

CONNECTING CLASSROOMS

Summary report: Policy dialogue on Inclusive Education and Covid-19

Jordan Experiences

27th October 2020

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Summary

The British Council believes that the inclusion of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) into the regular education systems is an entitlement and a fundamental human right. All children and young people should expect to receive an education that enables them to achieve the best possible educational and wider outcomes, and become confident, able to communicate their own views and ready to make a successful transition into adulthood.

British Council convened a webinar on Jordan's experience of promoting and enabling Inclusive Education and Covid-19 to the participants from the MENA region. This webinar – which was in Arabic - focused on what policy makers and system leaders can do to create an inclusive education plan for responding to Covid 19 for the benefit of students and new teaching and learning needs of educators, as well as schools returning after lockdown. This webinar builds on the 'Building Inclusive Education Systems and Schools' global webinar which took place on 11th June 2020.

The event provided an opportunity to share experiences between the network of the British Council Connecting Classrooms Programme, and work done in supporting inclusive education. The Policy

Dialogue also intended to raise awareness the work and efforts of the British Council in supporting local governments and donors, local communities and NGOs in the development of education systems globally, regionally and locally and respond to “education for all”.

The event was attended by 33 policy makers from six MENA countries: Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian Occupied Territories, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

In this webinar, which was hosted by Jordan, the speakers were:

- Dr. Sami Al Mahasis / Director of the Department of Education, Ministry of Education (MoE).
- Ms Ghadeer Al Haris / Secretary-General Assistant for Technical Affairs and Media Spokesperson at the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (HCD).
- Ms Alia Zureikat Adviser to the President of the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (HCD).
- Dr Kawther Marashdeh/ Director of the Educational Development Center at UNRWA for the Jordan Field.

Speakers highlighted mechanisms and techniques to create an inclusive plan for schools to meet the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). They shared the challenges faced by SEND children as a result of lockdown and solutions that their organizations have put in place. They also presented the communication plans between the schools and parents, adapting curricula, online distance learning and catch up programmes in sign language taking into consideration visual and hearing impairments and by providing psychosocial services.

Dr. Sami Al Mahasis shared Jordan’s experience in inclusive education facing Covid-19 lockdown, showcased the current situation in schools, numbers and percentage of SEND students where 11.2% of people have disabilities in Jordan according to the 2015 population census. As 79% of students with disabilities of school age do not receive any form of education, there comes the importance to focus on “Education for All” inclusive learning in Jordan to help provide all school-age children with educational opportunities in Ministry of Education schools of all categories. The number of integrated students with different disabilities reached 21,0000 male and female students included in the school education in 2020/21 school year.

Dr. Sami highlighted the collaboration with HCD and international NGOs in implementing the 10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education (2020-2030), the challenges faced and the Ministry’s interventions and support to overcome those challenges by activating distance education and filming the curriculum lessons that the Ministry of Education developed for students with SEND including sign language and audio. The lessons were uploaded to the website of the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, www.hcd.gov.jo.

The grades required for passing, completing or failing the subjects for the second semester of 2019/2020 were revised and amended. Moreover, excluding students with disabilities from some of the passing requirements to facilitate their education.

The education support for students with SEND disbursed an amount of (450) thousand dinars for those enrolled in special education centers and private schools, and (429) male and female students benefited from the education support, whereby each male and female student was disbursed (1000) dinars and lastly, the pilot exam that students with disabilities submitted in the high school examination was supervised by the Education Administration / Directorate of Disabled Students' Programs.

Ms Ghadeer Al Haris and Ms Alia Zureikat introduced HCD’s scope of work and Inclusive Education methodology. Shared the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 20 for the Year 2017. As it was the first law against discrimination based on disability, it includes a new definition of people with

disabilities and gives the relevant government agencies clear responsibilities entrusted with clear periods of time.

They shared the challenges faced by SEND students with different disabilities and the interventions to resolve those challenges through E-learning programmes by producing 2300 filmed videos by initiating “Basera” Initiative and “Isteklale” Application for students with visual impairment. They also provide counseling and support services to families with intellectual disability students (<https://www.habaybna.net/>). In addition, they created a YouTube channel that includes 200 movies dedicated to children with intellectual disabilities and autistic disorder. Lastly, they shared HCD’s plan for the upcoming 3 years as part of the implementation of the 10 Year Strategy for Inclusive Education (2020-2030) for Jordan.

www.facebook.com/HCDJordan www.twitter.com/HCDJordan [Youtube @HCDJordan](https://www.youtube.com/@HCDJordan)

Dr Kawther Marashdeh introduced UNRWA’s Inclusion policy and highlighted UNRWA’s strategic opportunities and challenges faced during lockdown. They shed the light on the different inclusive activities implemented with SEND students and parents during COVID-19 lockdown; such as creating a network of communication during home quarantine; after-school closures between the school management, teacher, mentor psychological educators, special education teachers / support centers, students, and parents.

