

ERF Policy Brief

Does Social Protection in Jordan Ensure Coverage for Vulnerable Groups?

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About the authors

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In a nutshell

- *Jordan's social protection system has made important strides since 2010, with effective coverage recovering to 63 percent of households in 2025 after a notable dip in 2016.*
- *Yet aggregate coverage masks structural gaps: access to contributory schemes remains strongly shaped by wealth, gender, household structure, and employment status, with poorer and female-headed households relying disproportionately on non-contributory assistance that is both limited in reach and declining in real value.*
- *Coverage disparities that persist across wealth, gender, age, and disability underscore that social protection outcomes are shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities rather than single factors.*
- *Jordan's National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025–2033 is a critical policy vehicle to address these disparities and coverage gaps towards realizing the ambition of a unified, inclusive and shock-responsive system.*
- *Achieving this ambition requires moving beyond aggregate coverage targets to track who is being left behind, stronger integration of employment and social protection policies, and sustained investment in reaching those who remain structurally excluded: the poorest female-headed households, women outside the labor force, informal and outside-establishment workers, own-account workers, disabled individuals, and the growing share of elderly Jordanians still living without any form of social protection benefit.*

We acknowledge the financial support of the European Union; the International Labour Organization (ILO) through the EU-Madad funded project 'Towards an inclusive national social protection system and accelerating decent job opportunities for Syrians and vulnerable Jordanians'; the World Bank; UNICEF; UN Women; and the International Growth Centre (IGC) for the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey 2025, on which this policy brief is based. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this work are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors, or the governments they represent.

1. Introduction

In Jordan, Social Protection (SP) has been rapidly evolving, with several adjustments in social security laws and social assistance programs since 2010 (See Alhwarin and Selwaness 2019; Razzaz and Selwaness 2022; Kawar et al. 2022). Jordan has undergone significant reforms culminating in the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025–2033, which aims to build a unified and inclusive system aligned with the country’s Economic Modernization Vision, enabling consistent transfers to vulnerable groups while allowing coverage to expand during various types of shocks. In this context, SP expenditure reached 11 percent of GDP in 2023, a share below the global average (12.9 percent) but nearly double that of other Arab and lower middle-income countries (ILO, 2024). Nevertheless, key lifecycle and equity gaps remain in Jordan’s social protection coverage (ILO 2022), requiring further action to ensure equitable coverage for all vulnerable groups.

This policy brief highlights key findings from a recent study of SP in Jordan (Alhwarin and Selwaness 2026), drawing on data from the three waves of the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey (JLMPS) conducted in 2010, 2016, and 2025. The study provides an evidence base for policy design, especially given the scarcity of nationally representative data on social protection coverage in Jordan.

2. The evolution of aggregate social protection coverage

The effective coverage rate, corresponding to Indicator 1.3.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and measured by the proportion of households in which at least one member is covered by at least one type of SP benefit (whether non-contributory social assistance, old-age pensions, or active contribution to a social security scheme) improved to 63 percent of households in 2025 (around 1,258,830 households). This marks an important recovery from the noticeable drop to 47 percent in 2016 and may reflect Jordan’s ongoing SP reform efforts (Figure 1).

The 2025 effective coverage rate is also substantially higher than most recent official estimates based on administrative data, which showed that in 2021 roughly 35 percent of the population was covered by at least one program, rising to 45 percent of Jordanians (DOS 2021). Each component of effective coverage improved in 2025: old-age pensions receipt rose to 25 percent of households in 2025, non-contributory transfers

(primarily capturing NAF monthly cash assistance)¹ rose to 7 percent, and social insurance coverage rates recovered to 40 percent in 2025 after falling sharply from 47 percent in 2010 to 32 percent in 2016.

Coverage rates vary by nationality

In 2025, the effective coverage rate for Jordanian households reached 66 percent (around 1,181,367 households), while that of non-Jordanian households reached 39 percent (around 77,463 households).

