Review Report on the Education Sector’s Strategic Plan (ESSP) from a Gender-Based Corruption Perspective

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Review Report on the Education Sector’s Strategic Plan (ESSP) from a Gender-Based Corruption Perspective

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report was to review and analyze the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) in order to determine the extent of its response to combating corruption in general, and gender-based corruption in particular. It also aimed to propose recommendations to decision-makers on how to incorporate policies and mechanisms to enhance integrity and combat corruption in general, and gender-based corruption in particular, into the next strategic plan.

For this purpose, the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2017-2022, Education Sector Strategy 2021-2023, and the Ministry of Education’s annual monitoring and evaluation reports were reviewed. Furthermore, the Council of Ministers’ National Policy Agenda (NPA) “Citizen First” 2017-2022 and the National Development Plan for Palestine (NDP) 2021-2023, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and relevant local and international literature, were reviewed.

In addition to conducting numerous interviews with educational cadres from various departments within the Ministry of Education, educational experts, and members of civil society and feminist organizations.

The Report’s most significant conclusions:

1. The ESSP’s third strategic goal focused on improving accountability, results-based leadership, governance, and management; however, it made no mention of corruption or gender-based corruption. This was reflected in the absence of the concept in terms of goals, outputs, indicators, and monitoring and evaluation.

2. The ESSP intersects with the SDGs and the Council of Ministers’ plans in the general framework, but it focuses specifically on the fourth goal.

3. The Ministry of Education addresses gender-based corruption as sexual violence.

4. The indicators developed by the Ministry of Education are not detailed in terms of several factors of marginalization (gender, disability, and marginalized areas), that include areas (A), (B), and (C) in the West Bank, as detailed data better organizes policies.

5. The Complaints Unit at the Ministry of Education is only authorized to receive complaints from outside the educational body. There is no specific competent authority that receives reporting cases involving gender-based corruption.

The Report’s key recommendations are as follows:

1. The new ESSP should include principles promoting integrity, transparency, combating corruption, and gender-based corruption.

2. Aligning the upcoming ESSP in accordance with the National SDGs and the NDP, with regards to gender, integrity, transparency, accountability, and combating gender-based corruption.

3. Activating the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the Ministry of Education and the Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission.
4. Developing a policy and system for reporting cases of corruption in general, and gender-based corruption in particular, as well as unifying the competent authority in charge of dealing with reporting cases.

5. Improving engagement and accountability, which includes increasing participation, decentralization, accountability, involving Ministry of Education staff in all stages of the ESSP, disseminating the plan to all employees and the public through various means, including parents’ councils in each school, and all directorates, in addition to enhancing linkage with the law, structural suitability, and Gaza’s participation.

6. Statistics and reports must include new indicators that contribute to a better understanding of women’s and men’s values, roles, conditions, and needs, as well as indicators that can help monitor other variables that may influence gender discrimination.

7. The ESSP must include professional development for those concerned, from the perspective of gender-based corruption.

8. Systems development and atomization, such as improving the current results-based planning and follow-up system, introducing labeled indicators, establishing a monitoring, evaluation, learning, and accountability system, improving the efficiency of the finance and procurement systems, reviewing the Education Law, and developing regulations for various programs as needed.
Introduction:

Education is regarded as one of the most important sources of human capital investment, and it serves as a means of development and progress. It is viewed around the world as a way to improve people’s quality of lives and eliminate poverty by giving them the tools they need to sustain their livelihood, live in dignity, and contribute effectively to society.

Due to the importance of education to individuals, groups, and societies, it has been designated as one of the fundamental enabling rights guaranteed by all international and regional conventions and treaties. Furthermore, clear articles about it can be found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other sources of international and humanitarian law.

The right to education is founded on a set of fundamental principles that have become the subject of consensus and agreement, including non-discrimination, equal opportunities and treatment, and access to education for all. These principles are outlined in the UNESCO Constitution, support the right to education, serve as the foundation for the Organization’s legal measures\(^1\), and are consistent with the provisions of the Palestinian Basic Law.

With this remarkable interest - at the national and international levels - in education as a human and social right, significant challenges and failures have been recorded to varying degrees around the world in terms of enjoying this right, which remains inaccessible to millions of children from poor, deprived, and marginalized families, as well as girls and women as a result of their lack of access to educational opportunities. Free and compulsory education, as well as discrimination, remained major concerns, particularly in light of the expected role and the growing global challenges associated with this right at the level of comprehensive development, in the context of the new global concept that requires creativity and innovation, high quality, adequate budgets, and wise use of resources.

Consequently, education has become linked to international discussions and efforts for sustainable development, with the topic of education appearing in more than one agreement, document, and conference. This interest has grown “in magnitude and attention since the Our Common Future document was issued in 1987, which provided the first broad definition of sustainable development.\(^2\)”

In 2015, the United Nations member states unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 goals. The plan sought to shape global and national development policies, as well as to provide new options and opportunities for bridging the gap between human rights and development. As a result, many of the goals are based on international human rights standards, including the fourth goal, which is centered on providing quality education. Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda is based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, and it is committed to including everyone, without exception, by first reaching out to the excluded and prioritizing marginalized groups. It has also set two goals to combat discrimination and inequality: the fifth goal is gender equality, and the tenth aims to reduce inequality within and between countries.

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The Sustainable Development Goals brought the concept of integrity of governance back into the center of attention. This is because the 17 goals are interconnected and indivisible, and it is impossible to work on some goals while ignoring others, and it is impossible to discuss development in the face of corruption. Working on the fourth goal, “Quality Education,” also requires working to achieve concrete steps at the level of other goals, including Goal 16 related to peace, justice, and strong institutions, and the detailed indicators associated with it, such as governance and combating corruption. Corruption is considered a “complex social, political and economic phenomenon that affects all countries. Corruption undermines democratic institutions, slows economic development, and contributes to governmental instability. Corruption attacks the foundation of democratic institutions by distorting electoral processes, perverting the rule of law, and creating bureaucratic quagmires whose only reason for existing is the soliciting of bribes.”

