

COMMUNITY-BASED INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT
A PARTICIPATORY DIAGNOSTIC STUDY ON THE RIGHTS
AND NEEDS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

IN THE TOWN OF SA'IR
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Table of Contents

1.Overview of the Study and the Methodology	5
2.Context	6
2.1 Overview of the Town	6
2.2 Socioeconomic Characteristics of Families of Persons with Disabilities	7
2.3 Organizations in the town of Sa'ir	8
3.The Reality of Persons with Disabilities in the Town of Sa'ir	11
3.1 The Right to Access Education.....	11
3.1.1 Early Education.....	11
3.1.2 Basic and Secondary Education	12
3.1.2.1 Key Indicators for Basic and Secondary Education at the Community Level	12
3.1.2.2 School Accessibility in Sa'ir from the Perspective of Persons with Disabilities.....	13
3.1.2.3 Enrollment Rates in Basic and Secondary Education among Students with Disabilities	13
3.1.3 Enrollment in Higher Educations	14
3.1.4 Enrollment in Vocational Education and Training.....	14
3.2 The Right to Economic Empowerment and Employment.....	14
3.2.1 Economic Participation and Employment.....	15
3.3 The Right to Health.....	16
3.3.1 Available Health Services.....	17
3.3.2 Health Services Covered under Health Insurance	17
3.3.3 Needs of Persons with Disabilities (Coverage and Accessibility)	17
3.4 The Right to Participation in Cultural and Recreational Activities	18
3.5 The Right to Participation in Political Life	18
3.6 The Right to Social Protection and their Access to Services	19
3.6.1 Access to Social Services	20
3.6.2 The Reality of Protection and Community Support for Persons with Disabilities.....	20
3.7 Community Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities	21
4 Findings	26
Recommendations.....	29

1. Overview of the Study and the Methodology

Objectives and Significance of the Study

This study aims to provide a participatory diagnosis of the reality and needs of persons with disabilities in Sa'ir, through engaging the local community in analyzing challenges and identifying relevant opportunities. This approach stems from a firm belief in the pivotal role that local communities can play in driving development efforts, ensuring that persons with disabilities are engaged as active contributors across all aspects of life, and preventing their marginalization or exclusion.

The study also seeks to enhance coordination and strengthen linkages among governmental organizations, the municipality, development organizations, community-based organizations, volunteer and civic initiatives, and the private sector. This is to develop more inclusive and effective responses to the needs of persons with disabilities. The study supports the inclusion of persons with disabilities into community services and activities, based on the human rights principles set forth in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), particularly in the areas of education, health, employment, social protection, and community participation.

Furthermore, the study aspires to reinforce community partnerships in shaping local policies and programs, building a knowledge base grounded in local realities to inform decision-making and guide development interventions that align with the rights and needs of marginalized groups in general, and persons with disabilities in particular. The findings of this study are expected to form a strategic framework for partnership between QADER for Community Development, Sa'ir Municipality, local organizations, and the community accountability team in the town. This partnership will contribute to implementing direct interventions and activities that aim to bridge existing gaps in the enjoyment of rights and to strengthen the active participation of persons with disabilities.

QADER will also facilitate networking and coordination between Sa'ir Municipality, local initiatives and organizations, as well as governmental, civil society, and international development actors. This will promote joint action on agreed priorities and mainstream inclusion across all areas of life.

Methodology:

The study follows a participatory approach that combines field research with secondary data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation of persons with disabilities in the targeted communities. This approach is guided by rights-based and developmental standards that ensure the inclusion of disability issues while taking into account social, economic, and political factors affecting access to basic services and rights.

To ensure data quality and accuracy, a series of methodological steps were implemented starting with capacity building and training. QADER formed inclusive youth accountability teams in the targeted areas and trained them on various topics including field research tools, the rights of persons with disabilities, inclusion requirements, advocacy, and community accountability.

The methodology of the study relied on diverse data sources, including:

Primary data: collected through direct interviews, focus group discussions, and community meetings.

Secondary data: obtained from official reports, national statistics, the local strategic plan, and data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics—particularly disability-related data for the targeted towns—along with updated information from the Ministry of Education regarding schools in the targeted areas.

The process of collecting primary data in the town of Sa’ir included the following:

- **Questionnaires:** Surveys were completed with 73 households that have family members with disabilities, and 73 persons with disabilities themselves, to identify their current situation and needs. Additionally, surveys were filled out with 99 community members to explore their attitudes and perceptions toward persons with disabilities and their rights.
- **Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with representatives of local institutions, including municipalities, community-based organizations, kindergartens, and public and private health institutions, to assess the inclusiveness of the services provided.
- **Focus groups:** Three focus group discussions were organized, involving 19 participants, including persons with disabilities (children, adults, and women), their families, and representatives of local and educational institutions in Sa’ir.
- **Community meetings:** A community meeting was held to review preliminary data. It brought together representatives from various sectors to discuss the findings, verify their accuracy, and identify local priorities based on field data. The meeting also aimed to agree on possible interventions to enhance the inclusion of persons with disabilities and ensure their access to rights across different sectors. Participants included representatives of local authorities, persons with disabilities and their families, and representatives of local institutions.

2.Context

2.1 Overview of the Town

Sa'ir is a Palestinian town situated in the southern part of the West Bank. It is bordered to the north by the city of Bethlehem and Al-Aroub refugee camp, to the south by the town of Bani Na'im, to the east by open lands extending to Ein Gedi and the Dead Sea, and to the west by the town of Halhul. Sa'ir is approximately 8 km away from the city of Hebron at an elevation of approximately 1,027 meters above sea level. The town is known for its scenic geographical location and mountainous terrain.

The area of Sa'ir spans approximately 150 km², and it is renowned for cultivating a variety of crops such as olives, grapes, and vegetables. The town also contains several natural water springs that contribute to irrigating agricultural lands, in addition to having an industrial zone.

As of 2024, the population of Sa'ir is estimated at 30,000. Children under the age of 15 account for approximately 37% of the total population, while individuals aged 65 and above account for about 4%.

Water services: Around 98% of buildings in the town are connected to the water network. Residents rely on two main water sources: the public water network and domestic rainwater harvesting wells. The town suffers from water cuts, especially during the summer months.

Electricity services: Approximately 95% of residential units are connected to the electricity network, with the municipality providing electricity services around the clock.

Sewage services: Sa'ir does not have a sewage network, and residents rely on cesspits to dispose of wastewater.

Solid waste: The municipality provides waste collection services using a designated vehicle that collects waste daily.

