



Assessing Challenges, Successful programs and Initiatives, and Unmet Needs: The Case of Palestinian Adolescents and Youth with Disabilities

(Rapid Assessment)



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I. Introduction

i. Background and Context

Children and adolescents with disabilities represent one of the most marginalized and excluded groups in society, often enduring significant violations of their rights. They are more likely than their non-disabled peers to face profound social, economic, cultural, and civic disparities. These young individuals frequently encounter negative attitudes, stereotypes, and stigma, which can lead to violence, abuse, and social isolation. Additionally, they often suffer from a lack of adequate policies, legislation, and access to educational and economic opportunities¹. Compared to their peers without disabilities, children and adolescents with disabilities are more likely to be among the poorest in society, less likely to attend school, access medical services, or have their voices heard. Their disabilities increase their vulnerability to violence and abuse, raise the likelihood of being placed in residential institutions, and often result in exclusion from proper nutrition or humanitarian assistance during emergencies². Tragically, in many countries, the response to the needs of children with disabilities remains inadequate, often limited to institutionalization, abandonment, or neglect, rather than providing the necessary support and inclusion.

The context of Palestinian adolescents and youth

Adolescents and youth represent a significant proportion of the population in Palestine, with those aged between 10 and 24 years accounting for nearly 30% of the population. This demographic, which includes over 1.4 million individuals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, is an essential segment of Palestinian society, contributing to the nation's social, cultural, and economic life³. However, the lives of these young people are profoundly shaped by the ongoing political conflict, economic instability, and social challenges that have characterized the region for decades. The Israeli occupation, continuous and endless escalations of violence, restrictions on movement, and a struggling economy have created an environment of uncertainty and hardship that disproportionately affects the youth, particularly those with disabilities.

The socio-political environment in the West Bank and Gaza has significant implications for the accessibility of services and opportunities for adolescents and youth. The ongoing conflict has led to the destruction of infrastructure, including schools, healthcare facilities, and recreational spaces, further limiting the already scarce resources available to this population group⁴. Additionally, economic constraints have led to high unemployment rates, limited access to quality education,

¹ UNICEF. (2013). The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities.

² World Health Organization. (2011). World Report on Disability.

³ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2023). "Population Statistics in Palestine."

⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2022). "Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory."

and inadequate healthcare services, all of which exacerbate the challenges faced by young people, especially those living with disabilities⁵.

Adolescents and Youth with Disabilities in Palestine

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), as of 2023, approximately 2.7% of the Palestinian population lives with some form of disability⁶. This translates to over 130,000 individuals, with a slightly higher prevalence in the West Bank compared to Gaza. According to data from PCBS, around 2.9% of adolescents aged 10-19 in Palestine have a disability. Adolescents and youth with disabilities represent a particularly vulnerable subgroup within the Palestinian population, as they are more likely to experience poverty, social exclusion, and a lack of access to essential services⁷. Disabilities in this context are often compounded by socio-economic factors, such as low household income and limited access to social safety nets, making it even more challenging for these young people to achieve their full potential⁸.

In Palestine, being an adolescent or youth with a disability creates a complex landscape of needs and challenges that are not only physical but also social, economic, and psychological⁹. Adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine face a myriad of barriers that severely limit their ability to participate fully in society. These barriers include physical accessibility issues, such as the lack of ramps or elevators in buildings, public transportation that is not equipped for wheelchairs, and schools that do not have the necessary facilities to accommodate students with disabilities. Furthermore, many educational institutions lack trained staff who can provide specialized support to students with disabilities, such as sign language interpreters or teachers trained in inclusive education practices^{10,11}.

Education and adolescents with disabilities

Education is highly valued among families across the State of Palestine, with 95.4 percent of children enrolled in basic education. But these rates of enrollment mask the challenges of access to school, as adolescent boys and children with disabilities are vulnerable to dropping out of school. According to data by UNICEF, 22.5% of boys and 30% of girls aged 6-15 years with a disability have never enrolled in school¹². Education is a critical area where adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine face significant challenges. The Palestinian education system, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, struggles with overcrowded classrooms, insufficient

⁵ UNDP. (2020). "Palestinian Youth: Challenges and Prospects."

⁶ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2023). "Disability Statistics in Palestine."

⁷ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2023). "Disability Statistics in Palestine."

⁸ UNICEF. (2020). "Disability in the State of Palestine."

⁹ UNICEF. "Disability and Development: The Status of Children with Disabilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." 2020.

¹⁰ Handicap International. (2021). "Accessibility in Palestine: Challenges and Opportunities."

¹¹ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). (2022). "Youth with Disabilities in Palestine."

¹² UNICEF. Education and Adolescents. 2022.

resources, and a lack of trained personnel to support students with disabilities. According to UNICEF, only about 31% of children with disabilities in Palestine attend school, compared to a national average of 87% for children without disabilities¹³. This stark difference highlights the ongoing challenges in implementing inclusive education across the West Bank. The lack of accessibility, both in terms of physical infrastructure and adapted curricula, contributes to high dropout rates and limits the educational attainment of youth with disabilities. The education system in Palestine, for this neglected population group is guided by a series of legal frameworks, national plans, and regulations that aim to create an inclusive environment for all students. However, despite these efforts, the reality on the ground presents a complex and often challenging landscape for students with disabilities ¹⁴.

The Palestinian Basic Law and the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (1999) serve as the cornerstone of the legal framework protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities in Palestine. These laws guarantee the right to education and emphasize the principle of non-discrimination, ensuring that students with disabilities should have equal access to educational opportunities. Specifically, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates the state to facilitate access to education for individuals with disabilities and promotes their integration into mainstream schools wherever possible ^{15,16}. Despite these legal guarantees, the practical implementation of these laws is often inconsistent, particularly in areas outside major urban centers where resources and oversight are limited. The National Strategy for Inclusive Education, developed by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, represents a key policy initiative aimed at integrating students with disabilities into mainstream educational settings. This strategy focuses on several critical areas, including the adaptation of school curricula, the training of teachers in special education methods, and the modification of school infrastructure to be more accessible ¹⁷. Complementing this is the broader Education Development Strategic Plan (EDSP), which includes specific goals related to improving access to education for marginalized groups, including those with disabilities. The EDSP seeks to enhance educational infrastructure, ensure the availability of appropriate teaching materials, and allocate resources to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools ¹⁸.

Although inclusive education has been promoted, its implementation remains limited, and there is still a stigma attached to students with disabilities, who are often isolated or inadequately supported.

Stigma and discrimination are also pervasive issues that exacerbate the challenges faced by young people with disabilities in Palestine. Societal attitudes often marginalize individuals with disabilities, viewing them as dependent or incapable of contributing to society. This stigma can

¹³ UNICEF. "Disability and Development: The Status of Children with Disabilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." 2020.

¹⁴ UNICEF. "Education and Disability: The Case of Palestine." 2021.

¹⁵ Palestinian Legislative Council. "The Palestinian Basic Law." 2003.

¹⁶ Palestinian Legislative Council. "Law No. 4 of 1999: The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." 1999.

¹⁷ Palestinian Ministry of Education. "National Strategy for Inclusive Education." 2020.

¹⁸ Palestinian Ministry of Education. "Education Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) 2017-2022." 2017.

lead to social isolation, bullying, and a lack of opportunities for personal development. For instance, youth with disabilities may be excluded from social activities, sports, and community events, which are crucial for their social and emotional well-being. Moreover, negative perceptions about the capabilities of people with disabilities often result in limited employment opportunities, as employers may be reluctant to hire individuals with disabilities or may not provide the necessary accommodations in the workplace ¹⁹.

Healthcare Services and adolescents with disabilities

Healthcare services for adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine are critically underdeveloped. The ongoing conflict and economic difficulties have severely strained the healthcare system, resulting in inadequate access to specialized care. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), less than 50% of people with disabilities in Palestine have regular access to the healthcare services they require²⁰. This gap includes essential services such as rehabilitation, mental health support, and medication. The situation is particularly dire in Gaza, where the most recent war has completely devastated healthcare infrastructure. Reports from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) indicate that the destruction of medical facilities and shortages of medical supplies have left many individuals with disabilities without necessary treatments and support²¹. The blockade and restrictions on movement further hinder access to healthcare, with many people unable to reach facilities that are still operational.