Education is recognized as an established human right, so it is the responsibility of states to uphold this right, which necessitates a set of procedures and resources. Violation of the right to education may result directly from failure to take the necessary measures to achieve the basic principles, but it does not end there; some cases of corruption, such as corruption in procurement, forged certificates, embezzlement of funds allocated for education, employment procedures, promotions, favoritism in school grades, and so on, can also constitute a violation of this right.

Perhaps one of the silent manifestations of corruption is “gender-based corruption,” which cannot be measured at precise and clear rates for a variety of reasons, including a lack of statistical data and a sensitive societal culture of dealing with the subject, particularly with girls and women, and its classification in many cases as sexual violence. However, it is a topic that cannot be denied, nor can its gravity be underestimated, as confirmed by the majority of those interviewed outside the educational institution. In its research on obstacles to education in more than 15 countries, Human Rights Watch discovered that “children and youth experience multiple forms of gender-based school violence. Students frequently report corporal punishment, sexual exploitation, assault, harassment, sexual violence, and bullying. Some teachers and school supervisors, as well as other students, are responsible for committing these violations.” Given its devastating effects and widespread prevalence in the global education sector, UNESCO has addressed this issue on multiple occasions.

The International Labor Organization Convention on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work No. 190, adopted by ILO members in June 2019, is considered the first international treaty aimed at eliminating violence and combating harassment against working women and girls. It included three sections: first, defining the concept of sexual harassment in the workplace; second, defining the scope of the Convention’s jurisdiction; and third, providing a broad and comprehensive definition of the world of work.

Transparency International addressed sexual violence as a form of corruption in the use of power

in the “Global Corruption Report/Education,” demonstrating its effects and dire consequences in terms of mediocre performance, dropout, health, psychological and social effects, and the effects on the image of girls and women, who are most vulnerable to harassment and extortion. Moreover, its danger lies in the abuse of power and insulting the concept of education and the institution\(^6\). The education sector is not immune to corruption in general, and gender-based corruption in particular, due to the presence of approximately 3,142 schools, which serve approximately one million and 358 thousand students and are taught by 73,405 male and female teachers\(^7\), as well as a large public audience and members of parents’ councils who have direct contact with the Ministry of Education, education directorates, and schools.

The size of Palestine’s education sector, as well as the large numbers involved within its framework, render this report significant. It reviews and analyzes the Ministry of Education’s strategy and policies to determine the extent of its response to combating corruption in general, and gender-based corruption in particular. This provides decision-makers with data to help them make decisions, such as developing work policies and strategies to maintain a healthy, safe, and stimulating work and school environment, encouraging reporting in the event of corruption, protecting victims, and imposing appropriate penalties to preserve rights and limit corruption.

**Overall report objective:**

Review and analyze the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) to determine the extent of its response to combat gender-based corruption. Proposing recommendations to decision makers that will contribute to include policies and mechanisms that enhance integrity, transparency, and accountability in the next strategic plan, as well as reflect them in annual work plans and budgets (AWPBs), to ensure that preventive measures are taken against corruption in the education sector.

**Detailed objectives:**

1. Explaining the concept of corruption in the education sector, its causes, consequences, and ways to combat it.
2. Diagnosing potential forms of corruption in the education sector, according to local and international standards.
3. Analyzing the extent to which the ESSP responds to some sustainable development goals related to combating gender-based corruption, the “Citizen First” National Policy Agenda, and the National Development Plan (NDP) in Palestine.

Providing recommendations that help decision-makers in developing the next strategic plan, including the concept of gender-based corruption.

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Report methodology:

To review the ESSP and analyze it from the perspective of gender-based corruption; the work methodology was based on:

1. Reviewing and analyzing the ESSP 2017-2022 and 2021-2023, and the annual monitoring and evaluation reports issued by the Ministry of Education.

2. Reviewing many international and local documents, reports, and studies related to the subject, issued by (the United Nations, UNESCO, Transparency International, the Palestinian Council of Ministers, the Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission, AMAN Coalition, and others)\(^8\).

3. Interviews and meetings with educational cadres in the Ministry of Education representing various departments, educational experts, and a group of civil society and feminist organizations\(^9\).

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8. For more information, refer to: Appendix (1): Resources and References
9. For more information, refer to: Appendix (2): A list of individuals and institutions interviewed for this report.
The Corruption and Gender in Education Sector

Definition of Corruption:

There is no specific definition of the concept of corruption that is recognized at the international level. However, some definitions can be provided, including: the definition of Transparency International, which states that it is “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.” The World Bank defines corruption as “the abuse of public office for private gain.” Corruption, according to the United Nations definition, is: “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines it as “the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit – through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement.”

The Arab Anti-Corruption Convention defines corruption as a crime that takes many forms with negative impacts on moral values, political life, the economy and society, it clarifies in Article (4) the aspects of criminalization associated with the concept of corruption. In light of the Palestinian experience, the Palestinian Legislative Council’s report on corruption for 1997 defined it as a departure from the provisions of the law or regulations issued pursuant to it, or a violation of approved public policies by a public employee with the intention of reaping gains for her/himself or others related to her/him, or consciously exploiting the absence of the law to obtain these benefits.

The Anti-Corruption Law No. (1) of 2005 and its amendments did not address the definition of corruption; however, it specified forms of it, including: bribery, embezzlement, forgery, job exploitation, misuse of trust, abuse of power, negligence in carrying out job duties, laundering money resulting from corruption crimes, graft, trading in influence, nepotism and favoritism, failure to declare investments, property, or benefits that lead to a conflict of interest, and obstruction of justice.