Roads and transportation: Sa'ir includes an internal road network of 60 km in good condition, an additional 30 km of paved roads in poor condition, and 114 km of unpaved roads. The roads connecting the town to nearby communities total 7 km and are paved. The town has public transportation that connects it with the city center and neighboring villages, relying on 8 licensed public taxis and 10 unlicensed vehicles.

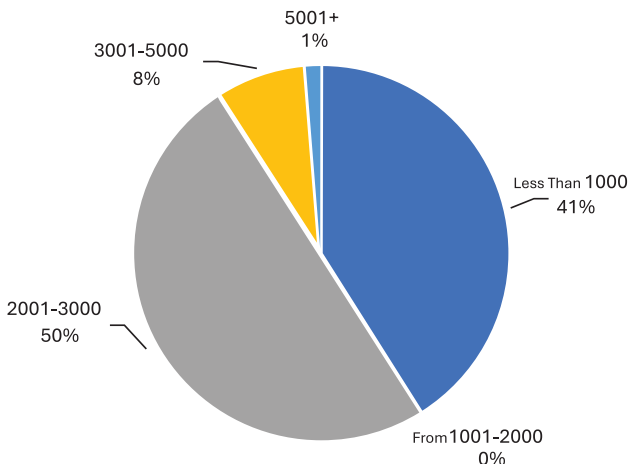
2.2 Socioeconomic Characteristics of Families of Persons with Disabilities

Household Size and Members with Disabilities: In Sa’ir, the average household size for persons with disabilities is approximately 6.7 members, compared to an average of 4.7 members in the West Bank in 2022 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics).

Around 61.5% of household heads surveyed were persons with disabilities, as the field findings also showed that 74.4% of the households surveyed include one person with a disability, while 18% include two persons with disabilities, and another 7.6% include three or more.

Economic Situation and Income Level: Field data indicated that approximately 41% of households of persons with disabilities in the town have a monthly income of no more than 1,000 shekels. About 50% reported a monthly income between 2,000 and 3,000 shekels, placing them below the poverty line of 2,470 shekels per month. Only about 1.3% of these households reported a monthly income exceeding 5,000 shekels.

Approximately 20.5% of the surveyed households of persons with disabilities reported having at least one person with a disability who is unemployed, while 7.7% of these households indicated that they have two or more persons with disabilities who are unemployed.



“Relative distribution of the income of households of persons with disabilities by different income categories – Shekel.”

Monthly Household Expenditure: The average monthly expenditure of surveyed households of persons with disabilities in Sa’ir is approximately 2,133 shekels, compared to the average monthly household expenditure in the West Bank, which was 5,800 shekels for an average household size of 5.2 members in 2017 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics).

This gap is largely attributed to the low average income of households of persons with disabilities relative to their monthly spending. The average monthly expenditure on healthcare and treatment amounted to 836 shekels, of which 480 shekels were specifically allocated for persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, the average monthly expenditure on food for these households was about 1,423 shekels.

2.3 Organizations in the town of Sa'ir

In addition to the municipality, the town of Sa'ir hosts five main organizations that operate across various sectors, including social and economic empowerment, education and health services, and community development.

Sa'ir Municipality plays a central role in improving the quality of life for residents by providing infrastructure and social development services. The municipal council is composed of 13 members, including two women, but does not include any persons with disabilities.

The municipality employs 50 staff members, of whom five are women and four are persons with disabilities. As part of its commitment to supporting persons with disabilities, the municipality offers several forms of support, including discounts of up to 30% on water and electricity services, as well as full exemption from licensing fees for residential spaces up to 200 square meters. It also contributes to making public buildings in the health and education sectors more accessible.

In collaboration with various organizations, the municipality helps organize events and initiatives by hosting them in public venues, ensuring access to services, and providing the logistical support needed to ensure their success.

Moreover, the town's strategic plan includes targeted programs for persons with disabilities, such as the establishment of a rehabilitation center, economic empowerment programs, and awareness-raising programs on the rights of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities represented approximately 5% of participants involved in the preparation of the strategic plan.

Shabab Sa'ir Sports Club, established in 1992, is registered with the Ministry of Interior and operates under the supervision of the Higher Council for Youth and Sports. It is a cultural, social, sports, and arts club that aims to promote youth participation in sports, cultural, and social activities, while also fostering their skills and building their capacities across various fields. The club has a general assembly of 600 members, 50% of whom are women, and includes five persons with disabilities. Its administrative board is composed of 11 members, including one woman. The club operates with the support of 40 volunteers, in addition to four temporary staff members employed under the "Steps" project. Currently, the club does not offer activities specifically targeted at persons with disabilities.

Sa'ir Zakat Committee, established in 1990, aims to provide support to families in need, patients, and orphans. It relies primarily on donations from the local community, which are collected through mosques and community centers. The committee consists of eight male members who were appointed by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, with no representation of persons with disabilities. The committee employs one staff member. It targets the most vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, and offers services such as the distribution of medicine, food parcels, and essential medical supplies, in addition to providing economic support for the establishment of small-scale projects.

Sa'ir Charitable Association, established in 1963, is the first organization founded in the town of Sa'ir and played a key role in establishing the electricity and water infrastructure before the municipality was formed. The association is licensed by the Ministry of Interior and aims to serve all sectors of the community. Its general assembly includes 45 members, of whom 4 are women, with no representation of persons with disabilities. The administrative board is composed of 9 members, including 2 women. The association operates with the support of 25 volunteers. It carries out activities in the fields of education and community awareness, runs a kindergarten, and implements family empowerment programs. However, it does not currently offer programs specifically directed at persons with disabilities.

Red Crescent Society – Sa'ir Branch, established in 2005, aims to provide medical and community services. Its medical center offers 24-hour emergency services and a range of specialized clinics. The administrative board consists of nine members (seven men and two women), with no representation of persons with disabilities. The branch employs four staff members and includes 50 volunteers, in addition to five doctors. While there are no programs exclusively dedicated to persons with disabilities, they are included within the activities of the rehabilitation unit, which serves around 12 children annually through a home enrichment program. Persons with disabilities are also integrated into community activities such as health awareness campaigns, distribution of assistive devices, and first aid workshops. The branch faces several challenges, including limited resources and a lack of specialized services for persons with disabilities. It continues to develop its services based on annual plans informed by needs assessments.