Employment and adolescents with disabilities

Economic challenges are a significant barrier to the well-being of adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine. The unemployment rate among this group is substantially higher than the national average, with estimates indicating that over 80% of youth with disabilities are unemployed²². This high unemployment rate is driven by multiple factors, including the limited availability of accessible vocational training programs and a lack of inclusive employment policies. The Palestinian job market offers few opportunities for people with disabilities due to widespread barriers such as physical inaccessibility and employer bias. For instance, a study by the Palestinian NGO "Handicap International" highlighted that there is a critical shortage of vocational training programs tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities²³. Additionally, many employers are hesitant to hire people with disabilities due to misconceptions about their productivity and the costs associated with making workplaces accessible²⁴. The economic strain on families with disabled members is exacerbated by the high costs of medical care, assistive

¹⁹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). "Disability Survey, 2017."

²⁰ World Health Organization (WHO). (2023). *Access to Health Services for People with Disabilities in Palestine*. WHO Report.

²¹ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (2024). *Health Care in Conflict Zones: The Impact on Gaza's Health System*. ICRC Report.

²² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2023). *Annual Statistical Report*. PCBS.

²³ Handicap International. (2022). *Disability and Employment: Challenges and Opportunities in the Palestinian Territories*. Handicap International Report.

²⁴ Al-Sarraj, M., Abu-Saad, A., & Rabi, K. (2023). *Employment Barriers for People with Disabilities in Palestine: An Overview*. *Middle East Journal of Disability Studies*, 15(2), 80-95.

devices, and transportation. These expenses are often not fully covered by insurance or government programs.

Recreational Activities and adolescents with disabilities

Recreational activities are crucial for the social and psychological development of adolescents and youth. However, in Palestine, these activities are often inaccessible to those with disabilities. Public spaces, parks, and recreational facilities frequently lack the necessary accommodations to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities²⁵. A survey conducted by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) revealed that there are few specialized recreational programs designed for youth with disabilities, which limits their opportunities for physical exercise and social interaction²⁶. This exclusion from recreational activities not only impacts their physical health but also reinforces their social isolation and marginalization within the community. The lack of inclusive recreational facilities further perpetuates their sense of exclusion from broader societal activities.

Significance and rationale of study

In summary, the challenges faced by adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine are multifaceted and deeply entrenched in the broader socio-political context of the region. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that includes policy reforms, increased resource allocation, and a shift in societal attitudes towards people with disabilities. The pressing need for this study stems from the significant gaps in existing research on adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine, particularly within the West Bank and Gaza Strip (pre-war). Despite the critical role this population plays in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Palestinian society, comprehensive assessments of their challenges and needs remain notably absent. The existing literature reveals a dearth of in-depth studies addressing the barriers these young individuals face in accessing education, healthcare, employment, and recreational services. This research aims to fill this gap by assessing the key challenges, successful programs, and initiatives in these critical areas, providing a detailed overview of the current state of services for adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank, Palestine.

By synthesizing the experiences and insights of various organizations working in this field, the study will offer valuable insights into the gaps and shortcomings of current approaches. This information is crucial for informing policy-making, advocating for necessary reforms, and developing targeted interventions to enhance the quality of life and opportunities for this vulnerable group. The study aims to understand and evaluate current efforts, identify gaps, unmet needs and provide essential insights and recommendations to inform policy-making. This will help

²⁵ Al-Khatib, I., & Hamed, J. (2022). Accessibility and Inclusion: The Status of Public Spaces in Palestine. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 32(1), 45-58.

²⁶ Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS). (2023). Survey on Recreational Facilities for Youth with Disabilities. PRCS Report.

develop more inclusive and supportive environments for young people with disabilities in Palestine, ensuring they receive the resources and support needed to thrive.

ii. Objectives of Study

Main Objective

To identify and assess the key challenges, successful programs and initiatives in accessing education, healthcare services, employment, and recreational activities among adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank, Palestine. The study also aims to identify unmet needs and provide actionable recommendations for improvement, alongside outlining future research areas to enhance understanding and support for this vulnerable and neglected population.

Sub-Objectives

1. Challenges and Barriers

- Assess the primary challenges faced by adolescents and youth with disabilities in accessing education, healthcare services, employment, and recreational activities.
- Identify systemic and practical obstacles that hinder their participation and inclusion in these areas.

2. Successful Programs and Initiatives

- Identify successful programs and initiatives that have effectively improved access to education, healthcare services, employment opportunities, and recreational activities for adolescents and youth with disabilities.

3. Recreational activities

- Identify what type of recreational activities are available for adolescents and youth with disabilities.

4. Violence

- Investigate the types of violence experienced by adolescents and youth with disabilities.
- Identify existing systems and initiatives designed to address and prevent violence against adolescents and youth with disabilities.

5. Unmet Needs

- Identify the unmet needs of adolescents with disabilities across education, healthcare services, employment, and recreational activities.
- Determine the extent to which current services and programs address these needs and where additional support is required.

6. Recommendations

- Provide actionable recommendations for policy changes, program enhancements, and practical measures to address the identified challenges and unmet needs.
- Suggest improvements to existing systems and initiatives based on the findings.

7. Future Research and Initiatives

- Outline areas for future research and initiatives to gain deeper insights into the needs and experiences of adolescents and youth with disabilities that could contribute to better understanding and addressing the needs of this population.

II. Methodology

i. Study Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to assess the challenges, successful initiatives and programs related to access to education, healthcare, employment, and recreational activities, addressing violence, unmet needs and recommendations for adolescents with disabilities in the West Bank, Palestine. The study was conducted in two phases: a desk review and semi-structured interviews with representatives from organizations actively working with adolescents with disabilities in the West Bank and Gaza (Pre-War). Due to the ongoing war in Gaza, the study's findings are based solely on the organization's responses on the situation in the West Bank, even though many of the organizations interviewed also work with adolescents and youth with disabilities in Gaza.

ii. Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of leading organizations that work with adolescents with disabilities in the West Bank and Gaza, Palestine. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a total of 10 organizations. Table 1 lists the organizations included in the study as well as a description of the services each organization provides for adolescents and youth with disabilities. These organizations were chosen based on their prominence and established track record in providing services to adolescents and youth with disabilities. The sample size of 10 organizations was deemed sufficient for this rapid assessment study to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences regarding access to education, healthcare, employment, and recreational activities.

Table 1. List and descriptions of organizations included in the study for key informant interviews

Organization	Description of services provided for adolescents and youth with disabilities
Qader	-Advocacy and accountability -Protection rights -Economic empowerment -Community development for adolescents and adults with disabilities
Palestine Medical Relief Society (PMRS)	-Comprehensive primary healthcare for adolescents with disabilities addressing physical, psychological, and social aspects of life.
Thalassemia Palestinian Friends Society (TPFS)	-Education and awareness programs for adolescents (ex. pre-marital medical examinations to identify carriers of thalassemia and prevent new cases) - Medical Support and Continuous Care: -Psychosocial support -Advocacy and rights protection -Community integration and social activities -Capacity building for healthcare providers