UNRWA ensured the continuation of distance learning through:

- Initiatives by teachers: Providing SEND students with videos, assignments and worksheets according to the objectives included in Individual educational plans for each student.
- Presenting a visual agenda to ensure familiarity, and applications and activities that can be carried out during the ban period.
- UNRWA’s interactive learning program.
- Integration of all students into the catch-up program "September 2020" and implementing a specialized compensatory program for Arabic language and mathematics skills for students with disabilities and severe difficulties by Special Education Teachers in Support Centers Learning.
- Ongoing psychosocial support
- Recreational activities: Providing students with videos and songs for children explaining how to protect themselves from Covid-19.

[HTTPS://WWW.UNRWA.ORG/AR/COVID_19](https://www.unrwa.org/ar/covid_19)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw1uj9BT3hg>

- Speaker presentations can be accessed through the following link:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LgL_54r8dUMmcPlms6mWxMMCR3y0JADj

Recommendations from the policy dialogue

- Building capacities of teachers and parents on how to improve communication and collaboration during Covid-19 lockdown and ensure technical accessibility settings are available i.e. educational videos to support e-learning and provide psychological support to the SEND students families.
- Ensure the availability of various technical accessibility options based on SEND students' needs for the E-learning videos. For example, availability of audio curricula.
- Focus on the challenges faced by Students with SEND that emerged from the survey considering the pandemic and the provision of possible support mechanisms.
- Establishing the Curative Education Department in different Education Directorates under the Ministry of Education.
- As a result, from the data collected by the committee that was responsible of visiting schools to assess and develop schools to become inclusive. It was recommended to provide teachers with In-service trainings focusing on Inclusive Education.
- Providing opportunities for teachers to participate in study visits to developed countries such as UK Canada, USA, Lebanon, Australia, UK, and the countries of the European Union; to gain experiences in integrating children, as this experience is recent in Jordan.
- Focus on SEND inclusion processes by creating special classes, where students with disabilities receive educational support, while working to provide them with the opportunity to integrate with their peers in classroom and extra-curricular activities. These classes may apply the regular curriculum or special curricula. In addition, it is crucial to mainstream students with SEND in regular classes while considering some modifications to and arrangements in the physical environment, curricula, teaching methods and educational support methods to meet their needs. These classes apply general education curricula.
- The 10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education (2020-2030) objective is enhancing and ensuring access to education for persons with disabilities through the identification of nine main pillars within the strategy related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the education process. The strategy is based on qualifying school teachers and leaders and focusing on curriculum alignment and developing the school environment in order to reach an educational system that accommodates diversity and difference and meets the requirements of students with disabilities to be able to access all educational programs and services on the basis of equality to contribute to the development of their capabilities and enable them to contribute to their communities as committed and active individuals.
- Continuing the Ministry's collaboration with local partners on developing and implementing the 10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education.

Questions and Answers session

- *Is the the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities a governmental entity and affiliated with the Kingdom of Jordan if it is an organization? Who is responsible for it?*

HCD is a government agency affiliated with the Prime Minister of Jordan.

- **How were the video lessons carried out and how was privacy ensured? How was the individual financial budget for each with special needs secured?**

HCD: The video lessons were carried out in partnership with a company that provides sign language translation services. Services agreements were signed with teachers working in teaching deaf students for translation. The video lessons were reviewed to ensure the quality of the translation provided, and the Council covered the financial costs involved. All teachers have agreed to display the videos on the platform.

MOE: During the second semester 2019/2020, Sign Language lessons were filmed for deaf students, in cooperation with the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The financial budget has been secured in order to cover the fees of photography by the Higher Council. From the first grade to the third primary and the second secondary / literary grade, by teachers from the Ministry of Education and the publication of the lessons was uploaded on the Higher Council's website. As for grades from the fourth to the tenth grade, they were photographed by the ministry's teachers, and uploaded on the Higher Council's website.

The privacy was ensured by uploading the lessons on Google drive. The production was by adding information related to the pictorial lessons and the individual financial budget was secured through the current funds of the Education Administration / Directorate of the Disabled Students Program 100 thousand dinars

- **How many UNRWA learning support / support centers are there, and how is coordination between schools and these centers carried out?**

The number of centers in UNRWA is 32 centers, in which 34 special education teachers work. The center is inside the school. By the special education teacher, and in partnership with the class teacher, to meet the child's needs in proportion to his capabilities, the rest of the classes are received within the regular class to achieve inclusion, the class teacher completes the objectives of the individual educational plan according to strategies that suit the situation.

- **Distance learning represents a greater opportunity for integration because it reduces costs and provides additional facilities, so how can we invest that in the integration strategy and seize the opportunity?**

HCD : The implementation plan for the inclusive education strategy included an activity on distance education in view of the current circumstances, as well as because technological progress imposes on us a kind of blended education. To ensure that distance education considers the requirements of persons with disabilities, this activity has been added.