Ikram Elderly Care Association – Sa'ir Branch is part of the broader Ikram Elderly Care Association, which was established in 2018 and is headquartered in the city of Halhul. The association's mission is to provide care and support to elderly individuals in the Palestinian community through social, health, and recreational services aimed at enhancing their quality of life and ensuring their safety and stability. Its main activities include organizing free medical days and offering recreational events such as psychological relief sessions and joyful community gatherings. The association also distributes medical supplies to elderly individuals—such as wheelchairs, crutches, and other equipment—in cooperation with charitable organizations. The administrative board consists of seven members, including two women. In the Sa'ir branch, one female employee manages operations, and the association relies primarily on volunteers to carry out its activities.

Key Challenges Facing Local Organizations in Including Persons with Disabilities:

- **Lack of comprehensive strategic plans for persons with disabilities:** The vast majority of local organizations in the town of Sa'ir lack inclusive strategic plans and have not integrated or organizationalized the inclusion of persons with disabilities within their programs and services.
- **Lack of representation of persons with disabilities in administrative and general bodies:** Persons with disabilities are absent from the administrative bodies of all local organizations, and their representation in general assemblies is very limited, resulting in their marginalization from decision-making processes.
- **Lack of qualified personnel to address the needs of persons with disabilities:** Most local organizations in the town (including staff, volunteers, general assembly members, and administrators) have not received any training on how to interact with persons with disabilities, understand their needs, or be familiar with their rights. This leads to a failure to respond to their needs or adopt an inclusive approach in organizational programs and interventions.
- **Weak funding and networking:** The lack of financial resources and heavy reliance on external funding to implement programs and activities is a major challenge for local organizations. This limits their ability to address the needs of persons with disabilities and include them in their programs, especially since external funding is often restrictive and aligned with the priorities of donors. Additionally, limited partnerships with local and international actors reduce opportunities to secure additional support for organizational development.
- **Lack of accessible infrastructure:** Most facilities of local organizations are not adapted to the principles of universal design. This includes the absence of accessible entrances, elevators, wide hallways, and adapted restrooms, posing a significant barrier to the access and participation of persons with disabilities.
- **Lack of universal design and reasonable accommodations in programs and activities:** Programs and activities implemented by local organizations often fail to meet universal design standards or provide reasonable accommodations to ensure access and participation of persons with disabilities. This is reflected in the lack of accessible transportation, adapted communication materials (such as inclusive advertisements), and other necessary arrangements.
- **Community awareness and prevailing negative attitudes:** Negative societal perceptions toward persons with disabilities, accompanied by social stigma, present a major barrier to their inclusion. Additionally, the low level of awareness among families of persons with disabilities and the local community about the importance of inclusion limits their active participation in various activities.

3.The Reality of Persons with Disabilities in the Town

3.1 The Right to Access Education

The right to education is a fundamental right guaranteed by both national legislation and international conventions, without discrimination. The amended Palestinian Basic Law (the Constitution) prohibits discrimination based on disability, including in the field of education, as explicitly stated in Article (9) under the second chapter on constitutional rights and freedoms. This principle is reinforced by Law No. (4) of 1999 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which affirms in Article (10) the right of students with disabilities to equal opportunities in accessing educational organizations, including schools and universities.

Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) for the year 2017 revealed that the illiteracy rate among persons with disabilities aged 10 years and above in the town of Sa'ir is approximately 45.7%, compared to an illiteracy rate of 4.4% at the level of Hebron Governorate. The same data also indicate that around 79.6% of persons with disabilities in Sa'ir have either never enrolled in education or dropped out after enrolling.

The law obliges the Ministry of Social Development, in coordination with all relevant bodies, to provide the necessary educational assessments to determine the nature and degree of disability, as well as to develop appropriate curricula and teaching materials and ensure facilities that support an inclusive learning environment. It also emphasizes the importance of training qualified staff to work with students with disabilities, ensuring that they can access all forms and levels of education in ways that meet their needs and promote their active participation in society.

Following the publication of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in the Official Gazette under Decree-Law No. (36) of 2023, these obligations must now be grounded in the provisions of the Convention itself—particularly Article (24), which addresses the right to education. This includes the establishment of an inclusive, disability-friendly educational system, with a strict commitment to not exclude any person with a disability from the education system on the basis of disability. It also requires attention to individual differences, facilitation of learning Braille and sign language, the inclusion of teachers with disabilities who are proficient in these methods, and the fulfillment of other related obligations.

3.1.1 Early Education

The town of Sa'ir has eight kindergartens distributed geographically, varying in size and services. They serve children aged 4 to 6 years. The total number of children enrolled in these kindergartens is approximately 750, with 52% boys and 48% girls. A total of 42 teachers provide early childhood education, with an average of 18 children per teacher. The average number of children per classroom is around 24.

Interviews with kindergarten administrators in Sa'ir revealed that children with disabilities make up about 3% of total enrollment. However, kindergartens face social challenges, particularly with some families refraining from enrolling their children with disabilities due to fears of stigma or bullying. About 16.7% of surveyed households with persons with disabilities reported having a child of kindergarten age who is currently not enrolled, citing social stigma and concern for their child's emotional safety. On the other hand, some parents of non-disabled children expressed discomfort with having children with disabilities in the same classroom, considering it a challenge to the learning process.

Kindergarten tuition fees in Sa'ir are approximately 150 shekels per month. Financial exemptions are offered to some low-income families of children with disabilities. In terms of infrastructure, there is one toilet for every 23 children. Outdoor play areas average around 100 square meters, most of which are covered with artificial grass and shaded canopies covering about 65% of the area.

Field visits and interviews highlighted a general lack of accessibility and universal design across most kindergarten buildings. This includes the absence of accessible entrances, hallways, restrooms, elevators, playgrounds, and equipment suited for children with disabilities. Most kindergartens also lack modern educational technologies that support early learning, and there are no inclusive curricula or educational tools tailored to the needs of children with disabilities, which hinders their participation in the learning process.

In addition, transportation services used by the kindergartens are not adapted for children with disabilities, making it more difficult for them to attend and engage in educational activities. While most kindergarten teachers in Sa'ir hold university degrees and have received training in early childhood education, they have not received specialized training on working with children with disabilities, including awareness of their rights and relevant legislation. As a result, the activities offered in kindergartens often fail to consider the needs of children with disabilities, and they are frequently excluded from physical activities without being offered suitable alternatives.

3.1.2 Basic and Secondary Education

3.1.2.1 Key Indicators for Basic and Secondary Education at the Community Level

Students in the town of Sa’ir receive their education through 17 schools, including 16 public schools and one private school, with a total of 290 teachers. The schools include three secondary schools and 14 basic schools for boys and girls. The total number of students enrolled in these schools is 6,312, of whom 2,884 are boys and 3,428 are girls. Among them, there are 60 students with disabilities (23 boys and 37 girls).