UNRWA	-Primary health care services -Basic education services -Community-based rehabilitation services including (early detection of disability, diagnosis, speech, auditory, visual, mental) and special education services and assistive devices -Physical and occupational therapy services -Vocational social guidance and counseling services -Vocational training -Case management and violence protection services. -Recreational and leisure activities including awareness and training
UNICEF	-Inclusive education -Healthcare and rehabilitation -Protection and child rights -Social Inclusion and participation -Advocacy and policy development -Capacity building and training
Stars of Hope	-Empower women with disabilities -Protection Program-protects women and people with disabilities from gender-based violence -Economic Empowerment Program- works to develop the skills and capabilities of women with disabilities with the aim to include them in the labor market and provide them with job opportunities
YMCA	-Psychological, social, individual and group counseling for groups of adolescents and youth with disabilities -Family, individual and collective intervention for the families of persons with disabilities in order to integrate roles in interventions. -Academic qualification for the arrival of students with disabilities to school, giving them private lessons, and qualifying them for exams. -Vocational rehabilitation, including diagnosis, counseling and vocational guidance - Self-employment of some cases (non-profit loans) -Environmental harmonization of public institutions and homes -Providing auxiliary medical tools in partnership with the local community. -Advocacy campaigns for the rights of persons with disabilities
Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR)	-Raising Awareness: Educating young people and adolescents with disabilities, along with their families, about their rights. Promoting positive attitudes through human rights education, psychological support, and social counseling. -Enhancing Access to Rights: Improving access for youth and adolescents with disabilities to their rights through specialized interventions, skill development, and programs focused on economic empowerment, education, and social participation. -Promoting Independence and Social Participation: Supporting the independence and social engagement of youth and adolescents with disabilities by providing prosthetic devices, assistive technologies, and access to medical rehabilitation services, tailored to available resources. -Empowering Youth Participation: Strengthening the role of youth by encouraging their participation in advocacy activities through self-support groups. -Facilitating Access to Education: Ensuring young people and adolescents with disabilities can access educational services that develop their abilities and support their learning. -Training for Independence: Empowering youth and adolescents with disabilities by teaching self-reliance and independence in daily life, and training family members to support them. -Inclusive Activities: Organizing inclusive activities that raise awareness, educate, entertain, and promote community participation through summer camps and similar initiatives.
Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS)	-Treatment services -Rehabilitation services -Educational courses for those with hearing disabilities -Psychosocial support and interventions -Raise awareness among people with disabilities

	-Recreational activities
Al-Jaleel Society for Care and Community- Based Rehabilitation	-Rehabilitation and psychological support services -Guidance and counseling -Social and sports programs -Advocacy and Rights Campaigns

iii. Setting

The study was conducted remotely due to geographical and time constraints. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, allowing for real-time interaction while ensuring the safety and comfort of the participants. Interviews were conducted over a three-week period during July, 2024.

iv. Data Collection

Data collection occurred in two phases:

1. Phase 1: Desk Review

- A comprehensive desk review was conducted to gather background information and contextual data on the current state of access to education, healthcare, employment, and recreational activities for adolescents with disabilities in Palestine. This phase involved reviewing existing literature, reports, policy documents and organization websites. The desk review provided a foundational understanding of the challenges and opportunities in Palestine regarding adolescents and youth with disabilities, informing the development of the interview questions.

2. Phase 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with focal points from each of the 10 selected organizations. These focal points were individuals with direct knowledge and experience in working with adolescents and youth with disabilities. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, recorded with the participants' consent, and later transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then translated from Arabic to English for analysis and synthesis of the findings.
- The semi-structured questionnaire used in the interviews was designed to explore key areas of interest:
 - Challenges in access to education, healthcare, employment, and recreational activities for adolescents and youth with disabilities.
 - Success stories and examples of successful programs and initiatives that have been implemented in Palestine targeting adolescents and youth with disabilities.
 - Addressing violence amongst adolescents and youth with disabilities.

- Unmet needs facing adolescents and youth with disabilities.
- Recommendations for improving access to these services and activities for adolescents with disabilities.
- The questionnaire allowed for flexibility in probing deeper into specific topics as they arose during the interviews, ensuring a thorough exploration of each participant's insights and experiences.

v. **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved the following steps:

1. **Familiarization with Data:** The translated transcripts were read multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the content.
2. **Coding:** Key themes and patterns related to challenges, successful programs and initiatives, addressing violence, unmet needs, recommendations, future research were identified and coded. The coding process was focused on only pre-determined areas of interest.
3. **Theme Development:** Codes were organized into broader themes that captured the main findings of the study. Themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data.
4. **Interpretation:** The final themes were interpreted in the context of the research questions, providing insights into the challenges and successful programs and initiatives in access to education, healthcare, employment, and recreational activities for adolescents with disabilities in Palestine.

vi. **Ethical Considerations**

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the interviews. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, with all data anonymized to protect the identity of the participants and their organizations. The recorded interviews and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

vii. **Limitations**

The study's reliance on remote interviews may have limited the ability to capture non-verbal cues and limited the opportunity for probing in-detail with participants. While the inclusion of 10 organizations proved sufficient for this study, expanding the research to include additional organizations working with adolescents with disabilities could provide further valuable insights. Additionally, the absence of data on adolescents and youth with disabilities in Gaza represents a limitation of this study. In addition, the translation of transcripts from Arabic to English may have introduced variations in meaning. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the experiences of organizations working with adolescents with disabilities in Palestine.

III. Main Findings

The following section presents the main findings from the study, based on the insights provided by the 10 organizations interviewed. These findings cover an assessment of the challenges faced by adolescents and youth with disabilities, as well as the successful programs and initiatives in place across various domains including education, healthcare services, employment, and recreational activities. The section also addresses violence among adolescents and youth with disabilities, along with the existing systems and initiatives aimed at addressing and preventing such violence. Additionally, it highlights the pressing unmet needs in education, healthcare, employment, and recreational services, according to the organizations interviewed. Finally, the section offers recommendations provided by organizations for improvement including recommended policies and practical measures and outlines future research initiatives needed to further understand and address the aforementioned issues. All responses have been carefully synthesized and summarized to provide a cohesive overview of the current landscape and areas for development for this neglected yet important population group. Due to the ongoing war in Gaza, the study's findings are based solely on the organization's responses on the situation in the West Bank, even though most of the organizations interviewed also work with adolescents and youth with disabilities in Gaza.

i. Challenges and obstacles in accessing education among adolescents and youth with disabilities

Accessing education for adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank, Palestine, presents countless challenges rooted in both structural and societal factors. Despite the existence of national strategies and plans as well as legal frameworks designed to ensure inclusive education, these young individuals often face significant barriers that hinder their ability to fully participate in the educational system. From inadequate physical infrastructure and limited availability of specialized educational resources to pervasive social stigma and the impact of ongoing political conflict, the obstacles they encounter are multifaceted and deeply entrenched. The following section explores the key challenges identified during interviews with the 10 organizations included in the study. The challenges contribute to the educational marginalization of adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank, highlighting the complex interplay of factors that must be addressed to achieve inclusion in education.

One of the primary obstacles identified is the **geographical distance of educational centers**, including schools, universities and learning centers from the students' places of residence. This distance is compounded by **transportation difficulties and movement restrictions imposed by the ongoing political situation**, making it exceedingly difficult for these young individuals to commute to educational institutions regularly. Almost all organizations reported the impact the Israeli Occupation on access to education among adolescents and youth with disabilities. Frequent disruptions and the destruction of infrastructure make it difficult to maintain consistent educational services, particularly for students with disabilities who require more stable and supportive environments. The inadequate infrastructure and limited accessibility of these centers—such as

buildings that lack ramps, elevators, or other necessary modifications—further exacerbate the problem, creating a physical environment that is not conducive to the needs of students with disabilities.

Economic challenges also play a critical role in limiting access to education. Many families of adolescents and youth with disabilities live in **difficult economic conditions**, making it hard to afford the high costs associated with supportive education and university tuition fees. Even when supportive technologies and resources are available, they often come with prohibitive costs, putting them out of reach for many families. The economic situation is worsened by a lack of national plans that adequately address the financial and educational needs of these students, leaving them without sufficient state or institutional support.

Despite legal frameworks advocating for inclusive education, **societal attitudes** towards disabilities remain a significant barrier to access of education. There is also lack of awareness about the capabilities and rights of individuals with disabilities, which contributes to discrimination and exclusion within the education system. The study highlighted the lack of parental interest in their children's education, which is often linked to societal stigma and a lack of awareness about the rights and potential of individuals with disabilities. This societal mindset is reflected in the discrimination, bullying, and negative attitudes that students with disabilities frequently encounter in educational settings. These behaviors not only alienate these students but also discourage them from continuing their education, leading to higher dropout rates.

