in inclusive education, rather than conforming with long standing norms and societal segregation of children with disabilities, especially those with moderate to severe disabilities.

The inclusive modality being implemented does tackle the project's sustainability since it works on giving an active role to specialized disability organizations to be agents of change in their areas, working with local communities and schools to push for disability inclusion. To ensure sustainability of the project, a requirement for selected organizations is:

- To specify the school they will be partnering with along with having a clear disability inclusive plan with the school,
- To promote a local school level approach,
- To have special educators supporting the teachers for a short period of time to ensure inclusion of child in learning. The special educator not to replace/ or stay next to child in the classroom for a long period of time, rather their role is to support the teacher and child for the main goal of ensuring independence of the child to learn similarly to his/ her peers.



## References

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2. European Academy for Childhood Disability (2003). Provision of services for children with disabilities in central and eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Groningen, European Academy for Childhood Disability.
3. Disability Under Siege, March 2021. Lebanon Literature review, funded by UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and Global Challenges Research Fund Wissam Marouche, Kate McAuliff, and Maha Shuayb.
4. UNESCO (2013) Social Inclusion of Young Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Lebanon. In 2016, according to Mosa the number is close to 14,000.
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6. Around 1,550 children with disabilities (41 per cent girls and 59 per cent boys) were enrolled in the inclusive schools in 2020/2021.