Corruption in the education sector:

The right to education becomes fragile when the scourge of corruption affects and violates it, and increased investment in education locally and internationally is misplaced, with little to expect if corruption and mismanagement penetrate the sector’s structures. There is a good chance that this will happen because of the high stakes associated with it and its outcomes, which determine the future of individuals and societies alike, the size of the large budgets allocated to it, and the sector’s large size in terms of material and human resources, making it a potential fertile environment for manipulation and corruption.

Corruption’s characteristics as an illegal phenomenon makes it difficult to assess its fiscal impact on education. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between corruption, inefficiency, and mismanagement in schools and universities. However, Corruption imposes significant societal costs.

Young children are the first victims of corruption in education, which can have a long-term impact.

10. Official Website of the Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission. Last access: 5/7/2023 https://www.pacc.ps/FAQs/ questions/1
on a person’s integrity and dignity, as well as society as a whole. Social investment in future citizens fails when individuals succeed dishonestly and without merit. The existence of incompetent graduate teachers, engineers, judges, and doctors, as well as fraudulent scientific research conducted by corrupt academics, raises the possibility that human life itself is at risk\textsuperscript{15}.

Transparency International’s “Global Corruption Barometer/Middle East and North Africa” published in 2019 examined citizens’ opinions and encounters with corruption. 17% of Palestinian respondents reported having paid a bribe in exchange for basic services such as health and education\textsuperscript{16}. The findings also revealed that 24% of respondents had employed nepotism in Palestinian schools\textsuperscript{17}, having many of them paying a bribe because they were asked to, and a lesser amount paying it out of appreciation.

For the first time, the Global Corruption Barometer - Middle East and North Africa sheds light on data related to sexual bribery, which is one of the most serious forms of gender-based corruption. Some Palestinian citizens have stated that they have been subjected to sexual bribery or know someone who has, and there is frequently a lack of effective reporting of sexual bribery. This could be because society tends to blame the victim, and sexual matters are considered taboo topics. Consequently, women are often hesitant to report such cases\textsuperscript{18}. Although the survey was comprehensive and included all government departments, it included the education sector but failed to specify the percentage covered.

According to the results of a public opinion poll conducted by AMAN in 2022 on Corruption and Anti-Corruption Efforts in Palestine, 8% of respondents believe that the Ministry of Education is vulnerable to corruption risks\textsuperscript{19}, and with regard to the areas and services most vulnerable to it; 19.4% believe that education services are vulnerable to the spread of bribery\textsuperscript{20}.

As for the opinion poll of female beneficiaries of social development, health and education services conducted by the AMAN in 2021, the results showed that 14% of female beneficiaries encountered problems when requesting a service from the Ministry of Education or its directorates\textsuperscript{21}, with a 2%\textsuperscript{22} rate of nepotism.

\textbf{Areas of corruption and potential opportunity in the education sector:}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Transparency International. 2019. “Global Corruption Barometer/Middle East and North Africa”. 16
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. 19
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 22
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 34
\textsuperscript{21} The Coalition for Accountability and Integrity –AMAN. 2021. “Surveying the Opinion of Women Beneficiaries of Social Development, Health, and Education Services on the Impact of Corruption on Service Delivery.” Ramallah-Palestine. 7
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 29
Corruption in general has multiple forms in all sectors, but the education sector is unique due to its role, extensive work area, and diverse locations (Ministry of Education, directorates, schools, classrooms). Each level is associated with specific potential opportunities for corruption, the most notable of which can be summarized as follows:

1. Opportunities for corruption in the construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation of schools and school facilities. Tenders and specifications, as well as commissions and bribes, are potential sources of corruption.

2. Using nepotism and favoritism in appointments, promotions, performance evaluations, training opportunities, and external participations.

3. Opportunities for corruption in implementing the system of supplies, equipment, and printing school books, as well as the corrupt practices that may accompany them in tenders, exceeding standards, and carrying out annual destruction.

4. Conducting exams and issuing certificates, leaking and selling exam questions, or favoritism during exam surveilling have all contributed to the collapse of these exams’ credibility, unfairness, and corruption of the public morals system.

5. Opportunities for in-kind and cash embezzlement by finance or warehouse officials.

6. Policies conflict and change constantly, without rational justification, for special interests.

7. Scholarships are an opportunity for corruption and acquiring them is often accompanied by corruption (such as nepotism and favoritism).

8. The lack of specific criteria for issuing licenses to early, basic, secondary, and higher education institutions, as well as the failure to carry out the required oversight.

9. Private tutoring: This exhausts parents and places significant obligations on them, and the risk arises when it becomes a major source of success. This may cause teachers to leak exam questions and be more liberal in awarding grades to students who receive private tutoring.

10. Gender-Based Corruption: It is a violation of the power vested in those in charge of education, and it is rarely addressed and cannot be assessed in precise and clear data. The above is due to a lack of statistical data, as well as the fact that “societal culture is sensitive in dealing with the issue, especially with girls and women, and it is often classified as sexual violence.”

The impact of corruption on the education sector:

1. Corruption places a significant strain on public resources, particularly the education budget, which in most countries, including Palestine, accounts for the largest or second largest portion of public spending.

Corruption affects education through the cost, size, and quality of educational services. “Children bear the brunt of the corrupt education system’s negative outcomes. It undermines society and parents’ investment and aspirations for educating and preparing future citizens. Success without merit implies incompetent and unqualified individuals. Moreover, the educational system’s lack of interest in persons with immense potential, or in revealing their latent abilities, results in the loss of the right to quality education. The presence of inexperienced or incompetent doctors, judges, and engineers, as well as pseudoscientific research conducted by corrupt academics, endangers not only society but also human life.”

2. Corruption in education has long-term consequences for a person’s integrity and dignity, as well as for society as a whole. It also has a detrimental impact on the performance of individuals and graduates throughout their careers, as well as the individual and social value systems.

Corruption and its relation to gender

To understand the nature of the relationship between corruption and gender, as well as its impacts and repercussions, we must first clarify the concept of gender:

- Gender

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines gender as “a term intended to describe the characteristics of women and men, which are socially constructed that have no relation to physical differences.”