The **education system** itself presents additional challenges. The curriculum and available specializations are often not designed with the needs of students with disabilities in mind, limiting their options and future career opportunities. Inclusive education, while promoted in theory, remains poorly implemented in practice. The study findings pointed out a lack of specialists in inclusive education, and even where such policies exist, they are not effectively activated, leaving students with disabilities isolated or underserved within mainstream educational frameworks. Furthermore, the education system's failure to accommodate diverse types of disabilities—such as mental, visual, auditory, and physical—adds to the difficulties these students face. Customizing educational services to meet specific needs remains a significant challenge, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to address the unique barriers faced by different disability groups.

In addition to these systemic issues, **support systems such as literacy programs and specialized educational resources** are weak and limited. There is also a shortage of **supporting technologies in education**, which are essential for enabling students with disabilities to learn effectively. These technological gaps, coupled with the general lack of accessibility in educational environments, severely hinder the ability of these students to participate fully in their education.

Finally, the study highlighted the issue of **positive discrimination**, where individuals with disabilities are sometimes overly protected or isolated in educational settings, particularly in cases like thalassemia patients who face frequent medical absences. While well-intentioned, this protective attitude can further marginalize these students, preventing them from fully integrating into educational environments and limiting their social and academic development.

The study findings underscores the urgent need for a holistic approach to address these challenges. This includes improving the physical and technological infrastructure of educational institutions, enhancing the economic support available to families, increasing societal awareness, and fully implementing inclusive education policies. Without these measures, adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank will continue to face significant barriers to accessing the education they need and deserve.

ii. Challenges in access to healthcare services among adolescents and youth with disabilities

Access to healthcare for adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank, Palestine, is strained with significant barriers, resulting in a healthcare system that inadequately addresses the needs of this vulnerable population. These challenges are multi-faceted, ranging from systemic issues within the healthcare infrastructure to socio-economic factors that further marginalize individuals with disabilities. The following section provides a comprehensive overview of the key obstacles that impede access to healthcare services for adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank, according to responses from focal points in the organizations included in this study.

Limited Prioritization of Disabilities in the Healthcare System

The healthcare system in the West Bank does not sufficiently prioritize the needs of people with disabilities. While there are efforts to integrate disability-specific services, these are often concentrated in central locations, leaving those in rural or marginalized areas with limited access. The lack of decentralization in healthcare services means that many adolescents and youth with disabilities must travel long distances to receive basic medical care. This centralization is particularly problematic given the geographical and political landscape of the West Bank, where movement restrictions and security checkpoints create additional hurdles for individuals trying to reach healthcare facilities.

Gaps in Early Diagnosis and Intervention

Early diagnosis and intervention are critical for managing disabilities and improving long-term outcomes. However, in the West Bank, there are significant gaps in these areas. Awareness of disabilities among healthcare providers and the general population is limited, leading to delays in diagnosis and intervention. This lack of early detection is compounded by a shortage of specialized services, particularly in rural areas, where healthcare providers may not have the training or resources to identify and address disabilities effectively. As a result, many children and adolescents with disabilities do not receive the timely care they need, exacerbating their conditions and reducing their quality of life.

Ineffective Implementation of the National Health Insurance System

Although the national health insurance system in Palestine has been officially revised to better serve individuals with disabilities, its implementation has been largely ineffective. One of the critical issues is the requirement that a disability must be assessed at 60% or higher for individuals to qualify for health insurance benefits. This assessment process is based on outdated protocols, which often do not accurately reflect the current needs of individuals with disabilities.

Consequently, a significant portion of the disabled population is excluded from accessing necessary health services due to these bureaucratic barriers.

Economic and Transportation Barriers

Economic hardship is a pervasive issue in the West Bank, and it disproportionately affects families with disabled members. The costs associated with healthcare, including transportation, medications, and specialized treatments, are often unaffordable for these families. Many adolescents and youth with disabilities live in poverty, making it difficult for them to afford regular medical care. The situation is further complicated by the high transportation costs required to reach medical centers, especially for those living in remote areas. For example, increased closures and restrictions in areas like Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem have further isolated these communities, making access to healthcare even more challenging.

Inadequate and Inaccessible Healthcare Facilities

Healthcare facilities in the West Bank are often under-equipped and not tailored to meet the needs of adolescents and youth with disabilities. Poor accessibility is a widespread issue, with many health centers lacking essential adaptations such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. This physical inaccessibility creates significant barriers for individuals with mobility impairments. Furthermore, many healthcare institutions do not have the necessary adaptations to cater to the specific needs of patients with disabilities, such as sensory aids for individuals with hearing or vision impairments. The absence of communication aids, like sign language interpreters, further marginalizes individuals with sensory disabilities, limiting their ability to receive appropriate care.

Shortages of Medical Supplies and Trained Healthcare Providers

The availability of essential medical services and supplies is another critical challenge. Many healthcare centers in the West Bank suffer from chronic shortages of basic medical supplies, including medications, medical consumables like urine drawing devices, and equipment necessary for rehabilitation services. The scarcity of these resources significantly impacts the quality of care available to adolescents and youth with disabilities. Additionally, there is a marked shortage of trained healthcare providers who specialize in disability care. This shortage means that many individuals with disabilities are directed to general practitioners who may lack the expertise to provide appropriate rehabilitation services. Consequently, disabilities are often left untreated or improperly managed, leading to a deterioration in the individual's condition.

Social and Cultural Barriers

Social and cultural factors also play a significant role in limiting access to healthcare for adolescents and youth with disabilities. There is a general lack of awareness among healthcare providers about how to communicate with and treat individuals with disabilities. This lack of awareness contributes to inadequate service delivery and, in some cases, discriminatory practices. Moreover, the stigma associated with disability within some communities leads to social isolation and reluctance among families to seek healthcare services for their disabled children. This social isolation is particularly problematic in accessing services like sexual and reproductive health, where cultural sensitivities may further discourage families from seeking care.

Movement Restrictions and Political Instability

The ongoing political conflict in the West Bank exacerbates the difficulties faced by adolescents and youth with disabilities in accessing healthcare. Movement restrictions, including roadblocks, checkpoints, and closures, make it increasingly difficult for individuals to reach healthcare facilities. These restrictions are particularly severe in conflict-prone areas, where frequent disruptions to infrastructure further hinder access to care. For example, in areas like Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem, increased closures have isolated communities, making it almost impossible for individuals with disabilities to access necessary healthcare services. Despite efforts by local health authorities and emergency services to coordinate care, such as ensuring blood transfusions for thalassemia patients, these measures are often insufficient to overcome the systemic barriers imposed by the political situation.

Lack of Awareness and Advocacy

There is also a significant lack of awareness among persons with disabilities about their rights, legislation, and available services. This lack of knowledge often leads to a reluctance to advocate for their rights or seek the healthcare services they need. Without a strong understanding of the legal protections and services available, many individuals with disabilities do not access the care they are entitled to. This gap in awareness underscores the need for more robust outreach and education efforts to empower individuals with disabilities and their families.

In summary, adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank face a myriad of challenges in accessing healthcare services. These challenges are rooted in systemic issues within the healthcare system, compounded by socio-economic factors, political instability, and cultural barriers. To improve healthcare access for this population, there is a need for comprehensive reforms that address the structural deficiencies in the healthcare system, enhance the availability of specialized services, and promote greater awareness and advocacy for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from the government, healthcare providers, and the broader community to ensure that all individuals with disabilities have equitable access to the healthcare services they need.

iii. Challenges in employment opportunities for adolescents and youth with disabilities

Adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank face significant barriers in securing meaningful employment opportunities. Despite existing legislation aimed at promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce, the reality is that these laws are often poorly implemented, and numerous structural and societal challenges persist. This section provides an in-depth analysis of the key obstacles in employment, drawing on insights from various organizations that participated in the study.

