

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN EAST JERUSALEM



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This study addresses the challenge of dropouts in East Jerusalem; it identifies potential remedies to getting them back into the loop through (re)engagement in education or training and looks into the actual options currently available for school dropouts from East Jerusalem.

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INTRODUCTION

Youth living in Jerusalem are more socioeconomically and politically vulnerable due to unemployment, inappropriate housing conditions, demolition of houses, easier access to the unofficial Israeli market, political violence practiced by Israeli settlers and soldiers, and lack of protective policies and measures – all of which leads not only to high levels of frustration but also contributes to the high numbers of school dropouts.

Dropping out of school is a result of the weakness of the educational system and the associated hindrance of achievement of a fruitful and inspiring educational experience, but cannot be addressed in isolation from the economic and social system which constitutes a pillar in determining the value of education in the state and society.

School dropout is considered a pivotal problem whose negative ramifications reflect not only upon students but even upon society as a whole.

It is a problem that has garnered the world's attention in recent years and has increasingly become a priority issue. Most studies indicate that dropping out has consequences for individuals and societies alike because education is a crucial factor for healthy and natural development in societies, therefore any disruption poses a danger.

Desk and literature review has shown that dropout in Jerusalem is in many ways consistent with experiences in other parts of the world, as it is associated with low socioeconomic backgrounds, poorly educated and/or uninvolved parents, de-motivating school environments (unsupportive teachers, disruptive peers, inadequate facilities), and factors unique to the city and its Palestinian residents.

There have been several studies on Palestinian dropouts in general and Jerusalem dropouts in particular – addressing both youth who have already left school and “disengaged” youth (usually referred to in Israel as “hidden dropouts”), who still attend some educational framework but are frequently absent, perform poorly, display difficult behavior and often feel alienated from the school and classes. However, while the majority of the research has focused on the reasons for leaving compulsory education and how to prevent this “phenomenon”, the study presented here intends to look at those young men and women who have already dropped out and to examine how to ideally “get them back on track”, what options exist for them and whether they are successful and readily available, and how to reach out to dropouts in Jerusalem. Based on the findings, recommendations for alternative measures and programs are offered.

Youth who drop out lack access to relevant education and training opportunities and are therefore unable to further develop basic livelihood skills, which often makes them one of the most vulnerable segments of society. This is why this study hopes to address/contribute to addressing the challenge of dropouts in East Jerusalem and gather information about

existing options for early school leavers as well as identify potential remedies to getting them back into the loop through (re)engagement in education or training – not least as a means to reduce poverty and social disintegration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the phenomenon of dropouts in East Jerusalem and looks at ways and means on how to facilitate sustained (re)engagement in education or training for them as one of the most vulnerable groups in East Jerusalem society. The study has set itself the task of looking into existing options for dropouts and assessing whether these are sufficient, successful and readily available, and if not, suggesting alternative measures and programs to support young Palestinians who left compulsory education to obtain skills which are required to enter the occupational field that corresponds best to their potential.

The neglect of education in East Jerusalem has led to Palestinians there having the highest dropout rate anywhere in Palestine. The social, economic and housing conditions aggravate the situation, while the Israeli authorities in charge are not seriously interested in addressing this problem. Faced with either an underdeveloped East Jerusalem economy with little job opportunities, or an ethnically stratified Israeli job market that is difficult to penetrate except for low-income work, Palestinians believe that Israel does not want their education sector to develop as they need uneducated people to work as cheap laborers.

A major problem in studying the issue of Palestinian dropouts in East Jerusalem is the unavailability and inaccuracy of statistics on their rates and whereabouts. There are actual, “physical” dropouts and those who still attend school but do not really perform (at risk of dropouts), but neither are properly documented nor traced. However, available data on dropouts in East Jerusalem suggest that students face more challenges to continue school attendance as they grow older, and that finishing secondary school, in particular, proves difficult for a significant proportion of young people. It is mostly secondary-school age boys who leave school early and since there are no educational alternatives to the *Tawjihi* for academically weaker students, their only alternative often is blue collar work.

Part of the problem lies within the education system, which is fragmented with different administrative authorities and a lack of coordination between them. While private schools are usually better equipped and have more extracurricular offerings, low-income families cannot afford their fees, which results in inequality of opportunities.

While dropout reasons are manifold and often complex, relevant literature cites a number of common risk factors that apply across countries and cultures and are also valid for the Palestinian case. These include: low socioeconomic status (i.e., the need to financially support the family); having a learning or physical disability; academic struggles manifested in poor grades; lack of interest in class; lack of engagement with school; alienation from peers and adults; lack of parent involvement; lack of interest on the part of teachers, and un-

healthy learning environments, such as substandard classrooms, over-crowdedness, etc. Additionally, dropout in Jerusalem is caused by factors unique to the city and its residents, including house arrest, restrictions on access and movement across military checkpoints at the entrances to the city, and ease of access to the Israeli labor market.

What is not known is the percentage of actual dropouts in East Jerusalem who would like and appreciate a second chance as opposed to those who are content with having have “escaped” the learning circle and started earning money instead. Findings of this study showed, however, that the majority of young men seem to prefer to enter the labor market, even as unskilled workers, while young women are more eager to improve their skills and qualifications. It is also unclear how many of the dropouts even know that there are alternatives for them and what they are, but the interviews conducted for this report suggest that the level of information is rather low.

Several Palestinian civil society and non-governmental organizations in East Jerusalem have offered programs targeting dropouts over the years, but all of these were isolated one-time efforts that were severely limited in scope and time as they depended on (foreign) funding, which is usually project-based and does rarely exceed a one-year funding horizon. In the face of these obstacles, Palestinian CSOs can hardly “compete” with the programs and schemes run by the Israeli Jerusalem municipality.

Two key findings from the study highlight that young males who discontinued their education for a period of five years or more often find stability in whatever career path they have taken and express satisfaction with their current situations; therefore, they are rarely interested in dropout programs. By comparison, young females who do not get married after dropout exhibit a notably higher enthusiasm for engaging in dropout programs, and even many of those who drop out to get married find themselves having to enter the job market a few years after marriage and would therefore be interested in dropout programs that would enhance their capacities and improve their employability. Given these insights, dropout programs should particularly focus on recent dropouts from both sexes, especially females, as well as middle aged women. Such programs should take into account each age-group's interests and the types of professions they would be keen to learn.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons and potential remedies of the large number of dropouts in East Jerusalem to tackle the causes and consequences of this phenomenon, and to understand the contributing factors in the Palestinian education sector. This was

done delving into the different barriers and opportunities for both young men and women and identifying required interventions and measures on how to get dropouts back into the loop with the goal to improve their life chances and resilience, help them realize their rights to education and decent work, and, last but not least, reduce poverty and social disintegration.

The direct target group for the study were young Palestinian actual or at-risk dropouts in Jerusalem who are considered to belong to the group of the “most vulnerable” with regard to employment and future chances. In the best case, they end up working in low-paid jobs in the Israeli labor market (if they possess the necessary Hebrew and/or English language skills), in the worst they resort to drugs and crime. The study also gained insights from related actors from within the civil society sector and governmental or semi-governmental institutions.

Questions

The study is divided into two parts; the first part focuses on students vulnerable to dropping out and discusses how to keep them in school, while the second part addresses the reality of those who have already dropped out and examines what options they have after they have left school. A set of guiding questions was developed for each chapter in line with its objectives.

In particular, the first part deals with the following questions:

- Is the dropout rate in East Jerusalem (males and females) very high, and why?
- What are the reasons for dropping out of East Jerusalem schools?
- What measures are the Israeli and Palestinian governments taking to reduce the percentage of school dropout?
- What programs are in place to combat dropout?
- What solutions and suggestions can be put forward at the ecological level to reduce school dropout?

The second part explores these questions:

- Where do dropouts go after dropping out of school in East Jerusalem?
- Which civil society organizations (CSOs) provide programs for the rehabilitation and skill-building of dropouts in East Jerusalem?
- Do dropouts know about those organizations? Are they familiar with the programs offered by those organizations?
- Do dropouts wish to enroll in the programs offered by those organizations?
- What existing programs do dropouts wish to enroll in and what programs that dropouts may be attracted to can be developed?

- What are the appropriate times for dropouts to enroll in programs offered by those organizations?
- What outreach/communication methods are used by organizations to reach dropouts?
- What recommendations and interventions may contribute to returning the largest possible number of dropouts to school or enrolling them in programs that improve their skills and qualify them to enter the labor market as skilled workmen?

Scope and Limits

The study is spatially limited to East Jerusalem. It was conducted between June and September 2023. The following target groups were consulted and/or interviewed for the purpose of gaining knowledge:

school dropouts, parents, school principals, educational counselors, social workers who focus their work on the phenomenon of school dropout, and local community organizations concerned with the youth sector that currently have or previously had programs dealing with dropouts.

Methodology and Tools

The research team adopted a descriptive analytical approach in preparing the study. The team reviewed literature related to the subject of the study, studied the results of surveys conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, and analyzed reports and legal pleadings submitted by Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations in addition to the information and statistics available on the websites of the Palestinian Ministry of Education, the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality and Ministry of Education and CSOs concerned with education.

Moreover, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with a number of dropouts, parents, and officials in the education sector in Jerusalem, as well as educators and representatives of local community organizations concerned with the youth sector. In addition, focus group discussions were held with dropouts and their families and a roundtable was organized for representatives of academic institutions and educational experts to discuss the reality of dropouts after dropping out and devise and propose solutions on how to return them to school or how to rehabilitate and build skills of those who refuse to return to school.

Interviews were conducted as follows:

- 24 individual interviews with educators, officials representing the Palestinian and Israeli educational systems in East Jerusalem, experts and representatives of local community organizations.

- 26 individual interviews with dropouts (9 young women and 17 young men).
- Three focus groups with mothers of dropouts, dropouts, and students in a vocational rehabilitation center.
- Roundtable with a group of educational experts.

A large number of theories and models have dealt with the subject, and delving into them is outside the scope of this study. However, it will be based on the theoretical framework of the ecological model, which divides the causes of dropping out of school and methods of dealing with dropouts into six spheres¹, all of which are overlapping, affected by each other and can affect, positively or negatively, educational participation, progress in learning and learning outcomes. Those spheres are considered causes in certain cases and results in others.

1. **The self** (the student): self-vision, expectations of others (including the family, friends and school), and aspirations (towards education, work life and adult life). The self interacts with all levels of the model to influence them and be affected by them.
2. **Family**: social and gender norms, family expectations and aspirations, parental support, family size and composition, socioeconomic status, and location of residence. The family can play a key role in supporting or frustrating a student and thus influencing his/her learning orientation.
3. **Peers**: Peers' expectations, prevailing gender norms, formal and informal social networks such as sports associations and gatherings, and social support systems.
4. **Society**: customs and traditions, societal accountability structures, societal contexts, and formal and informal networks, including religious and traditional institutions and civil society participation in education. These societal structures and processes can affect the family, peers, the school and consequently the self.
5. **School**: characteristics of educational institutions, including school environments, teacher workforce and professional development opportunities available to teachers, pedagogical practices, social norms, gender expectations, levels of school violence, availability and implementation of school policies, and other factors such as teacher attitudes, expectations and relationships between the teacher and the student. The school and its interrelationships with other institutions, along with the self, is the most important sphere because it is the place where education is conducted and shared.

¹ UNESCO (2022), *Leave no child behind, global report on boys' disengagement from education*, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381105>.

6. **State:** Local and national laws and policies (whether present or non-existent), along with the broader socioeconomic context, employment (including employability, labor markets and social mobility), and support for gender equality, including prevailing societal norms and practices and cultural expectations. The state and society influence all other systems and structures. Appropriate policies, coupled with proper institutional mechanisms, have the capacity to change social norms and thus can play a key role in determining the success or failure of dropout prevention and reduction programs. In the absence of the state and its organs and laws for any reason whatsoever – such as absence of the Palestinian sovereign authority in East Jerusalem – there can be ample room for maneuver by alternatives to the state, whether the organs of the occupying state or local, national and popular alternatives or CSOs, to cover the forced absence of the state, even for a while and with narrow limits.

Difficulties Faced

While conducting research and preparing this study, the research team faced the following problems:

- The Israeli Jerusalem Municipality and Ministry of Education’s irresponsiveness to the research team’s queries and requests to obtain permission to interview their employees.
- Difficulty in accessing data from official Israeli websites as most of them are not available to the public and require usernames and passwords that cannot be obtained easily.
- Conflicting figures and statistics between Israeli and Palestinian sources on school dropout rates in East Jerusalem.
- Unavailability of sex-aggregated statistics.
- Repeated postponement of meetings with experts despite continuous communication and coordination.
- Difficulty in scheduling appointments with school principals and counselors as well as representatives of the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem Governorate.
- Difficulty in organizing and holding focus groups for parents or students, especially since most of the study was carried out during the summer vacation.
- Most of those interviewed did not want their names to be mentioned.
- Non-availability of any tracer study monitoring the whereabouts of dropouts.

1.2 THE REALITY OF EDUCATION IN JERUSALEM

Following the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in June 1967, the Israeli government announced on 28 June 1967 – illegally and unilaterally - the annexation of the eastern part of the city to the State of Israel and expanded the boundaries of the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality to include the recently annexed part, which was under the Jordanian government's control. The Israeli government imposed laws and policies in line with its interests and strategic objectives, which aimed primarily at emptying the city of its Palestinian inhabitants by employing discriminatory and restrictive measures in various political, economic, living and cultural spheres, including the education sector due to its importance in the nurturing and upbringing of future generations.

Since then, Israeli violations against the education sector took several forms including restricting mobility and freedom of movement between Jerusalem and West Bank cities and *vice versa*, which hindered the movement of students and teachers between Jerusalem and its surroundings on one side, and other West Bank cities on the other. Israeli authorities abstained from allocating necessary and adequate budgets for the needs of the Arab education sector in the eastern part of the city. Moreover, Israeli security services carried out direct attacks on schools, or within their vicinities, whether by opening fire or firing tear gas canisters, as witnessed in many instances in Shu'fat Refugee Camp, Silwan, Ras Al-Amud, Al-Thouri and Al-Issawiya, thereby negatively impacting the educational process.

In addition, in early 2020, the Israeli authorities closed the Jerusalem office of the Palestinian Ministry of Education in the Jerusalem Governorate, which oversees the educational progress of the city's schools affiliated with the Ministry, thereby hindering the follow up of the educational process in these schools.

In recent years, Israeli authorities have also made increased efforts to replace the Palestinian curriculum with the Israeli curriculum or impose a distorted curriculum by deleting pages from Palestinian textbooks and replacing them with content that is aimed at obliterating any form or sign of the Palestinian identity, culture or character.

Bodies Overseeing Education in Jerusalem

The education sector in East Jerusalem is characterized by a multiplicity of supervising bodies. East Jerusalem schools are subject to two main reference bodies: the Palestinian Ministry of Education and the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality. The Palestinian Ministry of Education supervises approximately 47% of the education sector, including schools affiliated with the Waqf Department, private schools and UNRWA schools, while Israeli authorities supervise 53% of the city's education sector.

The Israeli-administered education system in East Jerusalem is further divided into:

- 1) the official system's 'government' schools (i.e., public/municipal), maintained by the municipality and the Ministry of Education but teaching a separate "Arab educational system";
- 2) recognized but unofficial schools: licensed schools owned by private bodies, recognized by the Ministry of Education, allowed to charge tuition, and largely funded by the Ministry and the municipality, which partly supervise their activities;

The absence of a unified reference body responsible for developing educational and pedagogic strategies for schools has led to multiplicity and divergence of plans and strategies and opened the door for the Israeli authorities to intervene in directing Palestinian students towards serving their interests and goals.

Currently, there are 201 schools in the area illegally annexed by Israel with a total number of 98,428 students (not including students in kindergartens), of whom approximately 45,500 students are enrolled in 104 schools under the Palestinian umbrella (Waqf, private and UNRWA schools). The rest were enrolled in schools administered by the Israeli government.²

There are five types of schools in the Jerusalem Governorate (2022-2023 statistics):

Type	Run by	Supervised by	No. of schools / students
Waqf schools	Waqf	PA Ministry of Education	39 / 7,001
Private commercial and non-commercial schools	churches and charities	PA Ministry of Education, Israeli authorities	59 / 23,379
UNRWA schools³	UNRWA	PA Ministry of Education	6 / 910
Schools belonging to the Israeli authorities	Israeli Ministry of Education & Municipality of Jerusalem	Israeli Ministry of Education and Municipality of Jerusalem	74 / 40,573 (2020-21 ⁴)
Contractor Schools⁵	private for-profit or non-profit NGOs or companies	Israeli Ministry of Education and Municipality of Jerusalem	23 / 2,734

² Faisal Husseini Foundation, "Education in Jerusalem", <https://www.fhfpal.org/programs/63.html>, February 2023.

³ PCBS, *Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook 2023* (<https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2669.pdf>), p. 71-76.

⁴ Palestinian News Agency (Wafa), "The Reality of Education in Jerusalem and the Occupation", 2023, https://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=VUxGjia28071002982aVUxGji.

⁵ Israeli authorities resorted to this type of contracting as a result of a ruling issued by the Israeli High Court of Justice, which ordered the Ministry of Education and the Municipality to increase the number of classrooms in Jerusalem after the shortage of classrooms reached 3,794, including 2,100 classrooms in East Jerusalem, see Ir Amim, *Report on Education in East Jerusalem for the Year 2021-2022*, <https://www.ir-amim.org.il/he/node/2737>.

It should be noted that since the Palestinian Ministry of Education is not allowed to officially operate in East Jerusalem, its capacities are limited, so Waqf schools run by it are of lower quality due to the comparatively low wages for teachers, the difficulty to secure an adequate number of suitable classrooms, high Jerusalem municipal taxes, and the impossibility to obtain permits for building and expanding schools, in addition to demolition orders.⁶

The quality of education is also relatively lower in municipal schools in East Jerusalem compared to those in West Jerusalem, which is due to disparities in the distribution of professional personnel, including inspectors and counselors, classroom shortages, and shortage in dropout prevention programs and of supplemental classes.⁷

In East Jerusalem, the most pressing problem facing the educational process is the exploitation of the education sector in the city's Israelization – which began at all levels from the moment of the occupation in 1967 and has accelerated in the last twenty years. In particular, Israel tries to impose its curriculum on East Jerusalem schools (i.e., studying towards the Israeli *Bagrut* rather than the Palestinian matriculation exam *Tawjihi*), which only teaches the Israel narrative.

