

# **Social Inclusion of Young Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Lebanon:**

**Where do we stand and  
what should be done to promote their rights?**

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## Acronyms

AUB: The American University of Beirut  
CAS: Central Administration for Statistics  
CERD: Center for Educational Research and Development  
CRPD: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability  
CSC: Civil Servant Council MOL: Ministry of Labor  
CSO: Civil Society Organization  
DG: Director General  
DPO: Disabled People Organization  
FHANL: Forum of Handicapped Association in North Lebanon  
FOH: Forum Of the Handicapped in North Lebanon  
LCDP: Lebanese Council of Disabled People  
LL: Lebanese Lira/ Pounds  
LPHU: Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union  
LU: Lebanese University  
MEA: Middle East Airlines  
MEHE: Ministry of Education and Higher Education  
MOED: Ministry of Education  
MOF: Ministry of Finance  
MOI: Ministry of Interior  
MOIM: Ministry of Interior and Municipalities  
MOPH: Ministry of Public Health  
MOSA: Ministry of Social Affairs  
MOST: Management of Social Transformations  
MOYS: Ministry of Youth and Sport  
NARD: National Assembly for Rights of the Disabled  
NCOD: National Council on Disability  
NCRPWD: National Coalition for the Rights of Persons with Disability  
NDA: National Disability Alliance NIA: National Inclusion Alliance  
NIE: National Institution for Employment  
NIE: National Institution for Employment  
PWD: Person with Disabilities  
TVET: Technical Education and Vocational Training DPOs: Disabled People Organizations  
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
WHO: World Health Organization

## Executive summary

This study comprises an analysis of the status of the issue of disability in Lebanon and in particular young men and women with disability after the adoption by the Parliament of law 220/2000 and by the United Nations of the international convention on the rights of persons with disability (CRPD). In order to assess the attention given to the issue of disability by Government and people in Lebanon, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Are there clear statistical standards for measuring disability in general and youth with disability in particular in terms of numbers and kind?
2. Does the law 220/2000 deal with disability on the principles of integration and human rights?
3. Which authorities are responsible for implementing disability-related policies?

In an attempt to measure the commitment of the State in executing each issue of the law, the study reviews the status of implementation of those issues, and proposes what could be done to ameliorate the situation.

The concept of disability as a global issue was transformed in the year 2006 when the United Nations witnessed the signing of more than 80 states of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The adopted convention was, in the history of disability, an unprecedented transition from the medical care approach, which prevailed in the early twentieth century, to an approach based on human rights and social inclusion.

In the case of UNESCO, social inclusion has always been at the heart of its mandate and work.

Through its intergovernmental programme on the Management of Social Transformations (MOST), the Organization assists Member States in improving the quality of social policy feeding in to more inclusive, just and equitable societies and in strengthening evidence-based research policy interface.

The present paper is prepared as part of UNESCO's programme on "Assessment of the Level of Inclusiveness of Public Policies» (2013) which aims to support national efforts to assess, compare and reform national policy and regulatory frameworks in view of increasing their inclusiveness and social sustainability. The assessment will focus on the specific rights holder group: young men and women living with disabilities in Lebanon.

Even though Lebanon has not yet ratified the convention, the Lebanese government and Parliament has passed in the year 2000 the law 220/2000 concerning the rights of persons with disabilities in the country. This law clearly deals with disability as a right based issue and calls upon government to adopt policies and programs based on the philosophy of integration.

Furthermore, in April 2012, the Lebanese government adopted a youth policy in Lebanon. The National youth policy urges all stakeholders to take actions in reforming laws and

policies to make Lebanese society more inclusive towards young men and women at all aspects of the society, overcoming many different forms of social, economic and political exclusions, including disabilities. For the interest of this study, the policy refers to the need and rights of young persons with disability and the role of government in this respect, including the need to implement the law 220/2000 on disability in the country. Looking at the subject from a social protection perspective, one has to look on governmental policies and programs that provide such kind of protection. To locate the existence and comprehensiveness of a governmental social protection program, one needs to find answers to the following questions:

- Are there any awareness programs for families to deal with a born child with disability?
- Are there any governmental financial scheme to support the families with children with disability?
- Are there any governmental supported kinder gardens that deal with the need of children with disability?
- Are there any supported medical coverage scheme to cover the medical cost of persons with disability?
- Are there any public or supported medical centers and hospitals that deal with the medical cases of children and persons with disability?
- Are there any governmental program to cover the cost of equipment and needed materials for persons with disability?
- Are there adopted public schools for the need of students with disability?
- Are there adopted public vocational schools for students with disability?
- Are there any governmental program that covers the cost of an assistant for persons with disability?
- Are there an accessible public transport or a financial scheme to cover the cost of private transport (taxis for example) for persons with disability? Are there any governmental safeguard, policies and programs that support and facilitate the provision of employment opportunities for persons with disability?
- Are there any policies to provide persons with disability with accessible housing and accommodation?
- Are there any supported governmental program for sport of persons with disability?