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) defines gender as “the socially defined roles for both males and females, and these roles change over time and vary widely within one culture, as well as from one culture to another.”

The concept refers to “the socially learned differences between men and women that, although deeply rooted in each culture, are subject to change over time and have wide variations within and between cultures.”

The concept refers to “the socially learned differences between men and women that, although deeply rooted in each culture, are subject to change over time and have wide variations within and between cultures.”

Dalal Al-Ukaili describes gender as “the relationships, social roles, and values that society establishes for both men and women.” These roles, relationships, and values are not constant, and they vary throughout time and place as a result of their overlap and intertwining with other social relationships caused by religion, social and economic class, customs, traditions, race, environment, culture, and

media. Gender is synonymous with equal opportunity and social justice, as well as promoting equality in access to and control of political, social, economic, and cultural resources.\textsuperscript{28}"

Gender relations are a dynamic that is both conflicting and cooperative, and they are intermingled with other axes of collected factors such as sect, class, age, marital status, or status within the family.

- \textbf{Gender-based corruption}

Despite its existence in various forms and disastrous consequences, gender-based corruption has yet to be defined as a distinct term in international and local literature. Many approaches, however, have led some institutions and activists to develop definitions of gender-based corruption, as the WHO defines sexual exploitation as: “Any actual or attempted abuse of a state of weakness, power differential, or trust for sexual purposes, including for example: “threatening or benefiting financially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another person.”\textsuperscript{29} This definition is consistent with Transparency International’s agreed-upon definition of corruption, which is “every act that involves the abuse of entrusted power for private gain,” which means that an official exploits her/his position to benefit herself/himself or her/his group.

“Sextortion,” according to the International Association of Judges (IAJ), is the abuse of authority to achieve a sexual benefit or advantage. As such, it is a form of corruption in which the bribe is sexual rather than financial. It can be found anywhere where persons in power lack integrity and attempt to sexually exploit the vulnerable and those who rely on their authority.\textsuperscript{30} Not all bribes are monetary. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) flagship study highlighted that “the term and concept of undue advantage in The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) is intended to apply as broadly as possible, covering situations where intangible elements are given or non-pecuniary benefits (such as honorary positions and titles, preferential treatment, or sexual favors) insofar as they create or may create a sense of obligation on the part of the recipient.” There is evidence that the use of the human body as currency, whether sexual or otherwise, is corrupt.\textsuperscript{31}

“For the first time, the Global Corruption Barometer - Middle East and North Africa - revealed statistics on sexual bribery, one of the gravest forms of gender-based corruption in which sex is utilized instead of cash in bribery transactions. The aforementioned is founded on gender bias, which impacts women in particular, as some women are coerced to perform sexual services in order to receive public services from government agencies, such as health care and education.\textsuperscript{32}"

Although corruption affects all groups, it denies women the ability to exercise their social and economic rights, exposes them to various forms of corruption, such as sexual extortion and bribery, and prevents them from accessing justice, jobs, and appointments for which they compete on an equal footing. Corruption also exacerbates poverty among women, adds to their social obligations, and hinders substantial portions of them from accessing timely and high-quality services.

\textsuperscript{28} Al-Ukaili, dalal. “All You Want to Know About Gender”. https://annabaa.org/arabic/community/24164
\textsuperscript{29} The Coalition for Accountability and Integrity-AMAN. 2021. “A Guide on How to Prevent Gender-Based Corruption in Social Services Provision”. Ramallah-Palestine. 6
\textsuperscript{32} Transparency International. 2019. “Global Corruption Barometer/Middle East and North Africa”. 23
Exposing gender-based corruption is considered one of the difficult issues “because of the victims’ fear of possible retaliation, which takes many forms, the societal view that criminalizes and blames women, and the lack of serious treatment of reporting cases, which is why the majority of women prefer to remain silent and not report.”

Several interviewees raised this issue, which AMAN addressed in its publications as well as those of the United Nations and Transparency International.

**Forms of gender-based corruption**

- **Sexual harassment**

“It is a form of gender-based violence and discrimination that involves any explicit or implicit act of a sexual nature, which is undesired or unwanted, and that makes the other person feel ashamed, degraded, intimidated, humiliated, threatened, or fearful. Sexual harassment can be classified into two types: a hostile work environment caused by persistent, unwanted advances or harassment, and shocking sexual behavior. Second, harassment in exchange for granting privileges, in which the performance of a sexual act for the advantage of the harasser or a third party is required in order to acquire a professional opportunity.”

The Australian Human Rights Commission forms of sexual harassment include staring, unreasonable or unwanted friendly interaction, such as deliberately touching or hugging a person, using sexually suggestive comments, telling sexual or sexually suggestive jokes, insults, name-calling, or taunts based on the victim’s sex. In addition, intrusive questions about a person’s private life or body, sexually explicit pictures, posters, screensavers, calendars, such as an employee in the workplace placing pornographic posters on their desk so that they are visible to the victim, explicitly or indirectly asking for sex, engaging in direct physical assault, such as touching, kissing attempts, or removing clothes, and this is where harassment progresses to sexual assault.

- **Sexual extortion**

“Any behavior, sexual offer, or gesture of requesting an unwanted sexual favor directed at any individual, regardless of gender, in which this behavior indicates, explicitly or implicitly, to the threatened person or victim that she or he is conditional on fulfilling a need more easily amidst the complexities of systems and human interventions, such as employing an individual, awarding undeserved grades to a student, completing a transaction, or overlooking serious mistakes. That is, sexual extortion is essentially based on doing one thing in return for another, and rejection always results in the opposite outcome or scandal.”