After decades of neglecting basic development, the Israeli Jerusalem municipality and other government institutions shifted their attention to the eastern side of the city, particularly its education sector, with more than NIS 2 billion allocated in the five-year plan (known as "Government Decision 3790") "to reduce social and economic gaps and generate economic development in East Jerusalem 2018-2023"⁸. The plan included NIS 445 million for the education sector, but tied the transfer of budgets for East Jerusalem schools to applying the Israeli curriculum in accordance with a decision made by then Israeli Minister of "Jerusalem and Heritage" Ze'ev Elkin: "Of the NIS 445 million allocated for education in the Israeli five-year plan, approximately NIS 200 million is allocated to the goal of 'encouraging engagement in Israeli education,' meaning increasing the number of students studying the Israeli curriculum in East Jerusalem."⁹ This is in flagrant violation of the UNESCO Convention on Combatting Discrimination in Education, which states in Article 3 e: "not to allow, in any form of assistance granted by the public authorities to educational institutions, any restrictions or preference based solely on the ground that pupils belong to a particular group."¹⁰

⁶ UNICEF, *State of Palestine Country Report on Out-Of-School Children*, July 2018, p. 94, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/sop/media/176/file/OOSC%20Study%20.pdf>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁸ Al-Jundi, Aseel, "One of the Sectors Most Targeted by Judaization ... All You Need to Know about the Reality of Education in Jerusalem," *Aljazeera Net*, 17 July 2022 (Arabic).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ UNESCO Convention on Combating Discrimination in Education, <https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education/convention-against-discrimination>.

The new five-year plan (NIS 3 billion for 2024-2028), which focuses on six sectors (education and higher education, economy and trade, employment and welfare, transportation, improving the quality of life and services provided to the citizens, and land planning and registration), almost doubled the budget for education to NIS 800 million¹¹ with the stated aim of "increasing the number and percentage of students enrolled in Israeli curricula and academic preparation programs leading to their integration into academia and employment by providing financial and educational incentives."¹²

Palestinians believe that the real intentions of these plans are to impose Israeli control over the city and "domesticate" the Palestinians so that only those who have acquiesced and accepted to follow the goals of Israelization can remain in the city. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that about 81% of the 2018-2023 plan's budget for formal education was allocated for schools that exclusively teach the Israeli curriculum,¹³ meaning that the "development" of education in East Jerusalem did not come in response to the real need in the city, nor in response to the decisions issued by Israeli courts over decades, but rather as continuation of the policy of imposing control and deepening linkage and dependency between Palestinian Jerusalemites and official Israeli state institutions.

2. ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN EAST JERUSALEM

2.1 THE PHENOMENON OF SCHOOL DROPOUT IN EAST JERUSALEM

Definition of "Dropout"

"Dropout" means a student's departure from the academic or vocational educational system, whether formal or informal, he/she was enrolled in before completing a qualification or course, whether by withdrawing from the school or educational or vocational center, or by continuous absence or irregular attendance in class without a convincing excuse.

In the educational literature of international organizations, many definitions of dropout are cited as leaving school before completing any of the educational stages, or before the end of the last year. Common references include:

¹¹ Ir Amim, *Curriculum Under Attack - East Jerusalem Education Report, 2022-23*, August 2023 (Hebrew).

¹² *Al-Risalah Newspaper website*, 7 August 2023.

¹³ Ir Amim, *Curriculum Under Attack - East Jerusalem Education Report, 2022-23*, *op. cit.*

Save the Children and UNICEF, who define school dropouts as "children of school age who cannot be accounted for as enrolled in or attending schools that are recognized by the ministry mandated with providing education within an internationally recognized state."¹⁴

The European Union defines school dropout as "obtained no more than a lower secondary diploma and are not enrolled in further education or training."¹⁵

And the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) defines school dropout as "students' departure from education at one of the educational levels before they receive a certificate from it."¹⁶

Voluntary vs. Induced Dropout

Students who go to school but do not really engage or contribute to academic life, students who spend more time in corridors between classrooms than inside their classrooms, and students who miss school no less than one or two days a week or who physically attend school but are preoccupied with other things cannot be overlooked as dropouts. Many interviewed educators pointed out that children who spend most of their time in schools' corridors rather than in classrooms are indeed dropouts even if they are not defined as such. At best, they are "potential dropout" and such hidden or masked dropouts must be treated as dropouts.

Dropping out refers to a voluntary act, but in reality, ceasing to attend school is attributed to a range of economic, social, political or even cultural reasons the child or student has no opinion about or influence on. Hence, the term "induced dropout" is used when children are pushed out of school for political, economic or social reasons or in order for schools and their administrations to maintain high academic "achievement" records. In some cases, the school/teacher "encourage" students to quit¹⁷, e.g., to empty overcrowded classrooms.

A strongly-worded report by Israel's State Comptroller on East Jerusalem revealed that "one in four students drop out of school and tens of thousands are not enrolled in the education

¹⁴ *Main Trends and Analysis on Out of School Children in the Middle East and North Africa Region 2015-2020: Desk Study*, Equitas Education, Save the Children, WFP, UNICEF, 2022, p. 11, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/main-trends-and-analysis-on-out-of-school-children-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-region-desk-study/>

¹⁵ European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2019*, September 2019, p. 51; <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf>.

¹⁶ Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), *Education and Improving Scholastic Performance in Arab Countries*, <http://www.alecso.org/nsite/ar/>.

¹⁷ Alayan, Samira and Yair, G. (2009) "Paralysis at the Top of a Roaring Volcano: Israel and the Schooling of Palestinians in East Jerusalem," *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 53, Issue 2, p. 235-257: 246.

system at all."¹⁸ The comptroller strongly criticized the Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality which, "despite the serious problem, [they] only allocate a small part of the resources to the residents of East Jerusalem, do not run enough programs to prevent school dropouts, and have no details about the children who have 'disappeared' and do not even try to locate them." The report complained about the "incompetence and laxity of the Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality in locating those children in East Jerusalem for the purpose of providing them with basic education." The director of the dropout prevention program in the Jerusalem Municipality pointed out that "dropout in East Jerusalem is among the highest in the country despite the large number of schools in Jerusalem."¹⁹

During its analysis of interviews with some of those in charge of dropout prevention programs, the research team noticed discrepancies in the data and information on dropouts and their numbers in East Jerusalem, which can partially be attributed to the multiplicity of parties supervising education in East Jerusalem and their struggle to achieve sovereignty. Israeli agencies count students who transfer from schools affiliated with the Jerusalem Municipality or the Ministry of Education to schools in the West Bank or even schools affiliated with the Palestinian Ministry of Education in Jerusalem, for whatever reason, as dropouts and delete their names from the records of students who are supposed to be enrolled within the compulsory education system. In other words, students who may still be in an educational framework but are not documented in official statistics, and those who may have actually dropped out of Israeli-administered schools due to lack of an educational framework to accommodate them, are simply counted as dropouts and not accounted for otherwise nor followed up upon. Hence, there are thousands of children who are actually enrolled in schools but their names are not listed under any educational framework in Jerusalem.²⁰ It was also found that figures reported in the media are inaccurate due to the different administrative and educational frameworks in the city in addition to the lack of interest and follow-up on the side of some schools affiliated with the Israeli Ministry of Education and Jerusalem Municipality on dropouts or even monitoring their numbers.²¹

The diversity of school types available to students and the multiplicity of reference bodies for those schools complicate follow-up on education and allow each party to place the burden of dealing with the issue of dropout on the shoulders of other groups. This, in turn, complicates matters for students, parents and local community organizations in following

¹⁸ Horodnitsano, M., "23 thousand children "disappear", thousands drop out of school: the neglect in the Middle East is exposed," *Walla!*, 2 June 2019, <https://news.walla.co.il/item/3239441>.

¹⁹ Interview with Areej Idrees, Director of the Dropout Prevention and Individual Welfare Program at Jerusalem Municipality, Arab Programs Department, 2 July 2023.

²⁰ Ir Amim, *Report on Five Years Implementation of Resolution 3790*, May 2023; and *Curriculum Under Attack - East Jerusalem Education Report, 2022-23*, *op. cit.*

²¹ Palestinian News Agency (Wafa), "The Reality of Education in Jerusalem and the Occupation", 2023, *op. cit.*

up and holding accountable the party responsible for failing to confront and reduce the phenomenon of dropout.

Many Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem are unique cases on their own with regard to the issue of dropout. For example, in areas such as Kufr Aqab, there is no municipal secondary school for boys, while a secondary school for girls was opened just recently; therefore, many students from Kufr Aqab go to schools in Beit Hanina or Atarot. They face hardship and humiliation on a daily basis when crossing Qalandia Checkpoint and often arrive late for school, which prompts them to think about backing down and dropping out of school before heading to school every morning. Similarly, a child from Shu'fat Refugee Camp, which was under tight siege in early 2023 during which students were also barred from going to their schools inside Jerusalem, said: "I felt like a trapped mouse. I could not go out to receive my education like the rest of my peers." This feeling of anger puts the educational process in these neighborhoods in the face of greater challenges and makes dropping out an option to be considered every day.

Human rights organizations consider Israeli authorities' failure to provide educational services to the residents of Jerusalem a human rights violation. One manifestation of this failure is the acute shortage of classrooms, which is not due to lack of land but lack in "planned area for public buildings", resulting from discrimination in planning. In 2023, at least 2,986 classrooms were missing.²² Such shortage results in overcrowding in schools in general, and in Waqf schools affiliated with the Palestinian Ministry of Education in particular, where the suffocating average classroom area per student ranges between 0.5 and 0.9 m². Such conditions prevent provision of a proper educational environment for students and limit the schools' ability to absorb the projected 5-8% increase in the number of students from one academic year to another. In fact, a study by the Palestinian Ministry of Education showed that "about 41% of the schools supervised by the ministry in East Jerusalem suffer from the overcrowding problem" (as revealed by a principal of a school affiliated with the Ministry of Education who asked not to be named).

The shortage of classrooms also deprives students of their right to free education that the government is supposed to provide²³ and which is called for by all human and child rights charters and conventions. Shortage of classrooms forces students to enroll in private schools that charge high tuition ranging from NIS 8,000-12,000 per year in Jerusalem, despite a 2011 Israeli Supreme Court of Justice ruling (in response to a petition filed by parents of students in East Jerusalem) that the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality and Ministry of Education must build classrooms to accommodate the East Jerusalem students. The ruling

²² Ir Amim, *Curriculum Under Attack - East Jerusalem Education Report, 2022-23, op. cit.*

²³ Israel's Compulsory Education Law (1949) requires all children aged 5-16 to attend school, entitling them to free public education regardless of the legal status of their parents.

stated: "the authorities are violating their constitutional duties in education in light of the enormous shortage of classrooms in East Jerusalem."²⁴

According to official Israeli estimates, the shortage of classrooms stood at 2,247 classrooms in the 2020-2021 academic year (in contrast with Ir Amim's estimate of 3,794 classrooms for the same year).

Dropout - Legal Aspects

According to the Palestinian Education Law No. 1 of 2013, "Education is compulsory and free in public schools during the basic stage, as stated in Article 3; the duration of study at this stage is ten years, as stated in Article 15; and every parent, custodian or guardian is obligated to enroll children under his/her custodianship or guardianship in basic educational institutions and is prohibited from withdrawing them from such institutions before they reach the age of sixteen without an acceptable excuse, Article 18."²⁵

The Palestinian Authority also issued the Law by Decree No. (8) of 2017 on Public Education, which states in Article (5), paragraph (1): "Education shall be compulsory until the end of the tenth grade," and in paragraph (2): "Education shall be free in all public educational institutions." It also states in Article (50): "A punishment of imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year, or payment of a fine not exceeding (1,000) Jordanian Dinars or its equivalent in the currency in circulation, or both, shall be imposed on: 1) any parent who refuses to enroll or withdraws his or her son or daughter under the age of sixteen from an educational institution, 2) any person who prevents the enrollment of any child under the age of sixteen or influences by any means whatsoever his/her enrolment in any educational institution."²⁶ However, since Palestinian authorities do not have any effective sovereignty over Jerusalem, they cannot apply and enforce these provisions, i.e., punish anyone who prevents a child under the age of 16 from attending school.

Article (42) of the Law by Decree No. (8) states: "1) The Ministry shall develop the necessary programs for students who drop out or miss school due to force majeure circumstances approved by the Ministry with the aim of returning them to school, in coordination with the relevant authorities. 2) The school shall develop programs and plans to improve the level of students' educational achievement and performance in cooperation with the relevant ex-

²⁴ Ir Amim, *Report on Education in East Jerusalem for the Year 2021-2022*, <https://www.ir-amim.org.il/he/node/2737>. Israeli Supreme Court of Justice Case No. 3834/01: Hamdan and others vs. Jerusalem Municipality, Supreme Court of Justice Case no. 5185/01: Badrieh and others vs. Jerusalem Municipality (unpublished), and Supreme Court of Justice Case no. 5373/08: Abu Libdeh vs. Minister of Education).

²⁵ Palestinian Education Law No. 1 of 2013.

²⁶ Law by Decree No. (8) of 2017 on Public Education, passed in Ramallah, 2017; available in Arabic at <https://www.wattan.net/data/uploads/bafce6842e81cbbbeac9fd6a7f5a5dfdd.pdf>.

perts and educators at the community and CSO levels, in accordance with instructions issued by the Minister.”

Furthermore, the Palestinian Child Law, Chapter VII, Educational Rights, Article (37) states: “1. A) Every child has the right to free education in state schools until the completion of secondary education, B) Education is compulsory until completion of the upper basic education stage as a minimum. 2) The State shall take all appropriate measures to prevent children’s early dropout of schools.”²⁷ The Palestinian Child Law clearly demonstrates the Palestinian state’s interest in providing compulsory and free education until completion of the basic educational stage, but, as stated above, the Palestinian Authority cannot enforce its laws in East Jerusalem.

There, instead, Israeli law applies. Israel’s Compulsory Education Law (1949) requires all children aged 5-16 (grade 10 inclusive) to attend school, giving them the right to free public education regardless of their parents’ legal status.²⁸ In addition, the law provides for free education for those aged 16-17 and for 18-year-olds who did not complete their schooling in grade 11. However, interviews conducted by the research team and the literature review showed that most dropouts in East Jerusalem had left their schools in the secondary education stage, especially in grades 11 and 12, as well as during transition from one educational stage to another. Relevant literature includes an analysis of main trends on out-of-school children in the Middle East and North Africa from 2015-2020.²⁹

Goal 4 of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is “Quality Education” and states that “obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people’s lives and sustainable development.”³⁰ It seeks to ensure “inclusive and equitable education for all”³¹ and promote lifelong learning and to “ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes” by 2030 (4.1).³² Among other things, it also seeks to achieve equal access to all levels of education and learning (4.3).

The importance of SDG 4 stems from its forward-looking vision that providing an equitable (lifelong) learning environment and improving the quality of education is the primary key to achieving sustainable development and a brighter and fairer future for all. Giving individuals

²⁷ The Palestinian Child Law No. (7) of 2004.

²⁸ However, the public system still accounts for less than half of the Palestinian students in Jerusalem, while the rest is enrolled in private or semi-private recognized but unofficial schools.

²⁹ *Main Trends and Analysis on Out of School Children in the Middle East and North Africa Region 2015-2020, op. cit.*

³⁰ UN Sustainable Development Goals <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

opportunities for skills development and professional growth enables them to contribute to more sustainable and prosperous societies and economies.

School Dropouts in East Jerusalem

The school dropout rate in East Jerusalem is very high, with some 32% of Palestinians over the age of 18 not having completed 12 years of schooling (compared to only 1.5% in West Jerusalem)³³. While Palestinian students in Jerusalem make up about 41% of all students in the city, they represent 70% of the total number of students who drop out and their percentage is also much higher than that of the Palestinian community in Israel.³⁴ Nonetheless, the Israeli State Comptroller found that “the Ministry of Education and the [Jerusalem] municipality allocated to Palestinian students no more than 17% of their services and programs and 25% of the budget of the unit that works on dropout prevention.”³⁵

In the 2021/22 school year, some 2,682 Palestinian students, representing almost 100 classes, dropped out of schools in Jerusalem and in the 2022/23 school year, the number increased to 3,183 dropouts, representing 117 classes and 4% of the boys and 3% of the girls studying in grades 1-11.³⁶

In addition, in 2022, Israeli state authorities did not know where some 41,000 children in East Jerusalem (=29% of the children of compulsory education age) were studying, and in 2023, the municipality reported the number of unaccounted or so-called “disappearing” children as 26,619 (20.2%).³⁷ This, too, clearly indicates significant gaps in the implementation of school dropout prevention programs in Palestinian neighborhoods. While there were 21 dropout prevention programs in the Jewish education system in Jerusalem, only 8 such programs³⁸ were available in the Arab education system.”³⁹

School principals in schools affiliated with Jerusalem Municipality, as well as Ms. Areej Idrees, Director of the Dropout Prevention Program in Jerusalem Municipality, noted that

³³ ACRI, *East Jerusalem: Facts & Figures 2019*, May 2019.

³⁴ “‘There is no interest in us succeeding’: young Palestinians explain the plague of dropouts in East Jerusalem”, *Haaretz*, 6 December 2021 (Hebrew), <https://www.haaretz.co.il/haaretz21/2021-12-06/ty-article/0000017f-f2fc-d487-abff-f3fe77770000>.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Ir Amim, *Curriculum Under Attack - East Jerusalem Education Report, 2022-23*, *op. cit.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, and Ir Amim, *Report on Five Years Implementation of Resolution 3790*, May 2023.

³⁸ The eight programs, according to the director of the dropout prevention and individual welfare program at the Jerusalem Municipality’s Arab Programs Department are: School Social Worker (Marfa’), Psychological Counseling, Youth Progress “Kidum No’ar”, “Malé” Program - A Different Educational Space, Steps Toward Success (most likely to be canceled but still existent in 2023), Jusour Program, Hila Center, and B’ahad Program at the Social Welfare Department.