These are some of many other questions that one can put to try to find answers and therefore understanding of the degree of governmental commitment to the rights of persons with disability. Based on the above, , the study will attempt to provide information and answers to the above questions and provide recommendations to better formulate policies and interventions to promote social inclusion of young PWD in the following policy areas:

- Health and medical sector
- Educational sector
- Rehabilitative sector
- Employment
- Sport programs and other integrative and intervention programs
- Political participation: elections, civil society and leadership.

# I. Overview of Disability and Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Lebanon

## A. Definition of disability

Disability is defined differently in developed and developing countries and by the various Arab countries. In that regard, Lebanese law is distinguished by a definition of disability that represents the middle ground between the wide Western definitions, which produce a high ratio of persons with disabilities to total population, as in Australia, where the ratio is 19.3 per cent, and the narrow definitions adopted by some developing countries, which produce a low ratio of persons with disabilities to total population: that ratio is 1-2 per cent in some Asian countries. The Lebanese law 220/2000 on disability defines in article 2 a disabled individual as a:

“person whose capacity to perform one or more vital functions, independently secure his personal existential needs, participate in social activities on an equal basis with others, and live a personal and social life that is normal by existing social standards, is reduced or non-existent because of a partial or complete, permanent or temporary, bodily, sensory or intellectual functional loss or incapacity, that is the outcome of a congenital or acquired illness or from a pathological condition that has been prolonged beyond normal medical expectations”.

The international definition of disability in the convention states in article one that:

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

It is clear that the Lebanese definition that is affected by the World Health Organization (WHO) definition of disability is very much affected by the medical definition thus excluding defining disability in relation with social and legal barriers that impede the capacity of a PWD to live normally. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD), on the other hand, acknowledges both the physical impairment and social barriers as the main reasons behind disability.

## B. Definition of Youth in Lebanon

“Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group”.<sup>1</sup>

The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. All UN

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, social and human science web page. [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)



statistics on youth are based on this definition as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health<sup>2</sup>.

In Lebanon, the youth is defined in Lebanon as persons between the age of 15 and 29 in the formulation of the national youth policy. This category forms around 28% of the Lebanese population<sup>3</sup>. According to the youth policy document, the main challenges facing youth in Lebanon are problems related to education and in particular the issue of school dropouts, low level of participation in public and political life, unemployment and migration. Youth policy is a proof of the government commitment to youth issues and to deal with the challenges mentioned above. It informs about the need for inter-ministerial collaboration and intervention, and the need to allocate resources for programs and projects.<sup>4</sup>. As far as young persons with disability are concerned, the report clearly speaks of the need for the government to implement a strategy of social inclusion and integration of young persons with disability in all its programs and projects, the need to change the culture towards disability in the country for more acceptance and attitude change and, finally, the need for the government to implement Law 220/2000 on disability.

### **C. Disability statistics in Lebanon**

While the United Nations estimate the number of persons with disabilities in the world to be around 15 per cent of the total population according to the latest World Report on Disability (2011), developed country statistics show that the ratio of such persons to total population exceeds 15 per cent, reaching more than 15 per cent (World report on disability, p. 30).

According to the Central Administration for Statistics (CAS), there are no statistics on the disabled population in Lebanon.

However, the Lebanese government has started to issue the disability card in 1990s. According to this policy, PWD can register themselves in the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) to obtain a disability card, on a voluntary basis. Indeed, the registration form provides comprehensive information on the corresponding PWD, including age, gender, education, employment status, residence and disability types. The latest number of registered persons with a disability card reveals the following:

- 1) The total number of registered persons with a disability card until the end of January 2013 is 80,703.
- 2) The gender distribution is: 62% male or 50,186 and 38% female or 30,517 persons.

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, social and human science web page. [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

<sup>3</sup> Youth policy Document, p2).

<sup>4</sup> Youth Policy document, pp.3-4

3) The distribution in terms of forms of disabilities is as follows:

Form of disability	Number	Percentage
Motor	48288	53.76
Mental	24656	27.45
Hearing	7808	8.65
Visual	6886	7.67
Learning	2185	2.43

4) The distribution based on age is as follows:

Age group	Number	Percentage
Less than 5	1933	2.4
From 6 to 18	11224	13.9
From 19 to 34	15345	19.01
From 35 to 65	31232	38.7
Above 66	20969	25.98

5) The distribution in terms of regions is as follows:

Region	Number	Percentage
Beirut	6059	7.51
Mount Lebanon	29696	36.8
North Lebanon	14638	18.14
South Lebanon	17461	19.64
Beqaa valley	12849	15.92

6) Finally, there are 7,638 persons with multiple disabilities and 353 autistic persons. Based on the average percentage of persons with disability (PWD) out of the total population, which is 15%, the total number of persons with disability (PWD) in Lebanon can be estimated around 600,000 persons based on the total population of 4 million. This figure includes elderly population as well as people who suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes and kidney failure. As for the permanent disability (persons who suffer from blindness, deafness, and mobility and mental impairment excluding the elderly and the above mentioned factors), the average percentage worldwide is around 4% according to the same World Disability Report (2011). By applying this percentage, the total number of persons with permanent disability is estimated around 160,000.

