

SPORT FOR PROTECTION THROUGH EDUCATION: CONFLICTING POLICY FRAMEWORKS

INTRODUCTION

Jordan has undertaken key policy and procedural steps toward child protection since the 1990s. However, the turbulent regional context has strained Jordan's capacities in protection due to the huge influx of refugee children with the current number of refugee children estimated at 337,279 (Iraqis (14,489), Syrians (317,423), and other nationalities (5,367)).¹ The declining socio-economic conditions in the country also affect protection services offered to Jordanian children.

Governmental and NGO stakeholders collaborate to meet child protection needs. The Riadati / رياضي Programme, funded by the Olympic Refugee Foundation and implemented by Generations For Peace since 2022, illustrates these efforts and seeks to improve the psychosocial well-being of 15,000 vulnerable refugee and Jordanian children through sport activities delivered in UNICEF's Makani Centres and summer camps in public schools.

The analysis is informed by Riadati activities in addition to three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 16 (7 Males, 9 Females)

stakeholders from the education, health, and sport sectors, including national policymakers, UN agencies, and NGO practitioners. Two group interviews were also conducted with five officials from the Jordan School Sport Federation and the Ministry of Education (MoE). Both research activities were conducted in February-March 2024.

This policy brief argues for investing in Sport for Protection programmes through formal and non-formal educational services. It recommends designing a unified policy framework that aligns national protection frameworks and international commitments, with clear and simple guiding notes and procedural plans. Otherwise, the potential of Sport for Protection in improving the psychosocial well-being of children in host and refugee communities will remain untapped.

¹ UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP). "External Statistical Report on UNHCR Registered Refugees and Asylum-Seekers Jordan as of 15

February 2024," UNHCR, 2024.
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/106772>.

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WHAT IS PROTECTION?

The term protection is broadly defined, with variations between humanitarian, and development actors. ICRC defines humanitarian protection as the effort to protect the fundamental well-being of individuals caught up in conflicts or “man-made” emergencies.² The UN defines protection in peacebuilding and development as ensuring the safety and protecting the rights of individuals affected by conflict and violence. This includes physical safety, upholding human rights, providing humanitarian assistance, strengthening accountability, empowering communities, and creating enabling environments.³ Despite sectoral variations, protection seeks to guarantee the rights and dignity of the vulnerable.

GFP defines protection as:

safeguarding the rights and dignity of individuals to ensure their physical and psychosocial well-being through community empowerment, preventive and mitigation efforts, and respect to rights and dignity through enabling local environments.

Although protection definitions include physical and psychosocial well-being, the analysis here focuses on one element of protection only: psychosocial well-being of children.

PROTECTION IN JORDAN

Jordan is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Rat. in 1991).⁴ In line with this commitment, the Jordanian parliament ratified in 2022 the Children's Rights Law no.17 after persistent advocacy efforts. The Law encompasses provisions for protection from violence, the right to life, health, family care, and education.⁵ While supporters and rights groups believe the Law offers necessary legal safeguards for children, critics argue it undermines local values and could introduce Western influence into Jordanian families.⁶

While the Law is oriented towards rights rather than protection, Jordan has, nevertheless, developed a comprehensive policy framework for child protection in alignment with the CRC.⁷ Laws such as the Juvenile Law and Protection from Domestic Violence Law form the backbone of this framework, with the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), the Ministry of Social Development, and the Ministry of Health, and the Juvenile and Family Protection Department as key policy stakeholders. Additionally, plans like the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development and the National Plan to End Violence Against Children contribute to these efforts. The Guiding Principles to prevent violence also define child protection albeit broadly. Despite these legislative advances, specific operational definitions with procedural measures are

² David Forsythe, by P. (2001). Humanitarian protection: The International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 83, 843.

³ As in UNCHR definition. UNHCR. “Protecting Refugees CYPRUS Contents,” UNHCR 2017. https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/05/UNHCR_Brochure_EN.pdf.

⁴ UN. “Convention on the Rights of the Child Text,” UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>.

⁵ Official Gazette. “Child Right law Act No. (17) of (2022),” The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2022. <https://shorturl.at/W2dLT>.

⁶ Ayman Fdilal. “The Child Rights Law in Jordan: between the imperative of safeguarding children and apprehensions surrounding religious and gender dynamics,” Al Jazeera News, 2022, <https://shorturl.at/mNJUv>.

⁷ Policies – Children of Jordan – اطفال الاردن (n.d.). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from <https://www.childrenofjordan.org/en/policies/>

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needed to ensure effective and coordinated protection efforts.

WHY SPORT FOR PROTECTION THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES?