³⁹ Ir Amim, *Falling between the Cracks: Student Dropout and the Shortage of Classrooms in East Jerusalem - Annual Update*, August 2015 (revised English version, December 2015), pp. 21-22, <https://www.altro.co.il/uploads/252/File/Falling%20between%20the%20Cracks.2015.pdf>.

the eight offered programs were usually not implemented together, meaning that some of them were implemented in some schools only. According to Ms. Idrees, "it was agreed about 5-6 years ago that the municipality will offer all available programs for 6 schools in East Jerusalem. All dropout prevention programs were indeed offered in those schools as part of a package of responses to prevent dropout, and a qualitative jump was indeed achieved in these schools in terms of reducing dropout rates and addressing other problems, but the Covid-19 pandemic returned us to a difficult place." She explained that the schools were selected according to different criteria and data, most importantly the dropout rates which in some of those schools reached 26%. She added that her program worked to integrate Israeli matriculation exam (*Bagrut*) materials in these schools to suit the needs of students who do not have an affinity to the literary or scientific streams by integrating *Bagrut* units with vocational programs such as cosmetology or home electricity.⁴⁰

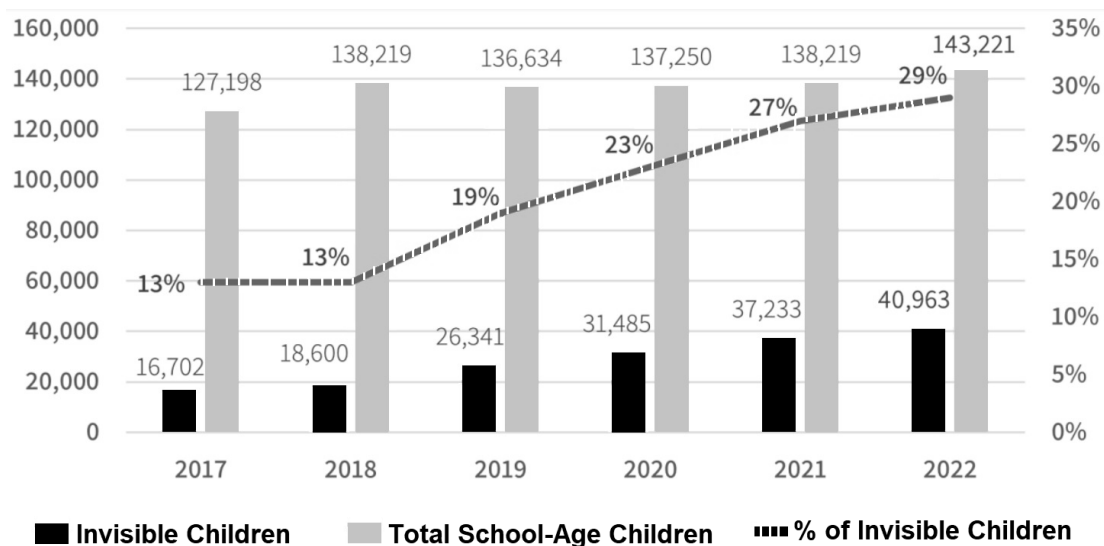
In its 2022 Education Report,⁴¹ Ir Amim points out that there has been a disturbing rise in the phenomenon of "invisible" students – school-age children who are registered with the Jerusalem Municipality but not in any of the schools within the municipality's educational framework. The following table illustrates this:

"Invisible Children" Over the Years

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
No. of Palestinian children of compulsory school-age (3-18) in Jerusalem	127,198	138,219	136,634	137,250	138,219	143,221
No. of Palestinian "invisible children" of compulsory school-age, per the Municipality's lower calculation	16,702	18,600	26,341	31,485	37,233	40,963
Percentage of "invisible children" from among all Palestinian children of compulsory school-age in Jerusalem	13%	13%	19%	23%	27%	29%

⁴⁰ These remarks contradict with the Ir Amim report which noted that providing municipal serves and implementing those programs was conditioned on schools shifting to the Israeli educational system and curriculum (*Bagrut*), which means that interest in developing these programs stemmed for a desire to impose control rather than addressing the dire need for academic, psychological and social interventions to deal with school dropout or learning difficulties.

⁴¹ Ir Amim, *The State of Education in East Jerusalem 2021-2022*, September 2022, https://www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Education%20in%20East%20Jerusalem_2021_2022.pdf.



Source: Ir Amim, *The State of Education in East Jerusalem for the Year 2021-2022*, September 2022.

As for the schools supervised by the Palestinian Ministry of Education in East Jerusalem, the percentage of dropout students did not exceed 1% as reported in interviews with staff of the Palestinian Directorate of Education in Jerusalem.⁴² A review of the tables of dropouts from schools supervised by the Directorate showed that the total number of their female and male dropout students was 120 (which is actually less than 1% of the total number of students in Waqf schools, Palestinian public schools and private schools affiliated with the Directorate). Therefore, those interviewed from the Directorate did not consider dropout a significant phenomenon or problem, which explains why the Palestinian Ministry of Education does not attach great importance to the issue of dropouts given the other difficulties it faces in Jerusalem in terms of the Israeli restrictions imposed on the educational process, the most significant of which are attempts to Israelize the curriculum.

The table and graph below show the number of students dropping out of schools supervised by the Palestinian Ministry of Education during 2021-2022, 82 (or 68.3%) of whom were males and 38 (31.7%) females. Considering them a random sample representing the total number of dropouts in East Jerusalem, they shed some light on the most significant reasons for dropout⁴³:

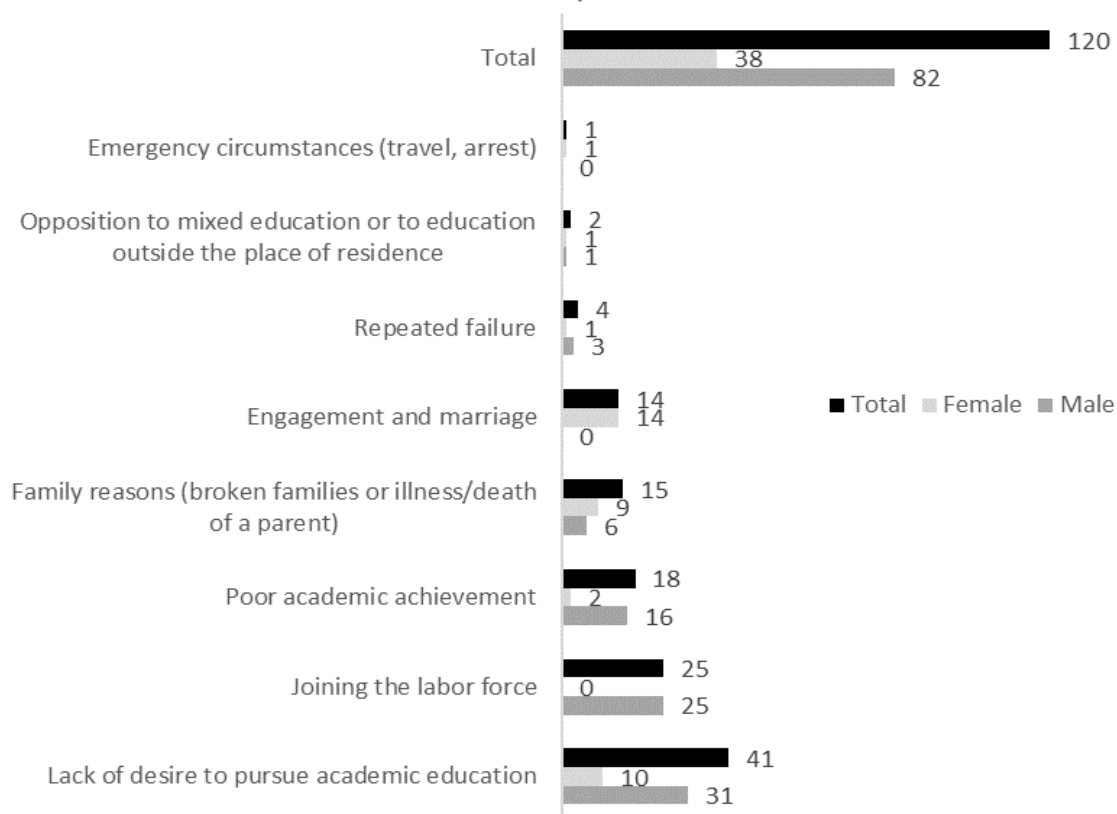
⁴² Interview with Raeda Attoun, 13 July 2023.

⁴³ Directory of Education in Jerusalem, numbers of dropouts in private and Waqf schools for the first and second semesters of the 2021-2022 academic year, August 2022.

**Number of Dropouts in Palestinian Ministry of Education Supervised Schools
and Reasons for their Dropout, 2021-2022**

	Private Schools		Waqf School	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Poor academic achievement	6	0	10	2
Lack of desire to pursue academic education	17	2	14	8
Engagement and marriage	0	1	0	13
Joining the labor force	10	0	15	0
Family circumstances	3	2	3	7
Repeated failure	0	0	3	1
Opposition to mixed education or to education outside the place of residence	0	0	1	1
Emergency circumstances (travel, arrest)	0	0	0	1
Total	36	5	46	33

Number of Dropouts from Private and Waqf (Endowment) Schools by Reason, 2021-2022



Causes of School Dropout in East Jerusalem

Understanding and awareness of the reasons behind school dropout by school administrators in East Jerusalem, whether from the Palestinian Ministry of Education or the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality and Ministry of Education, should contribute to developing preventive plans, programs and policies to reduce the rate of school dropout. Reasons for school dropout include:

1. **Lack of desire to learn:** Data for the academic year 2021-2022 showed that lack of desire to learn was the single most important reason for dropout among the reasons collected by the Palestinian Ministry of Education. Dropouts from different types of schools confessed that they did not like school and did not have any desire to learn. This sentiment was echoed in the focus group for mothers of dropouts, who agreed that the main and most significant reason why their sons and daughters dropped out of school was their lack of desire to learn. One mother said: "My son hates school and has no desire to learn, and I think he has a learning difficulty." Another mother said: "My daughter did not like to learn and refused to go to school. She preferred dying to opening a book." Similarly, 4 out of 7 girls who took part in a focus group for dropout girls stated in their answers to a question on the reason for dropping out of school: "I did not want to learn ... The curriculum is difficult, the school is boring and classes are overcrowded."⁴⁴

One of the important indicators of potential dropout, which is difficult to ignore, is the increased time a student spends in the corridors of the school or outside the administration room during classes, either because he/she is kicked out of class or because he/she chooses to stay outside. Additionally, sometimes students remain in the classroom only physically. Such "disguised dropout", as referred to by most educators, is indeed one of the most glaring indicators that should sound an alarm bell and require direct professional intervention.

Other signs are frequent absence and neglect of homework. Mothers of dropouts revealed that the most important indicator for them that their sons or daughters were planning to drop out was their frequent absence from school under pretexts such as illness and fatigue and their frequent running away from school. One mother said, "my son started running away from school in ninth grade. Every day he went to school, threw his schoolbag in the playground and ran away. He was studying at Ibn Rushd School, which is affiliated with the municipality, and the school wasn't interested in letting us know. We found out that he was running away from school by coincidence, when his older brother saw him working in a warehouse in Talpiot. He dropped out of school for good in tenth grade." Another mother added, "In addition to being absent and running away from school, my son refused to take exams and threw away his text-

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

books several times. In tenth grade, I bought him textbooks three times. I kept pressuring him to stay in school until eleventh grade, and then he dropped out." All mothers confirmed that their dropout sons and daughters had exhibited similar behaviors in terms of neglecting school, ignoring homework, and tearing textbooks and throwing them away. Another mother whose daughter dropped out in tenth grade said, "she always pretended she was sick and I did not see her studying. I also did not see her grades. In tenth grade, she refused to go to school at all."

2. **Poor academic performance/achievement:** Most interviewees agreed that poor academic achievement was a common trait of most dropouts. A counselor at a Waqf school explained that "most male dropouts drop out of school for two interrelated reasons: poor academic performance and achievement and economic reasons," adding, "we rarely find a student who drops out just because of poor economic situation; this reason is often accompanied by poor academic achievement."⁴⁵ The reasons for poor academic performance and achievement are numerous, including, as stated in interviews with educators and education officials: learning difficulty, the student's lack of desire and unwillingness to learn, the negative ramifications of family problems on the student in terms of weakening his/her academic achievement, difficult and irrelevant curricula, and lack of teachers' experience in dealing with students with weak academic performance.

Areej Idrees, Director of the Dropout Prevention and Individual Welfare Program at the Jerusalem Municipality, put it this way: "One of the most important reasons [for school dropout] is the academic gap and learning difficulties. The lack of adequate and appropriate programs for the needs of students with learning difficulties increases their sense of failure and fuels their desire to miss school and eventually leave it. In the absence of such programs, a student searches for a place that enables him/her to show the strengths of his/her personality, such as the neighborhood or the labor market, and becomes less willing to go to school, where his/her weaknesses and learning difficulties are manifested in front of his/her peers. Stubborn and exclusive adherence to rigid classical frameworks that demand all students to go through the same programs and systems generates a desire among the student to leave school."⁴⁶

A dropout interviewee said, "I dropped out of school when I was in ninth grade. I did so for more than one reason; the first was that I was not good in school." Similarly, a female dropout said, "I got to eighth grade without knowing how to read and write. It was better for me to leave school."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ From an interview with a counselor at a Waqf school who did not wish to be named.

⁴⁶ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

⁴⁷ Focus groups with male and female dropouts.

Counselor Basima Abdeen pointed out that "the common characteristic shared by most dropouts is weak academic achievement, which may be caused by learning difficulties. Poor academic performance increases students' distress and makes them feel trapped in school. It generates a desire to leave school for another place where they may feel comfortable." A counselor who did not want to be named told us that potential dropouts share many common indicators such as "low motivation and lack of participation, forgetting or ignoring to bring stationery and school supplies, coming late to school, lack of concentration in classes, and sometimes sleeping during classes, isolation and introversion."⁴⁸

More than one educator interviewed in depth also indicated that some dropout students from the tenth or eleventh grades had poor reading and writing abilities, indicating that despite spending nine or ten years in school, they were not able to pass the basics of the learning process. For example, Areej Idrees, Director of the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality's Dropout Prevention and Individual Welfare Program, said: "some students reach secondary school without knowing how to read and write."⁴⁹

3. **Violent behavior and bullying:** Bullying and lack of protection for students inside schools and schoolyards is another significant reason for drop out. On the perpetrator's side, students vulnerable to dropping out exhibit violent behavior, exercise bullying against their schoolmates, assault teachers, initiate problems, instigate quarrels, and utter inappropriate and profane language. The mother of a dropout girl recalled, "either the school principal or counselor often called me to complain about my daughter's violence. My daughter used to beat her schoolmates and pull their hair." Another mother said, "my son broke the hand of a student at school, the principal found a blade with him, and he beat his teacher once."

On the victim's side, threats and intimidation are an issue. One young man (S. A., 25 years old) who used to attend a school affiliated with the Israeli Ministry of Education in one of Jerusalem's neighborhoods, explained that the reason for his drop out was being repeatedly harassed by an older student: "I used to like school and my grades were average, I mean my average was between 60-65%. But my constant subjugation to harassment and my fear of that student made me hate school and miss classes a lot. Sometimes I pretended that I was sick and sometimes I lied to my parents and told them that I went to school while I did not get there. He started harassing me in sixth grade and in eighth grade I decided to leave school altogether. At first, my parents opposed me, but in the end, they allowed me to leave school because of my determination." Similarly, a mother recalled, "my son would come back every day from school assaulted and beaten by other students. Every day we had a fight. I think the most important reason my son

⁴⁸ Interview with Basima Abdeen, 27 June 2023.

⁴⁹ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

dropped out was because he was subjected to violence at school. His physique was weak and he could not fight back students who were stronger and older than him."

Bullying on the part of teachers also has a negative impact on students and can be a cause for dropping out. One mother described the impact of a teacher's bullying on her son, saying, "my son used to get really nervous every morning because he did not want to go to school. He started hating school in fifth grade because his math teacher was bullying him and always called him a math idiot." Another female dropout reported that "some teachers used to describe students as animals and tell us we could not understand anything just like cows, donkeys or sheep. This bothered me very much. I am a human being, not an animal."

Most interviewees agreed that one common characteristic among dropouts was their low sense of belonging to school, which often led them to tamper with and vandalize school property. Generally, dropouts had behaved aggressively towards everything related to the school before dropping out. A school counselor reported: "when students, especially boys, decide to leave school, they begin displaying certain aggressive behaviors which indicate that they were going to leave school such as breaking glass, ripping off door handles and breaking washbasins."⁵⁰

4. **Lack of a stimulating educational environment:** Substandard schools and facilities - poor quality, lack of space, inadequate classrooms, non-motivating teachers, etc. - do not encourage students to learn and do not create a sense of belonging to their schools. All this contributes to dropout. Most Waqf schools affiliated with the Palestinian Ministry of Education are actually residential buildings – either separate houses or apartments within buildings – that are rented and converted into schools. Renting residential space and converting it into schools also applies to a number of schools affiliated with the Israeli Ministry of Education and Jerusalem Municipality, especially older schools and schools known as contractor schools. The majority of the buildings and apartments that have been converted into schools are not qualified to serve this purpose; they lack playgrounds, offices, halls and laboratories. Therefore, students attending such schools do not find the right place to demonstrate their abilities and creativity.