However, the total number of registered persons who are eligible for a disability card in Lebanon is around 80,000, a way beyond the estimated figures. The reluctant registration as PWD could be attributed to two factors. One is the narrow definition of disability adopted by MOSA excluding for example hearing difficulties. The other is social

stigma and shame. Many persons and their families don't like to be called or known to be disabled.

Why is there less disability among women? This could be attributed to several factors, one of which is that Lebanese males are more prone to acquire disabilities due to the wars and car and work related accidents as the number of workers and drivers is larger for males.

As for young PWD, based on the existing number of PWDs aged from 6 to 34, which is around 27,000 persons, one may estimate the number of PWDs aged from 15 to 24 to be around 9000 persons. This number is extracted based on an estimation of an average of 1000/ each year of age. If the total number of persons between 6 and 34 is 27000, then it covers 28 years of age or around 1000/year of age, therefore the total number of persons between 15 and 24 should be 9000 (9 years of age).

## **D. The LAW 220/2000 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

Law 220/2000 is one of the Lebanese government's most important achievements to improve the livelihood conditions of people with disabilities in Lebanon. It is issued in May 2000 and remains one of the most progressive in the Middle East region, based on the UN Standard Rules for Equalisation of Opportunities and on the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons.

The law consists of ten parts and 102 articles divided as follows:

- Part I. On terms, Definitions, Classification and Card from article 1 to article 5
- Part II. On the National Council of Disability Affairs from article 6 to article 26
- Part III. The Right to Health, Rehabilitation and Support Services from article 27 to article 32
- Part IV. The Right to Rehabilitated Environment (Accessibility) from article 33 to article 43
- Part V. The Right to Transport, Parking Lots and Driving Licenses from article 44 to article 54
- Part VI. The Right to Housing from article 55 to article 58
- Part VII. The Right to Education and Sports from article 59 to article 67
- Part VIII. The Right to Work, Employment and Social Benefits from article 68 to article 82
- Part IX. Fiscal Rules from article 83 to article 94
- Part X. Miscellaneous Rules from article 95 to article 102

The law also stresses the right to participation, moving away from the previous charity-based model of exclusion to a rights-based inclusive approach to disability issues.<sup>5</sup>

A quick look at the law shows that it is comprehensive in terms of covering all aspects connected to the life of PWDs. There is a striking and serious reference to societal and government responsibility for the removal of political and social obstacles to the integration of persons with disabilities into their communities and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against them. With respect to the mechanism for and the parties concerned with the implementation of the law, the Lebanese law is unique in that it provides for a

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<sup>5</sup> Strategic directions for Human Rights Advocacy, Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union, October 2003, pp.3-4

mechanism for the formation of the National Council on Disability (NCOD) and, in particular, a process for the direct election of representatives of civil organizations, associations of persons with disabilities and persons with disability themselves in the National Council. The law is not far from meeting the basic international standards set by the convention and the various international resolutions and charters which are based on the principle of participatory decision-making and the need to ensure real representation of persons with disabilities in all relevant bodies, committees and decisions. In another words, even though the Lebanese law does not adopt the rights-based approach paradigm, it meets many of the basic international standards. It focuses on integration instead of institutionalization and care. It respects the real representation and participation of persons with disability (PWD) in the decision making process by having PWD directly electing their representatives in the NCOD. It mentions rights of PWDs in many clauses of the law.

It is noteworthy that passing of the Law 220 in Parliament was a fruit of long process of lobbying and advocacy on the part of Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) in Lebanon. Since the eighties, DPOs, as the most active members of the NCOD, are taking the lead in lobbying the rights of PWD at the Parliament and to different governments and pressuring the implementation of the law, which will be thoroughly analyzed in the section II of the current report.

## **E. Poverty and Disability**

Different studies, including the World Disability Report (World Bank and WHO, 2009), Making PRSP Inclusive (Handicap International and Christoffel-Blindenmission, 2006), and Disability and poverty: A conceptual review (Palmer, 2010), have shown the correlation between the poverty and disability worldwide.

Over one billion people worldwide have some form of disability. More than 70% of people with disabilities live in developing countries, and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 575 million live below the poverty line. Preventable illnesses, such as measles and polio, cause many of these disabilities; deprived living conditions, malnutrition and lack of healthcare during pregnancy or birth, natural disasters, famine and civil war add to the numbers.

In case of Lebanon, nearly 27 percent of the Lebanese population, or 1 million people, are poor, living on less than US\$4 per day, and 8 percent, or 300,000 people, are extremely poor, living on less than US\$2.40 per day.<sup>6</sup> Cascading effect of poverty is no exception for PWD in Lebanon. Most of PWD are either without education and/or without employment. Many poor families with children with disability struggle to pay the medical and rehabilitative cost for their children with disabilities. Based on MOSA statistics, 94.77 of PWD in the age between 18 and 64 are unemployed in 2012 ( (25/9/2012, Rights and Access program statistics).