The focus on psychosocial well-being stems from its role in children's development and social skills as well as coping with challenges.⁸ For refugee children, psychosocial well-being becomes a key element of protection given the stressors they face.⁹ Likewise, sport provide emotional stability to children and adults. For the displaced, sport offer a constructive and secure environment to alleviate stress, encourage healing, and foster resilience.¹⁰

Development and humanitarian actors in Jordan, influenced by international practices, have increasingly relied on sport to aid marginalized populations.¹¹

A UNICEF Makani Site Supervisor in Jordan notes,

“Sport provides an essential outlet for children to release negative energy and develop important skills, particularly in camps where designated play areas are lacking.”¹²

For him, sport offers a sense of normalcy, helping children cope with their challenging circumstances. A Senior protection officer notes that “Sport is crucial for reduction of aggressive behaviour among refugee children.”¹³ National sport actors agree with these perspectives, also noting the potential of sport to prevent drug abuse¹⁴ and as a rehabilitation tool,¹⁵ albeit in a broad sense, for children who have experienced violence, and as means of inclusion among students.

To meet this protection potential of sport, the (MoE) stands out. It has a reach to approximately 2,250,000 students in the Kingdom, including a substantial portion of 250,000 non-Jordanian students.¹⁶

“If you want to reach every household in Jordan, the Ministry of Education is the key, as its influence extends to all regions of the Kingdom through its extensive network of facilities, students, parents, and educational staff.”¹⁷

But educational institutions also include providers of non-formal education, who ease the strain in host communities. These actors include UNICEF Makani centres, Save the Children services, and numerous other INGOs and local NGOs.¹⁸

⁸ Nana Wiedemann, Pia Ammann, Martha M. Bird, Jutta Engelhardt, Katrin Koenen, Dr Marianne Meier and Dr Daniela Schwarz. “Moving Together: Promoting psychosocial well-being through sport and physical activity,” the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, 2014. <https://pscentre.org/resource/moving-together-english/>.

⁹ Rochelle L. Frounfelker, Diana Miconi, Jordan Farrar, Mohamad Adam Brooks, Cécile Rousseau, and Theresa S. Betancourt. “Mental Health of Refugee Children and Youth: Epidemiology, Interventions and Future Directions,” 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9307067/pdf/nihms-1810178.pdf>.

¹⁰ Nana Wiedemann, Pia Ammann, Martha M. Bird, Jutta Engelhardt, Katrin Koenen, Dr Marianne Meier and Dr Daniela Schwarz. “Moving Together: Promoting psychosocial well-being through sport and physical activity,” the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, 2014. <https://pscentre.org/resource/moving-together-english/>.

¹¹ Cheung-Gaffney, E. (2018). Sport and Humanitarian Development: A Look at Sport Programming in the Refugee Crisis Through a Case Study of KickStart Joy Soccer Project at the Zaatar Refugee Camp. *Journal of Legal Aspects of Sport*, 28(2), 208–221. <https://doi.org/10.18060/22571>

¹² Makani Site Supervisor at UNICEF Jordan, Group Interview, Amman, 12 February 2024.

¹³ Senior protection officer /safeguarding focal point Jordan field at Relief International, Group Interview, Amman, 12 February 2024.

¹⁴Head of the Jordan Sport Medicine Federation, Group Interview, Amman, 11 February 2024.

¹⁵ Member of the Protection and Safe Environment Department at the Ministry of Education, Group Interview, Amman, 11 February 2024.

¹⁶ Hala News, “Minister of Education: Quarter of a Million Non-Jordanian Students in the Kingdom,” Hala News, May 2024. <https://www.hala.io/?p=641081>.

¹⁷ Head of the School Sport Department at the Ministry of Education, Group Interview, Amman, 10 March 2024.

¹⁸ Al-Ghad News. “Mahafza: 165 thousand Syrian students in public schools,” Al-Ghad News, 2024. <https://shorturl.at/uqQ0m>.

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THE EVIDENCE IN NUMBERS

During 2023, The Riadati Programme implemented one summer camp during the school’s summer holiday and four annual cycles in Makani Centres. In 2023, 761 of the 894 targeted children and adults (10-24 years old) in Makani Centres and 1,232 of 2,000 targeted in summer camps completed the baseline/endline surveys.

While the psychosocial well-being indicators slightly differed between the two settings, the percentage of refugees who reported improvement was higher than those who reported improvement in host communities in Makani Centres (Figure 1) and summer camps (Figure 2).