The sharp rise in non-Jordanian coverage relative to 2016 (8 percent) is primarily attributed to the expanded scope of SP-related questions in the JLMPS 2025 questionnaire, which capture a wider set of benefits, particularly UN assistance to refugees and forced migrants (Krafft and Tamim 2026). This has led to improved measurement between 2016 and 2025, especially for refugees. When the UN assistance is excluded, effective coverage for non-Jordanians falls to around 9 percent, broadly comparable to 2016 (8 percent).

Given the focus of this brief on Jordan’s social protection system and its coverage of vulnerable Jordanian households, the remainder of the analysis focuses exclusively on Jordanian households and individuals.

3. Social protection of vulnerable groups among Jordanians

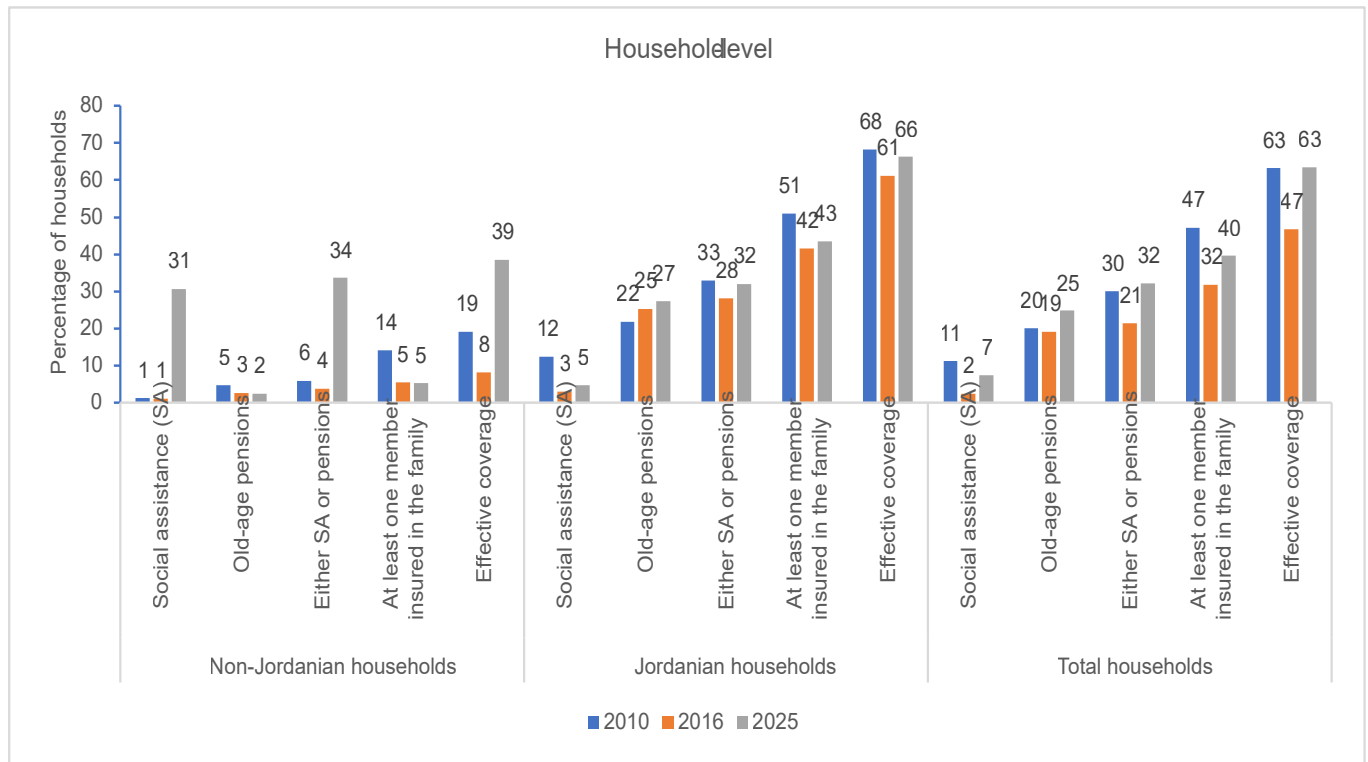
Social assistance transfers in 2025 target poor Jordanian households, particularly female-headed ones