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<sup>6</sup> "Household Budget Survey" conducted by the World Bank, 2004.

## II. Rights, challenges and opportunities in promotion of Rights of young PWD

The Law 220/2000 is comprehensive and includes all sectors; it addresses the rights of people with disabilities to proper education, rehabilitation services, employment, medical services, sports and access to public transport and other facilities. It also stresses the right to participation. What is the status of its implementation, 13 years after its promulgation? What has been achieved and what has been untracked? What are the specific challenges to the young PWD?

### A. Health and Medical Sector

One of the most important obstacles for young PWD in Lebanon to live a “normal life” is the lack of medical coverage and the limited availability of disability related medical specialties within the medical establishment (doctors, hospitals, studies, medical centers, etc.) in Lebanon.

There are no governmental medical institutions that have specialized services for PWDs. However, the government supports medical centers run by different civil society organizations (CSO) that basically provide rehabilitative services for PWDs.

Consequently, young PWD, and in particular those who live in families with low income are challenged with medical problem. It is either because of limited resources to cover the cost of high medical cost or due to the lack of enough knowledge on how to deal with disability and medical implications.

Despite the Law 220/2000 calling on the state’s responsibility to provide PWD with full medical coverage and health care, the implementation is not yet promising.

In fact, the joint committee between the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and NCOD was formed in 2002 to look into this issue. However, the committee did not fulfill its mission due to its structural problem for which MOSA and MOPH failed to collaborate. From 2002 to 2013, the committee met less than 15 times. Discussions unsuccessfully concentrated on unifying governmental medical provisions for PWDs in different governmental departments.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, negotiations with hospitals to accept the disability card as a document that entitles PWDs to free medical services failed, even after two Ministerial circulars were issued.<sup>8</sup> As of today, this ministerial decision to adopt the disability card for hospitalization is not even respected in most governmental owned hospitals. Outdoor medical support in terms of medical care, laboratory and medicine are not provided neither.

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<sup>7</sup> The author held a phone interview with Mr. Moussa Charafeddine, the member of the committee, April 2013

<sup>8</sup> The first circular was issued by Minister Suleiamn Franjeh, in 1995 and the second one resulted from a joint communiqué between the actual minister of health and of social affairs in 2012 (Al-Nahar, Al-Safir, 13/4/2013)

The reluctance of hospitals to cooperate can be explained mainly by two factors. First, there is a limited financial allocation by the ministry to hospitals in general to cover cases on the expense of the ministry. The meager fund is usually be used up very early every month and cannot cover many people in need including PWDs. Hospitals often find the treatment of PWDs very costly, in particular those connected with pressure sores and medical equipment. The more PWD are covered, the less persons in need, regardless of disabilities, will be allowed to access to the free medical care. Secondly, administrative measures to put the ministerial decision into application are not adequate. For example, the ministerial decision calls hospitals to accept the disability card as a passport for free entry to hospitals. However, the card is not like insurance cards that are produced by insurance companies or the social security. Without being linked to any central information unit, the disability card does not provide either medical history or extents of coverage.

The latest decision in 2013 by the Minister of Finance is to allocate a separate fund within the budget of the MOPH for the hospitalization of PWDs.<sup>9</sup> This latest development, if applied, will help in facilitating the provision of free hospitalization to PWDs.

Whereas the MOPH covers annually an average of 1,700 cases of PWD of a total cost of around \$ 4 million, including the provision of equipment, technical aids and prosthetic devices such as artificial limbs, provision of some technical aids such as wheelchairs is left to the responsibility of MOSA as it relates to the accessibility of PWD. Both MOPH and MOSA cover the cost of physiotherapy treatment.

## **B. Education Sector**

Education is one of the most important policy areas for young PWD. Children and young PWD aged between 5 and 18 need, like any other children and youth, need to have access to good education.

According to the Law 220 part VII ( “The Right to Education and Sports” from article 59 to article 67), the State is in charge of providing integrative educational services for PWDs (article 59). In another term, public educational institutions need to be made accessible for use by PWDs. Exams need to be organized for different forms of disability. Whereas the Article 63 stipulates that an educational committee is to be formed to take charge of following up the implementation of the clauses related to education in the law, almost all clauses pertaining to education are not yet implemented 13 years after the promulgation of the law.

Under the initiative of Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), there are only five schools have been turned accessible for children with “physical” disability for the entire country (one in each governorate/Mouhafaza). Other schools have been made accessible through the intervention of CSOs and in particular DPOs. For example, the Forum of the Handicapped in North Lebanon (FOH) has supported making seven schools accessible in the North. However, in many cases, neither resources nor training have been provided to school

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<sup>9</sup> The author held an interview with Mr Abraham Abdallah, the member of NOCD in March 2013.

directors and teachers to deal with disabilities and to monitor integration of students with disabilities in schools. There are few educational programs in promoting positive image of PWD within schools among teachers and students. This is why, in spite of Law 220 that decrees accepting people with disability in public schools, a great number of schools still refuse to accept students with disability in their class rooms (Chamsine, 2013.)