Basic and Secondary Education Indicators in the Town Compared to National-Level Indicators

General Indicator	Sa’ir	National-level figures
Number of students per teacher	21.7	19.4
Number of students per counselor	526	200-300
Number of students per class section	30	26.4
Classroom space per student (m²)	1.5	1.5
Number of students per toilet	46	30.1
Number of students per drinking fountain	41	32.5
Number of students per sink	61	49.7

The table above presents a comparison between education indicators in the town of Sa’ir and national-level indicators. The student-to-teacher ratio in Sa’ir is 21.7, compared to the national average of 19.4, and the average number of students per classroom is 30, compared to the national average of 26.4. This reflects overcrowded classrooms and an increased academic burden on teachers—an issue that was confirmed by teachers during focus group discussions, highlighting its impact on the quality of education.

3.1.2.2 School Accessibility in Sa’ir from the Perspective of Persons with Disabilities.

Most persons with disabilities and their families who participated in the field study and focus group discussions reported that schools in the town are not accessible or adequately equipped to accommodate students with disabilities. They highlighted limited access to both basic and secondary education, primarily due to financial burdens and physical barriers.

One of the main shortcomings they pointed to was the lack of inclusive design in educational facilities that meets the needs of students with disabilities. The findings showed that five schools—equivalent to 29% of the schools in the town lack ramps to facilitate the movement of students with physical disabilities. Moreover, universal design and reasonable accommodations are generally absent from key school facilities such as libraries, computer and science labs, classrooms, and restrooms.

Students with disabilities and their families also described the available educational tools, computer equipment, and curricula as unsuitable and not responsive to their needs. Regarding resource rooms, only three are currently available in the town's schools.

Participants in the focus groups also noted a shortage of qualified personnel to support students with disabilities. Around 61% of them believed that there are no adequately trained teachers in schools to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This aligns with the statements made by teachers themselves confirmed in the focus discussions that they lack the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively work with students with disabilities.

3.1.2.3 Enrollment Rates in Basic and Secondary Education among Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities in Sa'ir face a range of challenges that hinder their access to inclusive education. These challenges often begin before school entry due to the lack of early disability screening services and early intervention programs, which are essential for preparing children with disabilities to enroll in the education system.

Participants in the education-sector focus group discussions reported that many schools in Sa'ir refuse to enroll students with disabilities. Administrative authorities in schools justify this refusal with various reasons, including concerns over maintaining the flow of the educational process, the absence of appropriate curricula, overcrowded classrooms, and an inability to provide individualized attention to students with disabilities. Additionally, the limited awareness among parents about their children's right to education and the accommodation necessary for inclusion often leads them to accept such rejections without objection.

Within the school environment, students with disabilities face several challenges chief among them is a lack of acceptance by their peers. About 15% of surveyed students with disabilities reported feeling unaccepted by classmates. This lack of social inclusion contributes to increased incidents of bullying and violence, with more than half of the students with disabilities indicating that they have been subjected to bullying or violence, sometimes even from teachers.

Families of persons with disabilities also noted that their children's presence in schools is often symbolic, as they experience ongoing marginalization and exclusion. In some cases, teachers resort to isolating or removing students with disabilities from the classroom, preventing them from participating meaningfully in the educational process.

3.1.3 Enrollment in Higher Educations

Persons with disabilities face significant challenges in accessing higher and post-secondary education organizations. Findings from the field study indicated that only about 3% of persons with disabilities surveyed in the town are currently enrolled in higher or intermediate education. The most prominent challenges include the lack of accessible infrastructure and facilities within higher education organizations, as well as the absence of accessible transportation in the town that meets the needs of students with disabilities.

Within university campuses, lecture halls are not adequately equipped to support the engagement of students with disabilities with educational content, which hinders their ability to participate effectively. The study also revealed a complete absence of qualified instructors trained to work with students with disabilities—an issue highlighted by all respondents with disabilities. In addition, the curricula themselves pose an added challenge, as they fail to accommodate the individual needs of students with disabilities.

3.1.4 Enrollment in Vocational Education and Training

Findings from the field study revealed that only about 2% of persons with disabilities are enrolled in vocational training programs. This low participation rate is attributed to several challenges, the most notable being the lack of accessible information regarding enrollment procedures and requirements. In fact, 98% of persons with disabilities surveyed reported not receiving appropriate awareness or guidance on how to access public or private vocational education opportunities.

Additionally, persons with disabilities and their families cited the absence of vocational training organizations in nearby areas as a major barrier. The nearest public vocational training centers are located in the cities of Halhul and Hebron, which limits access particularly given the lack of accessible transportation options.

Moreover, most participants in the field interviews and focus groups highlighted the inadequate design of vocational education facilities, pointing to poor infrastructure in classrooms, laboratories, and workshops. They also emphasized that educational materials and curricula are not adapted to their needs. A further challenge is the lack of qualified vocational education staff, with many professionals lacking the training and experience required to effectively support the needs of students with disabilities.

3.2 The Right to Economic Empowerment and Employment

The right to work and employment is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed under Palestinian legislation. The amended Palestinian Basic Law (the Constitution) explicitly affirms in Article (25) the right of every citizen to work and mandates that labor relations be regulated in a manner that ensures justice for all and provides workers with health and social protection. Article (9) strictly prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, including in relation to the right to work.

Additionally, Article (10) of Law No. (4) of 1999 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities assigns responsibility to the Ministry of Social Development, in coordination with all relevant bodies, for ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities in vocational rehabilitation, training, and employment based on the principle of equal opportunity. The law also obligates public and private organizations to employ persons with disabilities at a rate of no less than 5% of their workforce and requires that workplaces be adapted to meet their needs. Moreover, it encourages private sector organizations to employ persons with disabilities by offering tax incentives.

Cabinet Decision No. (40) of 2004, which issued the executive regulations for Law No. (4) of 1999, further emphasized this obligation in Article (12). It stipulates that any company or organization that fails to employ persons with disabilities in accordance with the law (i.e., at least 5%) must pay an amount equivalent to the minimum wage for a person with a disability into a “Special Fund for Persons with Disabilities.” This fund was to be established by a decision from the Minister of Social Development and intended to provide financial assistance to unemployed persons with disabilities.

Despite the significance of this provision in promoting the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities, and the many years that have passed since the executive regulation came into force, the fund has yet to be established—contrary to the legal requirement set out in the regulation.