These schools are characterized by "overcrowding, severe shortage of classrooms, and problems related to overcrowding such as poor ventilation and lighting, noise, weak infrastructure and under equipment in terms of blackboards, benches and tables, laboratories and sports halls. In some schools, there are not even playgrounds for students to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

go out during breaks. Together, these factors lower student and teacher motivation for learning and teaching."⁵¹

Renting buildings and classrooms in East Jerusalem "is a shame. Some buildings are in such poor conditions that even if we bring in 100 social workers to work with students, we will not be able to overcome the problems created by poor classroom environment. In Kufr Aqab, for example, some schools are in dangerous areas and some are in the vicinity of construction sites and threaten students' lives."⁵²

A dropout who took part in the focus group for female dropouts recalled, "school was like a prison for me. We were all on top of each other. In the summer it gets very hot and in the winter it gets cold. The class smells very bad. I could not wait to get out of class. Sometimes I used to make a fight so that the teacher would kick me out and I would stay outside class."⁵³

The large number of students in one classroom also prevents teachers from giving personal attention to their students as well as from focusing on the social and academic aspects of their lives. In such classrooms, a teacher is required to pass on educational content during a period not exceeding 45 minutes to more than 30 students, as indicated by one educator. "When the huge shortage of classrooms intersects with the difficult economic situation in East Jerusalem – where the city's poverty rate is one of the highest in the country – it will be difficult for families to find alternatives such as enrolling their children in private schools. The only option for families becomes free schools such as municipal, Palestinian Authority or UNRWA schools, which do not meet all the needs of students in the city."⁵⁴

5. **Social factors including early marriage:** Interviews conducted by the research team revealed that most male dropouts come from large and poor households characterized by parents' low educational attainment and that many of their relatives had previously dropped out of school. A school counselor told us that "dropouts share common social, economic and educational characteristics, including their difficult economic conditions, broken families, parents' low educational attainment, the fact that most children in their extended families are dropouts, large household size, in addition to spread of the phenomenon of early marriage among female family members."⁵⁵

The phenomenon of early marriage – sometimes also to lift a financial burden off their families – is also closely linked to increased female dropout. A study carried out by the

⁵¹ Interviews with the principals of two schools affiliated with the Jerusalem Municipality in Al-Sawahreh on 24 June 2023.

⁵² Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

⁵³ Focus group for female dropouts, 12 June 2023.

⁵⁴ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Women Studies Center in Jerusalem found that the rate of marriage under the age of 18 hovers around 38%⁵⁶, which is very high. There are no centralized accurate statistics regarding the number or percentage of girls who drop out because of engagement and marriage, but a counselor at a Waqf school confirmed that, "the reasons behind drop-out are numerous, but the most important of them for females is engagement and marriage, especially among female students from poor families, while the second most important reason is poor academic performance. Failure to enforce compulsory education until the secondary stage plays an important role in drop out."⁵⁷ A participant in the focus group of female dropouts said the reason for her dropping out was that "I got married and left school." This reason was the same for 5 others, while a sixth participant said, "I left school, and then I got married."

6. **Deterioration of the economic situation:** All respondents agreed that low economic level is one of the strong reasons that push students to leave school so as to work and support their families. A school counselor told us that "most dropouts have low economic levels. Dropouts often enter the labor market under the pressure of financial need, which pushes them to leave school and look for work. They find themselves having to earn an income that would contribute to helping the family meet its basic needs."⁵⁸ The desire or necessity to join the labor market, either for personal gain or to contribute to household expenses, especially in poor and middle-income households, which comprise the majority of households in Jerusalem,⁵⁹ is thus an important reason for dropout. Sometimes, students find themselves obliged to work part-time or full-time in order to support themselves or their families. Balancing work and school responsibilities can be difficult, especially when schools are ill-equipped to deal with students engaged in the labor market. Even vocational schools that are supposed to prepare their students for a profession sometimes lack practical mechanisms and models to integrate education and work at the same time; therefore, students may choose, or find themselves obliged, to leave school to focus on work, as a result of conflicting work and school schedules, or because of their inability to reconcile work with the demands of being students.

Some students may find themselves simply tempted with the idea of earning money, and if this temptation is accompanied with loss of vocational guidance at school, home or institutions that work with youth, the option of leaving school becomes more attractive. Dropout A. J., for example, left school for the first time to enroll in a vocational

⁵⁶ Rabadi, Marlene, *The Causes and Consequences of Palestinian Early Female Marriage in Jerusalem Governorate*, Women Studies Center, 2021, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Interview with Basima Abdeen, 27 June, 2023.

⁵⁸ From interviews with school counselors.

⁵⁹ In 2021/22, 57.3% of Palestinian families, 61.4% of Palestinian individuals and 70.3% of Palestinian children in Jerusalem lived below the Israeli poverty line, JIPR, *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem 2022*.

school, but then left because he believed that one of his teachers was exploiting students for his private work. Instead, he joined the labor market as a men's hairdresser, and once he started earning his own money, he gave up on the idea of returning to school. Another dropout reported, "I was in school and was doing well as a student. I did not like school, but I also did not want to leave it. However, when my father got sick and unable to work, I had to help with the expenses of the house, especially since we are a big family and the National Insurance payment is not enough." Uday, a 23-year-old youth from Al-Sawahreh, who works in a gas station in the Talpiot industrial zone in West Jerusalem, said, "I dropped out of school because of my family's poor economic situation. I decided to leave school and work, and my parents did not object. My father found me a job in a supermarket and later I got a job at the gas station. I work and help my father with the household expenses. I cover my own expenses, and am saving money in order to get married."

7. **Feeling that the educational system does not meet one's needs or ambitions:** To a large portion of students who feel they do not have a future anyway, the educational system is irrelevant. As one interviewed dropout asked: "why should I go back to school? What did school do for me?" Another said, "I see my friends who completed high school (*Tawjihi*) and are now in the university. They work at night in restaurants and shops in order to earn money to cover their needs and their school expenses. I cut it short." This points to dropouts' feeling that going back to school is useless.

Khaled, a 23-year-old resident of Al-Suwaneh neighborhood, who preferred not to give his full name, dropped out in tenth grade and felt that until then he had wasted his time studying. "I felt like I wasn't getting ready for life. I don't understand why I have to learn math and physics," he said, adding sadly, "I also don't think there is a difference between me and anyone else who graduated. Neither of us has a future."

8. **Parents' encouragement or pressure on their children to leave school:** Many respondents pointed to the role of family, especially parents, in their sons' and daughters' dropout because they are unconvinced of the usefulness of education or because of their poor economic conditions. Sons are mostly encouraged to join the labor market instead and daughters to get married. Counselor Basima Abdeen stated, "some parents encourage their children to leave school and others even convince them to join the labor market. They do so during the summer vacation at first and then encourage them to leave school to work full time throughout the year."⁶⁰ She added that students sometimes turn to counselors for help to convince their parents to keep them in school. Counselor Wadi'a Bustani from the Lutheran World Federation School in Beit Hanina added, "sometimes, parents' desire for their sons and daughters to learn professions that qualify them to enter the labor market early causes their sons and daughters to drop out.

⁶⁰ Interview with Basima Abdeen, 27 June, 2023.

For example, some parents seek to enroll their sons in workshops and daughters in beauty salons so they learn a profession without completing academic or vocational education."⁶¹

Also, some families who own small income-generating enterprises, such as groceries, workshops or small factories, push their sons to work with them, which sometimes leads to them dropping out of school. According to Counselor Basima Abdeen, "child labor for many students, especially Old City students, begins with family projects – grocery store, blacksmith workshop, carpentry, street vending, bakery, and most recently delivery – which encourages students to leave school and join the labor market early. For example, many students from the Dar Al-Aytam School in the Old City work after school in family businesses. They start working in fourth or fifth grade, and after a while leave school to work full time."

The Head of the Counseling Department at the Palestinian Ministry of Education also mentioned that when contacted to find out the reason behind their son's or daughter's dropout "parents often do not cooperate with us and it turns out that they had encouraged their children to drop out of school to join the labor market, or had convinced their daughters to drop out of school to get married."⁶²

9. **Family Disintegration:** Family disintegration is an important factor that pushes students to drop out of school. A female dropout shared her reason for dropping out, saying, "I left school to run away from the brutality of my father and his wife. I got married to the first man who proposed to me, which led to me dropping out of school in tenth grade because my husband and his family refused to let me continue my education." Counselor Basima Abdeen also confirmed, "most dropouts do not have a supportive family environment. Family disintegration contributes significantly to dropping out of school." Obviously, family disintegration plays a role in drop out, especially among females.

The director of dropout prevention programs in Jerusalem Municipality schools also stressed the family factor and its role in dropout in families broken by divorce, for example, "where children's custody and residence are divided between the mother and father. In cases where children spend some days with the father and others with the mother, chances of absence from school and lack of follow-up increase, especially if one or both parents live far from the school. The situation is even more difficult when a child is in the custody of grandparents or relatives who may not provide the child with anything other than shelter and food."⁶³

⁶¹ Interview with Wadi'a Bustani, 26 June, 2023.

⁶² Interview with Wael Hudeib, Head of the Counseling Department at the Palestinian Ministry of Education, 24 July 2023.

⁶³ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

The situation is similar for children from mixed-residency households without temporary residency status who have **restricted mobility and access to schools**. Access restrictions for students in Area C and East Jerusalem have shown to have a negative effect on enrolment and result in increased dropout rates.⁶⁴

10. **Peer Influence:** Formal and informal social networks influence school dropout; if youngsters have relationships with dropouts or with people who consider education unimportant, it is safe to say that they may be influenced by those people's views and decisions. Peer groups thus play a crucial role in encouraging dropping out of school. If peers have negative views of education, they may lead them to also believe that education is unimportant or invaluable. Interviews and focus groups showed that dropouts receive encouragement from their peers, especially if they had dropped out before and joined the labor market.

Women who had dropped out and gotten married at an early age may also serve as role models for their friends and relatives. As a respondent said: "I view marriage and leaving school as normal. I have three cousins who dropped out of school and got married, and also our neighbors' daughters." Another added, "I was encouraged to leave school because three friends of mine had gotten married and left school. I thought they were happy and did not have to worry about studying and exams; I was encouraged because of this and accepted to get married to my cousin."

11. **Transition between educational stages:** Transition from one educational stage to another is another reason for dropping out and a key factor in the high dropout rates, especially among academically weaker students, due to their feeling that they are not prepared to move forward and re-experience academic failure in a new stage and/or a new school, especially if the new school is outside their place of residence. Data indicate that "the highest dropout rates, whether in formal or informal but recognized educational institutions in Jerusalem, are after eighth grade during the transition to ninth grade in a new school. The transitional period coincides with students receiving their official identification cards, which makes their entry into the labor market more accessible."⁶⁵ On the one hand, they suffer from difficult economic conditions, and on the other, they, especially males, feel able to achieve some kind of financial independence, which increases their feeling of freedom in the face of family and societal "restrictions".

Interviews with educators revealed that the number of dropouts increases upon completion of one educational stage and transition to another. Most schools affiliated with the Jerusalem Municipality and some schools affiliated with the Waqf are middle schools,

⁶⁴ European Training Foundation (2021), *Policies for Human Capital Development Palestine - An ETF Torino Process Assessment*, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-03/03_trp_etf_assessment_2020_palestine.pdf.

⁶⁵ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

meaning that students will not complete all 12 years of education in the same school and will have to move at some point from one school to another to complete their education (transition from primary and preparatory to secondary education). Most municipal schools have classes from first to sixth or from first to eighth grade, while UNRWA schools have classes until ninth grade.

The principal of Al-Maysara Secondary School for Girls in Shu'fat Refugee Camp, which is affiliated with the Palestinian Ministry of Education, stated that "most dropout of female students occurs in the transitional phase from the UNRWA preparatory school to secondary schools, whether inside the refugee camp or outside it."⁶⁶ The director of the dropout prevention program in municipal schools also stressed the importance of this reason for students dropping out of schools.⁶⁷

12. **Difficult curricula and lack of applied and practical programs:** Interviews with students and parents revealed that curricula were generally neither tempting, nor motivating for students or convincing to parents. Most individual meetings and focus groups showed that difficulty of the curricula was one of the reasons for dropping out of school. One respondent said, "I left school because lessons were very difficult and required a lot of study, and I got tired of studying a lot to the point that I hated school. I spent all my time memorizing and memorizing, and I don't like memorizing." A school principal also confirmed that "the traditional, uninspiring and demotivating quality of education, which depends on memorization, is mute and does not incorporate entertaining and attractive educational methods, and is also distant from students' inquisitive interests that simulate individual abilities. This is one of the main reasons for dropping out in Jerusalem schools."⁶⁸

A related problem is that there are only limited programs for special-needs students and many learning disabilities remain undiagnosed, which makes children with disabilities particularly vulnerable to dropping out of school. There are no numbers for Jerusalem, but one study found that 22.5% of boys and 30% of girls aged 6-15 years with a disability in Palestine had never enrolled in school.⁶⁹

13. **Poor school follow-up of dropout cases:** School administrations, whether Israeli/municipal or PA schools, are supposed to commit to submitting reports on the reasons for every student's dropout. This assumes that the school has communicated with the parents of every dropout to understand the reasons, try to work on returning him/her to school, or present the available options to the student and his or her par-

⁶⁶ Principal of Al-Maysara Secondary School for Girls, 2022.

⁶⁷ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

⁶⁸ Principals of two schools in Al-Sawahreh affiliated with the Jerusalem Municipality, 24 June, 2023.

⁶⁹ UNICEF (2018), *State of Palestine Country Report on Out-Of-School Children*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/sop/media/176/file/OOSC%20Study%20.pdf>.

ents. Both the director of dropout prevention programs in municipal schools and an educational counselor in PA schools indicated that this procedure is adhered to. However, only four out of nine mothers who took part in the focus group for mothers of dropouts in Sur Baher and Um Tuba confirmed that their children's schools had contacted them to find out why their children left school – in two PA and two municipal schools, while the remaining five mothers reported that they were not contacted by any staff member of their children's schools. Moreover, only four out of seven dropouts who took part in the focus group for female dropouts confirmed that their schools contacted their parents to convince them to return their daughters to school, while the schools of the other three never did so. These responses indicate that schools' adherence to this procedure is random and not strict, and may be subject to vague standards. It is worth noting that some administrations of schools that receive funding from the Israeli Ministry of Education also conceal the real number of dropouts in order to keep funding ongoing⁷⁰, as the amount of funding is directly proportional to the number of students enrolled in their schools.

14. **Arrest and imprisonment:** Palestinian Jerusalemite students are subject to detention, house arrest, deportation from their homes or city, and other practices that hamper their educational process and increase the likelihood of them dropping out of school. Mr. Ziad Al-Shamali, Head of the Parents' Committee in East Jerusalem Schools, described those measures as "forced dropout imposed by the occupation."⁷¹ A student who went through house arrest explained in an interview how difficult it is to learn during house arrest. He pointed out that although the private school he was attending provided him with all means of assistance to facilitate continuation of his education, he felt very frustrated because his house arrest restricted his movement within the boundaries of the house. He added that tension had increased with his family members due to their continuous attempts to oblige him to the terms of his house arrest for fear of him being re-arrested and thus failing school.

This also applies to students who are effectively detained in Israeli prisons and detention centers, whether males or females, although the number of males is much higher than that of females, and to those who are deported from their houses and areas of residence. They may have neither the supportive environment nor the proper infrastructure to continue their education, which increases the likelihood of their dropout.

15. **The Covid-19 epidemic:** Undoubtedly, the Corona years have greatly contributed to increasing dropout rates and hampered the ability of those concerned with this problem to collect accurate data and precise figures. The sudden transition to remote education

⁷⁰ Interviews with two principals of schools affiliated with the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality in Al-Sawahreh.

⁷¹ Interview with Ziad Al-Shamali, Head of the Parents' Committee in East Jerusalem Schools, 27 July 2023.

without schools being prepared to deal with the emerging challenges, and without families having the ability to provide a computer or other device (or more than one in families with multiple students), internet connection and adequate technological literacy, made it impossible to record dropout figures and rates in schools. After resuming face-to-face education, educators observed students' reluctance to return to school. In fact, an unpublished study by Al-Raja' Association in Jerusalem found that remote learning reduced the desire of 66% of students to return to school.⁷²

Measures to Combat School Dropout

Measures Undertaken by the Palestinian Ministry of Education

The Palestinian Directorate of Education in the Jerusalem Government does not seem to consider dropout a problem that requires much attention, especially when taking into account the magnitude of other challenges facing the Directorate in Jerusalem. Therefore, it focuses on advice, guidance and preventive measures to prevent and reduce dropout, but does not work at all with dropouts.

The restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities on the work of the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem force it to resort to cooperating with educational civil society organizations (CSOs) to deal with the dropout problem. In doing so, those organizations hold awareness activities for students on the importance of completing education, organize career summer camps to introduce different professions they could learn if they did not want to complete academic education, or provide vocational guidance and counseling as an alternative to academic education as well as to dropping out (although in the 2022-2023 academic year the Directorate of Education barred representatives of all CSOs from entering the schools it supervises without giving reasons). CSOs that have worked with the Education Directorate in the past include the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Burj Al-Laqlaq, the Palestinian Counseling Center, the Lutheran World Federation, and Al-Saraya Center. However, they all suffer from limited staff and capabilities and depend on external funding; therefore, they cannot cover the large number of dropout cases and all schools in need of intervention, and are forced to stop their programs when funding ends (as happened, for example, with the Palestinian Counseling Center and the Youth Development Department at the Arab Studies Society). It is worth reminding that CSOs are not mandated to carry out the tasks and responsibilities of the state or the governing authority, but they play this alternate role due to the special situation in Jerusalem.

Furthermore, Sawsan Dannoun from the Palestinian Social Development Department acknowledged in an interview that "the department does not officially work in Jerusalem

⁷² Al-Raja' Association, "Dropout Trends in East Jerusalem Schools", unpublished study, 2022.

because we do not have the ability to work with families or dropout cases inside the wall except after security coordination through the family protection police. Usually, security coordination does not occur in dropout cases or minor family problems, so we cannot follow up on dropout cases in Jerusalem neighborhoods inside the wall, and not even in those behind the wall such as Kufr Aqab, where our teams are prevented from entering schools affiliated with the Jerusalem Municipality or Ministry of Education under the pretext that the municipality has its own dropout follow-up programs in these schools."⁷³ Wael Hudeib, Head of the Counseling Department at the Palestinian Ministry of Education, underscored this notion, saying, "frankly, our intervention is very limited. If a student insists on leaving school before completing the compulsory stage, we do not have any authority to stop him from do so."⁷⁴

The scope of action of the Palestinian Directorate of Education in the Jerusalem Governorate when it comes to dropout prevention is thus limited to guidance and advice to dropouts and their families through school counselors.