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35. [https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2014/6/10/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A](https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2014/6/10/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A) Last access: 9/7/2023
• **Sexual bribery**

The so-called “sexual bribery” has become a global term for a form of corruption. It was devised by the International Association of Judges (IAJ), which defines it as “the granting of undue sexual advantages to a public servant, with the intention of influencing her/him to perform an action or to abstain from an action while performing official duties.”

In 2019, Transparency International issued the Global Corruption Barometer - Middle East and North Africa - and the importance of the issuance lies in the fact that sexual bribery was considered one of the most important forms of gender-based corruption.

**Obstacles to reporting gender-based corruption**

Women may react differently to extortion and sexual harassment than men. Women often hide the matter if they are exposed to it owing to a restrictive cultural and societal value system. This, combined with their limited financial status and network of relationships, inhibits their decision-making abilities.

All of this has an impact on women, whether it is through exposure to any sort of gender-based corruption directed at them, or through the disclosure mechanism, reporting, or access to justice. According to the IAJ, “The main obstacle to the fight against sextortion is victims’ fear of exposing the perpetrators, for fear of possible retaliation, which may include being demoted, withheld from privileges, or even losing their jobs.” Furthermore, lawyers may decline to represent victims for similar reasons, fearing that it may have a detrimental impact on their practice of law before the courts.

“Many incidences of sexual bribery go unreported. This could be because Palestinian communities tend to blame the victim, as sexual matters are considered taboo topics, and as a result, women are hesitant to disclose these occurrences.” Most persons interviewed for this report corroborated the same conclusion. This emphasizes the importance of further discussion, research, and analysis in combating gender-based corruption, as well as explaining its limitations, forms, and connection to the legal, social, and intellectual systems. This is critical in preparing for inclusion as a kind of corruption that violates the law, as Palestine still lacks a coherent and consistent legal framework to criminalize this type of corruption.

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39. Ibid. 22
The Education Sector’s Strategic Plan (ESSP) and the Extent of its Response to Preventing Gender-Based Corruption

Brief description of the education sector:

There are numerous sub-sectors within the Palestinian education sector, and their interests and interventions cross with those of many other sectors. The education sector includes the following sub-sectors:

1. Pre-school education (kindergarten): It extends from the age of three years and seven months to school admission age.

2. School education (basic and secondary)
   - The basic education stage: This stage begins from the first grade until the end of the ninth grade, divided into two parts: (the lower basic stage for grades (1-4), the foundational phase, and the upper basic stage for grades (5-9), the empowerment phase).
   - Secondary education stage (acquisition phase): This stage includes grades (10-12) with its various academic, vocational and technical tracks.

3. Higher Education

4. Non-formal education

Multiple bodies supervising education:

- Pre-school education: This sector is supervised/provided with services by the Ministry of Education, the private sector, or civil society/associations.

- School education: The Ministry of Education supervises the majority of schools; however, schools in Jerusalem are still under occupation authority. The UNRWA, the civil society sector, and the private sector also participate in this aspect.

- Non-formal education: The Ministry of Education supervises non-formal education programs, including literacy, parallel education, and continuing education at universities and colleges. Supervision and service provision are carried out by the Ministries of Education and Social Development, as well as the private sector and international institutions.

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40. Before the Ministry of Education was separated from higher education.
Liabilities of the Sustainable Development Plan

In 2015, the United Nations member states unanimously adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Plan, which includes 17 goals and 244 indicators. The plan aimed to identify trends in global and national development policies, as well as to propose new options and opportunities to bridge the gap between human rights and development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically addressed quality education in Goal 4, gender equality in Goal 5, reducing inequalities in Goal 10, and peace, justice, and strong institutions in Goal 16. These SDGs included several gender and anti-corruption indicators, most notably combating corruption represented by bribery, reducing rates of sexual violence and sexual harassment, the availability of legal frameworks to promote and ensure equality, and non-discrimination on the basis of gender, or discrimination prohibited under international human rights law, and empowering women and increasing their percentage in administrative positions, among other things. Many other goals incorporated gender indicators, with a total of 54 indicators focusing on gender, accounting for 22.1% of the total\(^41\). The Sustainable Development Plan have been described as global, transformative, comprehensive, inclusive, interrelated, and indivisible.

Liabilities of plans issued by the Palestinian Council of Ministers

The seventeenth Palestinian government presented the National Policy Agenda “Citizen First” 2017-2022, which aimed to establish a national action program for the purpose of humanity while also achieving freedom and prosperity. The plan consisted of three axes, ten priorities, fifty general policies, and 120 policy interventions. The agenda, with all of its components, intersects with the SDGs on education, gender, and corruption in several policy interventions.

When the current eighteenth government took office, it presented the National Development Plan 2021-2023 (Resilient Communities, Economic Disengagement from the Occupation, and Cluster Development Toward Independence), which is centered on a vision of ending the occupation, providing excellent service to the people, and promoting sustainable development. The plan duplicated the National Policy Agenda and expanded it through policy interventions. The plan comprised three axes, ten priorities, 33 general policies, and 148 policy interventions. The national policies and policy interventions included in the plan that intersect with the issues of education, gender, and corruption are as follows:

Based on the government’s directives, the Ministry of Education updated the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2021-2023 according to specifications, including\(^42\):

- Amending sectoral priorities while taking into consideration the current government’s agenda and priorities, as well as introducing new priorities to the sector, modifying existing priorities, or omitting previously attained priorities.
- Improving the quality of services provided to citizens, so that sectoral strategies include goals, outcomes, and targets for further improving service provision and quality.

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\(^{42}\) Minister of Education. Dr. Marwan Awartani. Ibid. 8
Sectoral strategies should address cross-sectoral concerns and issues, particularly gender, youth, and the environment, by collaborating closely with the bodies in charge of cross-sectoral strategy development.

Harmonization with treaties and the international development agenda, particularly those signed and implemented following the adoption of sector plans in 2017.