Weak Implementation of Employment Laws. One of the primary challenges highlighted by organizations is the inadequate enforcement of existing employment laws for people with disabilities. According to **Stars of Hope**, while the law mandates that at least 5% of jobs in the government sector should be reserved for people with disabilities, this requirement is not effectively implemented. In practice, most employment opportunities that do become available are

reserved for individuals with minimal disabilities, leaving those with more significant impairments largely excluded. The private sector also lacks robust regulations enforcing the employment of people with disabilities, further limiting opportunities. Many private employers do not prioritize accessibility, which is a critical factor for integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce.

Economic Conditions and Mobility Issues. The challenging economic environment in the West Bank exacerbates the difficulties faced by adolescents and youth with disabilities in finding employment. **The Palestine Medical Relief Society (PMRS)** emphasizes that unemployment rates for youth, including those with disabilities, are high and continue to rise. The economic downturn, combined with mobility issues stemming from the ongoing political situation, makes it difficult for individuals with disabilities to reach workplaces. Movement restrictions, poor infrastructure, and the lack of accessible public transportation further isolate these individuals from potential employment opportunities, especially those in remote and marginalized areas.

Limited Vocational Training and Technical Skills. A significant barrier to employment for youth with disabilities is the lack of access to appropriate vocational training and education. **Qader** identified a clear gap in vocational training programs tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities. The limited availability of such programs means that many young people with disabilities do not acquire the technical skills required by the labor market. **PRCS** echoes this, noting that specialized training that aligns with the abilities of individuals with disabilities is scarce. As a result, these individuals are often unable to compete with their non-disabled peers, particularly in a labor market characterized by high unemployment and intense competition.

Inadequate Support from Government and Private Sector. The lack of strong national employment policies and incentives to encourage the hiring of people with disabilities is another significant challenge. **UNRWA** points out that there are no clear policies specifically targeting the employment of adolescents with disabilities. Without such policies, there is little motivation for employers to hire individuals with disabilities, especially when these candidates are perceived as requiring additional accommodations or when they are from marginalized backgrounds. **PRCS** suggests that government policies need to change, proposing measures such as tax exemptions for enterprises that employ people with disabilities as a potential solution to encourage hiring.

Negative Societal Perceptions and Discrimination. Negative societal perceptions and discrimination against individuals with disabilities further limit their employment opportunities. **UNICEF** reports that many employers are hesitant to hire individuals with disabilities due to perceived additional costs and misconceptions about their abilities. This discrimination is compounded by the fact that many employment opportunities offered to people with disabilities are driven by pity rather than recognition of their skills and qualifications. This attitude not only limits the types of jobs available to them but also reinforces stereotypes that people with disabilities are less capable or deserving of meaningful work. Social and cultural norms also hinder individuals with disabilities from accessing information and services.

Accessibility Barriers. Physical accessibility to workplaces remains a major hurdle. **YMCA** and **Stars of Hope** both highlight the poor accessibility of many workplaces in the West Bank. Many buildings are not equipped with the necessary adaptations such as ramps, elevators, or accessible restrooms, to accommodate employees with disabilities. This lack of infrastructure not only prevents individuals with physical disabilities from accessing workspaces but also sends a broader message about the lack of inclusivity in the labor market. Additionally, the absence of necessary adaptations for individuals with sensory disabilities, such as sign language interpreters or assistive technologies, further limits their ability to engage in the workforce.

High Costs and Economic Disadvantage. The high costs associated with disability, including healthcare, transportation, and assistive devices, place additional financial burdens on individuals with disabilities and their families. **UNRWA** notes that these costs are particularly prohibitive for individuals from poor or marginalized backgrounds, further restricting their access to employment opportunities. For example, **TPFS** highlights that thalassemia patients face legal and policy barriers due to chronic illness, which often excludes them from employment. The high cost of managing their condition, coupled with job restrictions related to their health, significantly limits their employment prospects.

Lack of Accessible Vocational Training Programs. Access to vocational training programs is particularly challenging for adolescents with disabilities living in rural or marginalized areas. **UNRWA** and **YMCA** both point out that most vocational training centers are located in urban and central areas, making them inaccessible to those living in rural and marginalized areas. This geographic disparity not only limits the ability of these individuals to acquire necessary skills but also perpetuates the cycle of unemployment and underemployment among youth with disabilities.

The challenges in finding employment opportunities for adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank are deeply entrenched in systemic, social, and economic factors. Weak enforcement of employment laws, limited access to vocational training, poor workplace accessibility, negative societal perceptions, and economic hardships all contribute to the marginalization of this population in the labor market. While there are efforts by various organizations to address these issues through targeted programs and initiatives, the overall impact remains limited. Comprehensive policy reforms, stronger enforcement of existing laws, and greater societal awareness are needed to create an inclusive labor market that offers equitable opportunities for all, including adolescents and youth with disabilities.

iv. Challenges to accessibility of recreational activities for adolescents with disabilities

As highlighted by the organizations interviewed, the findings show significant challenges to accessibility in recreational activities for adolescents with disabilities in Palestine. Despite the recognized importance of recreation, it often remains a low priority for individuals with disabilities, primarily because they face numerous barriers that make participation difficult. Accessibility issues are pervasive, preventing many from engaging in activities available to their non-disabled peers. Families of individuals with disabilities, who are often focused on meeting their children's basic needs, find that transportation to these recreational activities is costly and

there is a lack of support from organizations for adolescents with disabilities to attend these recreational activities. This financial strain leads families to avoid entertainment in favor of essential needs, further limiting opportunities for recreational engagement among adolescents with disabilities.

As many recreational facilities and services are either not available or are located in urban centers, access to recreational activities is particularly limited in rural and marginalized areas of Palestine. Even when activities are available, they are often costly and not designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities. The entertainment environment, in general, is not inclusive, with most recreational venues and programs lacking the necessary adaptations to be fully accessible by those with disabilities. This includes physical inaccessibility, such as the lack of ramps or accessible restrooms, and a general lack of inclusive recreational programming that would allow adolescents with disabilities to participate meaningfully. Similarly, findings from TPFS show widespread stigma and misconceptions about thalassemia often limit patient participation in activities. To combat this, recreational programs are designed not only to challenge these negative perceptions but also to alleviate the social isolation and psychological stress that many thalassemia patients frequently experience.

The issue is further compounded by the ongoing political situation, where closures and movement restrictions severely limit access to recreational activities. Almost all of the organizations reported that for many families, their children have only attended recreational activities once due to the hardships the country continuously faces. Overall, the findings suggest that while there are efforts to create more inclusive recreational opportunities, these initiatives are still in their early stages and face significant challenges in overcoming the deep-rooted barriers to accessibility in Palestine.

v. ***Successful programs and initiatives implemented that positively impacted and supported adolescents and youth with disabilities***

➤ **Programs and Initiatives that Improved Access to Education**

The study highlighted several successful programs and initiatives implemented by the organizations included in this study which have significantly improved access to education for adolescents and youth with disabilities. These efforts, driven by a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility, have been instrumental in addressing the unique challenges faced by this population group.

UNICEF has played a pivotal role in enhancing educational access by implementing a range of strategies focused on creating inclusive learning environments. Through collaboration with decision-makers, UNICEF has influenced policy changes to promote inclusivity. The organization has also worked closely with educational institutions to make necessary adjustments, such as adapting physical environments and providing specialized support. These efforts have been complemented by partnerships that raise awareness among educational staff, ensuring a more inclusive approach to education. PMRS and its partners, including Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), have emphasized the importance of making their interventions compatible

with the needs of individuals with disabilities. PMRS focuses on two levels of compatibility: physical and capacity building. Physically, they ensure that locations, stairs, and lighting are accessible, while on the capacity-building front, they train staff in sign language and communication skills. Additionally, PMRS tailors educational materials to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities, ensuring that they receive appropriate support throughout their educational journey.

TPFS has collaborated with educational institutions like Al-Quds Open University to offer scholarships to thalassemia patients. While the overall impact of these scholarships remains limited, TPFS has successfully integrated students with thalassemia into schools, particularly in Nablus. This has been achieved through both individual and group efforts, with a strong emphasis on providing psychological support programs to assist students in coping with their challenges. **Qader** has established Community Centers across the West Bank that serve as hubs for children and adolescents with disabilities. These centers provide specialized support and facilitate the integration of students into mainstream schools. Qader's collaboration with universities has also led to the review and enhancement of admission policies and facilities to be more inclusive of students with disabilities. The organization has developed comprehensive tools to evaluate and address gaps in inclusivity within educational institutions, contributing significantly to the broader effort to improve educational access.