3.2.1 Economic Participation and Employment

The vast majority 67% of families of persons with disabilities surveyed in Sa’ir believe that accessing the labor market is difficult, while 25% consider it moderately difficult. This reflects a wide range of challenges that contribute to the low levels of economic participation among persons with disabilities, both male and female.

Interviews conducted with persons with disabilities (both employed and unemployed), their families, and employers revealed several key barriers contributing to this situation. One of the main challenges is the lack of accessibility in the work environment. According to the field study, 86% of respondents with disabilities stated that organizations—both public

and private—in the area are not adapted to accommodate persons with disabilities in the workplace. This violates the provisions of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its executive regulations, as well as the obligations resulting from the publication of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in the Official Gazette under Decree-Law No. (36) of 2023.

Another major barrier is discrimination and bias within the workplace. A striking 89% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination in employment settings. This includes being denied job opportunities, being excluded from training and promotion, and facing unjustified restrictions on accessing employment. Such bias is largely rooted in societal and cultural factors, including limited awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities and prevailing stereotypes that question their competence and productivity.

The lack of training and educational opportunities also plays a significant role. The study found that 79.7% of persons with disabilities in Sa’ir had never participated in any capacity-building programs or workshops to prepare for the labor market. This is due to a combination of factors, including a shortage of tailored training programs, inaccessible training environments, and a general lack of awareness among organizations about the importance of including persons with disabilities in such opportunities. Financial and social challenges—such as limited family support or the absence of suitable opportunities—also hinder participation.

Regarding self-employment, only 2% of persons with disabilities and their families reported having received any support to start income-generating projects. However, most of the previously implemented projects were discontinued. This was largely due to a lack of prior market research, leading to the launch of projects that did not align with local demand. Many of the initiatives were repetitive or generic, such as sheep or poultry farming, which are already saturated in the market. The limited skills and experience of beneficiaries in managing these projects also contributed to their failure. Additionally, the depletion of capital without sufficient revenue to cover ongoing costs, coupled with limited financial capacity to grow or reinvest in the projects, made it difficult to sustain them.

3.3 The Right to Health

Article (22) of the amended Palestinian Basic Law (the Constitution), under the chapter on public rights and freedoms, states the following: 1. The law shall regulate social and health insurance services and pensions for disability and old age. 2. Caring for the families of martyrs and prisoners, and for the wounded, those affected, and persons with disabilities is a duty regulated by law, and the Palestinian National Authority shall guarantee them education, social insurance, and health services.

This constitutional provision (Article 22) outlines two distinct levels of obligation. In the first paragraph, the regulation of social and health insurance and pensions is left to ordinary legislation, meaning the government is not required to provide these services free of charge; instead, their provision is subject to how the relevant authorities choose to regulate them.

In contrast, the second paragraph adopts a clear and decisive tone, stating that the care of families of martyrs, prisoners, the wounded, those affected, and persons with disabilities is a “duty” of the Palestinian National Authority, governed by law. More importantly, it mandates that the Authority “shall guarantee” them education, social, and health insurance services.

In constitutional terms, the word “guarantee” implies full responsibility that is, the state is directly obligated to provide these services free of charge, without requiring beneficiaries to pay for them. Any law that fails to uphold this standard is considered unconstitutional.

Additionally, Article (10) of Law No. (4) of 1999 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that the Ministry of Social Development, in coordination with all relevant bodies, is responsible for “ensuring that persons with disabilities and their families receive the health services covered under public health insurance free of charge.”

Despite the fact that free access to health insurance along with social insurance and education—for persons with disabilities is a duty firmly established by the Basic Law, and despite the clear provision in the Disabilities Law affirming the right of persons with disabilities and their families to free health insurance services, and despite the issuance and enforcement of the 2021 Government Health Insurance Regulation for Persons with Disabilities (as published in the Official Gazette), actual practices continue to violate the Basic Law, the Disabilities Law, and the 2021 regulation concerning free health insurance for persons with disabilities.

3.3.1 Available Health Services

Persons with disabilities in the town of Sa’ir receive health services through both public and private healthcare centers located within the town. These include five public clinics classified as second-level centers, with one operating as a third-level clinic. These facilities provide primary healthcare services, including general medicine, pediatric care, laboratory services, and a pharmacy. Additionally, the Sa’ir branch of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society offers 24-hour emergency services and various specialized clinics, alongside several private health clinics and centers.

Despite the availability of healthcare services in the town, persons with disabilities and their families reported several challenges that hinder their access to these services. Key concerns include the lack of specialized healthcare services tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities, limited physical accessibility of medical facilities, and the absence of trained personnel capable of appropriately supporting and interacting with persons with disabilities.

Families also pointed to the lack of early disability screening services, which can delay diagnosis and prevent timely or adequate care. As a result, some individuals are forced to seek care from private facilities outside the town, incurring additional expenses that many families are unable to afford or are not covered by available insurance schemes.

3.3.2 Health Services Covered under Health Insurance

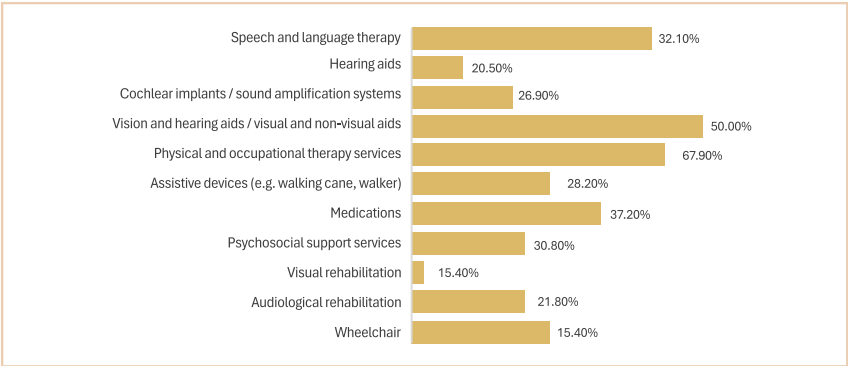
Although 83% of families of persons with disabilities in Sa’ir have free health insurance, the level of coverage does not meet the healthcare needs of most families. As a result, 27% of these families cover medical expenses out of pocket, including treatment, medications, nutritional supplements, and physical therapy, in addition to transportation costs. This places a significant financial burden on low-income families of persons with disabilities.