General comments on the ESSP:

After reviewing and analyzing the ESSP and its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, the National Policy Agenda 2022-2027, and the National Development Plan 2021-2023, the following observations can be made:

1. Although the ESSP claims to be aligned with the SDGs, which are “integrated and indivisible goals and objectives, global in nature, and comprehensive in application”, the ESSP has primarily focused on the fourth goal, education, and has not advanced to a high level of integration with other goals, particularly those related to gender, strong institutions, and combating corruption.

2. The concepts of accountability, transparency, governance, gender, and sexual violence were mentioned in the ESSP; however, the concept of corruption and gender-based corruption were not.

The vision and mission of the Ministry of Education according to the ESSP:

Vision: a Palestinian society that possesses values, knowledge, science and technology and is able to employ that knowledge for liberation as well as development.

Mission: Building an educational system that contributes to consolidating national moral and humanitarian values, forms an environment for critical thinking, and develops the foundations of research, passion, and knowledge, by empowering distinguished educational cadres capable of making a positive change in the educational process, in which the outcomes of the new educational system contribute to meeting the requirements of comprehensive development and creating promising economic opportunities that achieve the goals of the modern enlightened Palestinian society.

The Ministry of Education’s vision and mission included, in its implications and not in its text, concepts related to gender and combating corruption through its talk about values, empowering cadres, and positive change in the educational process, in addition to the requirements of comprehensive development.

The plan also stated that achieving the vision necessitates an examination of the educational system and schools in terms of being free of bureaucratic structures, having all of the system’s operating processes subject to continuous development and improvement, having child-friendly and safe schools, having qualified, committed staff who receive support and appreciation, and understanding that their first priority is to serve students. Additionally, schools that operate in partnership with the Ministry and directorates, with the latter providing equitable material and human resources, supplies, and technical support, as well as setting learning standards and objectives, and enabling evaluation and accountability systems that inform society regarding the quality of school education and student achievement.

43. Ibid. 19
Applying the implicit concepts contained in the vision and mission may reduce corruption risks and address gender issues to some extent, nevertheless it would have been more effective if the vision and mission included the concepts of equality, justice, accountability, transparency, participation, and equal opportunities in its text and implications.

**Strategic Goal 1: Ensuring Safe, Inclusive, and Equitable Enrollment in Education at all Levels of the System.**

This goal includes ensuring safe access to education, inclusion, and equity in education. It also includes providing safe access to schools and educational institutions, and a safe, encouraging, and violence-free educational environment for students and teachers, and ensuring the provision of protection and security for students and teachers.

Palestinian education also seeks, through the first goal, to achieve inclusion and equity, through education at all levels of the educational system (pre-school, basic education, secondary and vocational education, higher education and research, and non-formal education).

This goal constitutes a commitment to addressing all types of exclusion and marginalization, as well as inequalities in access to learning, teaching, and engagement opportunities. As a result, this goal involves a pledge to make the necessary reforms in educational policies and to focus its efforts on the most disadvantaged groups, including people with disability, in order to ensure that no one remains without an education.

What is covered in the goal has a clear connection to the concept of gender, including equality between male and female students. The goal also considers people with disability, and some of the primary policies and strategies related to the goal have reflected this matter, as have priorities in some areas stated in the Strategic Plan.

The preceding constitutes points of strength in terms of gender, with the exception of vocational education, the results of which will be discussed in depth. Furthermore, the report’s statistics of sexual violence at the basic and secondary levels require serious consideration, despite the fact that they were provided as mere percentages without detail.

An interpretation of the first strategic goal, based on the monitoring and evaluation report (2021-2022); The Ministry of Education has made tangible progress in terms of female enrollment in all levels of education, as well as attention to people with disability, both of which are recorded as strengths in favor of the Strategic Plan and implemented by the Ministry of Education.

According to the data⁴⁴, the total enrollment rate in pre-schools for the year 2020-2021 was 27.6%, an increase in favor of females and a decrease from the previous report.

In terms of **basic education**, dropout rates among students in the basic stage (those who leave the formal educational system) before completing the ninth grade reached 0.4% in 2020-2021, with females having the lowest percentage as compared to males.

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As for the number of students with disability in public schools in the basic stage (integrated into public schools for grades 1-9), it reached 2,623 male and female students in 2021; however, the monitoring and evaluation report provided no gender breakdown of the total number. In terms of violence, the percentage of students exposed to violence at school for both genders was as follows: verbal violence 53.8%, physical violence 44.6%, violence caused by neglect and deprivation 35.2%, and sexual violence 14.4%, with females being the least exposed to all forms of violence. At the secondary level, the adjusted net enrollment rate in 2020-2021 reached 81.8%, with a noticeable and significant increase in favor of females. While the total enrollment rate (regardless of age in the secondary stage) in 2020-2021 reached 83.4%, where female enrollment increased noticeably and significantly. The secondary dropout rate in 2020-2021 was 2.2%, with female dropouts being the lowest when compared to males.

According to the report, the number of students with disability integrated into public schools for grades 10-12 in 2021 reached 1,725 male and female students, with 956 females and 769 males.

The monitoring and evaluation report also addressed the percentage of students exposed to violence at school in 2021, which was broken down into the following categories: verbal violence for both genders 55.8%, physical violence 43.1%, violence caused by neglect and deprivation 35.8%, and sexual violence 14%, with females being the least exposed to all past forms of violence. At the vocational education program level, the enrollment rate for the vocational secondary stage (grade 11) in 2020-2021 was 4.8%, with males accounting for the largest percentage; more than three times the female enrollment rate. The percentage of students in vocational streams of the overall secondary stage (grades 10-12) reached 3.5% in 2021; with males accounting for more than twice as females.

As for labeled data, it is only available based on gender (males, females), while the data must be classified according to other marginalized groups as well to allow targeting dropout students.