As such, almost half of those who obtain a disability card are not in schooling. Others will stay at home without any access to formal education or to enter one of the specialized schools or institutions.

With regards to technical education and vocational training (TVET), most of governmental vocational institutions are not accessible to students with disabilities. Some NGO and private institutions provide services with the funding of MOSA and/or MEHE.

As far as higher education is concerned, the old buildings of the Lebanese University (LU) are not accessible. The new premises of the LU in El-Hadath are accessible to the students with physical disability. However, there are no provisions for the needs of blind and deaf students. By the same token, campuses of most private universities are not accessible either, with the exception of Balamand University. The American University of Beirut (AUB) has facilities for blind students in certain faculties (mainly social sciences).

In the law, it is stipulated that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) is in charge of financing specialized schools and education for certain forms of disability (article 61). Yet, there is no unit dedicated to the students with disabilities. The ministry's interventions have not sufficiently addressed the needs of students with disabilities in Lebanon, in terms of aligning sign language, provision of books with Braille. Specialized education or technical rehabilitation was rather left to the responsibility of the MOSA.

Finally, the National Educational Plan for Persons with Disabilities that was developed in 2012 by the Center for Educational Research and Development of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education states goals that reflect a wide inclusion perspective into the education sector, as per the following:

1. To broaden the reception capacity in public schools in order to ensure the principle of equal opportunities and conditions for full enrollment of different categories of students;
2. To improve the terms, conditions and quality of basic education without discrimination as a preventive measure to reduce drop-out and marginalization;
3. To develop caring mechanisms for all kinds of deficiencies to compensate for the poorest social families of the society;
4. To ensure school support mechanisms for children with disabilities;
5. To build the capacities of some members of the teaching staff on how to educate and support persons with special needs;
6. To secure inclusive schools, including buildings, equipment and tools adapted to all cases of children with disabilities;
7. To bring attention to the quality and the harmonization of curricula for various categories of students;

8. To introduce specialists into the school structure to detect and treat disabilities and difficulties;
9. To raise awareness on the culture of rights to all segments of the Lebanese society; and,
10. To open the school on the surrounding environment, allowing for the involvement of parents in prevention programs.

### **C. Rehabilitation: Accessibility and Transport**

In fact, most of these buildings are not accessible to people with physical disabilities even though the law stipulates that the rehabilitation of these buildings must be completed within a period of five years from its date of issuance according to the “Accessibility Directory for Beirut”, conducted in 2006 by the National Assembly for Rights of the Disabled (NARD) in Lebanon. The study assessed the accessibility of 612 government institution and public universities and hotels, restaurants, theaters and other public places in Beirut. 95% of them do not have proper accessibility measures for PWDs.

This situation persisted in the lack of an official building standard and code adopted by the State. In 2011, an accessibility code was adopted by the government. From then, any new public building or premise for public use has to be accessible by PWDs. However, it is worth mentioning that most governmental buildings, including some new ones, remain inaccessible by PWDs,

As for the public transport, which is mainly buses in Lebanon, none of them is accessible by PWDs. In a recent tender for the purchase of 250 buses for public transport, it seems that all the buses will be accessible.<sup>10</sup>

Individual vehicles are the most expanded mean of transport in Lebanon, in general. As for the PWDs, there are several issues tackle. In fact, the custom duty for a car registration is exempted for persons with certain kinds of physical disability. The exemptions limited for people with total loss of movement and people with persons with right legs amputees.

Municipalities are also providing PWDs with parking lots’ certificates. In crowded streets, parking is quite a challenge for all. The same study of NARD shows that there is a limited number of parking lots with places assigned for PWDs and special parking can be found in big shopping malls, only.

One can find accessible sidewalks in the main cities, mainly Beirut and Tripoli. However, not all sidewalks are accessible. In the lack of regulations, they are often blocked by cars and other objects.

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<sup>10</sup> The author interviewed with the Minister of Transport and Public Works (MTPW) and Minister of Social Affairs (MOSA) in March 2013.



## D. Employment

Employment is one of the most important issues for young PWD. There are no solid statistics of PWDs in the labor force in Lebanon. We can only deduct a rough estimate as 78% of PWDs in their active age (18-64 years old) are unemployed, thereof from the MOSA's data on the Personal Disability Card applicants without indicating any particular sectors or specific kinds of jobs.

Most working PWDs are employed in the public sector. Few others are employed in private sector but the vast majority earns their living by being either self-employed or in the informal sector, according to the MOSA rights an access programme statistics in 2012.

Depending qualifications and aptitude to work and disability types of each PWD, particular difficulties, conditions and circumstances occur. The struggle of young PWDs in job search is constant in both public and private sectors in a society which is not neither cooperative nor inclusive.