3.3.3 Needs of Persons with Disabilities (Coverage and Accessibility)

Persons with disabilities in Sa’ir face a clear gap in meeting their basic health needs, which forces them to rely heavily on personal resources or irregular organizational support. According to the survey, 37.2% of persons with disabilities reported needing rehabilitation services—such as physical and occupational therapy—but these services are typically paid for out of pocket, as they are not covered by the health insurance provided by the Ministry of Health.

More than one-third of persons with disabilities in Sa’ir expressed a need for psychological and social support services, noting that the lack of specialized centers and qualified professionals significantly limits access to such support. In terms of assistive devices, 15.4% of respondents stated a need for wheelchairs, 22% for hearing aids, and 30.8% for visual or auditory assistive devices. Despite these needs, 16.7% of families of persons with disabilities reported covering the cost of these devices themselves.

Additionally, nearly half of persons with disabilities require regular medication. However, these medications are often unavailable through the Ministry of Health or are not covered by public health insurance, which compels individuals to bear the cost on their own, further straining already limited household finances.



“Distribution of health and rehabilitation needs for people with disabilities in Sa’ir

3.4 The Right to Participation in Cultural and Recreational Activities

The participation of persons with disabilities particularly children in cultural and recreational activities in Sa'ir is extremely limited and largely dependent on modest efforts by local organizations. Law No. (4) of 1999 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities affirms the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development, in coordination with all relevant stakeholders, to provide opportunities for sports and recreation for persons with disabilities. This includes ensuring the accessibility of playgrounds, halls, camps, and clubs, as well as supporting their participation in national and international sports programs. The law also stipulates a 50% reduction in admission fees for persons with disabilities at public cultural and recreational venues.

More than one-third (40%) of persons with disabilities reported feeling marginalized by both the local community and local institutions. This sense of marginalization is reflected in the lack of attention given to their participation in various community activities carried out in the town, as well as the failure to take necessary measures to ensure their inclusion in such events.

Despite this legal framework, persons with disabilities and their families reported that there is a severe lack of targeted and inclusive cultural and recreational programming in the town. Field study results showed that only about 2% of persons with disabilities participate in cultural and recreational activities. More than half of respondents indicated that local organizations do not take into account universal design requirements or reasonable accommodations needed to ensure access and participation for persons with disabilities. These shortcomings include the absence of accessible transportation, inclusive communication materials (such as adapted advertisements), and other necessary accessibility measures. Families also noted that local organizations typically implement such measures only when required by external donors.

Moreover, families of persons with disabilities highlighted that poor economic conditions pose a significant barrier to participation in cultural and recreational activities. On the other hand, most local organizations cited the inaccessibility of public facilities in the town and their reliance on external funding as key challenges to including persons with disabilities in cultural and recreational programs.

Local organizations also pointed to limited community awareness as a contributing factor. They observed that many families of persons with disabilities lack awareness of the importance of cultural and recreational activities in promoting mental and social well-being. This is further compounded by the general lack of awareness-raising programs about the cultural and recreational rights of persons with disabilities and their significance.

3.5 The Right to Participation in Political Life

Article (2) of the 1999 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities affirms the right of persons with disabilities to enjoy a free and dignified life and access to various services on an equal basis with other citizens. It states that they have the same rights and are subject to the same duties, within the limits of their capacities and abilities. The law explicitly prohibits disability from being used as a justification to deny individuals their rights. Article (3) goes further by placing a general obligation on the state to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and to facilitate their access to those rights.

Although the law does not explicitly mention political rights, these are inherently included under the broad language guaranteeing “all rights” to persons with disabilities. In particular, Article (4) of the law acknowledges the right of persons with disabilities to establish their own organizations and associations—an element that falls clearly within the scope of political rights. Taken together, these provisions confirm that political rights are legally protected for persons with disabilities.

The adoption of Decree-Law No. (36) of 2023, which formally published the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in the Official Gazette (Palestinian Gazette), further strengthens the overall framework for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, with political participation being a core component of that framework. However, interviews, focus group discussions, and field research with persons with disabilities, their families, and local organizations in Sa’ir revealed several challenges that hinder their political participation.

Lack of accessible design was identified as one of the most pressing issues. Persons with disabilities cited the inaccessibility of public facilities, voter registration centers, and polling stations as major obstacles. A total of 78% reported difficulties in reaching these facilities and participating in public meetings and political events due to the lack of necessary accommodations such as accessible buildings, transportation, and other support measures.

The rate of participation of persons with disabilities in political life—whether through running for office, voting, or attending public meetings—did not exceed 20.3% in the town of Sa’ir.

Social perceptions also pose a significant barrier. The field study showed that half of the respondents with disabilities believe the local community views them as incapable of making political decisions, which contributes to their exclusion from political life.

Tribal and political influences were noted as another key challenge. Many persons with disabilities and their families pointed out that strong tribal and political affiliations often shape political engagement in the town. As a result, persons with disabilities who lack strong tribal backing may find it difficult to access political positions or influence decision-making processes.

Gaps in awareness-raising programs and accessible media materials were also highlighted. The vast majority of respondents stated that there is a lack of accessible information such as materials in sign language or Braille about political rights and how to exercise them. While the Central Elections Commission has taken some steps, such as issuing Braille materials and using sign language in videos, these efforts remain limited. Greater collaboration is needed among official and non-official bodies, including the media and civil society organizations, to produce inclusive, accessible, and sustainable materials that meet the diverse needs of persons with different types of disabilities. Such efforts are essential for raising awareness and promoting the political rights of persons with disabilities.

3.6 The Right to Social Protection and their Access to Services

The right to social protection is a fundamental right guaranteed by both international and national laws, including Law No. (4) of 1999 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This law emphasizes the importance of providing a safe and supportive environment that ensures persons with disabilities have access to care services and protection from all forms of discrimination and exclusion.

3.6.1 Access to Social Services

Approximately 10.3% of families of persons with disabilities surveyed in the town of Sa'ir reported receiving financial or in-kind assistance from various sources, such as the Ministry of Social Development, UNRWA, and local organizations. On average, families received assistance about four times per year, with the average value of each monthly installment amounting to approximately 788 shekels per household.

59% of the families of persons with disabilities surveyed in Sa'ir reported facing significant difficulties in accessing services provided by the Ministry of Social Development and other institutions.

Persons with disabilities face several challenges in accessing social services provided by the Ministry of Social Development, UNRWA, and other organizations. These services include financial and in-kind aid, health insurance, assistive devices, and customs exemptions, among others.

About 55% of families of persons with disabilities stated that bureaucratic procedures and administrative complexities which often require multiple visits and paperwork—pose a significant barrier to accessing social services. These challenges are further compounded by the lack of accessible infrastructure within service-providing organizations and the absence of accessible transportation, a concern echoed by 42% of respondents.