The analysis of JLMPS 2025 data shows that social assistance programs are effectively targeted toward poorer households. Jordanian households in the first decile of the wealth distribution (i.e., the poorest) have the highest incidence of receiving cash benefits, either non-contributory social assistance or old age/survivor pensions, at 41 percent (Figure 2). This is primarily driven by their receipt of non-contributory (tax-funded) social assistance transfers, which are inversely related to wealth decile and appear to be pro-poor: 16 percent of the first decile received such benefits, compared to virtually zero in the highest decile (the richest). There is also a strong gendered dimension in the receipt of

¹ It should also be noted that newer social assistance programs, such as the Takaful cash transfer program, are likely not captured by the JLMPS 2025 questionnaire, which may lead to an underestimate of non-contributory coverage.

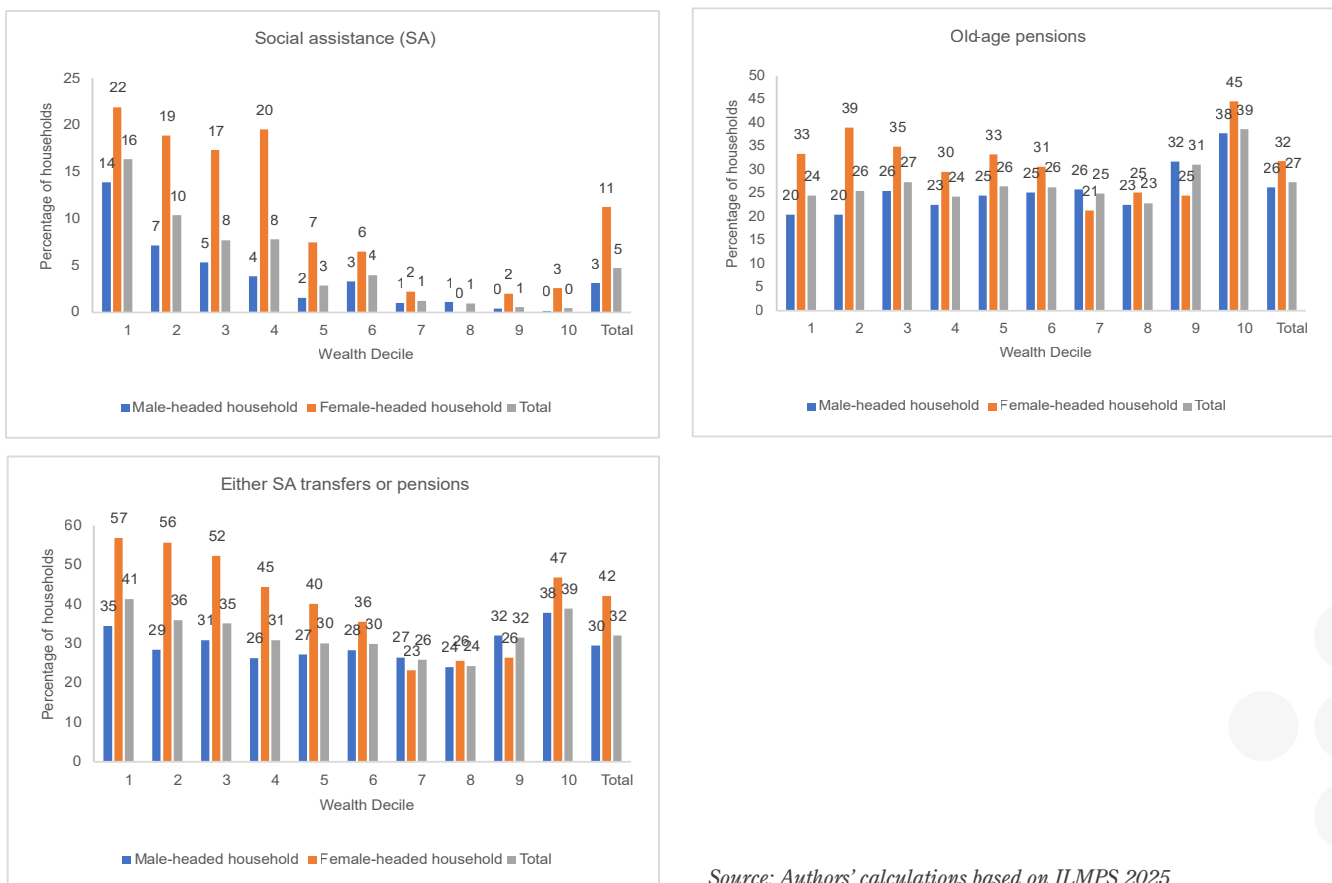


Figure 1. Coverage rates (at the household) by type of social protection program and nationality, JLMPS 2010-2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, 2016, 2025.

Figure 2. Proportion of households covered by program type, household wealth decile and sex of head of household, Jordanian households, JLMPS 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

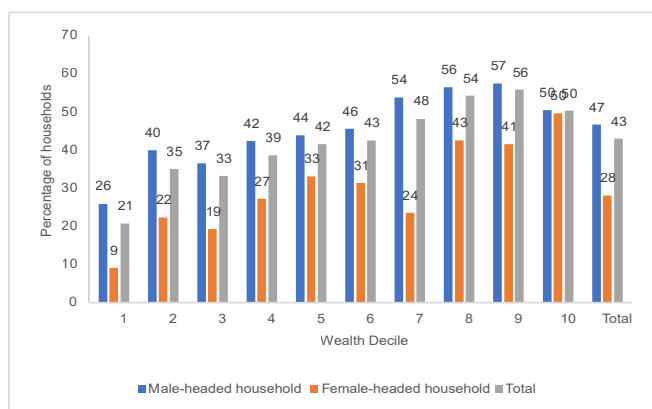


cash benefits among poor Jordanian households, with more than half of female-headed households in the first and second deciles (57-56 percent) receiving cash benefits, either social assistance or old-age/survivor pensions, compared to roughly a third of their male-headed counterparts (35 and 29 percent respectively).

Uneven access to old age/survivor pensions across the wealth distribution

The patterns of old-age pension receipt and social insurance access by wealth and gender reflect two completely different mechanisms working at opposite ends of the wealth spectrum. The first is the wealthy/male dynamic whereby contributory retirement pensions rise with wealth because they are tied to formal employment (i.e., covered by social insurance). Male-headed and wealthier households dominate this space. The second is the poor/female dynamic whereby the poorest women (in the first to third deciles of the wealth distribution) have very weak formal labor participation, reflected by their low likelihood of having at least one socially insured working member in the household (Figure 3), yet receive old-age or survivor pensions at substantially higher rates (33 to 39 percent) than their male counterparts (20 to 25 percent) as shown in Figure 2. Because purely contributory schemes typically favor men due to historically higher formal labor market participation, this disparity suggests that an important portion of these old-age benefits received by poor women are likely non-contributory social pensions or survivor benefits, functioning essentially as poverty-targeted social assistance for vulnerable women.

Figure 3. Proportion of households with a socially insured working member by household wealth deciles and sex of head of household, Jordanian households, JLMPS 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

Both non-contributory social assistance and old-age or survivor pensions remain vital for supporting elderly Jordanians, particularly women