Another intervention is counseling classes regarding vocational education and training (VET) and the various programs and specializations available.

While the Palestinian Directorate of Education in Jerusalem Governorate faces huge obstacles in implementing programs within Jerusalem because the Israeli authorities prevent it from working in the city, this cannot exonerate the Ministry of Education from its poor performance in Jerusalem.

Measures Undertaken by the Israeli Ministry of Education and Jerusalem Municipality

The Israeli Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality follow the following routine procedures to address school dropout:

First: School principals must report any student who leaves school to an attendance officer. The school principal will explain the steps taken by the school to prevent the student from dropping out and ask the attendance officer to follow up the case.

Second: The attendance officer will follow up with the student and his/her parents, including threatening to resort to the law after all available means at his/her disposal in the attempt to convince the student and his parents to return to the educational framework or engage in a suitable alternative are exhausted (although this is usually not done due to the sensitivities in Jerusalem). "According to the law, punitive measures can be undertaken against parents if they fail to send their children to school, which may lead to imprison-

⁷³ Interview with Sawsan Dannoun, Palestinian Social Development Department, 11 July 2023.

⁷⁴ Interview with Wael Hudeib, Head of the Counseling Department at the Palestinian Ministry of Education, 24 July 2023.

ment."⁷⁵ If the attendance officer succeeds in convincing the student to return to school, the school's social worker will build an appropriate personalized plan for the student to try to prevent him/her from dropping out again.

Third: Social workers will hold individual sessions with the student and his/her parents to devise plans and carry out interventions suitable to each case and its circumstances. Additionally, they will hold lectures and workshops on topics pertaining to positive parenting. The educational consultant will also follow up cases with social workers.

Moreover, discipline committees are held under the supervision of the Jerusalem Municipality Dropout Prevention and Individual Care Programs Officer to discuss difficult cases in schools and potential interventions that can be implemented with them. They include school staff and representatives of various institutions such as the Psychological Affairs and Services and Educational Counseling Department. Discipline committees usually convene in schools whose students are most vulnerable to dropout. During last academic year, they convened in 15 schools.

In addition, the Youth Progress Project "Kidum No'ar" dispatches social workers to neighborhoods to work with young people (females and males) in coordination with schools. They go to dropouts' work and gathering places and seek to invite them to counseling and guidance meetings in an attempt to enroll them in programs suitable for their situation.

Furthermore, the Jerusalem Municipality has been classifying dropouts whereby they were divided into categories and groups according to age, orientation, hobbies and abilities to work on providing programs and workshops that suit each category.

While the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality indeed have programs to work with dropouts, they actually are part of an Israelization plan that seeks to attract more schools and students to follow the Israeli educational system/curriculum. This was confirmed in a State Comptroller report, which found that the Israeli Ministry of Education does not run dropout programs at all except in a few institutions that teach the Israeli curriculum. Although 70% of all students who drop out in Jerusalem are from East Jerusalem, the municipality does not allocate for them more than 17% of its programs and services and only 25% of the total budget of the dropout prevention program. "There is no oversight of schools' records which must be filled by school principals, and meetings of the committee that aims at helping students vulnerable to dropping out (discipline committee) are not held."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

⁷⁶ "State Comptroller's Report on East Jerusalem: Thousands of Students Drop out of School", *Walla! Website*, 2 June 2019, <https://news.walla.co.il/item/3239441>.

In spite of the drop in the percentage of students registered as dropouts in the years 2018-2020, "this decline quickly returned to old figures after the Covid-19 pandemic."⁷⁷

As part of Government Decision 3790, the programs to combat dropout were budgeted within the welfare chapter, but most of them did not deal directly with dropouts. The funds were "divided between seven programs, only two of which mention dropout prevention as one of their indicators of success, and both of these deal with the prevention of drug use and alcohol and the prevention of marriage at a young age and respectful relationships – areas that indirectly have an effect on dropouts, but do not constitute a direct fight against the phenomenon."⁷⁸

Impact of Dropout on Students and the Society

Most countries suffer from the impact of dropout, but such impact varies from one country to another depending on the size of this problem. In developed countries, dropout rates are low, so its consequences are more limited to individuals than societies. In developing countries, however, dropout rates are high and its effects are felt on societies as a whole. Below are some of the most important effects of dropout:

1. **Deprivation of the right to education:** Dropout means depriving children from one of their fundamental rights recognized by the Universal Declaration of Rights of the Child, which is the right to education.
2. **Loss of educational opportunity:** Leaving school prematurely, without completing it, inhibits the development and refinement of students' theoretical and professional knowledge, which can impede their ability to fully explore their cognitive and professional capabilities. Consequently, dropping out of school can lead to missed educational and training opportunities that are crucial for their personal growth and success in life. This, in turn, can have a detrimental impact on their prospects of securing suitable employment in the future. Additionally, dropouts are deprived of the opportunity to complete education in the future, especially after leaving school for a long time, as they find it difficult to return to formal education. On the other hand, women who had already dropped out and most likely got married find it difficult to reconcile study with their responsibilities towards their families and homes. This notion was underscored by a female dropout, who said, "returning to school is impossible for me; first because I have grown older, and secondly because families do not accept that a married student goes to the same class as her unmarried daughters."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

⁷⁸ Ir Amim, *Report on Five Years Implementation of Resolution 3790, op.cit.*

⁷⁹ Focus group for female dropouts, 12 June, 2023.

3. **Raising poverty and unemployment rates:** In East Jerusalem, low educational levels significantly diminish individuals' prospects of securing employment. Insufficient educational qualifications limit their job opportunities, thereby contributing to higher rates of poverty and unemployment within the community. A number of interviewees mentioned the impact of dropping out on school leavers themselves in terms of their prospective levels of income: they had difficulties finding good job opportunities. Moreover, for people who have not completed their education, access to jobs with adequate financial and social rewards is severely limited as they usually join the labor market in jobs that are considered most physically demanding and least financially rewarding and valuable in the production process. In fact, many dropouts' mothers said, "our children who dropout work in jobs that Israelis do not accept to do, such as jobs that require heavy lifting, or cleaning."⁸⁰ Mai Amireh of the YWCA added, "male dropouts usually go to work either for their relatives, or in family businesses, or set up their own micro projects such as street vending, or work in the Israeli labor market. Young people prefer the latter option because its financial returns are greater than if they work for their relatives or in family businesses. Dropouts usually work in the Palestinian labor market until they reach the age [of 18] that qualifies them to work in the Israeli labor market. Usually, when dropouts enter the labor market, they do seasonal work; therefore, they remain unemployed for long periods before they find steady jobs. Female dropouts who do not get married resort to working as cleaners or cashiers in Israeli businesses if they are fluent in Hebrew."⁸¹
4. **Increased risk of sliding to crime and increase of the number of street children:** "A child out of school is a child in danger. We want every child to be in a safe place."⁸² Because dropout is one of the main contributing factors to high unemployment, as mentioned above, it inevitably leads to lowering individuals' standards of living, which in turn increases the likelihood of them engaging in illegal or immoral activities, such as robbery or drug dealing, in order to get money.

Young people who drop out of school are also usually more likely to practice socially and morally unacceptable behaviors. Participants in the focus groups for dropouts' mothers confirmed that their children's behaviors changed dramatically after leaving school, pointing out that especially their male children refused the idea of joining technical and vocational training centers in order to enter the labor market as fast as possible. One mother said, "Once our children join the labor market and start seeing money in their hands, they stop listening to us as parents and family and start spending more time outside home. The first thing they do is smoke openly, and then they become easily provoked and get angry quickly. Those who were calm and obedient and did not

⁸⁰ Focus group for dropouts' mothers, 7 June, 2023.

⁸¹ Interview with Mai Amireh, YWCA Jerusalem, 24 June 2023.

⁸² Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

spend much time outside home stop spending time at home once they drop out and start a job.”⁸³

A number of interviewees also pointed to the spread of the phenomenon of street children and child labor as a result of school dropout, which endangers children’s lives and futures. "Dropping out of school means an increase in the number of children on the streets either to sell some products or beg. Sometimes, those children work in workshops and factories in contradiction with international conventions and laws which forbid child labor. They turn overnight from children to men who bear various burdens, which exposes them to various health, social and moral risks.”⁸⁴

5. **Increased illiteracy:** Dropout also raises illiteracy in society, which in turn constitutes an obstacle to social and economic development. The high dropout phenomenon in the Jerusalemites community entails that a significant number of its members will be uneducated, which will cause a high level of ignorance in society. This could have great repercussions on individuals and society such as the spread of superstitions, increase in early marriage and surge in violence, etc. In this regard, Mrs. Anwar Al-Khateeb expressed her fears, saying, "the high rate of illiteracy will lead to individuals who are unable to solve their problems or make sound decisions, and this could lead to resort to violence to solve disputes and problems.”⁸⁵

In order to avoid these dangers, the society and the state must take the necessary measures to strengthen education and provide support and encouragement to students to ensure they remain enrolled in school and continue to receive the opportunities needed for their success in life.

Strategies for Reducing School Dropout in Jerusalem

In order to make dropping out less desirable and minimize the number of dropouts as well as the negative repercussions on society, several interventions have been suggested and discussed over the past years, including the following:

1. **Work-based learning system:** This incorporates vocational education and training (VET) in the educational institution through partnerships between VET organizations and the labor market in a systematic manner under the supervision of and with follow-up by professional trainers.⁸⁶ "The awareness of parents and students of the need to integrate learning with work and the need to continue learning away from traditional patterns of

⁸³ Focus group for dropouts’ mothers, 7 June 2023.

⁸⁴ Interview with an employee of the Israeli Social Affairs Department who wished to remain anonymous, 28 June 2023.

⁸⁵ Interview with Anwar Al-Khateeb, 26 June 2023.

⁸⁶ The Vocational Education and Training Portal in Palestine, <https://www.tvet.ps/article/308/>, 4, August 2023.

classical education, especially when it becomes clear for them that classical education cannot satisfy students' desires or respond to their individual strengths and weaknesses, will certainly help reduce the percentage of students complaining about stereotypical patterns of education and consequently reduce the percentage of those contemplating leaving school."

2. **E-learning programs in schools:** There are dozens of platforms that provide educational and training programs, many of which offer certificates of participation. Their fees are mostly affordable, so they can be made available in schools that have internet access. This type of programs requires attention to three main elements: infrastructure, training and electronic content.⁸⁷ Such programs are implemented through schools under the direct supervision of the respective teachers/experts in the types of programs they offer.
3. **Distance learning:** This type of program is flexible and allows students to study at times convenient to them and according to their study needs and mental comprehension.
4. **Parents' involvement:** Parents' involvement in the educational process (homework, study, reading, research and doing projects and experiments) in cooperation with the teachers can assist in overcoming educational difficulties and challenges, increase students' motivation and level of achievement, and fosters social and academic education opportunities. "The relationship between the family and the school is one of the most important elements that directly affect the student and the extent of his/her academic aptitude and educational achievement."⁸⁸ One principal pointed out that "creating a partnership relationship between the school and parents' committees leads to unified vision between the school and the parents."⁸⁹
5. **Schools' promotion of a culture of success:** Fostering a culture of success and supporting all students encourages students to achieve success. This can be done by setting achievable goals, celebrating students' achievements, and providing incentives to those who display academic progress, all of which "encourages them and deepens their sense of belonging to the school."⁹⁰
6. **Enhancing education:** Making education more interesting, attractive and easier, by providing internet connection, offering extracurricular activities, employing modern educational methods away from indoctrination and memorization. This was repeatedly

⁸⁷ Al-Jayyousi, Rashid (2015), "E-Learning in Palestine", *Wafa - Palestinian News & Info Agency*, https://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=9636.

⁸⁸ Al-Hattab, Amineh, "The Role of the Family in Children's Education", *Al-Rai Newspaper*, 28 August 2016.

⁸⁹ Interviews with two principals of schools affiliated with the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality in Al-Sawahreh, 24 June 2023.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

brought up in interviews with educators, dropouts and parents. "Making education more attractive by integrating curricular with extracurricular education, and adopting fun and interesting teaching methods, is one of the most important approaches that can reduce dropout"⁹¹, along with helping struggling students by providing services such as remedial lessons, and providing counseling and advice on the mechanisms and methods of successful study.

7. **After-school enrichment activities:** Extracurricular activities (e.g., music, arts, sports and computer lessons) make the educational process lively and vibrant. Music and dance performances, art exhibitions and sports competitions contribute to making the school a popular place for students and encourages them to keep learning. As one mother of a dropout said, "I wish school would be a fun place for our children. If the school were as such, it would certainly reduce dropouts. When a child goes to school knowing that he/she would put his talents to use and do things he/she likes, he/she will certainly not give up the chance to be present in it." Nabil Abdallah, Head of the Counseling Department at the Freres School and Head of the Jerusalem branch of the Association of Social and Psychological Workers in Jerusalem, stated, "after-school enrichment activities help students get rid of some psychological and social problems such as anxiety, stress, introversion, psychological pressure, shyness and depression. They also contribute to the development of positive personal traits and good behavioral habits such as self-confidence, emotional balance, cooperation, perseverance, fair competition and responsibility, as well as students' ability to interact with society and achieve social adaptation."⁹²
8. **Learning about and practicing professions:** giving students an opportunity to learn about and practice different professions helps unveil their talents and passions for certain professions. According to Mai Amireh from the YWCA, "organizing summer camps and open days to introduce students to professions and give them a chance to practice working in some of them significantly reduces dropout, especially because most dropouts do not wish to pursue further academic learning or face learning difficulties."⁹³
9. **Early warning systems:** A dropout early detection system is based on three elements: 1) identifying students at risk of dropping out, 2) monitoring and analyzing information about at-risk-students (attendance, absence records, grades, behavior, family background), and 3) raising awareness of the importance of education and the negative implications of dropout. It also builds relationships with parents and relevant community institutions.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Interview with Nabil Abdallah, Head of the Counseling Department at the Freres School and Head of the Jerusalem branch of the Association of Social and Psychological Workers in Jerusalem, 1 July 2023.

⁹³ Interview with Mai Amireh, 24 June 2023.

10. **Parents' councils:** Involving parents in managing the educational process, diagnosing the causes of dropout and proposing solutions.
11. **Student-friendly schools:** Providing schoolyards, playgrounds, halls, science and computer laboratories, and libraries, as well as furniture, equipment and supplies, heating in winter and air conditioning in summer in order to create a more comfortable and attractive learning environment. Many of those interviewed for this study reported that a significant number of schools in East Jerusalem are not student-friendly and that their dropout rates are usually high. As one principal put it: "of course, the location of the school and the extent of its readiness to meet the needs of its students increases students' desire to attend school, especially on extremely cold or hot days," adding that "the lack of playgrounds or yards in a large number of Jerusalem schools, especially in the Old City and in rented schools, increases students' desire to drop out."⁹⁴
12. **Providing low-cost education:** Providing free transportation for students living in remote areas, offering stipends and financial assistance to low-income families can contribute to reducing dropout.

⁹⁴ Interview with a school principal in Jerusalem.

2.2 THE REALITY OF DROPOUTS AFTER DROPPING OUT

The lack of official studies and statistics on the numbers and reality of dropouts in East Jerusalem makes it difficult to identify their needs, particularly those of recent dropouts. This issue is compounded by the fact that any form of intervention, whether at the governmental level or within local community organizations, necessitates a comprehensive database that tracks dropout numbers on an annual basis. Furthermore, a clear understanding of their current circumstances and most pressing issues is essential. Equally important is gaining insight into their perspectives and preferences concerning returning to school or entering the labor market. If the latter is the most suitable option for dropouts, it becomes crucial to ascertain which professions attract them most. Subsequently, concerned authorities must formulate policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at enhancing their skills and qualifications to make them competitive as skilled laborers in the labor market.

To gain some insights into these issues, interviews were conducted with dropouts, representatives of CSOs, and educators in East Jerusalem guided by questions such as where dropouts go after leaving school, which organizations provide programs for their rehabilitation and skill-building, do dropouts know about them and are they interested to enroll in them, and if not, what programs would attract them, i.e., what interventions are needed to returning them to education or enrolling them in skill-building trainings.

In total, 21 dropouts from Jerusalem were interviewed, 9 females and 12 males. Seven of them (33.33%) were between 12-18 years old, 12 (57.14%) between 19-25, and two (9.52%) were older than 25 years.

Interviews with Dropouts: Findings and Analysis

Interviews revealed that male dropouts tend to enter the labor market. Those who drop out at a young age usually work in Palestinian enterprises such as shops, cafes and hotels, because they are typically closer to their place of residence and because it is difficult, and even illegal, for them to work in Israel if they are under the age of 16. However, as soon as they get their official identity cards, dropouts head to work in the Israeli labor market, which, as dropout M. A. explained "is broader and offers more options than the Palestinian market."

The main reason for females to drop out of school is marriage; only a few of them enter the labor market immediately or shortly after dropout. However, some female dropouts go to work a few years after marriage, whether because of divorce or the husband's inability to work and support the family, for example, due to illness. In fact, all of those interviewed for this study were working, except for two who were looking for jobs.

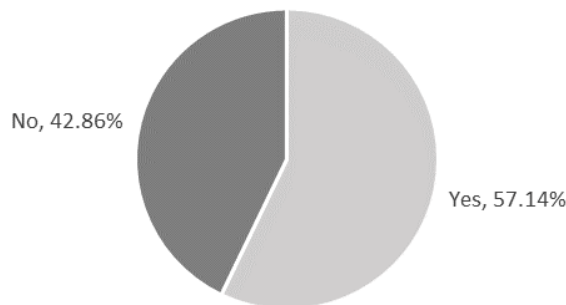
Regarding the types of jobs held by those interviewed, women predominantly worked as cleaners, saleswomen, or cashiers in shops, while men primarily worked in workshops such

as garages, carpentries or barbershops, but also as cleaners, shelf organizers, construction workers, or in the warehouses of large supermarkets and department stores.