UNRWA : In fact, at the beginning we need studies to prove that distance learning is a good opportunity for inclusion, especially as we are talking about a social and interactive environment among all students within the teaching and learning environment.

As for the material expenditures, we need a higher cost in the distance learning system in order to provide a good infrastructure for both schools and parents together, for example, advanced technological devices must be provided for effective communication, educational channels and platforms, and curricula designed to meet the needs of SEND students, and the teacher and

guardian are also trained, and this is what must be worked on diligently at the present time. The integration of the child means his presence in a normal class with students who do not suffer from disabilities or intense needs, and in distance learning it is difficult to achieve, However, UNRWA provides as much educational videos and follow-ups with families as possible to complete the implementation of individual educational plans and provide the necessary psychological support through supportive activities, whether for the family or the child .

MoE : - provide SEND students with laptops that has special arrangements and features based on the students' disability.

- Organize a committee to review distance and face-to-face lessons filming, if available at the special education centers, Amal school and school for blinds.
- Provide internet bundles for SEND students to upload and watch the lessons.
- Distribute the educational materials in boxes (can be purchased from educational libraries) to support enhancing inclusion education for SEND students.
- Diversity in providing distance education sessions to help reduce desirable behaviors for students with disabilities

Do you have a statistic about the results of students with disabilities in the high school exam? How were these results compared to the rest of the students? Are students with disabilities assessed in a different way from other students?

MoE : 213 SEND students passed "Tawjih" High School Exam for the school year 2020. 35 students got a total grade 90 /100 and Above.

Students with disabilities do not receive an individual and specific exam for them, the exam questions is standardized for all students. However, a service is provided to provide sign language translators for students with hearing impairment and a writer for students with visual impairment and cerebral palsy and increase the exam time by 30 % while sitting in a room alone with their companions according to disability, enlarging the general secondary examination questions for students with vision impairment and allocating a room on the ground floor for students with mobility disabilities.

Annex I – Bios of speakers

- Dr. Sami Al-Mahasis from the Ministry of Education. Worked as a teacher, educational supervisor and director of education in Rusaifah and Mafrq. As well as Director of the Department of Special Education, Special Education, Supervision and Educational Training, and now Director of the Department of Education. An expert in the field of quality and a professor at Al-Adir, both public and private universities.
- Ms. Ghadeer Al Hares is Secretary-General Assistant for Technical Affairs and Media Spokesperson at the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (HCD). Previously, she served as the Director of Policy and Planning and Director of Educational Program and Accreditation Standards Departments at HCD. Prior to joining HCD, Al Hares worked for Disabled Children Association in Saudi Arabia as a senior speech and language pathologist (2000-2009) and as a teacher of English language for Jordan's Ministry of Education (1995-2000).
- Ms. Alia Zureikat currently serves as Adviser to the President of the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (HCD), Jordan's primary disability policy-advocacy organisation, a position she has held since March 2015. She is also Director of the International Relations and Co-operation Department. she has also been heavily involved with the Hashemite Commission for

Disabled Soldiers (HCDS) in its preparations and work with the Invictus Games. In August 2017, Zureikat was appointed a member of the board of the Jordan Paralympic Committee (JPC), a position she held until June 2018. In January 2016, she was appointed by Royal Decree as a member of the Board of Trustees of Jordan's National Centre for Human Rights serving a full term, through to July 2019.

- Dr. Kawthar Marashdeh, a specialist in curricula and teaching, held many positions in the field of education, starting as a teacher in the schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East UNRWA, then an educational expert at the Educational Development Center, then as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts at UNRWA for a year. She worked with the UNRWA General Presidency in the Jordan Field as a consultant for teacher development and school empowerment. She ran an educational program with Relief International for a compensatory and informal education program for Syrian refugee students. She is currently working as the Director of the Educational Development Center at UNRWA for the Jordan Field.

Annex II – About the Connecting Classrooms project

The Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL) programme is the British Council's flagship global schools programme, delivered in partnership with the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The programme provides opportunities for pupils to learn about and take action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to live and work in a globalised economy. Globally, the programme develops international school partnerships, helps teachers to exchange good practice and increases understanding across cultures.

CCGL contributes toward the core purpose of the British Council's work in school systems to improve learning outcomes through:

- Building a body of research on international best practices that is publicly available;
- Providing and enabling consultancy on systems improvement on a continuum from access to quality to innovation; and
- Providing services that support practitioners to deliver high quality education

Connecting Classrooms 2018-21 will support school systems to develop their pedagogy through:

- Professional development for teachers and school leaders;
- Sustainable partnerships between schools in the UK and MENA to plan and implement a collaborative pupil-to-pupil project so that young people in both schools can benefit from the partnership;
- Policy dialogue opportunities for policy makers that will support national and regional level debate, reflection and action;
- Awards to schools who are successful in developing young people equipped with the knowledge and skills to live and work in a globalised economy;
- Providing online access to high quality resources to support teachers in delivering improved learning outcomes for young people.