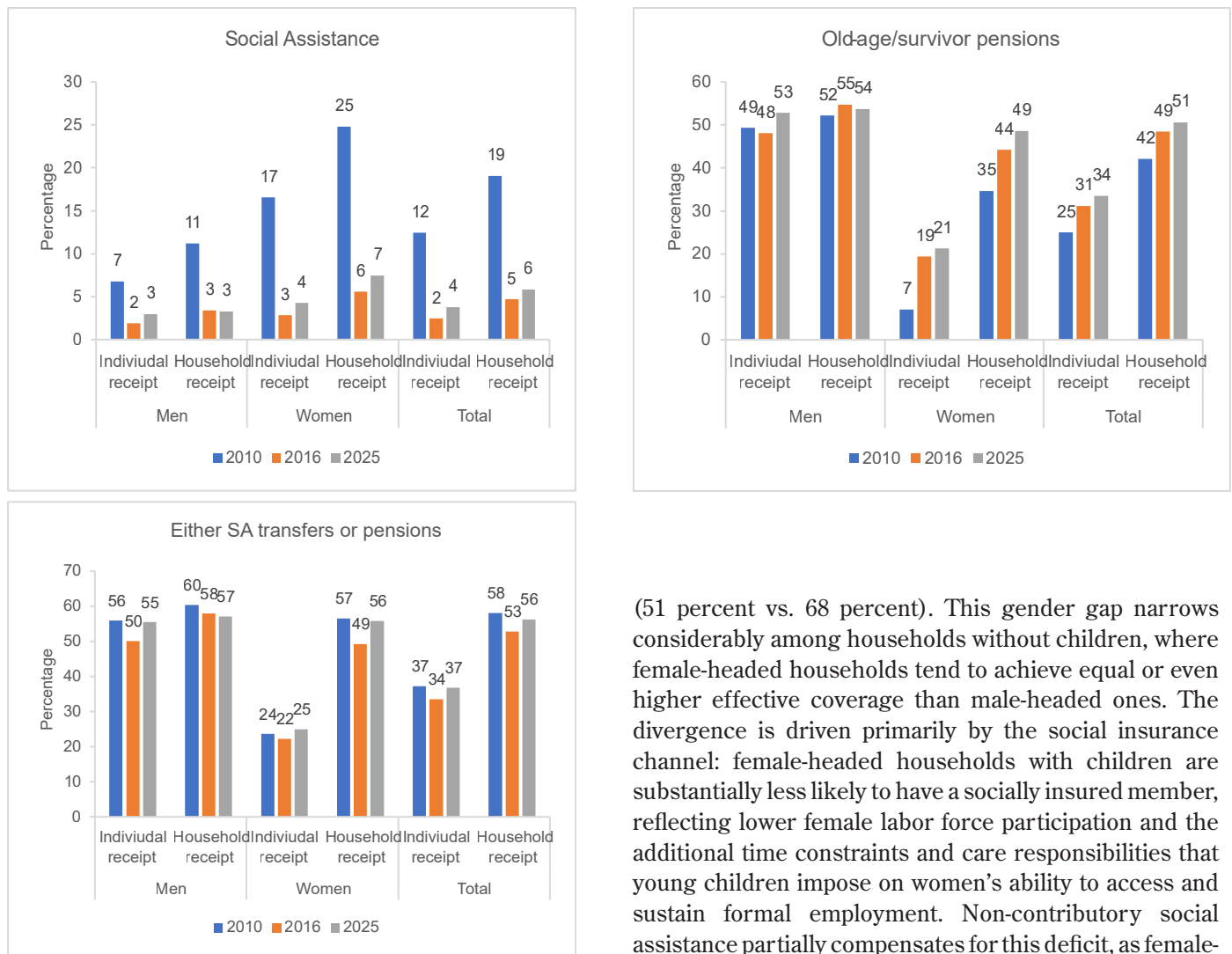
A key component of the NSPS is the extension of benefits to include all elderly individuals in the country. Elderly people, defined according to the statutory age of retirement in Jordan as women aged 55 and above, and men aged 60 years and above, represent a growing share of the population, reaching 13 percent of total Jordanians, up from 7 percent in 2016. In 2025, around 56 percent of elderly Jordanians lived in households receiving either non-contributory transfers or old age/survivor pensions, meaning that 44 percent still lived in non-beneficiary households (Figure 4).