At the Lebanese University (LU), students with disabilities are required to join humanities regardless their interests as specialized services or facilities for PWD cannot be offered in other departments. There was a plea from blind students that PWDs are confined to certain majors and job opportunities that they might not opt for.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Law 220 stipulates that both the public and private sectors have to reserve 3% of jobs for people with disability in companies and firms where the number of employees exceeds 60. The law also stipulates that the National Institution for Employment (NIE), together with concerned ministries, must ensure suitable technical trainings and guidance for PWDs in the labor market. The law also stipulates the formation of a joint committee with representatives from the Ministry of Labor (MOL), the economic sectors and the National Council on disability (NCOD) in order to formulate the means of implementing the articles of the law pertaining to employment and work.

The joint committee was formed in 2002 and during the past 11 years, more than 50 meetings were held with full quorum, but the representatives of the economic sectors – except for the banks and insurance companies – and some of those representing the official administrations were absent. The lack of participation indicates somewhat the interest of stakeholders on this issue. From 2001 to 2005, the Labour Union representative did not attend any of the meetings whereas the representatives of other economic sectors were not attending in a regular base.<sup>12</sup>

As for the social security, the Social Security institution conditioned to give liability clearance for companies in the private sector by implementing the article concerning the quota for employing persons with disability. Then Decree (# 7784, issued on 28/5/2002) of the Ministry of Labor (MOL), grants with unemployment compensation to PWD, who lost their

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<sup>11</sup> The author held an interview with Mr Abraham Abdallah, a member of NCOD and ex-president of the Blind University Students Association, in March 2013.

<sup>12</sup> The author held an interviewed with Mr Jerius Khoury, a committee member in March 2013.

jobs. However, this decree has not been implemented till today. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) refused to let the MOL establish a special account into which the fines for breaking the law would be deposited and then transferred to finance the unemployment compensations.<sup>13</sup> As such, the Social Security Directorate put on hold the binding provision of the liability clearance related to the employment of PWD.

In reality, most of legal provisions are not implemented. No fines are collected from the companies which do not respect the law. The compensation for unemployment is not being paid. Only modest attempts “to train people with disability on a trade” are the concrete achievement so far.

There are continuous efforts to break through this administrative mechanism between MOL, MOF and MOSA by establishing the Unemployment Compensation Fund to support the application of the 3% quota for employment of PWDs.<sup>14</sup>

The reason is simply the concoction of a legal problem by the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Finance. However, this problem will likely come to a resolution when an agreement takes place between the MOF, MOL, and MOSA on how to establish the fund and use it (Declaration of the Minister of Social Affairs in a meeting of the National Council on Disability (NCOD) April 2013. If this happens, efforts can be put to apply the 3% quota for employment of PWDs.

According to a mutual agreement in February 2011 between MOSA and CSC, the main institution for employment in the public sector in February 2011,, any PWD who passes the exam for employment in public posts will be employed regardless of his/her position in the scale of grades. In fact, many PWDs have been benefited this new pro-action policy, most of them are young.

Finally, it is worth mentioning some good practices in the employment of PWDs. The National Institute of Electricity recruited more than 150 PWDs in 1995 in different posts, including computer operators and administrators. “Spinney’s”, one of the major supermarkets has also employed a large number of deaf persons to work in its branches all over Lebanon. The Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (LPHU) has established a unit to lobby for jobs for PWDs, and around 300 PWDs found employment through this program in the last two years<sup>15</sup>. Another DPO led initiative is from the Forum of Handicapped Association in North Lebanon (FHANL). In January 1999, the Forum made an agreement with municipalities in the North Lebanon to restrict licenses for opening street kiosks in favor of PWDs. This initiative has provided employment opportunities for tens of PWDs in the North Lebanon.

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<sup>13</sup> The author held an interviewed with Mr Jerius Khoury, a committee member in March 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Declaration of the Minister of Social Affairs in a meeting of the NCDP, April 16, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> The author held a phone interview with Ms Sylvana Lakkis, the director of LPHU, in May 2013.

## **E. Sports and Other Integrative Programmes**

Sports for PWD is a policy area which requires a coordination among several ministries and departments (MOSA, MEHE and MOYS). The Law 220 emphasizes in particular the role of the MOYS, which should sponsor and encourage sports for PWDs. There is no specialized committee formed within the MOYS as the National Para-Olympic Union somehow substitutes it. The role of MOYS is reduced to fund the Union and other sports organizations. There is no data on the government's budget allocations for sports for PWDs.

In this context, most disability-specific sports activities are organized by civil society organizations (CSO). Many DPOs and institutions became partners of MOSA to providing services including promoting sport for PWD. They organize sport training, activities and events—as a part of their educational programs. Some institutions and DPOs take part in the nation-wide event such as Beirut Marathon. The Special Olympics is a kind of special network that works and organizes events in coordination with a number of other institutions.

Certainly, there is a great number of talented young PWDs who are eligible to participate in cultural and artistic activities tailored to their needs. In a current context, we can hardly say that they are benefitting of youth targeted activities in general and PWD targeted sports events in particular.

## **F. Political and Civic Participation**

According to the law 220, the organization of elections should take into consideration the rights of PWDs to accessible voting places. Moreover, the Parliamentary Election Law 25/2008 states that the government should ensure full accessibility of PWDs to the voting booths. In 2010, the Minister of Interior and Municipalities (MOIM) issued a policy document calling all districts and municipality officials to implement this law.