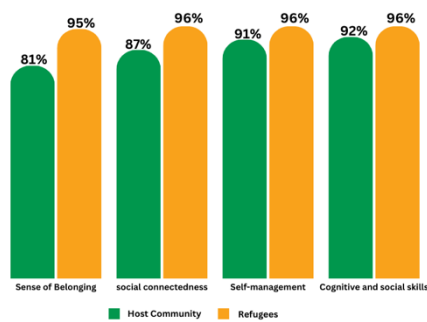


Figure 1: 2023 Percentage of individuals reporting Improvement in Makani Centres.

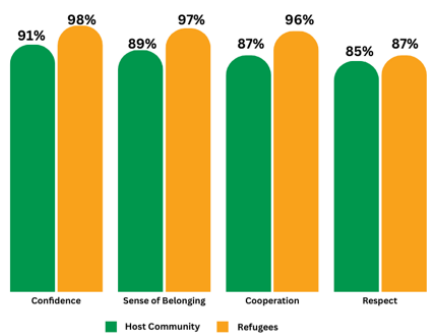
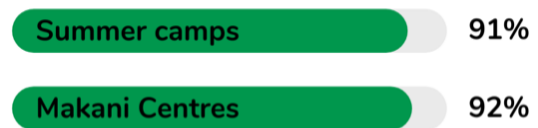


Figure 2: 2023 Percentage of individuals reporting improvement in summer camps.

This variation cannot be attributed to activities’ design. But might indicate a lack of alternate activities available to refugees; hence the causal relation between programme activities and self-reported improvement levels. Further research is needed to discern unintended correlations. The results also indicate that 40% of the surveyed wider Beneficiary Community members reported improvement, demonstrating the ripple effect of programme activities in enhancing the psychosocial well-being of family members of the Target Group.

Throughout Riadati implementation in 2023, an average of 92% improvement was reported, with minor divergence between summer camps and Makani Centres.



In a study across 1787 schools in Jordan, physical education teachers identified three areas of the positive impact of sport: students’ health (90%), positive influence on behaviour (87%), substantial social benefits (85%).¹⁹ The Jordanian Olympic Academy has built on this study in designing its National Strategy for Sport.²⁰

Despite these efforts, integrating Sport for Protection into existing frameworks encounters one main challenge: the divergent understandings of protection.

¹⁹ Jordan Olympic Academy, “Study of the Effectiveness of Physical Education Classes in Jordanian Schools,” JOA, August 2023.

²⁰ The Jordan Olympic Committee, “Jordan Strategy for Sport,” JOC, (n.d.).

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DEFINITIONAL AMBIGUITIES: A BARRIER TO EFFECTIVE PROTECTION

“Sport for Protection is a new concept in Jordan.”²¹

Jordan’s definition of child protection covers a broad spectrum,²² which confuse stakeholders and impede effective cooperation, particularly that they are not familiar nor specialized in protection. The same applies to Sport for Protection: while stakeholders recognize the value of sport for the psychosocial aspects of protection, actors operate in silos and with limited understanding of the concept’s potential. This calls for specialized capacity building within the sport sector on protection.

Some efforts in this regard have already started. The Jordan Olympic Committee developed guiding Instructions on Safe Sport,²³ and the Football Association’s Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.²⁴ Additionally, the School Sport Department at the MoE has its own unpublished child protection policy, which is intended as a resource for teachers. While this builds on the national protection framework and Child Rights Law, it does not align with sport-related policies like the JOC Safe Sport framework.

The ambiguous and broad articles of Children’s Rights Law also presents stakeholders, particularly the MoE with challenges on integrating Sport for Protection in educational

activities. The Head of the School Sport Department at the Ministry notes the hesitation among teachers to sign the MoE child protection policy. Teachers are uncertain on how the enclosed concepts are defined, what procedures they should follow, and what are parameters of liability particularly in relation to "touching" and "harassment,"²⁵ in sport activities.

Employees in MoE, the Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC), and the Jordan Football Association, needs capacity building on thematic knowledge on protection.²⁶

THE POLICY GAPS

“Protection issues cannot be addressed in isolation. Multiple parties must collaborate to effectively work on these issues.”²⁷

Four challenges limit stakeholders’ capacities in activating protection frameworks through sport in educational activities. These challenges operate in causal chain hindering effective cooperation between the main sectors: MoE, national sport actors, and NGOs/UN agencies that offer non-formal educational activities.

The main policy challenge for Sport for Protection arises from the conflicting two policy frameworks Jordanian educational and sport actors use.

²¹ Head of the Jordan Sport Medicine Federation, Group Interview, Amman, 11 February 2024.