Although the Ministry's plan did not address the concept of gender-based corruption, the percentages of sexual violence included in the monitoring and evaluation report necessitate that the concept be included in the next plan at the level of policies and/or priorities, as the details of the percentages included in the report indicate that the concept of gender-based corruption is one of the risks that should be considered when developing the plan. Added to that, individuals interviewed from the Ministry and professors (Tharwat Zaid, Ahmad al-Hindi, Amjad Abu Hussein) did not dispute its occurrence\[45\], although confirming that it happened on an extremely limited scale and that all incidents were handled with extreme confidentiality and attention.

\[45\] For more information, refer to: Appendix (2): A list of individuals and institutions interviewed for this report.
Strategic Goal 2: Developing Student-Centered Teaching and Learning Pedagogy and Environment.

The goal consists of several components, including teachers and educational staff (based on their roles and involvement), the curriculum, students, and resources. Returning to the policies and priorities related to this goal, we discover that it addressed all of these elements. It also discussed student equality, positive discrimination in favor of females, marginalized groups, and people with disability, and urged the establishment of standards and systems that ensure school safety and a violence-free environment, which is one of its gender-related strengths. Albeit certain interviewees stated, “that there are genuine issues in the curriculum with regard to gender, as the treatment of the subject reflects the nature of the working groups, which are ideologically and intellectually inconsistent.”

It is worth noting that the Strategic Plan’s policies and priorities made no mention of corruption, despite the fact that the goal is related to governance, as “good governance is one of the main policies for implementing the fourth SDG, and accountability in education is considered an important means of meeting commitments.” The goal also carries many inherent risks related to corruption, such as “everything related to resources, their use and dealing with them, educational loss, and what was stated in the Global Corruption Report- Education of” favoritism and nepotism with regard to enrollment, student transfers, the central role of teachers in educational integrity, the hidden cost of corruption in teacher absenteeism, school losses, shadow education (private tutoring), corruption in the form of abuse of power such as sexual violence and others, transparency related to quality...etc.” These are issues that are fundamental to the goal and should be reflected in the goal’s policies and priorities, as well as the measurement indicators.

One issue to note is that the policies related to this goal made no mention of the 75,777 male and female teachers, and they were only mentioned at the qualification level, which excluded issues related to the fight against corruption or corruption in education. Furthermore, the monitoring and evaluation reports do not assess teachers’ job satisfaction.

Strategic Goal 3: Promoting Accountability, Result-Based Leadership, Good Governance and Management.

The Ministry’s third goal is to strengthen its oversight and regulatory role in the educational sector by institutionalizing the strategic educational planning process, providing the necessary legislation to manage and develop the education sector, developing national educational policies and plans and ensuring their implementation, and promoting the transformation of the Ministry’s work from an input-based approach to a results and accountability-based approach. The aforementioned expands the scope for decentralization, local community engagement, and improved coordination with various partners, which are accompanied by intensive programs in practical training and capacity building for various functions at all administrative and sectoral levels.

46. Interview with Dr. Alia Al-Asali, on 6/7/2023.
Returning to the policies and priorities associated with the third goal, we see that they addressed equality, people with disability, marginalized groups, developing the regulatory legal environment, promoting decentralization in education, developing administrative systems and procedures that improve efficiency, and other issues, all of which are recorded as strengths in the strategy. However, the concept of combating corruption was not accurately, clearly, and explicitly reflected in line with General Policy No. (10) of the government’s NDP, “Promoting Integrity, Accountability, Transparency, and Combating Corruption,” to the point that the words “corruption and integrity” were not mentioned at all in the ESSP.

Although the third goal, which is one of the main pillars of combating corruption at all levels, has strengths at the level of strategy inclusion (policies and priorities), its implications on the ground are still unsatisfactory and require significant effort, necessitating the development of new policies in the next plan. The degree to which the Ministry, directorates, and schools practiced the dimensions of governance and accountability reached 53.9% in 2021, with the Ministry having the highest percentage, followed by the directorates, and schools having the lowest.

The evaluation of the ESSP 2017-2022 shows a significant weakness in transparency and inclusion in relation to the third goal. This calls for increased employee engagement and motivation, efforts to streamline bureaucratic procedures, improved planning and flexibility, the development of financial and administrative systems, and active and effective stakeholder engagement. It has also been demonstrated that there is an inflexible institutional culture that opposes change, exacerbating these issues. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive strategy development, accountability from leadership, and failure of training management to align with capacity development at the required level all impede goal and objective achievement, resulting in shortcomings and unrealistic expectations.

The Ministry and its partners face a number of challenges, including data availability and dissemination. Important studies on student achievement are still underreported or unpublished, making it difficult to assess educational quality. Other challenges include the lack of an incentive system, administrative follow-up, and accountability, which, if achieved, could encourage teachers to participate in training and self-development. Furthermore, there are complex tendering and financial disbursement procedures, as well as those that require 25% financial coverage, which causes the implementation process to be prolonged. It was also discovered that some director generals are unaware of the plan, and others do not adhere to it due to a lack of motivation or incentive.

The ESSP 2017-2022 evaluation concluded that “the accountability and governance program is the second least effective Ministry’s program overall. Despite its high effectiveness in some areas of the plan and digital systems, its low effectiveness in others had an impact on the rest of the programs”.

At the third goal level, the Ministry of Education collaborated to create a document on code of conduct and general professional ethics, and the strength in the document and the Ministry of Education is that it is comprehensive and detailed in a way that reflects the Ministry of Education’s specificity. The document included issues related to combating corruption, corruption in education, and gender-based

corruption. Mr. Tharwat Zaid stated that “the Ministry completed the document based on in-depth dialogues, taking into consideration the comprehensiveness of the document and addressing all issues related to education, and it is awaiting approval.”

