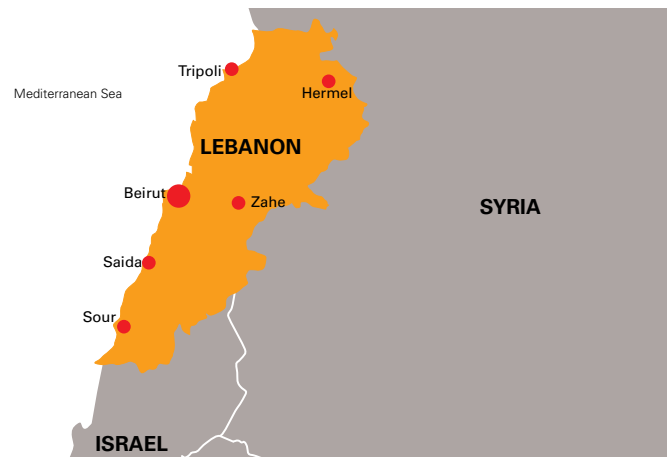


# OVERCOMING DISABILITY BARRIERS

## CHRISTIAN AID'S PARTNERSHIP SCHEME PROJECT IN THE MIDDLE EAST



### Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory

**Failure to secure a lasting solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is causing poverty to deepen, and allowing violence and despair to persist.**

The ancient town of Bethlehem is located in the West Bank, about five miles to the south of Jerusalem.

The West Bank is part of the occupied Palestinian territory, as are east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. These areas have been occupied by Israel since 1967. This military occupation controls much of the territory, including the movements of Palestinians, and leaves them with only nominal governance over their lives.

For many of the Palestinians living in Bethlehem, their situation has been steadily worsening due to the restrictions placed upon them, the building of the separation barrier around their town, and the continuing

expansion of Israeli settlements that are taking away their land and livelihoods. Many have also suffered from violence associated with the conflict.

Christian Aid's partner, the YMCA, works with disadvantaged young people in the West Bank. More than 50 per cent of Palestinians are under 18 years of age. Children have been, and continue to be, affected by the ongoing occupation and conflict – physically (through injury), psychologically (through impacts on themselves, family and community members) and socio-economically (through impacts on family livelihoods and access to education).

Christian Aid has been working in the region since the early 1950s, when we provided help to Palestinian refugees following the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent war of independence. Today we are working with more than 20 Israeli and Palestinian organisations to improve livelihoods, protect human rights, provide access to services and resources, and build a peace based on justice for all. Our development and humanitarian work is targeted at people in great need, regardless of their race or religion.

### The situation of people living with disabilities in the West Bank

Young people living with physical disabilities are among the most socially excluded and vulnerable people in the West Bank. They face many forms of deprivation, including high levels of poverty, lack of voice and accountability, persistent stigma and discrimination, and lack of access to basic services, including schooling and healthcare.

*'Poverty is not simply a lack of income or other material attributes such as housing, food, access to fresh water or consumer goods. Such needs are, of course, fundamental symptoms of what it is like to be poor, but poverty has far wider dimensions; poverty is a lack of opportunity, a lack of power over one's own life and prospects, a lack of human dignity.'*<sup>1</sup>

According to an assessment carried out by the East Jerusalem YMCA:

- Seventy per cent of young people living with physical disabilities in the West Bank are unemployed (compared with 34 per cent of all young people in the West Bank).
- Forty-eight per cent are illiterate (compared with six per cent of all young people in the West Bank).
- Less than 20 per cent have completed secondary school (compared with 60 per cent of all young people in the West Bank).

Focus groups held in the West Bank revealed high levels of stigma and discrimination experienced by physically disabled young people.

- Seventy-three per cent of young people surveyed had experienced discrimination in the past six months, and most of these had suffered from discrimination when trying to access Palestinian government services.
- Sixty-six per cent of respondents believed that their community viewed them negatively or as 'victims', while 81 per cent said they were represented negatively in the media.
- Of particular concern was the discovery that 74 per cent of respondents were unaware of the Palestinian Disability Law and the rights they were entitled to under the law. As a result of these persistent barriers to social inclusion, many young people with disabilities are denied their rights to be active members of their communities.

All these issues combine to form a vicious circle of poverty and exclusion for people living with disabilities. Those who are excluded from school are unable to obtain the necessary qualifications to gain employment, unable to support themselves, and unable to become active and productive members of their communities. Furthermore, many business owners in the private sector have negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, their capabilities and their rights, and therefore they lack the will to incorporate people living with disabilities into the workforce.

## Lebanon

Lebanon is a small country on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, which borders Syria to the north and east, and Israel to the south. It does not have the shocking poverty indicators of sub-Saharan African countries, or of Afghanistan or Haiti. Life expectancy rates are relatively high, maternal mortality rates reassuringly

low. However, Christian Aid is working there for good reason: there are pockets of extreme poverty, and perhaps more importantly, people in poverty in Lebanon are often trapped by laws or structural inequalities that constitute gross injustice.

In 1990, Lebanon came out of 15 years of civil war. The country still suffers from sectarianism, and many fear that the war could re-erupt if the delicate balance of power between the main groups (Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and Christians) is upset.

Palestinian refugees, who make up almost 10 per cent of Lebanon's population, face systematic discrimination. Unable to return to the Palestine they fled more than 60 years ago in fear of their lives, they lack basic civil rights in Lebanon. This restricts them from working in all but the most menial jobs, locking them in poverty. They cannot access free state healthcare, have almost no access to free state education, and cannot own land or property.

Discrimination and ignorance mean that people living with disabilities in Lebanon are often barred from education, employment and participation in public life. The Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) supports people with disabilities through training, counselling, local activities, and getting them into employment where possible. But it has also lobbied for – and secured – changes to Lebanese law, so that the rights of disabled people are now legally recognised and protected. In 2009, LPHU won a ruling stating that all polling stations must have disabled access. This ensured people with disabilities had a democratic say in the decisions that affect them.

## The situation of disabled people in Lebanon

According to the World Health Organisation's definitions, 7-10 per cent of Lebanon's population has some form of disability. People living with disabilities can find it impossible to find employment to support themselves. According to a 2006 International Labour Organisation report,<sup>2</sup> there is a 74 per cent unemployment rate among this group. The report states that 'for Lebanese people with disabilities, access to education and vocational training is limited, the support required is unavailable, and there is little or no infrastructure for physical access to the workplace'. In addition, many employed people with disabilities are working in jobs with no pension rights, on a very low salary, restricting inclusion even for those in work.

1. *Poverty Over: We're All in this Together*, Christian Aid, 2010, p3.

2 See [www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb/images\\_Gallery/ILO%202006%20report%20on%20Lebanon.pdf](http://www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb/images_Gallery/ILO%202006%20report%20on%20Lebanon.pdf)

**If there is any way we can help your group, please contact us.**

**Email [partnershipscheme@christian-aid.org](mailto:partnershipscheme@christian-aid.org) or call Max Khanna on 020 8123 7523.**

**Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives.**

**Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.**

**Christian Aid, 35 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL  
t. 020 7620 4444 [christianaid.org.uk](http://christianaid.org.uk)**



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