A special committee was formed for this matter, including representatives from the MOIM and MOSA, DPOs together with a few experts. The committee has not made a breakthrough in solving the issue of accessible voting for PWDs. There are no sign posters on voting regulations for deaf voters. Blind persons cannot be accompanied by another person to assist him/her. Even though there is no law or regulation that denies people with mental disabilities the right to vote, there are practices in Lebanon, according to Dr. Moussa Charafeddine<sup>16</sup>, Head of the Lebanese Intellectual Disability Union, where the chairs of some voting polls refuse to give persons with an intellectual disability the right to vote. As such, most voting places are inaccessible to PWD in Lebanon. This reflects the limited number of PWDs that participate in elections.

However, some persons with disability have participated in both the municipal and parliamentary elections as candidates. Promoting the social inclusion of PWD by implementing the Law 220 is part of their main political proposal.

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<sup>16</sup> The author interviewed in March 2013.

### III. Actors, mechanisms for policy formulation

#### A. The National Council on Disability (NCOD)

The National Council on Disability (NCOD) is the key mechanism for policy making with regards to the PWD in Lebanon. Its mission is defined in the Article 6 and 7 of Law 220/2000, as follows:

- Prepare the general policy on disability in coordination with the relevant agencies in the public and non-government sectors.
- Contribute to drawing up the executive programs and plans of the policy in coordination with the relevant institutions and administrations.
- Prepare disability-related bills and regulations spontaneously or on the demand of the Council of Ministers.
- Adopt the technical norms and standards that public institutions have to actively apply for persons with disabilities as well as for their service in coordination with the relevant departments of the Ministry.
- Take part in foreign contacts and international conferences to develop and organize projects and contribute to attracting aid for them. The National Council has the right to accept disability-related donations from states, institutions and organizations dedicated to the Ministry's independent fund.
- File a lawsuit or intervene with any case before a normal or special judicial body with respect to any subject that is related to its missions.

The first NCOD was appointed in 1994 prior to the promulgation of the law 220 by the government, and it included leaders of DPOs in addition to representatives of other NGOs and institutions that provide services for PWDs.

The first elected NCOD was established in 2001 followed by three others in 1995, 2008, and 2013.

NCOD is composed of 18 members including 4 members representing MOSA, 4 members representing CSOs, 4 members representing DPOs and 4 members directly elected PWDs. The two remaining members are appointed as consultants by the Minister of Social Affairs (MOSA), who is the head of the Council.<sup>17</sup>

Civil society organizations, DPOs, and member PWDs each should represent a certain kind of disability (motor, hearing, visual, and intellectual). However, there is no particular quota for women and young PWD.

NCOD is given the power to make all decisions on disability related issues in the country including formulation and implementation of national plans to make the law into effect. MOSA is the responsible governmental body in charge of executing the decisions of the NCOD.

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<sup>17</sup> Article 8 of the law 220

In fact, from 1994 till now, the NCOD has made a number of achievements: It played a key role in preparing and lobbying for the passing of government and Parliament of Law 220/2000 and the adoption of the disability card program, including the classification of different forms of disability. The Council formed committees related to employment, education, health, accessibility and transportation and pushed for adoption of the decree on accessibility code in Lebanon and the adoption of the right and access program for the provision of technical aids and other services for PWDs. However, this latter program is serving mostly persons with physical disability. Its budget fluctuates depending on the will of the minister. It was LL<sup>18</sup> 2 Billion in 2002, LL 3 Billion in 2006, LL 2 Billion in 2008, and 7 Billion in the newly proposed budget.

The Council also successfully negotiated the provision of a 50% reduction on airline tickets on Middle East Airlines (MEA) and formed a mechanism for the provision of municipality tax deduction; for the provision of custom duty reductions for cars used by persons with motor disability and; for facilitating access to housing loans for PWD.

Finally, NCOD represents Lebanon in the negotiations for the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Despite all the achievements, what are the challenges and limitations of NCOD? One of the key reasons for the limitations is its lack of autonomy from MOSA, which is in charge of executing the decisions of NCOD.

Many of the decisions taken by the Council were not executed due to the lack of the political will of MOSA. Other ministries did not feel concerned with the decisions of the council, which has no representation from other ministries. Moreover, many governmental and ministerial decisions were taken without any consultation with the Council. Changing the government's financial contribution to the work of institutions serving PWDs is one example. Two national committees, on Integration and on the eradication of landmines in Lebanon were created without real coordination with the Council. Moreover, NCOD is not consulted on how MOSA uses the budget related to disability.

## **B. Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs)**

Since the eighties, Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs), within and outside of the NCOD, are taking the lead in lobbying the rights of PWD at the Parliament and to different governments and pressuring the implementation of the law.

Lebanese DPOS are organized under two major umbrellas: the first is the Lebanese Council of Disabled People (LCDP) which is a coalition of 11 DPOs and the second is the National Disability Alliance (NDA) composed of 4 DPOs.

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<sup>18</sup> Exchange rate: 1USD for 1500 Lebanese Pounds (LL).