Further analysis of the interviews with dropouts revealed the following insights:

1. When asked about the extent of their awareness of institutions that provide programs for those who leave school before completing grade 12 in order to provide them with skills and knowledge that raise their competence, the answers were as follows: 12 dropouts (57.14%) answered that they did not know about such institutions and had never heard of any, while 9 (42.86%) answered that they knew at least one such institution, mentioning the ones listed below.

Knowledge of Institutions that Provide Programs for Dropouts



- Rayan Center, which works on career counseling and conducts workshops and seminars related to employment and labor rights, but is not a center for rehabilitating dropouts;
- Sakhnin College, a vocational secondary school not intended for dropouts;
- the Electricity Company, which offers specialized courses for electrical engineers and its employees only and does not offer any programs to dropouts;
- the Arab Orphan School, a vocational secondary school that does not have any programs for dropouts, and ceased to operate at the beginning of this academic year due to lack of demand for its vocational programs;
- Amal School, a secondary school and college that operates on a dual system, i.e., work-study, and the
- YWCA, which has some short courses aimed at everyone, including dropouts.

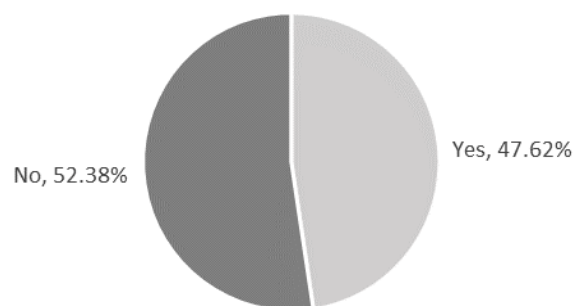
Review of the aforementioned institutions showed that they were vocational schools or organizations that did not offer programs for dropouts, except the YWCA. Interestingly, although community-based organizations such as the Youth Development Department affiliated with the Arab Studies Society, Spafford Center, Burj Al-Laqlaq and Al-Saraya

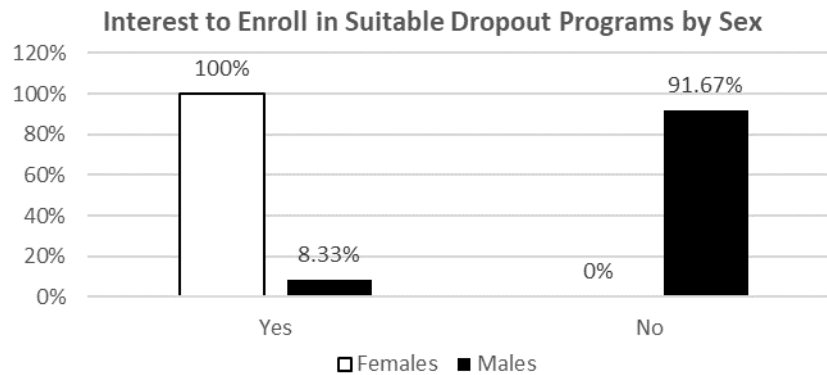
Center had provided programs for a few hundred dropouts in the past, none of the interviewees mentioned any of them. This may be because of the limited period those institutions worked on the dropout issue, or because their programs did not target dropouts specifically, so they were not known as institutions working with dropouts.

The fact that more than half of the interviewees did not even know any center or program working with dropouts, while the rest had a wrong perception about their dealings with dropouts is thought-provoking. It may indicate that they were never informed about those institutions and their programs, or they were never interested to find out about offerings for dropouts. This confusion raises a question about the work of CSOs on the dropout issue, and why they seemingly did not leave any mark worth mentioning in the community. Thus, more outreach in the promotion of their programs is required, bearing in mind that dropouts are scattered throughout the Jerusalem governorate, which may necessitate a variety of outreach methods and means.

2. Ten dropouts (47.62% of those interviewed) responded that they would like to enroll in programs offered for dropouts provided that they were suitable for them. It was remarkable that 9 of the 10 who responded positively were females (i.e., all females interviewed). Conversely, this shows that only one of the 12 males interviewed (8.33%) responded positively to the idea of enrolling in dropout programs even if they were suitable for them. This indicates that most female dropouts would be eager to enroll in programs that provide them with better skills and career opportunities and that demand for such programs would be much higher among females than males. In fact, seven male dropouts (33.33% of all those interviewed and nearly three fifths of male interviewees) said they did not want to enroll in any program, while two others (9.52% of all those interviewed and 16.67% of all male interviewees) said they were not sure.

Interest to Enroll in Suitable Programs for Dropouts





Obviously, the nature of work available for female dropouts who have joined the labor market, which is mainly unskilled labor such as cleaning, caring for elderly people in their homes, and working in stores, is viewed as demeaning for women in the prevailing social and cultural norms in Palestinian society, and therefore motivates them to find work that alleviates their social value and status. As such, it is imperative for the relevant institutions (as well as for women organizations) to take females' motivation to enroll in skill-imparting programs into consideration and develop unconventional training programs that allow women to raise their professional, social and economic status in the Jerusalemite society.

In contrast, male interviewees demonstrated a weak desire to enroll in dropout programs, with only one out of 13 male dropouts expressing interest to join such programs. This is due to the abundance of work opportunities for unskilled labor, especially in the Israeli labor market, at reasonable wages for young people just starting their lives, as well as the absence of significant differences between what an unskilled Palestinian Jerusalemite may earn in comparison with one who has completed high school or even university studies. In fact, neither school education for 12 years nor university education for another four years properly prepares young people to flourish in the Palestinian or Israeli labor markets because the education system relies mainly on indoctrination and memorization instead of developing skills and abilities, and because of the scarcity of educational fields and tracks available at local universities that mismatch with the needs of the labor market.

On the other hand, there are positive examples where unskilled labor within vocational sectors of the Israeli job market can serve as an entry point for individuals to build their skills and evolve into skilled laborers. This transformation is facilitated by the Israeli labor market's receptivity and the adaptability of the Israeli vocational education system to accommodate the demands and prerequisites of the Israeli job market. This includes offering ongoing training programs that lead to official professional certifications, contingent on the educational qualifications of those pursuing them. Asked about the kind

of programs in which dropouts would like to enroll, if they were available, the following fields were mentioned:

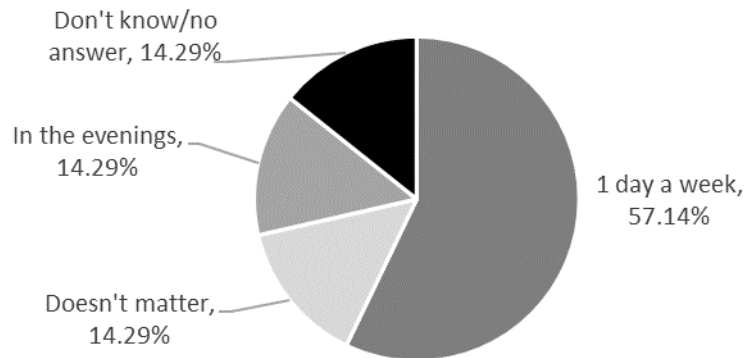
- Cosmetology, including tattoo drawing, skin care, makeup art, hair styling, nail building and polishing, and applying eyelashes.
- Electronics, like use of electronic devices to inspect modern vehicles.
- Culinary arts, especially western sweets.
- Photography, filming and videography.
- Arts, such as painting, and making accessories and handicrafts.
- Hebrew language.
- Driving commercial vehicles.
- Installing solar panels and systems.
- Child education.

With regard to the above, females' preferences included cosmetology, art, photography and child education, while they did not show interest in any of the other fields. These preferences are in line with the prevailing societal culture and the existing division of roles in Palestinian society, on the one hand, and with these professions' potential for providing decent income to those who take them on, on the other hand. Also, their attraction to learn videography and photography stems from the fact that these professions provide (according to the interviewed females) opportunities in filming and photographing unmixed weddings and other parties.

Males, in contrast, expressed preference to enroll in programs that meet their needs in their current jobs, meaning that those who worked in car repair workshops, for example, wanted to improve their skills and increase their knowledge in that same field. They also stressed the importance of receiving, upon completing their training, certificates accredited and recognized by the official authorities because they help them increase demand for their services as skilled labor, and as such help them improve their income.

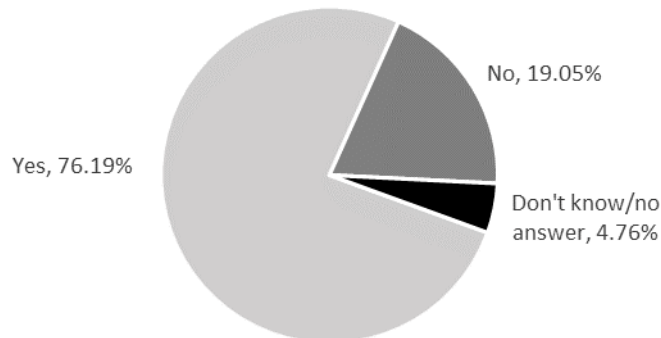
3. Regarding the days and times deemed most convenient for dropouts to take part in training, 12 of the interviewed dropouts (57.14%) answered that the most convenient thing for them was one day a week, with Saturday being their preferred day because usually it is their official day off from work. Another 3 dropouts (14.29%) answered that it did not matter which day or time as they did not have jobs when they were interviewed, and 3 others (14.29%) said the most convenient time for them was in the evening after they finished their work.

Preferred Date and Time to Participate in Dropout Programs



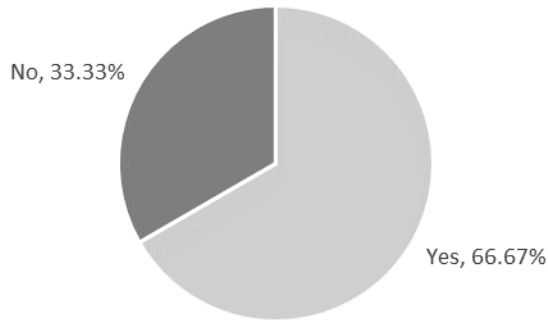
When asked if they had a certain position vis-à-vis participating in mixed programs, 16 dropouts (76.19%) answered that they did not mind participating in mixed programs, while 4 female dropouts (19.05% of the total number of respondents and about half of the girls surveyed) answered that they could not participate in mixed programs because their parents would not let them do so.

Readiness to Participate in Mixed Programs



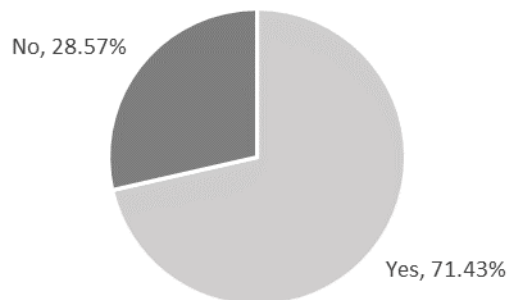
4. When asked about costs, 14 dropouts (66.67%) answered that they would accept to pay fees if the programs were in required professions that would enable them to secure jobs after completing their training and if the fees were reasonable (i.e., not exceeding NIS 2,000 as a maximum), while the remaining 7 (33.33%) said that they would not participate in any program that charged fees. Those who gave this negative response were either already employed and had a good income, as they said, or a recent dropout who did not turn 15 and was working as a street vendor at Qalandia Checkpoint, who said, "I ran out of school and I do not want to learn anything."

Acceptance to Pay Fees for Programs



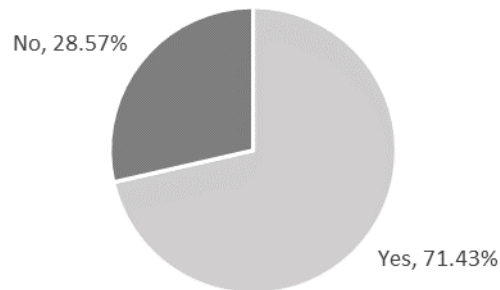
- When asked about the possibility of participating in a program that provides pocket money for the trainee while enrolled in the program, 15 dropouts (71.43% of those interviewed) said they would participate, while the remaining 6 dropouts (28.57%), all of whom males, said they would not. Again, these were the dropouts who already worked and earned money. In addition, they all were over 22 years old and as one of them explained: "I am an expert in my profession and my salary exceeds NIS 10,000. I cannot leave my job for pocket money."

Interest to Join Programs that Provide Pocket Money for Participants



- Regarding the possibility of participating in a VET program that would help place them in jobs, 15 dropouts (71.43%) answered that they would participate, among them all 9 females. Six of the 7 male dropouts who worked and received relatively high salaries again said that they would not participate. Obviously, females are eager to develop themselves and learn professions that would enable them to find jobs because they only work in services that have no future, while many of the male interviewees feel satisfied and stable in their jobs and thus see no added value in attending such program, even if it were related to their professions.

Participating in VET Programs that Help with Job Placement



In conclusion, it can be said that organizations that want to develop programs for dropouts must take into account that older dropouts (i.e., over 22 years), who already have professions and jobs are not a primary target group as they are not interested in further training. Therefore, relevant organizations should focus their attention on recent dropouts from both sexes and build training programs suitable for younger age groups. Additionally, it is necessary to identify the needs of female dropouts above the age of 24, because their needs differ from those of males since they do not have professions and are eager to find jobs that help them provide income for their families, raise their value in the society, and suit their role as mothers.

Interviews with Representatives of Local Community Organizations: Findings and Analysis

Interviews with representatives of local community organizations working with dropouts in Jerusalem provided further insights into the problems of dropouts once they have left formal education. Among them were the following:

- Nonexistence of continuous programs for dropouts at community institutions. Even YWCA programs, which are short and do not require their applicants to have a certain educational level, age or gender, i.e., that benefit dropouts, are not continuously available. In general, they are held upon demand and do not convene until a certain number of applicants has signed up. Moreover, participants must pay training fees, and only rarely some courses are funded so that no fees are charged.
- Institutions realize the importance of working with dropouts despite its complexity and difficulty. As such, they try to implement programs targeting dropouts, but they are sporadic and end with the end of funding. This is what happened with the 'Let's Build Our Future' program implemented by the Youth Development Department affiliated with the Arab Studies Society. Managers of community organizations believe that "programs aimed at returning dropouts to school fail because dropouts leave school for economic or family reasons or simply because they are unable to achieve educationally for whatever reason; therefore, trying to return them back to school is almost impossi-

ble. Whereas if free rehabilitation programs were provided to dropouts, which ensured at their conclusion that participants would get a job in the field they learned, it would be possible to convince dropouts of these programs.¹⁹⁵

- Unavailability of updated figures and statistics on the numbers and percentages of dropouts enrolled in those institutions' programs, which makes it difficult to develop policies responsive to the needs of dropouts. In addition, principals and managers of some schools affiliated with the Israeli Ministry of Education abstain from disclosing the real numbers of students who drop out from their schools or who are at risk of dropping out because the amount of financial support those schools receive from the Ministry of Education is commensurate with the numbers of students enrolled in them.⁹⁶
- Unavailability of figures and statistics at the Israeli and Palestinian governmental levels on the number of dropouts who have enrolled in training programs to gain skills, build their capacities or raise their competence to qualify them to enter the labor market as skilled labor.
- Nonexistence of studies that show and analyze dropouts' tendencies and preferences towards the various professions they may join if available.
- As for outreach, institutions have no strategy to communicate with dropouts. Their means of communication depend on the diligence of the employee in charge of the implemented program and on the funding allocated for communication and promotion of the program.

Options for Dropouts

For general advice, dropouts can turn to the YMCA Career Advancement Center in East Jerusalem, which targets Jerusalemite youth, 15-35 years old, in order to enhance their professional careers and develop their job skills.⁹⁷ Similarly, the Rayan centers in Sheikh Jarrah and Abu Tor, which are run by the municipality, offer career advice for everyone 17+ years old. This includes: personal and professional coaching, testing occupational tendencies, building employment plans, workshops to improve Hebrew and computer skills and prepare for entering the workforce (writing CVs, simulation of job interviews, preparation for study/assessment days), and help with job search and placement.⁹⁸

Second-Chance Education

For those dropouts who want to get back to the educational track, the most obvious solution is to take *Tawjihi* exams via the PA Ministry of Higher Education (through the Exams

⁹⁵ Interview with Muntaser Idkeidek, 13 September 2023.

⁹⁶ Interview with Qusay Abbas, 18 September 2023.

⁹⁷ See <https://www.facebook.com/EJYMCACAC> for details.

⁹⁸ <https://rayanjerusalem.com/> for details.

Department of the Jerusalem Education Directorate in Al-Ram), which requires a minimum of 9 years of schooling. In addition, there are currently several centers and colleges in East Jerusalem that offer courses preparing for the *Tawjihi* and *Bagrut* exams, including the M.S. Academy, Injaz Center, Riyadh Academy, and Al-Shihab Al-Maqdisi College.⁹⁹

Vocational and Educational Training Institutions

Palestinian VET institutes, such as technical schools and vocational education centers, provide their information online to students and parents through the Vocational Training Portal in Palestine.¹⁰⁰ The portal provides both dropouts and students still in school with useful information about available career paths by introducing vocational schools and centers and their specializations, offering assessment tests, and helping develop practical skills such as writing CVs and preparing for job interviews. The portal thus assists in determining a person's appropriate professional future by completing the following steps, each of which is linked to websites providing further details:

1. Professional tendencies test: determines whether the individual has professional or academic tendencies.
2. Introducing professions: listing details about different professions, and through the professions card and professions game.
3. Identifying appropriate professions: based on the outcome of the first two steps, listing job opportunities offered by each suitable profession.
4. Identifying institutions: listing relevant VET centers that offer the desired professional specializations.

In addition, the portal provides guidance and information to parents, employers, career counselors, educational counselors, high school graduates and vocational training centers.

Most vocational training centers are private centers affiliated with individuals or community associations and institutions. All of them charge tuition fees and have admission requirements. For example, all Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) diploma programs are available to both sexes but require that applicants have completed the tenth grade. However, there are short training courses in various subjects that do not set any conditions for admission, such as crocheting, art therapy, still photography, website development, proposal writing, fundraising, e-marketing, food processing, and how to start a small business.

There are many schools that provide VET in Jerusalem, some are girls only, some are boys only, and some are co-educational. They include, but are not limited to, the Lutheran World Federation School and its Vocational Training Center in Beit Hanina, which runs courses in

⁹⁹ See Annex 2 for details.