The plan did not address the issue of reporting gender-based corruption, despite its importance, and the concept appeared strange to the majority of those interviewed at the Ministry of Education. This naturally leads to a lack of clarity in dealing with gender-based corruption, including issues, competent authorities, and methods for dealing with cases. The term “sexual violence” appears to be the closest to the Ministry of Education and its educational cadres. The Ministry of Education has a Complaints Unit, which is responsible for “dealing with complaints submitted from outside the educational body; parents, the local community, and issues unrelated to the concept of gender-based corruption. Concerns regarding this type of corruption, which are few, are addressed by the Director of Education or the Minister of Education, as well as the Council of Ministers and, on occasion, committees are formed to address these issues.”

Mr. Amjad Abu Hussein explained, “The Ministry of Education deals seriously and confidentially with cases of sexual harassment, and similar behaviors, and investigation committees are formed in these cases, and at other times the Ministry forms fact-finding committees when it receives information indicating the occurrence of a suspicion related to sexual harassment.”

The issue of gender-based corruption requires the Ministry of Education to pay close attention to it at the strategic plan, policies, and priorities levels, so that it is reflected in a clear policy for reporting, as well as a clear procedural form that specifies the path of reporting, the competent authorities, and the mechanisms for dealing with the matter. These procedures must be announced, made clear, and distributed to all departments of the Ministry, directorates, and all Palestinian schools.

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51. Interview with Mr. Tharwat Zaid. Advisor to the Minister of Education, on 19/6/2023.
52. Interview with Mr. Ahmad Al-Hindi, Head of the Complaints Unit, Ministry of Education, on 11/7/2023.
53. Interview with Mr. Amjad Abu Hussein, Director General of Administrative Affairs, Ministry of Education, on 16/7/2023.
Conclusions and Recommendations:

Based on the information in this report on the extent of the Education Sector Strategic Plan’s response to gender-based corruption, as well as a review of the literature on corruption in the education sector and gender-based corruption, and the results of interviews with experts and relevant persons, we reach the following conclusions and recommendations:

Conclusions:

1. The Ministry of Education addresses cases of gender-based corruption as cases of sexual violence.

2. The indicators developed by the Ministry of Education do not include several factors of marginalization (gender, disability, and marginalized areas) that include areas (A), (B), and (C) in the West Bank, as detailed data better organizes policies.

3. Dealing with the concept of quality education is limited to traditional, routine issues and does not address concepts such as corruption in education.

4. The ESSP’s third strategic goal focused on promoting accountability, results-based leadership, governance and management, but it made no mention of corruption or gender-based corruption. This was evident in the lack of the concept at the levels of goals, outcomes, indicators, monitoring, and evaluation.

5. The Complaints Unit in the Ministry of Education is only authorized to receive complaints from outside the educational body; cases of gender-based corruption are not within its responsibilities. There is also no specific competent authority to receive allegations of gender-based corruption.

6. The Ministry of Education’s interest in gender is formal, as evidenced by the Gender Unit’s role and tasks, as well as its level of involvement, particularly in the ESSP.

Recommendations:

1. Including the values of integrity, principles of transparency, anti-corruption mechanisms, and gender-based corruption in the new plan of the Ministry of Education.

2. Aligning the upcoming ESSP with the SDGs and the NDP with regard to gender, promoting integrity, transparency, accountability, and combating gender-based corruption.

3. Developing a policy and system for reporting cases of corruption in general, and gender-based corruption in particular, and unifying the competent authorities in charge of dealing with reporting cases.

4. Improving engagement and accountability, which includes involving Ministry of Education staff in all stages of the ESSP, disseminating the plan to all employees and the public through various means, including parents’ councils in each school, and all directorates.

5. Statistics and reports must include new indicators that contribute to a better understanding of women’s and men’s values, roles, conditions, and needs, as well as indicators that can help monitor other variables that may influence gender discrimination.
6. Using the strategic results framework to determine the source of violence and then reduce it.
7. The ESSP must include professional development opportunities for those concerned, from the perspective of gender-based corruption.
8. Activating and developing the accountability system in the Ministry, at all levels.
9. Institutionalizing better decentralized systems for decision-making and delegation of powers.
10. Monitoring and evaluation reports should include new detailed indicators related to disability, gender, and gender-based corruption.
11. Systems development and atomization, including improving the current results-based planning and follow-up system, introducing labeled indicators, establishing a monitoring, evaluation, learning, and accountability system, improving the efficiency of the finance and procurement systems, reviewing the Education Law, and developing regulations for various programs as needed.

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Documents
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Interviews

- Mr. Tharwat Zaid. Advisor to the Minister of Education.
- Mr. Rifaat Sabah. Director General of the Teacher Creativity Center, and President of the Global Campaign for Education.
- Dr. Alia Al-Asali. Associate Professor - College of Educational Sciences. An-Najah National University.
- Ms. Ilham Sami. Acting Director General of Awareness and Education. Ministry of Women’s Affairs.
- Dr. Maamoun Jabr. Director General of Educational Planning. Ministry of Education
- Ms. Amani Hawash. Head of the Gender Unit. Ministry of Education.
- Mr. Amjad Abu Hussein, Director General of Administrative Affairs. Ministry of Education.
- Dr. Waheed Jubran, Educational Expert.
- Mr. Ahmad Al-Hindi, Head of the Complaints Unit. Ministry of Education.
AMAN was established in 2000 as a civil society organization that seeks to combat corruption and promote integrity, transparency and accountability in the Palestinian society. The Coalition was first formed by an initiative from a number of civil society organizations working in the field of democracy, human rights and good governance. In 2006, the Coalition was accredited as a national chapter for Transparency International.

AMAN is a Palestinian think tank and a specialized body providing knowledge on corruption at the local and regional level through producing specialized reports and studies. The periodic publications include: The annual Integrity and Anti-Corruption Report, the annual Palestinian Integrity Index and the National Integrity System studies and reports, in addition to the Coalition’s continued contributions to produce reports and studies on the status of corruption in the Arab region.

As part of the global anti-corruption movement - and of international alliances and partnerships with relevant specialized coalitions and organizations - AMAN plays a key role in the transfer and contextualization of necessary international knowledge and tools to combat corruption in all sectors.

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