Two other coalitions that are lobbying specifically in the area of inclusive education and social integration: the National Inclusion Alliance (NIA) and the National Coalition for the Rights of Persons with Disability (NCRPWD).

Some Lebanese DPOs, including the Forum of the Handicapped in North Lebanon (FOH), the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (LPHU), and the National Association for the Rights of Disabled people (NARD), have youth empowerment programs and some of the youth with disability are taking leading positions in these DPOs. Most training and empowerment programs are run by DPOs.

DPOs also played a major role in lobbying. NCDP drafted the law 220, it was left to DPOs to lobby the government and Parliament for its adoption. The efforts of DPOs in lobbying succeeded.

There are 51 Parents and Institutional Association as part of the National Union for Intellectual Disabilities (UNAPIEI).

## IV. Suggestions for possible future interventions

Based on our review of the implementation status of the law 220 and its mechanisms, it is evident that further efforts need to be given by both government and non-government institutions in a more coordinated manner to promote the social inclusion of PWD and in particular in their youth.

In order to enhance the situation of PWDs in Lebanon, a set of recommendations can be presented by Sector, as below. For the sake of preparation of a five-year action plan, the indicative timeline is included.<sup>19</sup>

Legal aspects		
#	Recommendations	Timeline
1	The ratification of Lebanon of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD).	
2	The reconciliation of Law 220/2000 with the terms of the CRPD.	
3	The revision of the Lebanese definition of disability in order to make it rights-oriented and comprehensive of the forms of disability as stipulated in the WHO/ WB reports (which year xxx) on disability.	

The National Council on Disability (NCOD)		
	Recommendations	Timeline
4	The reconciliation of To review the structure of the NCOD, more independent from any particular ministry so that the Council can better coordinate with other concerned ministries. It is preferable that the Council be under the authority of an institution of the Prime minister. The Council should be headed by an independent general secretary and comprise representatives of all concerned ministries.	
5	To increase the budget of the Rights and Access program to better cover the cost of technical aid and equipment for all kinds of disability including blind and deaf people.	
6	To pressure MOSA to give more support to integrative programs instead of supporting institutions. In a current situation, a limited support is provided for organizations that run integrative programs such as integrating PWDs in schools.	

<sup>19</sup> In the national workshop, the national stakeholders discussed the priority actions in each sector for a short term (within one year), a Mid-term (2-3 years) and a long term (more than 3 years) (2 April 2013).

<b>Health</b>		
<b>#</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
7	To provide a special autonomous fund to within the budget of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) in order to meet the health cost of PWDs including the provision of outdoor health care, hospitalization, limb replacements, physiotherapy and other related treatments.	Short
8	To equip public hospitals with trained staff to deal with the health issues related to PWDs.	Mid-term
9	To include disability in the curriculum of medical and paramedical schools in the public and other private universities.	Mid-term

<b>Education</b>		
<b>#</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
10	To elaborate a national action plan to make all educational institutions accessible for PWDs.	Mid-term
11	To align sign languages into one.	Mid-term
12	To train school administrators and teachers on how to deal with PWDs.	Mid-term
13	To support educational programs to promote positive image of PWD within schools.	Long

<b>The Accessibility and Transport</b>		
<b>#</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
14	To enforce the application of the law concerning accessibility.	Mid-term
15	To enforce the newly adopted codes of accessibility for new buildings and construction.	Short
16	To ensure that all new public buses will be accessible to PWDs.	Short

<b>Employment</b>		
<b>#</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
17	To enforce the 3% quota for the employment of PWDs in both the public and private sectors.	Mid-term
18	To empower the National Employment Institute (NEI) to play a leading role in providing employment of PWDs.	Mid-term
19	To activate the fund on 3% quota application coordinated by MOF, MOL and MOSA to rehabilitate PWDs for their labour market integration.	Mid-term
20	To increase the number of beneficiaries in the unemployment benefit decree.	Mid-term



<b>Sports and Integrative Programmes</b>		
<b>#</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
21	To include PWDs in all the youth programs in the country.	Mid-term
22	To provide stronger support to sports and Paralympics for PWD.	Short

<b>Political and civic participation</b>		
<b>#</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
23	To make all voting polls accessible for PWDs.	Mid-term
24	To promote sign posters on voting regulations for deaf voters.	Short
25	To give blind persons the right to have an assistant in the voting place.	Short
26	To give the persons with intellectual disability the right to vote.	Short

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### **List of persons interviewed by the author for this study:**

- Mr. Abraham Abdallah, the member, NOCD in March 2013.
- Mr. Moussa Charafeddine, Head of the Lebanese Intellectual Disability Union, April 2013.
- Ms. Sylvana Lakkis, Executive Director, LPHU in May 2013.
- H.E. Mr. Ghazi Aridi, Minister of Transport and Public Works (MTPW) in March 2013.
- H. E. Mr. Wael Abou Faour, Minister of Social Affairs (MOSA) in March 2013.
- Mr. Jerius Khoury, a committee member, NOCD in March 2013.