UNRWA has made significant strides through its Hope Initiative, which focuses on schools within refugee camps. This initiative involves diagnosing students with disabilities, providing services within schools, or transferring them to appropriate services as needed. UNRWA has also trained staff and fellow students to support their peers with disabilities, ensuring a more harmonious school environment. Additionally, the organization has worked on adapting the school environment and curriculum to better meet the needs of students with disabilities, providing necessary supportive devices to enhance their learning experience. **Al-Jaleel Society** has acted as a crucial link between schools and universities, focusing on harmonization efforts to facilitate movement and access for students with disabilities. The society has worked on physical adaptations, such as installing ramps and relocating classrooms to the ground floor when resources for adaptation are lacking. These interventions have made a significant difference in enabling students with disabilities to access education more easily. **Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR)** has contributed to improving educational access through the adoption of an inclusive education policy, albeit with limited impact. BASR has also introduced supporting technologies, particularly for blind students, such as speaking programs and magnifiers. The organization has provided essential support tools for students and allocated shadow teachers or facilitators to assist students with disabilities, helping to create a more supportive and inclusive educational environment.

➤ **Programs and Initiatives that have improved access to healthcare services**

The study revealed several successful programs and initiatives that have significantly improved access to healthcare services for adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank. These

efforts, implemented by various organizations, have addressed critical gaps in healthcare accessibility, though many challenges remain.

Stars of Hope highlighted the importance of long-term, comprehensive, and collaborative efforts in healthcare initiatives. While there have been some successful programs, they are often limited in scope and duration. The organization advocates for more sustained partnerships between healthcare providers and disability-focused organizations to create a lasting impact on healthcare access for people with disabilities. **UNICEF** echoed similar sentiments, noting that while there are successful healthcare initiatives, their scope and impact are often constrained. UNICEF has been involved in programs that aim to make healthcare facilities more inclusive and raise awareness among healthcare providers about the specific needs of individuals with disabilities. These initiatives have produced positive results, but UNICEF stresses the need for these efforts to be integrated into broader healthcare systems to ensure their long-term sustainability.

Al-Jaleel Society has taken significant steps to improve healthcare access by providing support devices and prosthetics at little to no cost for people with disabilities. These efforts have been particularly impactful in enabling individuals to access necessary healthcare services, addressing both mobility and financial barriers. **PMRS** operates a Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program that integrates various healthcare interventions, including sexual and reproductive health services, to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. This program has been effective in ensuring that healthcare services are tailored to the specific needs of people with disabilities, particularly in underserved areas.

TPFS has successfully collaborated with local authorities to provide transportation for thalassemia patients requiring treatment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization worked closely with emergency committees to ensure that patients continued to receive necessary care, demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinated local efforts in maintaining healthcare access during crises. **Qader** has also contributed to healthcare accessibility by developing protocols for the protection of children and adolescents with disabilities within healthcare settings. This includes training healthcare staff to better serve children and adolescents with disabilities. However, Qader has faced challenges in sustaining these initiatives due to shifting government priorities and funding constraints, which have slowed progress and created frustration among stakeholders. **UNRWA** has implemented a program of home visits for the elderly and people with disabilities, providing essential medical services such as blood pressure and sugar level checks, dental examinations, and more. Despite being in close proximity to health clinics, many individuals had not accessed these services until the home visits were initiated. UNRWA's efforts also include securing medical supplies and medicines through local personal initiatives, further enhancing healthcare accessibility. **BASR** has improved healthcare access by providing mobile health clinic services to reach people with disabilities in remote areas. Additionally, BASR has advocated for and provided free health insurance for individuals with disabilities, removing significant financial barriers to accessing healthcare services.

These initiatives reflect a growing commitment to improving healthcare access for adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank. While progress has been made, the study emphasizes the

need for more integrated, long-term, and collaborative efforts to ensure that these initiatives are sustained and expanded to reach all those in need.

➤ **Programs and initiatives to Address Vocational Training and Employment**

Findings show several successful initiatives that have improved employment opportunities for adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank. These initiatives, implemented by various organizations, have focused on tailoring programs to meet the specific needs of individuals with disabilities, thus enhancing their integration into the labor market.

Despite many challenges, some organizations have developed initiatives to improve employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. **PMRS** has integrated a community-based rehabilitation (CBR) program into its projects, ensuring high representation of individuals with disabilities among its staff. The **TPFS** has seen success with small-scale projects and advocates for more inclusive policies and greater support for small businesses to help thalassemia patients secure suitable employment. In addition, TPFS also works with different ministries to create job opportunities particularly in administrative roles suitable for thalassemia patients. Additionally, **UNICEF** supports economic empowerment initiatives that provide training and support for self-employment and small business development among adolescents and youth with disabilities, offering an alternative pathway to employment for those who may not find opportunities in the traditional labor market. Similarly, **Stars of Hope** has established an economic empowerment program, which has also developed temporary and permanent jobs for adolescents and youth with disabilities and fostered opportunities for them to develop their own projects. A key factor in their success has been the active involvement of individuals with disabilities in the decision-making processes, ensuring that the programs are designed to be both relevant and practical. This approach has not only empowered participants but also led to sustainable employment outcomes. **Qader** has also seen success through partnerships with local businesses, integrating young people with disabilities into the workforce through targeted training and job placements. However, these successes are limited by the broader economic and social barriers that continue to impede progress.

BASR has implemented a multi-faceted approach to improving employment prospects for individuals with disabilities. This includes offering professions that are accessible to people with disabilities, provided that necessary accommodations are made. BASR's programs have contributed significantly to increasing the chances of persons with disabilities entering the labor market, either by securing jobs or by starting their own small businesses. To support these efforts, BASR has established a financial lending portfolio that offers zero-interest loans to persons with disabilities, facilitating their entrepreneurial endeavors. Moreover, BASR has focused on the systemic aspects of employment by forming regional committees composed of community actors to coordinate the employment process. They have also built a comprehensive database of job seekers with disabilities, which employers can access when needed. Additionally, BASR has implemented programs aimed at raising the competencies and skills necessary for young people with disabilities to access job opportunities. This holistic approach has not only improved individual outcomes but has also strengthened the overall infrastructure supporting the employment of persons with disabilities.

UNRWA offers both short- and long-term vocational training programs at its training centers for boys and girls, which play a crucial role in targeting employment opportunities for adolescents and youth with disabilities. However, these centers are primarily located in the central West Bank, making them difficult to access for those in outlying areas. To better prepare adolescents with disabilities for the workforce, UNRWA focuses on early preparation, helping students identify their skills, tendencies, and attitudes, which are essential for their rehabilitation and future employment. One notable initiative involved training girls with disabilities in photography, hairdressing, and embroidery, which enabled them to pursue self-employment. Similarly, boys with disabilities were trained in upholstery and automotive seating through a vocational rehabilitation program. This program emphasized comprehensive support, including skill development, covering training costs, and providing necessary tools and transportation. As a result, many of these youths were able to secure employment in workshops after completing their training. The organization also emphasizes supportive education that equips students with the necessary knowledge for pursuing university-level academic disciplines, ultimately enhancing their employment prospects. Additionally, UNRWA is committed to offering academic and rehabilitation programs tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities, further facilitating their successful integration into the workforce.

These programs and initiatives underscore the importance of targeted, inclusive strategies that address the specific challenges faced by adolescents and youth with disabilities in the employment sector. By focusing on skill development, accessible opportunities, and systemic support, these organizations have made significant strides in improving employment outcomes for this vulnerable population.

➤ **Programs and Initiatives that improved access to recreational activities**

The study findings highlight several successful initiatives that have been implemented to provide recreational activities for adolescents with disabilities in Palestine, showcasing the efforts of various organizations included in the study. Among these initiatives, some summer camps have been organized with careful planning to ensure that all necessary accommodations are in place, allowing individuals with disabilities to participate fully. These camps provide a rare opportunity for inclusive recreation, tailored to meet the diverse needs of participants.