²² The National Council for Family Affairs, “Policies and Guidelines for the Prevention and Response to Violence in Jordan (Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Violence, and Child Protection),” NCFa, 2018. <https://ncfa.org.jo/uploads/2020/08/7af17841-4485-5f31151707f5.pdf>.

²³ Jordan Olympic Committee, “Instructions on Safe Sport,” Jordan Olympic Committee, 2003.

[https://www.ioc.jo/uploads/editor/source/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%20%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%8A%20\(v3\).pdf](https://www.ioc.jo/uploads/editor/source/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%20%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%8A%20(v3).pdf).

<https://www.ifa.jo/images/rules/6565fdb6a5bbf.pdf>.

²⁴ Jordan Football Association, “Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy,” Jordan Football Association.

<https://www.ifa.jo/images/rules/6565fdb6a5bbf.pdf>.

²⁵ Head of the School Sport Department at the Ministry of Education, Group Interview, Amman, 10 March 2024.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Member of the Protection and Safe Environment Department at the Ministry of Education, Group Interview, Amman, 11 February 2024.

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“The Football Association insists that the [protection] policy should align with the International Federation's standards, ensuring consistency and interconnectedness. However, the Ministry of Education's child protection policy is based on the National Framework for Family Protection against Violence²⁸ and Children's Rights Law.”²⁹

These **divergent policy frameworks** prevent coordination, complicates decision-making processes, and exacerbates fragmentation between institutional actors on Sport for Protection.

Even where one stakeholder has a clear policy framework, the absence of **procedural plans** to act on certain protection provisions limits institutional capacities to contribute effectively to protection efforts. For example, the Children's Rights Law assigns the MoE responsibility for specific provisions (Article 18 and 23)³⁰ relevant to sport initiatives. Overall, the Law comprises 33 articles, but no procedural plans to implement its provisions were designed.³¹

The third challenge pertains to the **shortage of specialized protection programs and trained personnel** who can advance and guide Sport for Protection efforts. “Specialization is essential for implementing agencies to ensure high-quality, and efficient, service delivery.”³² This specialization costs money, which the few

institutions working on protection cannot afford.

Finally, **inclusivity** remains a concern, with vulnerable groups such as refugees and people with disabilities facing limited access to Sport for Protection programs.

“The challenge becomes even greater when the student is both a refugee and has a disability.”³³

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The JOC should establish a national Sport for Protection coalition that unifies and consolidates the conflicting policy frameworks that government and sport actors adhere to with the goal of developing a clear definition for “Sport for Protection” and an accessible Sport for Protection framework with operational guiding notes for teachers, coaches, and providers of non-formal educational activities.
2. The MOE should create simplified guiding notes of the Child Rights Law and related policies on child protection and sport, making them accessible for teachers and educational providers. The guiding notes should translate complex legal language into clear, straightforward terms with engaging visuals and practical examples. The guiding note should be distributed to relevant actors and stakeholders to

²⁸ The National Council for Family Affairs. “The National Framework for Family Protection against Violence,” the National Council for Family Affairs, 2016. <https://psd.gov.jo/media/mbape0xs/1-1.pdf>.

²⁹ The Head of the School Sport Department at the Ministry of Education, group interview, Amman, 10 March 2024.

³⁰ Article 18 emphasizes children's entitlement to participate in games and sport activities and providing opportunities for recreational and

physical development. Article 23 obliges authorities to undertake preventive and educational measures to protect children from risks.

³¹ The Head of the Protection Department at the Ministry of Education, group interview, Amman, 05 March 2024.

³² The Head of the School Sport Department at the Ministry of Education, group interview, Amman, 10 March 2024.

³³ Director of Disabilities Department at the Ministry of Education, group interview, Amman, 12 February 2024.

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- foster greater awareness, compliance, and advocacy for children's rights and protection through sport in educational settings.
3. The MoE and JOC should develop a joint capacity building initiative, in collaboration with the National Council for Family Affairs and NGOs working in non-formal education to build capacities on Sport for Protection, and protection in general, for educators, coaches, NGO actors, and support staff utilizing Sport for Protection.
 4. Policy stakeholder leading suggested recommendations should respect the diversity and inclusion principles and international standards to ensure addressing protection needs of females, children with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.
 5. The Jordan School Sport Federation should organize quarterly meetings, bringing together national stakeholders and INGO actors engaged in Sport for Protection. The meetings can serve as platforms for exchanging best practices, lessons learned, and innovations.
 6. NGOs should collaborate with MoE, JOC, and other stakeholders to launch an awareness campaign featuring role models and athletes as ambassadors for Sport for Protection to clarify the protection potential of sport and inspire children and their families to engage in sport-based initiatives.

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