Additionally, families pointed to complex and restrictive eligibility criteria that prevent many persons with disabilities from benefiting from available services. Most respondents

also cited long waiting periods and irregularity in service provision as major challenges, particularly given the lack of stable income for most persons with disabilities, who largely rely on such assistance to meet their basic needs.

3.6.2 The Reality of Protection and Community Support for Persons with Disabilities.

Field study results revealed a general lack of awareness among families of persons with disabilities regarding their right to protection, access to services, available support measures, and mechanisms for reporting cases of violence or abuse. Participants in focus group discussions, including persons with disabilities and their families, highlighted the absence of effective protection mechanisms in the town.

It is estimated that approximately 30% of families of persons with disabilities hide their children due to fear of social stigma.

They reported that persons with disabilities are subjected to various forms of violence, including verbal and physical abuse, neglect, marginalization, exclusion, and discrimination most notably affecting children and women. Gender-based discrimination was identified as particularly widespread among women and girls with disabilities, with families often imposing more restrictions on their participation in community activities compared to their male counterparts.

Violence in schools was another major concern, with more than half of the persons with disabilities surveyed reporting exposure to violence within educational settings whether by peers or, in some cases, by teachers. Focus group participants indicated that boys with disabilities tend to experience higher rates of physical violence in schools compared to girls.

18% of the persons with disabilities surveyed reported experiencing violence within the home.

On the other hand, teachers and counselors involved in the focus groups confirmed stated that they intervene directly when incidents of violence occur, especially those involving students with disabilities. If a situation has a psychological impact on a student, the case is referred for individual counseling sessions. Teachers also participate in awareness and violence prevention efforts through classroom activities, school radio programs, and awareness sessions on the risks of violence.

However, most families of persons with disabilities believe that teachers lack adequate training to effectively handle incidents of violence against students with disabilities in school environments.

3.7 Community Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities

Field results revealed that 24% of community members in Sa'ir hold negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities, believing they are a burden on both the family and society. Additionally, 3% of respondents stated that they do not believe persons with disabilities can contribute positively to their community, while 32% believe that persons with disabilities are unable to meet their basic needs independently.

45% of community members reported feeling worry and fear at the idea of having a person with a disability in their family.

At the same time, there is strong support for certain rights. A significant majority 98% of community members believe that access to education and free healthcare is a fundamental right for persons with disabilities, and that granting them full rights, including through legal and policy reforms, can facilitate their access to all services.

Furthermore, 86.5% of respondents believe that providing necessary support such as making polling stations accessible and offering appropriate informational materials would give persons with disabilities a better chance to participate in elections. In addition, 64% agree that persons with disabilities can influence political decision-making if they are given the opportunity to participate in the electoral process.

However, 90% of respondents believe that persons with disabilities are capable of working effectively across different sectors. On a more positive note, 96% believe that creating job opportunities that accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities would enhance their inclusion in the labor market.

4 Findings

1. Most Marginalized Groups:

All persons with disabilities in the town of Sa'ir face a wide range of barriers that prevent their active participation in various sectors and hinder their well-being and dignity. These barriers place psychological, social, and economic burdens on both individuals and their families. The severity of these challenges increases for families with more than one person with a disability, households with more than six members, low-income families, female headed households, or families where the head is unemployed or elderly. The challenges are particularly acute for children of school age, persons with intellectual disabilities (especially severe or multiple), persons with chronic illnesses, those seeking employment, and youth outside the formal education system.

2. Weak Infrastructure and Services:

Several essential services in Sa'ir are either unavailable or insufficient. The town suffers from limited water supply during the summer, forcing many families to rely on water tanks. There is no proper sewage system; instead, households use cesspits. Road and sidewalk infrastructure is poor and not adapted for persons with disabilities, and there are no accessible public transportation services, making it difficult and costly for persons with disabilities to reach various services.

3. Poverty and Its Impact on Persons with Disabilities:

High poverty levels among families of persons with disabilities are linked to rising unemployment, especially after the war on Gaza and the loss of employment opportunities inside the occupied territories. High dependency ratios due to larger household sizes further exacerbate poverty. Very few families receive regular financial or in-kind assistance from the Ministry of Social Development, UNRWA, or other organizations. Poverty is especially severe among families needing medication not covered by health insurance, whether for persons with disabilities or members with chronic illnesses. As a result, poverty contributes to the exclusion of persons with disabilities especially children from accessing education, healthcare, rehabilitation, and participation in recreational, cultural, and political activities.

4. Access to Quality Education:

Despite the presence of 17 schools and 8 kindergartens in Sa'ir, access to pre-school and basic education remains limited for children with disabilities. Many children and youth with disabilities remain outside the formal education system, leading to high illiteracy rates and limited vocational opportunities. Contributing factors include the lack of early detection and intervention programs, unprepared educational organizations, the absence of trained and qualified staff, lack of support services in schools and kindergartens, and the high cost of transportation for families needing to enroll children in schools outside the town.

5. Access to Higher and Vocational Education:

Persons with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing higher education and vocational training. These include lack of physical accessibility in organizations, absence of accessible transportation, poorly equipped classrooms and labs, non-inclusive curricula, and teaching staff lacking the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

6. Access to Comprehensive Healthcare Services:

Although Sa'ir has five public health clinics (one third-level), a 24-hour emergency center operated by the Palestinian Red Crescent, and several private clinics, these services do not meet the needs of persons with disabilities. Key issues include the absence of early disability detection services, unavailability of essential medications, lack of insurance coverage for physical and occupational therapy, absence of psychological and psychiatric services, and insufficient assistive devices (especially for hearing disabilities). Many persons with disabilities are not enrolled in any form of health insurance due to limited awareness or administrative barriers.

7. Employment and Economic Empowerment:

Most persons with disabilities—whether youth, women, or men are excluded from the labor market. This is due in part to negative societal perceptions of their abilities (especially women and persons with intellectual disabilities) and limited access to higher education and vocational training. Additionally, many workplaces are not accessible or inclusive, which has contributed to higher poverty levels and dependency within families of persons with disabilities.

8. Protection from Violence and Access to Psychosocial Support:

The living conditions of persons with disabilities and their families often result in psychological and social challenges, particularly for women and other family members. These conditions also expose persons with disabilities to various forms of violence, both within and outside the family. Families often lack awareness of available protection services, complaint mechanisms, and how to report abuse. There are no effective protection mechanisms in the town, and services for legal and psychosocial support are weak, further contributing to marginalization, underreporting of abuse, and impunity—particularly in a cultural context that tends to tolerate violence and bullying against children, women, and persons with disabilities.