Additionally, marathons have been organized, offering a platform for individuals with disabilities to engage in sports and community activities alongside their peers. Another notable initiative is the establishment of a recreational club specifically designed to offer brief but meaningful entertainment opportunities for people with disabilities, making leisure more accessible.

One of the most significant achievements highlighted is the participation of adolescents and youth with disabilities in the Special Olympics. These participants, after receiving specialized training and support from professional trainers, were able to compete and win awards, demonstrating the impact of inclusive sports programs. Similarly, a Dabkeh band for the deaf has been formed, providing an artistic outlet that embraces cultural expression and inclusion.

Organizations involved in these initiatives are committed to creating inclusive environments by ensuring that venues are accessible and that necessary support services, are available. These efforts

are not only about providing recreational opportunities but also about integrating persons with and without disabilities, fostering a sense of acceptance and inclusion within the community. Additionally, programs that focus on mental health and self-esteem are being implemented, further supporting the overall well-being of adolescents with disabilities through recreational engagement.

vi. *Availability of and types of recreational activities for adolescents with disabilities*

The study findings reveal recreational activities for adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine are significantly limited, reflecting broader challenges in meeting their basic needs. The organizations interviewed consistently reported that recreational opportunities are scarce and often not a priority within the community. Almost all of the organizations stated there is a notable lack of entertainment and recreational culture in the country, especially concerning individuals with disabilities. This gap is exacerbated by the absence of systematic programs designed to offer consistent recreational opportunities for this population. Instead, most recreational activities are few and of a seasonal or limited nature, including some summer camps, occasional sports and recreational events like marathons, and participation in a handful of national competitions.

Specific activities reported by organizations include summer camps and leisure trips, which are sporadic, lack consistency and often not well-integrated into broader support systems for adolescents with disabilities. Art programs are occasionally offered, providing creative outlets. While there are some efforts to provide psychological support and entertainment for adolescents with disabilities these programs are often isolated and limited in scope. Sporting events, such as those organized under the Special Olympics, provide regular opportunities for participation in both local and international competitions, including uniform football and football for individuals with visual impairments. However, these activities, though valuable, do not fully address the broader recreational needs of adolescents with disabilities across Palestine.

In addition, TPFS arranges recreational activities and community service projects aimed at integrating thalassemia patients into society and shifting public perceptions. These initiatives, such as painting projects and youth training camps, have proven to be more effective than traditional programs in offering psychological support. Recently, efforts have been made to extend recreational opportunities to adolescents and young adults over 18 by integrating them into groups that focus on mental health and self-esteem. These programs are designed with accessibility in mind, ensuring that venues are accessible and that necessary accommodations, for example transportation and sign language interpreters, are provided to facilitate participation. Overall, despite these initiatives, the findings indicate a pressing need for more structured, comprehensive, accessible, sustainable and inclusive recreational programs that can provide consistent opportunities for engagement and development for adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine.

vii. *Violence among adolescents and youth with disabilities*

Adolescents and young people with disabilities in Palestine experience a broad spectrum of violence, with particular vulnerability among women and girls. While cases of physical violence

are less frequent, psychological violence, including verbal abuse, societal stigma, and social isolation, is widespread. These individuals also face economic exploitation, neglect, and various forms of sexual violence and exploitation. Cyberbullying has emerged as a new form of abuse, adding to the challenges faced by this group. The intersection of these forms of violence further marginalizes individuals with disabilities, often leading to their exclusion from basic services, education, employment, and social activities. Despite these challenges, some organizations report rare cases of exploitation in medical settings, indicating that in certain areas, integration efforts have been more successful.

viii. *Systems and initiatives to address and prevent violence against adolescents and youth with disabilities*

Efforts to address and prevent violence against adolescents and youth with disabilities in Palestine involve various systems and initiatives aimed at improving protection and support. **UNICEF's** protection program focuses on safeguarding women with disabilities by providing case tracking, psychological support, legal assistance, and economic empowerment, in collaboration with other organizations. Similarly, **Stars of Hope** partners with the National Referral System to offer psychological support, legal representation, and economic empowerment for women with disabilities facing violence.

PMRS operates a gender-based violence (GBV) program that provides safe spaces and comprehensive case management, including detection, assessment, referral, and support specifically tailored for individuals with disabilities. **Qader** has established protocols for reporting and addressing violence but faces challenges due to inconsistent implementation and limited resources, though they are working to enhance these systems.

YMCA highlights a gap in systematic monitoring and calls for the establishment of an observatory for violations of disability rights. They assist families by referring them to institutions such as the Navel Protection or Women's Center for Legal Counseling, where police intervention may occur. **UNRWA** manages cases of sexual assault through case management but lacks broader systems for addressing other types of violence. They advocate for better enforcement of disability rights laws and provide awareness workshops for parents on protection mechanisms and rights. **Al-Jaleel Society** addresses physical violence, stigma and family violence, by conducting awareness initiatives on protection skills and psychological support. They have established the Psychological Support Unit in Jenin Governorate, which offers awareness, entertainment, and training. **BASR** recognizes the absence of a dedicated monitoring system but is working to integrate indicators for disabilities into the national referral system and promote legislative and protective measures.

ix. **Unmet Needs of adolescents and youth with disabilities**

Organizations participating in the study have identified several pressing unmet needs of adolescents with disabilities across key sectors:

- **Education:** There is a critical shortage of accessible educational environments and resources tailored to students with disabilities. Many educational institutions lack necessary adaptations, such as sign language interpreters and accessible curricula. The absence of specialized support and inclusive policies further hinders the academic progress and integration of these students. Additionally, educational facilities often fail to accommodate students with disabilities beyond basic levels of education.
- **Employment:** Employment opportunities for adolescents with disabilities are scarce and poorly supported. There is a significant need for economic empowerment through improved job placement services and vocational training programs. The lack of inclusive hiring practices and the absence of supportive measures in the workplace further exacerbate the difficulties faced by these individuals in gaining meaningful employment.
- **Healthcare:** Access to comprehensive healthcare services remains a significant challenge. Adolescents with disabilities often struggle with inadequate access to specialized medical follow-ups, necessary medications, and rehabilitation services. Healthcare facilities frequently lack the necessary accommodations and resources to address the specific needs of these individuals, further impacting their overall well-being.
- **Recreational Activities:** Opportunities for participation in recreational activities are limited due to a lack of accessible and inclusive facilities. Many public spaces and recreational venues are not adapted to meet the needs of adolescents with disabilities, which restricts their ability to engage in social and leisure activities. There is a need for sustainable recreational programs and the adaptation of public spaces to support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

x. ***Addressing Unmet Needs for Adolescents and Young People with Disabilities***

To effectively meet the unmet needs of adolescents and young people with disabilities across education, healthcare, employment, and recreational activities, both NGOs and governmental bodies must take comprehensive and coordinated actions.

Education: It is crucial for both sectors to develop and implement inclusive educational policies and accessible facilities. This involves ensuring that educational institutions are equipped with necessary adaptations, such as sign language interpreters and accessible curricula. Collaborative efforts can drive systemic changes and provide resources for comprehensive support systems that facilitate the academic success of students with disabilities.

Healthcare: Continuous and reliable access to medical supplies and specialized care must be a priority. NGOs and government bodies should work together to enhance training for healthcare providers, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Creating supportive policies and frameworks that address gaps in healthcare services is essential for improving overall access and quality of care.

Employment: To address employment challenges, it is important to implement inclusive hiring practices and develop vocational training programs tailored to individuals with disabilities. Both NGOs and government agencies should collaborate on policy changes and resource allocation to create more opportunities for meaningful employment. Supporting self-financing projects and allocating dedicated budgets can also enhance economic empowerment.

Recreational Activities: Developing sustainable recreational programs and adapting public spaces to be more inclusive are vital. Coordination between civil and governmental institutions can help ensure that recreational venues and activities are accessible, promoting greater participation and integration for individuals with disabilities.