¹⁰⁰ The Vocational Education and Training Portal in Palestine, www.tvet.ps.

communications, carpentry, decoration, blacksmithing, aluminum, sanitary installations, car electricity, car mechanics, food preparation, and ceramics. All of these fields are available to both sexes except ceramics, which is only for girls. On female involvement in learning the different professions, Anwar Al-Khateeb, counsellor at the Lutheran World Federation School, explained, "these fields are open to both sexes, but females only enroll in communications, food preparation and ceramics, which are originally intended for them."¹⁰¹ This indicates that the prevailing societal and cultural norms of the Palestinian society still depict professions that women and men can practice. The result is restricting girls to specific professions that usually suit the role the community has assigned to them, which consequently limits their chances of finding employment.

Recently, the Hila Center¹⁰² was inaugurated to deal with students who frequently miss school for work and for whom everything indicates that they are on the way to dropping out. A special academic education program has been developed for these students to help them keep their jobs while attending the center twice a week so that they do not lose their jobs until they complete the Israeli matriculation program called "Technology *Bagrut*", which can be built upon to complete full *Bagrut*.¹⁰³

Other VET centers in Jerusalem which currently offer courses and trainings in a wide range of fields for which dropouts are also eligible include the Anwar Al-Quds College, Atid Biran College, the Center for Continuing Education and Community Service at Al-Quds Open University, Haifa College, Rayan College of Complementary Medicine, Riyadh Academy, Al-Shihab Al-Maqdisi College, the YMCA Career Advancement Center, and the Young Women's Muslim Association (YWMA).¹⁰⁴

Challenges Facing Palestinian VET Schools and Centers in Jerusalem

Palestinian VET schools and centers in Jerusalem are faced with a number of problems and challenges, including the following:

1. **Poor funding**, which forces vocational schools and centers to impose tuition and fees that often exceed the ability of the students' parents to pay them.
2. The **ban** imposed by the authorities responsible for education, both in the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli municipality, on Palestinian vocational schools and centers with regard to accessing their schools. Wadi'a Bustani and Anwar Al-Khateeb from the Lutheran World Federation School explained: "the Ministry of Education decided this year to deny access to their schools, including to us. Similarly, schools affiliated with

¹⁰¹ Interview with Wadi'a Bustani and Anwar Al-Khateeb, 26 June 2023.

¹⁰² See their website for details: <https://www.hila-matnasim.org.il/index.php>.

¹⁰³ Interview with Areej Idrees, 2 July 2023.

¹⁰⁴ For details see Annex 2.

the municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Education refuse to grant us access at the pretext that they have vocational education schools affiliated with the municipality."¹⁰⁵ As such, vocational schools and centers can introduce their vocational programs only to private schools. Mai Amireh from the YWCA in Jerusalem reiterated the same problem, saying, "before this year, we used to arrange with the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem to enter its schools and introduce our programs, but this year we were banned. On the other hand, as a Palestinian association, we never knock on the doors of schools affiliated with the Israeli authority. Therefore, our access to schools to introduce our programs became very limited."¹⁰⁶

3. **Competition** from vocational schools affiliated with the Israeli municipality and Ministry of Education, which are well-equipped, provide job opportunities for students while learning, offer payment plans and scholarships, and give grants to students wishing to start their own projects. Mai Amireh referred to these incentives, saying, "the municipality and the Ministry of Education have allocated huge amounts of money to this issue because they want to tie Palestinians to the Israeli labor market and because they also need skilled labor."¹⁰⁷
4. **Ineptitude** of the Palestinian VET sector and weak Palestinian Authority support to vocational institutions and centers in Jerusalem, both inside and outside the separation barrier. All VET centers suffer from weak promotion for their programs to the extent that some courses are attended by a few students only.¹⁰⁸
5. **Dropout** from vocational schools. There are students who drop out of vocational schools, albeit in smaller percentages, either because of their economic conditions, or because they do not wish to pursue the professions they are learning, or sometimes because of poor course management. For example, student A.J. noted that he left the vocational school he was attending because he felt he was being exploited as a worker rather than a student at school: "from the first day, the teacher asked me to install an air conditioning unit. He wanted me to do the work for him. I left school and never went back."
6. **Limited fields:** non-traditional technological vocational education opportunities, such as art or music therapy, artificial intelligence, sports, etc., are limited or even nonexistent in most centers and schools, which minimizes the opportunities and choices available to students, especially gifted ones.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Wadi'a Bustani and Anwar Al-Khateeb, 26 June 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Mai Amireh, 24 June 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Mai Amireh, 24 June 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Sawsan Dannoun from the vocational training center in Al-Eizariyeh, 11 July 2023.

Civil Society Organizations

Further interviews were conducted with the following five CSOs that have experience in working with dropouts in Jerusalem:

- 1- Al-Saraya Center for Community Service
- 2- Spafford Children's Center.
- 3- Burj Al-Laqlaq Association.
- 4- The Youth Development Department (affiliated with the Arab Studies Society).
- 5- Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

These institutions were asked about programs implemented for the benefit of dropouts in Jerusalem. It was found that none of them targets dropouts specifically and systematically, but rather partially in the general context of their programs for children and adolescents, and subject to the availability of funds. This means that dropouts are not one of the main groups targeted by the strategic objectives of these organizations although they are mainly concerned with the youth and child sectors. A recent study also pointed out that while there are many educational and skills development offerings in East Jerusalem as well as informal (extra-curricular) enrichment programs such as school support, language classes, science activities, reading and life skills, it is striking "that only very few seem to address school dropouts, although this is a great concern in East Jerusalem."¹⁰⁹ It is thus important that local community organizations include the specific goal of working with dropouts and building their skills and capacities as one of their strategic objectives.

Another study also found that most municipal informal education programs target schools teaching the Israeli curriculum and that there was a great need for sufficient programs that address, *inter alia*, the need for improving students' achievements and dropout prevention.¹¹⁰

Al-Saraya Center for Community Service implements a community development program that aims at developing and building the capabilities of young men and women aged 16 and above and enriching their knowledge by promoting a culture of continuous learning based on their needs, enhancing their leading role to become active members of the society, and improving their access to the labor market. The program targets young people in general and serves everyone who wishes to join, but is not explicitly intended for dropouts. According to Rasha Salah Eddin, program coordinator at the center, the number of dropouts who enroll in the program annually is very limited. "In previous years, we worked with dropouts,

¹⁰⁹ PASSIA (2020), *Mapping of Palestinian Youth, Meeting, Leisure, Training and Other Youth-Related Centers in East Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, 2020; <http://passia.org/publications/347>.

¹¹⁰ Alayan, Samira & Shada Kashkoush (2020), *Informal Education in East Jerusalem - Study of Needs and Recommendations*, Ir Amim, July 2020; [https://www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/Informal%20 Education%20in%20East%20Jerusalem%20-%20Study%20of%20Needs%20and%20Recommendations_0.pdf](https://www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/Informal%20Education%20in%20East%20Jerusalem%20-%20Study%20of%20Needs%20and%20Recommendations_0.pdf).

but today we target the whole community. We do not have a specific program for dropouts, but they are part of the beneficiaries of our programs."¹¹¹ Al-Saraya Center offers training in beauty, hair design, career guidance, tourist guidance, agricultural counseling, languages, and accessory making. There are no conditions for joining them and beneficiaries are reached through vocational summer camps and coordination with schools and vocational centers.

In addition, the center carries out preventive programs, such as the Academic and Social Support Program, which works on the three most important factors causing high dropout rates in Jerusalem; namely, low academic achievement, behavioral and social problems, and absence of a positive role model. It targets the age group from 6-12 years and is run by volunteers from different Palestinian universities who received proper training to develop their skills in providing academic and social support. The program also targets the parties most influential in the life of the child; namely, teachers and parents.¹¹²

Burj Al-Laqlaq Association also does not work with dropouts in particular, but they can be part of any of its programs, which provide opportunities for all young men and women. Some of its programs suitable for dropouts include the Fursa Project, which supports youth initiatives in Jerusalem, and the Qudwa Program, which is concerned with teaching students the meaning of community initiatives and how to implement them, in addition to the pottery and ceramic program, which aims at empowering Jerusalemite women and youth by teaching them how to make and decorate pottery. Other programs include mobile phone maintenance and photography.¹¹³

In contrast, the **Youth Development Department** of the Arab Studies Society in Jerusalem implemented a five-year program (2015-2020) that worked with dropouts, entitled 'Let's Build Our Future'. Some 350 dropouts enrolled in this program – 200 males and 150 females – which worked in coordination with the Lutheran World Federation and other vocational training institutions such as the YWCA and the Al-Ezariéh Vocational Training Center. Qusay Abbas, program coordinator, explained, "we used to go to workshops to recruit dropouts to the 'Let's Build Our Future' program to build their skills and capacities. They were trained and qualified in the same specialization in which they worked in professional institutions contracted by the Youth Development Department. The department covered the cost of the training and there were no conditions for joining the program except being a dropout."¹¹⁴

As for the training programs dropouts were attracted to most, Abbas said they were "the easiest (least physically demanding) programs such as beauty and hair cutting, while they

¹¹¹ Salah Eddin, Rasha, 12 September 2023.

¹¹² For details see: <https://www.alsaraya-center.org/articles/view/32/ar>.

¹¹³ Interview with Muntaser Idkeidek, director of Burj Al-Laqlaq, 13 September 2023.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Qusay Abbas, program coordinator at the Youth Development Department, 18 September 2023.

notably moved away from the more difficult (most physically demanding) construction-related professions such as tiling and plastering. For females, they had only two programs: beauty and cooking. They were more interested in the beauty program than the cooking program."¹¹⁵

While implementing their five-year program, the Youth Development Department faced the following challenges and obstacles:

- Reluctance of vocational institutions in Jerusalem to deal with dropouts, as that required implementing programs at times convenient to the dropouts, especially male dropouts, most of whom had jobs and were committed to their working hours;
- Dropouts did not have any controls regarding regular attendance except their desire to learn the profession, which made it difficult to control them in training;
- Poor reading and writing skills among the majority of participating dropouts, which made it difficult for them to be educated and trained;
- Reluctance of workshop owners and managers to accept trainees in their workshops, as some considered the presence of trainees a waste of their time, while other workshop owners refrained from training young professionals for fear of them becoming competitors in their professions in the future;
- Lack of accurate lists of workshops and enterprises willing to accommodate trainees for practical training for the profession they learned. Even when there were lists, "most of those workshops were located outside the wall and their contact information were inaccurate."¹¹⁶

Spafford Children's Center, which targets children aged 5-18, has a number of programs generally offered to children aged 14-18, such as Arabic and English courses, ballet, music and ICT courses. These courses are available to everyone, including dropouts, but the center does not have statistics on the number of dropouts who enroll in their programs.

The **YWCA** has a number of short courses that do not require a set age or certain educational level, such as crocheting, art therapy, still photography, website development, coffee making, proposal writing, fundraising, e-marketing and food processing. They are available to dropouts, but the YWCA does not have programs for dropouts only.

In addition to the centers interviewed for the study, there is the **Vocational Training Center in Al-Ezariyh**, which is affiliated with the Palestinian Ministry of Labor and is located adjacent to Jerusalem but in the West Bank beyond the separation wall.¹¹⁷ It offers many short

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Al-Eizariya Vocational Training Center, <https://www.facebook.com/QVTC2>.

courses along with diploma programs, and offers official certificates recognized by the Palestinian Ministry of Labor. The center offers courses in many professions such as sewing and fashion design, beauty and hairdressing, carpentry, blacksmithing, aluminum works, computer maintenance, electrical wiring, heating, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVAC), mechatronics and others. Every year, additional courses are offered according to market needs and trainees' demand. Enrollment conditions include a minimum age of 15 years, completed tenth grade to join the diploma program or ninth grade to enroll in non-diploma courses, physical fitness, and good conduct. Additionally, the trainee must pass a personal interview. Training at the center is free, and there may even be financial stipends to trainees for a period up to 3 months if the training is funded.

Besides the above, there are a number of short courses offered by community-based organizations for dropouts who are not interested in lengthy formal education but still want to gain vocational qualifications or specific skills. These programs are also often dependent on funding, but currently the following are available in East Jerusalem:

- **Ishraka for Training & Excellence** offers life skills training and self-management courses for teenage dropouts from age 14+ years;
- **Volunteer for Hope** runs self-empowerment and learning courses for 11-18-year-olds;
- the **Diyafa Academy for Hospitality and Culinary Art** offers cooking and hospitality courses;
- the **Sports College Jerusalem** provides the opportunity to get a certificate as a trainer in football, tennis, basketball, and aerobics;
- the **TALK Training Center** and the **Geniuses Institute** offer language courses; and the
- **Coding Academy of Jerusalem (CAJ)** has technological courses in 2D animation, photoshop, robot design, Facebook store, graphic design, website building, computer skills, programming, start-up & entrepreneurial training.

Reaching out to Dropouts

Besides the aforementioned 'TVET Portal in Palestine', students and parents learn about Palestinian VET options in several ways, including:

- Summer camps organized to familiarize students with the specializations provided by VET schools.
- Participation in open days which VET institutions organize at schools to introduce students to their available fields and enrollment conditions.
- VET institutions' websites and social media.

- The Palestinian Social Affairs Department, which transfers students to vocational training institutions.
- Acquaintances and relatives who had studied in those institutions, who give guidance about studying in one institution or another.

Israeli vocational training schools and institutions, or those that operate as contractors with the municipality (which are classified as recognized but unofficial), promote themselves through community centers in the neighborhoods, open days, and traditional means such as websites and social networking pages. Moreover, social workers at schools and in neighborhoods direct students to those schools or institutions if they insist on leaving academic education.

As far as CSOs are concerned, with the exception of the 'Let's Build Our Future' program implemented by the Youth Development Department, no intervention was carried out solely with or for dropouts, but were open to everyone, including dropouts. Asked about effective ways to reach dropouts, the Youth Development Department reported from its experience the following:

- Using social media to post attractive advertisements about programs targeting dropouts.
- Communicating with local youth institutions and sports clubs to announce programs targeting dropouts at their facilities for their members.
- Cooperating with local media to introduce programs targeting dropouts, such as radio and television.
- Printing simplified and stimulating introductory posters about programs targeting dropouts and distributing them at neighborhoods, mosques, bus stations, buses and public transportation, and driving schools (as most dropouts, especially males, seek to get a driving license as soon as they are getting a job and can afford it).
- Collaborating with local councils in Jerusalem neighborhoods to announce programs.
- Reaching out to dropouts at their workplaces in industrial zones, workshops and markets. Qusay Abbas, who was in charge of the Youth Development Department's program, stated, "going to workshops and industrial zones was the most successful way to reach male dropouts."
- Direct outreach and communication with dropouts' parents and school administrations where there may be high dropout or hidden dropout.
- Going to neighborhoods during morning hours, especially the most crowded and frictional areas such as Silwan, Al-Issawiya, Jabal Al-Mukabber, Sur Baher and the Old City to reach out to dropouts directly, especially recent dropouts, to convince them of the

importance of joining programs that care for them and meet their needs, "with a focus at first on trying to return them to school."¹¹⁸

In general, institutions resort to a number of the above-mentioned means and methods to advertise their programs aimed at young dropouts.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following interventions are derived from the interviews with local organizations as well as from the experiences of some countries that have taken an interest in the issue of dropout. Interventions in favor of dropouts, either to return them to school or rehabilitate them to become skilled workers, must be carried out in cooperation between government institutions concerned with addressing the dropout issue and CSOs. They must start with developing an integrated strategy by qualified experts to return dropouts to education, eradicate illiteracy and prepare young men and women for the labor market. This is done through expansion of VET centers in various areas of Jerusalem, providing incentives and rewards to dropouts enrolled in them, and diversifying VET programs to keep pace with the needs of the labor market.

■ *Interventions at the Governmental Level:*

- Activate a professional **referral and guidance system** comprising a network of Palestinian formal and informal educational institutions to increase their ability to deal with real or potential dropout cases as early as possible. This should include better coordination with CSOs to allow them access to schools under the Ministry of Education's supervision to complement its role and intervene when and where the Palestinian government is unable to.
- Work to create an **attractive learning environment** by improving infrastructure including classrooms, playgrounds and laboratories, as well as to institute the one-school system so that students continue their studies in the same school and within their area of residence instead of moving from one place to another. In addition, there must be attractive extracurricular activities to motivate and encourage students to continue their education. Such an approach must also be accompanied by the provision of improved public transportation to all locations.
- **Second Chance School:** Second Chance Schools are open to all, and adopt a flexible educational system that also ensures gender equality. They meet individuals' unique needs by providing basic education, languages, life skills enhancement, and VET and empower young men and women by providing them with 21st-century skills to keep pace with digital transformation and technological advancement. Second Chance

¹¹⁸ Interview with Qusay Abbas, 18 September 2023.

Schools allow their graduates to enter the labor market as qualified workers with certificates attesting to their abilities to carry out the tasks assigned to them at work. In addition, they provide continuous support and follow-up to ensure that the students enrolled in them get job opportunities or set up their own businesses.

- **The Enhancing Culture for Dropouts Program:** The Enhancing Culture for Dropouts program has been implemented in several Arab countries including Jordan, Morocco and Libya. It provides dropouts with educational opportunities to realize their positive reintegration in the society and with knowledge and skills. This program is based on specialized teaching methods and approaches that take into account the needs and preferences as well as the abilities of students. It uses active learning methods and participatory learning, dialogue and discussion, brainstorming and critical thinking. As its underlining principle is that "education is a basic human right"¹¹⁹, this program is intended for young age groups. In Jordan, there are 194 centers for promoting culture for dropouts distributed all over the country. Dropouts "choose the time that suits them, and once enrolled go through three modules, each for 8 months, upon the completion of which dropouts receive a 10th grade certificate. After passing the third module and receiving tenth grade certificate, dropouts can rejoin formal education."¹²⁰
- **Providing evening schools or distance learning** options for dropouts to expand opportunities to take matriculation examinations and help find solutions for those juggling multiple responsibilities such as child care and part-time jobs but wish to complete their education. This would also target marginalized and disadvantaged demographic groups that may be prone to dropping out of school.
- **Establishing VET centers** in all regions, especially in areas with a high dropout rate, with programs and specializations that meet the needs of the labor market and suit both females and males, and work to improve the image of VET as an effective transition channel between the education system and the labor market.
- **Establishing community schools** in all regions whereby schools' facilities are placed at the service of local community organizations to enable them to implement programs to return dropouts, especially younger dropouts, to school through various educational and training activities.
- **Documenting and preparing lists of dropouts** by the Ministry of Education, analyzing their reasons for dropping out and where they go after dropout through regular tracer studies. This information should be made available to CSOs to enable them to develop implementable plans to reach dropouts and programs that contribute to returning

¹¹⁹ Jordanian Ministry of Education, The Enhancing the Culture of Dropouts Program, <https://moe.gov.jo/node/2186>.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

them to school or rehabilitating and requalifying them and providing them with skills to enter the labor market.