9. Participation in Cultural, Sports, and Recreational Activities:

Although the town has active local organizations in the fields of women's, charitable, sports, and cultural work, persons with disabilities are largely excluded from participating in cultural, sports, and social activities. Families have expressed interest in involving their children with disabilities in such programs, but opportunities remain limited. Moreover, persons with disabilities have had little to no involvement in policy-making or the development of the town's local development strategy.

10. Participation in Political Life:

Political participation among persons with disabilities remains low due to several barriers, including inaccessible public buildings and voting centers, and exclusion from political processes. Negative social perceptions and tribal or political influences further undermine their ability to participate in decision-making. This is compounded by a lack of awareness among persons with disabilities about their political rights and a shortage of inclusive awareness programs and accessible informational materials.

11. Community Awareness and Support:

Community and family awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities is limited. Societal attitudes still tend to approach disability from a charitable or pity-based perspective rather than a rights-based one. As a result, there is ongoing tolerance for the exclusion or marginalization of persons with disabilities across many sectors, and limited engagement in volunteerism, support, or advocacy efforts.

12. Inclusion in Local Organizational Programs:

Many organizations still approach disability through a humanitarian or charitable lens, rather than as a human rights issue. This has weakened the scope and impact of their interventions, leading to a lack of long-term policies aimed at empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring their equitable access to services. While some organizations and the Sa'ir Municipality are active in providing basic services and supporting local development, these efforts have not translated into concrete improvements in the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities within a rights-based framework.

13. Accountability and Policy Influence:

The ability of persons with disabilities and their families to influence policies depends heavily on the alignment of national legislation with disability rights and the degree to which such laws and policies are implemented. Challenges include weak political will, inadequate mechanisms for public accountability, and limited advocacy capacity to influence decision-makers at both the national and local levels. As a result, persons with disabilities continue to be excluded from key sectors such as education, healthcare, employment, and social protection programs.

5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the disability participatory study and the final community meeting held in the town of Sa'ir organized to present and discuss the results and jointly agree on priority actions to enhance the inclusion of persons with disabilities a set of priority interventions was identified to improve the situation of persons with disabilities and promote their inclusion across all areas of life:

1. Enhancing the Role of the Municipality in Disability Inclusion

- Institutionalizing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Sa'ir Municipality's policies and services, and promoting their participation in planning processes, policy-making, and local development strategies.
- Ensuring fair and affordable access to water and energy services for persons with disabilities and their families particularly those living in poverty by adopting municipal decisions to offer discounted rates for these services.
- Supporting poor or low-income families of persons with disabilities by exempting them from certain municipal taxes (property tax, sanitation fees, etc.).
- Adapting roads, sidewalks, public buildings, and facilities—especially schools and health centers to improve physical accessibility for persons with all types of disabilities.
- Strengthening partnerships between the municipality, civil society organizations, international actors, and the private sector to improve existing services and introduce new ones, such as psychosocial and legal support services, vocational training programs, and income-generating activities particularly for persons with intellectual disabilities.

2. Strengthening the Role of Local Organizations to Provide Specialized and Inclusive Services

- Expanding the capacity of local organizations in Sa'ir to provide specialized services, including physical and occupational therapy, services for individuals with intellectual and severe disabilities, special education, assistive devices, and medical supplies.
- Promoting awareness-raising on the rights of persons with disabilities within families and the broader community to foster a rights-based, developmental approach.
- Enhancing the role of local organizations in community protection and support for persons with disabilities and their families, including establishing referral mechanisms between organizations and external services.

- Creating a comprehensive and regularly updated database of persons with disabilities and their families, to serve as a reference for planning and coordination, jointly managed by the municipality and local organizations.
- Adapting the facilities of local organizations to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- Ensuring representation of persons with disabilities in the administrative and general bodies of local organizations.
- Building organizational capacity in disability rights, inclusive program planning, community-based advocacy, and accountability mechanisms.

3. Inclusion in Healthcare Services

- Providing rehabilitation and specialized healthcare services including occupational and physical therapy at local health centers.
- Simplifying procedures for obtaining health insurance cards and medical referrals.
- Expanding mental health programs for persons with disabilities and their families.
- Ensuring health facilities in the town are physically accessible to persons with disabilities.

4. Inclusion in Education

- Adapting educational facilities to ensure access for children with disabilities.
- Establishing additional resource rooms and upgrading existing ones in schools.
- Building the capacity of teachers and administrative staff in schools and kindergartens to deliver inclusive education.
- Modifying curricula, teaching methods, and learning materials to ensure equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities, including at the preschool level.
- Implementing awareness programs in schools and kindergartens to promote positive attitudes among students and staff toward persons with disabilities.

5. Inclusion in Employment

- Advocating with the municipality and organizations in Sa'ir to hire persons with disabilities and provide decent work opportunities tailored to their abilities, along with necessary accommodations.

- Pressuring official bodies to implement the Palestinian Labor Law requirement that at least 5% of employees in any workplace be persons with disabilities.
- Facilitating equal access to self-employment opportunities for persons with disabilities to promote economic independence and dignity.
- Expanding access to vocational training and skills development workshops to increase inclusion in the labor market.
- Supporting sustainable, market-relevant entrepreneurship projects for persons with disabilities, based on needs assessments and local demand.

6. Advocacy and Community Accountability

- Activating community accountability mechanisms to monitor municipal and organizational compliance with disability inclusion in their programs and development plans, including reviewing budgets to assess responsiveness to actual needs.
- Organizing rights-based advocacy campaigns demanding the development and implementation of disability-related laws and policies, and ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making.
- Demanding full implementation of the 2021 Government Health Insurance Regulation for persons with disabilities, including access to rehabilitation services, essential medications, assistive devices, and medical supplies, through targeted advocacy directed at the Ministry of Health and relevant bodies.
- Advocating for the enforcement of inclusive education policies by the Ministry of Education—covering universal design in schools, adapted curricula and teaching methods, teacher training, and accessible learning environments.
- Launching campaigns to improve access to higher education and vocational training for persons with disabilities, including infrastructure upgrades, policy reforms, and provision of accessible learning tools and materials.
- Strengthening the role of persons with disabilities and their families as key actors in advocacy and community accountability efforts by building their capacity to use advocacy tools, document violations, submit complaints, and engage in monitoring initiatives at the local level.



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