By fostering collaboration, activating and enforcing relevant laws, and ensuring adequate funding and resources, NGOs and governmental bodies can more effectively address these critical needs and improve the quality of life for adolescents and young people with disabilities.

IV. Recommendations

The following recommendations, provided by the organizations which participated in the study, address various domains assessed, including education, healthcare, employment, and recreational services. They outline the policies that government authorities should adopt to enhance the conditions for adolescents and youth with disabilities and suggest general programmatic and practical measures that NGOs and other organizations can implement to support these individuals effectively.

Education

- **Adopt Inclusive Policies:** Government authorities should establish and enforce policies that prioritize the needs of students with disabilities, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in educational settings.
- **Enhance Accessibility:** Schools and educational institutions must provide necessary accommodations, such as accessible curricula, sign language interpreters, and environmental supports to facilitate learning for students with disabilities.
- **Revise Outdated Laws:** Update existing laws to reflect current best practices in disability education and ensure all educational institutions comply with these standards.
- **Allocate Resources:** Invest in specialized training for educators and the development of adaptive educational materials to support diverse learning needs.
- **Implement Supportive Programs:** Develop and fund programs that integrate students with disabilities into mainstream education and provide support throughout their academic journey.

Employment

- **Create Inclusive Job Opportunities:** Develop and implement national policies that promote inclusive hiring practices and ensure job opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- **Support Economic Empowerment:** Provide financial resources and vocational training programs to enhance job readiness and skills for people with disabilities.
- **Enforce Employment Quotas:** Implement and monitor policies that require public and private sector organizations to employ a certain percentage of individuals with disabilities.
- **Encourage Self-Financing Projects:** Support and fund initiatives that enable people with disabilities to start their own businesses or engage in self-employment.
- **Develop Specialized Programs:** Design targeted employment programs that address the specific needs of young people with disabilities and integrate them into the workforce.

Healthcare

- **Ensure Continuous Medical Supplies:** Guarantee uninterrupted access to essential medical supplies and specialized treatments for individuals with disabilities.
- **Expand Healthcare Services:** Increase the availability of specialized healthcare services, including rehabilitation centers and prosthetic devices.
- **Improve Healthcare Provider Training:** Train healthcare professionals to effectively address the needs of individuals with disabilities, ensuring they receive appropriate and empathetic care.
- **Activate Legal Frameworks:** Enforce laws and regulations that mandate the provision of healthcare services to people with disabilities, and ensure accountability in service delivery.
- **Address Emergency Needs:** Develop emergency response plans that include provisions for the healthcare needs of individuals with disabilities during crises.

Recreational Activities

- **Adapt Public Spaces:** Make adaptations to recreational venues, and public spaces to be accessible and inclusive for individuals with disabilities.
- **Develop Sustainable Programs:** Create and support recreational programs that are designed to be inclusive and cater to the interests and needs of people with disabilities.
- **Coordinate Efforts:** Foster collaboration between NGOs, governmental bodies, and local communities to ensure recreational activities are available and accessible to everyone.
- **Promote Participation:** Encourage the active involvement of individuals with disabilities in recreational planning and decision-making processes to ensure their needs are met.
- **Provide Financial Resources:** Allocate budgets specifically for the development and maintenance of accessible recreational facilities and programs for adolescents and youth with disabilities.

V. Future Research Initiatives and Areas for Further Investigation

- **Early Diagnosis and Intervention:** Investigate the effectiveness of early diagnosis programs for adolescents and youth with disabilities, including methods for early intervention and their impact on long-term outcomes.
- **Educational Inclusion:** Explore strategies and models that enhance educational inclusion for students with disabilities. This research should assess curriculum adaptations, teacher training, and the effectiveness of inclusive classroom settings.
- **Healthcare Access:** Conduct wide scale, representative studies in West Bank and Gaza to examine barriers to accessing healthcare services for adolescents with disabilities. Focus on identifying gaps in medical care, specialized treatment availability, and the integration of healthcare services.
- **Employment Opportunities:** Research employment barriers and opportunities for youth with disabilities. Investigate successful employment programs, employer attitudes, and the impact of vocational training on employment outcomes.
- **Recreational and Social Engagement:** Assess the availability and accessibility of recreational activities for adolescents with disabilities. Study the impact of social and community engagement on their overall well-being and development.
- **Impact of Conflict and Emergencies:** Conduct studies on how conflicts and emergencies affect adolescents with disabilities. Explore their specific needs during such times and the effectiveness of current responses.
- **Qualitative Needs Assessment:** Implement qualitative research methods to deeply understand the needs and challenges faced by adolescents with disabilities, particularly in refugee camps and the most marginalized areas.
- **Legal and Policy Implementation:** Research the effectiveness of current laws and policies related to disabilities. Investigate reasons for the lack of activation or implementation of disability rights and regulations.
- **Database and Standardization:** Develop and evaluate a national database to accurately track the number of individuals with disabilities and establish standards for diagnosis and disability percentage assessments.
- **Specialized Training:** Study the need for specialized training programs for professionals working with individuals with disabilities, including the development of relevant skills and knowledge.
- **Political Participation and Representation:** Explore how adolescents and youth with disabilities can be better represented in political processes and decision-making. Assess opportunities for their active participation and the impact of such involvement.
- **Policy and Program Evaluation:** Evaluate existing policies and programs for their effectiveness in addressing the needs of adolescents with disabilities. Research should focus on identifying best practices and areas for improvement.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study underscores a complex and multifaceted landscape of challenges faced by adolescents and youth with disabilities in the West Bank. These challenges span across education, healthcare, employment, and recreational activities, deeply rooted in structural deficiencies, economic hardships, and societal attitudes, further exacerbated by ongoing political conflict.

Access to education is hindered by inadequate infrastructure, economic constraints, and pervasive stigma, which marginalize these individuals within the educational system. While legal frameworks and national strategies advocate for inclusive education, their practical implementation remains insufficient, leaving students with disabilities underserved. In healthcare, systemic shortcomings, including limited disability-specific services, gaps in early diagnosis, and barriers related to economics and transportation, highlight an urgent need for comprehensive reforms and increased awareness to ensure equitable access. Employment opportunities are constrained by weak enforcement of employment laws, economic and mobility challenges, and limited vocational training tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities. The scarcity of accessible workplaces and negative societal perceptions further restrict opportunities, necessitating stronger policy implementation and societal change. Recreational activities, though recognized for their importance, are severely limited by accessibility issues and financial constraints. The lack of inclusive recreational facilities and the impact of the political situation further restrict engagement opportunities, indicating a need for targeted efforts to enhance accessibility and inclusion.

The study also highlights several successful programs and initiatives that have positively impacted this population across various sectors. These efforts have improved access to education, healthcare, vocational training, and recreational activities. Notable successes include enhanced educational environments, improved healthcare services, and vocational training programs that have fostered employment opportunities. Despite these advancements, many recreational programs remain sporadic and limited in scope, underscoring the need for more structured and consistent recreational activities.

Finally, the unmet needs and recommendations identified in the study are vital for overcoming the systemic barriers faced by adolescents and youth with disabilities. Addressing these needs is essential for creating a more inclusive environment, ensuring that this population in the West Bank can fully participate in and benefit from all aspects of life. The lack of adequate infrastructure, economic support, and effective policy implementation, coupled with societal stigma, underscores the importance of targeted interventions. By addressing these gaps, policymakers can create a more inclusive environment that ensures equitable access to education, healthcare, employment, and recreational activities. Recommendations for policy dialogue should focus on integrating comprehensive reforms, enhancing economic support, and promoting societal awareness to foster inclusivity. These measures are essential for developing a robust framework that supports this vulnerable population, ultimately enabling them to fully participate in and benefit from societal opportunities and resources.

Future research should focus on evaluating early diagnosis programs, enhancing educational inclusion strategies, examining barriers to healthcare access, and investigating employment and recreational opportunities for adolescents with disabilities. Additionally, studies should address the impact of conflict, assess legal and policy implementation, and explore the need for specialized training and better political representation.