- **Providing financial support** whereby the government provides financial assistance to needy students enrolled in vocational education programs, such as scholarships and educational loans at low or zero interest, so that they are not forced to leave school in order to join the labor market instead.
- **Encouraging lifelong learning** by supporting continuous educational programs and providing professional development opportunities. Lifelong learning is defined as "a broad concept that includes formal, informal and unofficial education during a person's lifetime to achieve the fullest possible development in his social, professional and career life. This concept includes education in all its aspects, including at school, in the workplace, through the media as well as by other means and in other situations that enable acquiring and enhancing knowledge and skills."¹²¹ Given the special case of Jerusalem, the responsibility of the state/authority becomes more pressing in organizing the engagement and participation of the various local and international organizations and bodies capable of working in Jerusalem and with its students.
- **Encouraging informal education** by accrediting the programs offered by this type of education and making their certificates equivalent to official educational certificates so that their graduates can pursue higher technical, technological, vocational or even academic education. "The informal education sector's projects and programs aim to provide educational opportunities for children who did not attend school, with special emphasis on girls, disadvantaged population groups that were deprived of education, and illiterate youth and adults, in order to help them by emphasizing and accommodating their special and diverse needs for education."¹²²

■ *Interventions by Local Community Organizations:*

Due to the special situation in Jerusalem, CSOs have a crucial role to play in supporting dropouts, rehabilitating them for education or the labor market, and playing a complementary role to what the state/authority can do. Required interventions include:

- **Addressing dropouts as a strategic objective** and developing sustainable programs appropriate to their needs, interests and capabilities, especially with regard to recent dropouts and unemployed youth, which would encourage them to return to school or gain professional skills that enable them to find decent work.

¹²¹ Balqees, Abdullah, "Lifelong Learning: Its Programs and Implementation Mechanisms", *Dirasat Tarbawiyyah*, Issue 8, October 2009, p. 196.

¹²² Balqees, Abdullah, *op. cit.* 2009, p. 207.

- **Holding workshops and dialogue sessions** to improve communication with dropouts, parents and education professionals and understand their needs, also taking into consideration their different geographical locations in Jerusalem. This could include conducting a survey to find out which programs are of interest to dropouts in general and specifically to sub-groups such as recent dropouts and females.
- **Organizing alternative educational programs** targeting dropouts, whether through remedial lessons, online education or vocational courses in line with the concepts of life-long and informal learning and in coordination with the official authorities to secure recognition and accreditation of such programs. Such an e-learning platform would develop a data bank of curricula for market-relevant short courses to cater to the different target groups including the unemployed, recent dropouts, and mothers returning to education and training, and provide custom programs to help them use digital tools, access features, learning modules, CV creators, etc.
- **Providing counseling and guidance** to dropouts to deal with the psychological and social challenges dropouts may face while away from education, including those in remote and marginalized neighborhoods. One way to do so is by operating “counseling on wheels”, i.e., a minibus or van equipped with the needed tools to examine the abilities, capabilities, hobbies and passions of dropouts and provide them with guidance and counseling on programs available in Jerusalem which would fulfill their passions and be commensurate with their abilities, along with the names and contact information of the centers, schools and institutions that offer such programs.
- **Organizing and running large-scale media campaigns** on various print and social media outlets to promote programs for dropouts and ensure information reach all areas of Jerusalem. This should include the development of a **web portal** to provide information about institutions concerned with dropouts, their courses, and also serve as a platform for advertisements as well as exchange of stories and lessons learned of dropouts.
- **Designing income-generating micro-projects** for dropouts who enroll in a program that would contribute to returning them to school or teaching them a profession in a vocational center.
- **Providing life skills courses for students-at-risk** (e.g., communication, problem-solving, conflict management, punctuality, respect for the opinions of others, debating, mediation, writing CVs, etc.) that help enhance their self-confidence and confront negative behaviors.
- **Providing training programs for dropouts**, either in their field of work (especially for male dropouts) to encourage them to get certified qualifications to enhance their labor status (e.g., carpentry training for dropouts working with carpenters); or with job prospects for trainees at the end of the program. Running evening programs (for those

working) and offering pocket money during course attendance (for the jobless) should here also be considered so that participants will not opt out in search for income.

- **Providing training programs for counselors and educators** to enable them to cater to the specific needs of (potential) dropouts, take preventive measures and actions against dropout-inducing behaviors such as bullying and violence, raise awareness of the harms of dropping out, and provide career advice.
- **Paying special attention to students with disabilities**, build teachers' capacities to deal with them, and contribute to developing national policies and strategies to support them and achieve their rights in cooperation with local community organizations and international donors.

■ Interventions by the Private Sector:

- **Encouraging private sector institutions that manage VET centers to diversify their programs** to keep pace with the needs of the labor market under the direct supervision of government institutions.
- **Incentivizing craftsmen and owners** of workshops, factories, companies, beauty salons, etc. to accept to train graduates of rehabilitation programs in their enterprises in exchange for equipment or money.
- **Expanding cooperation** with youth, community and international institutions to join forces in the efforts to assist dropouts.

■ Interventions by International Organizations:

- **Providing financial support** to local community organizations for projects aimed at rehabilitating dropouts, including establishing student-friendly schools and vocational education centers and developing educational infrastructure to enable local organizations to implement programs to return dropouts to school or to teach them professions that help them enter the labor market as skilled workers. Additionally, funding research aimed to understand the causes and effects of dropout, and measuring the impact of programs and measures taken to rehabilitate dropouts. Financial support should enable implementation of stable long-term programs.
- **Providing financial support** to TVET centers regarding fees and transportation as well as incentives for young men in Jerusalem who often drop out to become cheap laborers with relatively high salaries in the Israeli market.
- **Providing specialized experts** to help develop strategic plans, set achievable goals, and design an affordable, sustainable re-engagement model that attracts the target group and can be easily replicated and rolled out across the country.

4. CONCLUSION

While dropouts belong to the child and youth segments, which are the most vulnerable segments of society and are usually addressed as a main target group in programs tailored for East Jerusalem, only very few programs specifically target dropouts.

A great deal of research and work has been done on the reasons for dropping out and dropout *prevention*, but there is only negligible information on dropout *reengagement*, what motivates dropouts to get “back on track” either educationally or professionally, who enter recovery programs, and how successful such programs are.

Identifying and locating dropouts is difficult as there is no systemic approach to dropout monitoring and recovery, which appears to be fragmented, underinvested, and insufficiently prioritized in policy decisions, especially in light of the multiplicity of bodies supervising the education sector in East Jerusalem and the divergence of their objectives and goals vis-à-vis the city at large and the education sector in particular. The Palestinian Ministry of Education is at an even greater disadvantage with this regard given the ban on its functioning in East Jerusalem, prohibition of its staff from overseeing the educational process in schools under its supervision, and the “more serious problems” facing it; namely, attempts to change the Palestinian curriculum with an Israeli one and the acute shortage of classroom and school infrastructure.

In East Jerusalem, where the magnitude and multiplicity of reasons that would drive a young adolescent to drop out of school intersect with the high demand in the Israeli labor market for poor-quality unskilled labor, dropout becomes a viable option. The majority of those who dropout starts working in informal jobs at subsistence wages and without great prospects. While this may be seen as a solution for youth unemployment in the short-term perspective, it may have negative ramifications in the longer-term, as there are no career (and thus financial) advancement opportunities which may eventually discourage them from participating in the labor market and run the risk of drifting into crime, drug abuse, etc. - a phenomenon that is already widespread within the Palestinian community inside Israel.

In order to tackle the dropout problem, prevention must start by addressing its root causes, including social, economic, pedagogic and security causes, so as to keep children in school. In particular, it is important to improve the academic achievement of students by improving curricula, teaching methods and school infrastructures. Additionally, counseling must be provided to both students and parents about the significance of education.

Once children and adolescents have left school prematurely, the sound alternative becomes vocational training. As such, there is a need to develop the VET sector to attract school age children no longer interested in academic education or capable of pursuing it, and more effective outreach must be done to present TVET as a viable next step in their lives.

Presently, TVET is primarily an educational track parallel to the academic track, so dropouts who have not completed a basic formal education of 9-12 years are not eligible to enroll in most TVET centers and programs or such programs are not suitable for them. The number, size and distribution of TVET institutions must be increased to achieve greater geographical outreach, but most importantly, they must offer a wider range of options that would enable youth with differing affinities, needs, potentials and preferences to obtain quality vocational education of value to them and their future.

It was noted that the groups that would be most interested in reengagement programs are recent dropouts from both sexes, when females do not drop out to get married, as well as married women who are forced or want to return to the job market. They would be keener to enhance their capacities and improve their employability. Young males who discontinued their education for a period of five years or more often found stability in whatever career path they have taken and seemed satisfied with their current situations; therefore, they are rarely interested in dropout programs.

Effective strategies for working with dropouts must thus take into consideration that dropouts are a diverse segment of society, employ multiple means for identifying and recruiting them, and offer more specific assistance to them with regard to identifying opportunities, completing applications, preparing for employment, etc.

Since many young men leave school early to become cheap labor in the Israeli market with supposedly attractive wages, it is essential that TVET and other dropout recovery programs provide support to fees and transportation and/or flexible schedules that adapt to their working hours.

As dropouts are often academically and socially challenged, successful reengagement programs must include intensive support networks to address students' different needs, motivate and encourage them, and jointly develop individual solutions. Ideal program design should include dropouts, parents, educators, community workers etc. to properly analyze the barriers they face and their best way forward.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: INTERVIEWS (in alphabetical order)

Qusay Abbas, Program Officer, Let's Build Our Future program, Youth Development Department, 18 September 2023.

Nabil Abdallah, Head of the Counseling Department at the Freres School and Head of the Jerusalem branch of the Association of Social and Psychological Workers in Jerusalem, 1 July 2023.

Basima Abdeen, Vocational Counselor, Ministry of Education, 27 June 2023.

Sireen Alami, Head of the Therapeutic Department, Palestinian Counseling Center, Jerusalem Branch, 25 July 2023.

Mai Amireh, Vocational Training Supervisor, YWCA, 24 June 2023.

Raeda Attoun, Head of the General Education Department, Ministry of Education, 13 July 2023.

Nadia Aweidah and Bashaer Nairoukh, principals of Al-Farouq and Zahrat Al-Mada'en schools in Al-Sawahreh, 24 June 2023.

Sawsan Dannoun, Social Development Department in Jerusalem, 11 July 2023.

Muntaser Idkeidek, Director of Burg Al-Laqlaq Society, 13 September 2023.

Areej Idrees, Dropout Prevention and Individual Care Programs Officer at the Jerusalem Municipality, Arab Programs Section, 2 July 2023.

Ilham Joulani, principal, interview for a previous study conducted by the researcher in 2022.

Anwar Al-Khatib, Programs Director at the Lutheran World Federation School, 26 June 2023.

Rasha Salah Eddin, Financial and Administrative Assistant at Al-Saraya Center, 12 September, 2023.

Dima Al-Samman, Director General of the Jerusalem Affairs Unit, Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2 July, 2023.

Ziad Al-Shamali, Head of the Parents Union in Jerusalem, 27 July 2023

Shahd Souri, Director of Spafford Center in Jerusalem, 17 September 2023.

Suhair Al-Tamimi, Principal of Al-Maysarah School, interview for a previous study conducted by the researcher in 2022.

School counselor who preferred to remain anonymous, 23 June 2023.

School principal who preferred to remain anonymous, 24 June 2023.

Social worker, Israeli Social Affairs Department in Jerusalem, preferred to remain anonymous, 28 June 2023.

ANNEX 2: OPTIONS FOR PALESTINIAN DROPOUTS IN JERUSALEM

COURSES PREPARING FOR THE TAWJIHI AND BAGRUT EXAMS:

<p>M.S. ACADEMY T: 02-6579911 M: 0529-017727 E.: info@academy-ms.com www.academy-ms.com 4, Al Hariri St., Jerusalem</p>	<p>INJAZ CENTER Dir.: Mohammed Eweis M: 0585777316 E: injaz.center33@gmail.com Al-Injaz Bldg., Ras Al-Amud, Jerusalem</p>
<p>RIYADAH ACADEMY Dir.: Wala' Kayyal M: 0546-277450 F: 02-9701481 E: Riyadhah.academy@gmail.com or: walaa_kayyal@hotmail.com 96, Nablus Rd., Jerusalem</p>	<p>AL-SHIHAB AL-MAQDISI COLLEGE Gen. Man.: Dr. Amjad Shihab T: 02-9965322/0523-183616 E: shihabmaqdisi@gmail.com 22, Salah Al-Din St., POB 55148, Jerusalem</p>

GENERAL CAREER GUIDANCE

<p>YMCA (everyone 15+): T: 02-6286888 M: 053-2339256 E: cac@ej-ymca.org https://www.facebook.com/EJYMCACAC 82, Nablus Rd., PO Box 19023, Jerusalem</p>	<p>RAYAN CENTERS (everyone 17+): E-mail: info@rayanjerusalem.com https://rayanjerusalem.com/</p> <p><u>Sheikh Jarrah Branch</u>: Tel: 02-5408422 26 Nablus St., Mt. Scopus Building, 1st floor</p> <p><u>Abu Tor Branch</u>: Tel: 02-6308298/0585-777316 Ein Rogel 45, Abu Tor, 4th floor E: injaz.center33@gmail.com Al-Injaz Bldg., Ras Al-Amud, Jerusalem</p>
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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

	Fields	Conditions/ Requirements	Contact
ANWAR AL-QUDS COLLEGE		18+ years	Tel: 02-6281818 E: info@anwarcollege.org http://www.anwarcollege.org/ar/ https://www.facebook.com/anwarcollege/ Az-Zahra St. 3, Jerusalem
	• Accounting	11 years of schooling	
	• Beauty & Hairdressing	10 years of schooling	
	• Computer & Technology	11 years of schooling	
	• 3D epoxy flooring	interview	
	• Event management	10 years of schooling	
	• 1 st & 2 nd class school assistants	entrance exam	
	• Flower arrangement	10 years of schooling	
	• Graphic Design	11 + English proficiency	
	• Mobile maintenance	Interview, English	
	• Nannies & babysitter	12 years of schooling	
	• Safety/security engineering	Interview, English	
	• Secretarial	12 years of schooling	
• Trade	12 years of schooling		
• Vehicle license examiner	10 years of schooling or 9 years + garage management certificate		
ATID BIRAN COLLEGE	• Repair of household electrical appliances & ACs		Man.: Khaldoun Hammouri T: 02-5816467/0523-215476 F: 02-5816491 E: info@atidbiran.co.il www.atidbiran.co.il Opp. Ibn Sina Medical Center, Shu'fat, Jerusalem

CENTER FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICE AT AL-QUDS OPEN UNIVERSITY	<p>Vocational diplomas approved by the Palestinian Ministry of Labor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insurance and risk management; • Occupational health and safety; • Secretarial and office management; • Hotel management; • Hebrew; • Animal and poultry production technology; Plant production technology. 	Completed 9 th grade 16+ years old	<p>T: 02-22964571, ext. 230 E: cont_edu@qou.edu Al-Irsal St., Kanaan Building, 7th floor, Ramallah</p>
HAIFA COLLEGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursery (day care center) 	18+ years + 10 years of schooling	<p>Tel: 02-5853820 Email: jerusalemjat@gmail.com https://www.haifacollege.org.il/ https://www.facebook.com/HaifacollegeJerusalem 17, Al-Rashid St., 3rd floor, Jerusalem</p>
LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car mechanic • Car electronics • Blacksmithing, welding and aluminum • Carpentry & decoration • Sanitary installations and central heating • Communications & maintenance of mobile devices • Preparing & serving food • Ceramics and handicrafts 	Completed 9 th or 10 th grade, 16-20 years	<p>Dir.: Yousef Shalian T: 02-6282289/979/5854102 F: 02-6282628/6561741 E: info.jerusalem@lutheranworld.org or: yousef.shalian@lutheranworld.org https://jerusalem.lutheranworld.org Mai Ziadeh St., Beit Hanina, Jerusalem</p>
RAYAN COLLEGE OF COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complementary, Chinese & natural medicine • Medical massages • Skin treatment • Herbals. 		<p>T: 02-6263941 E: rayancollege0@gmail.com Haron Rashid St., Jaber Bldg., 1st fl., Jerusalem</p>
RIYADAH ACADEMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalism • Photography • Nursing 	some 18+ years	<p>Dir.: Wala' Kayyal M: 0546-277450 F: 02-9701481</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hebrew & English; Paramedics • Incubators 		<p>E: Riyadh.academy@gmail.com 96, Nablus Rd., Jerusalem</p>
AL-SHIHAB AL-MAQDISI COLLEGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary • Hebrew • Interior design and decor 	Upon a test	<p>Gen. Man.: Dr. Amjad Shihab T: 02-9965322/ 0523-183616 E: shihabmaqdisi@gmail.com 22, Salah Al-Din St., POB 55148, Jerusalem</p>
YOUNG WOMEN'S MUSLIM ASSOCIATION (YWMA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fashion Design • Sewing • Hairdressing • Facial Care • Professional Nails • Professional Make up 	18+ years women	<p>Program Dir.: Samah Jaber T: 02-5819148 E: info@muslim-woman.org http://muslim-woman.org/ Imam Al-Hanbali St., Wadi Al-Joz, POB 21730, Jerusalem</p>