Among direct recipients, around 37 percent of elderly Jordanians received either non-contributory transfers or old age/survivor pensions, with elderly men considerably more likely than elderly women to benefit (55 percent versus 25 percent). Old-age and survivor pensions remain the main form of SP that elderly individuals rely on. Social assistance plays a limited but gender-differentiated role: elderly women are more likely than elderly men to (directly) receive non-contributory transfers (4 vs. 3 percent) and to live in beneficiary households (7 vs. 3 percent). These findings underscore that social assistance functions as an important poverty alleviation instrument specifically for elderly women, whose access to contributory pensions might be restrained due to their historically lower access to the labor market and weaker attachment to contributory schemes.

In terms of adequacy, the real average value of NAF social assistance transfers declined from JOD 118 per month in 2016 to JOD 100 in 2025. Real average pension values showed more positive trajectory, reaching JOD 409 per month in 2025, up from JOD 362 in 2010. Yet, the median retirement pension fell from JOD 356 in 2016 to JOD 350 in 2025, suggesting that purchasing power gains have been uneven and that lower-income pensioners and social assistance recipients have seen limited improvement in the real value of their benefits over time.



Figure 4. Receipt rate (%) of contributory and non-contributory cash transfers and effective coverage rates by sex among elderly people, Jordanians, JLMPS 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

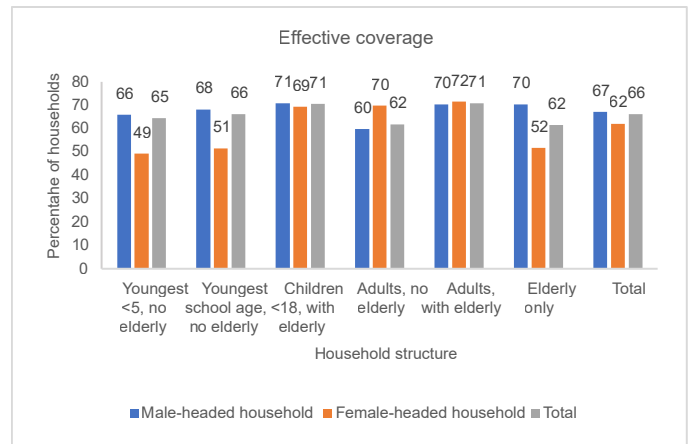
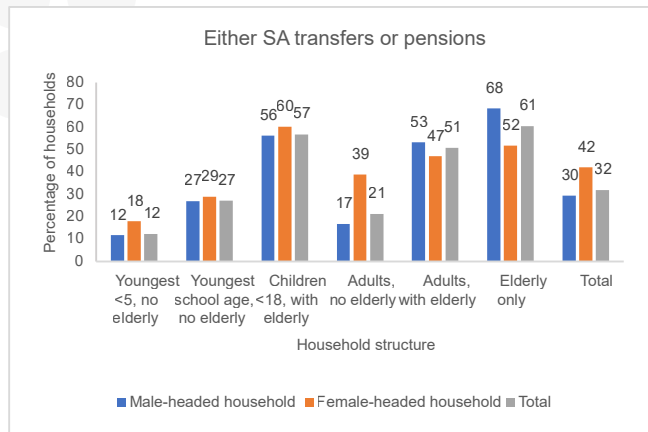
Social protection coverage varies by household structure, particularly by the presence and age of children and elderly members

Children indirectly benefit from household-level SP coverage, as no direct recipients are found among those aged 0–14. Household structure, particularly the presence and age of children, shapes coverage rates substantially. Female-headed households with young children face the largest gender gap in effective coverage: 49 percent among female-headed households with a youngest child under five and no elderly, compared to 66 percent for their male-headed counterparts (Figure 5). A similar gap holds for households with school-age children and no elderly

(51 percent vs. 68 percent). This gender gap narrows considerably among households without children, where female-headed households tend to achieve equal or even higher effective coverage than male-headed ones. The divergence is driven primarily by the social insurance channel: female-headed households with children are substantially less likely to have a socially insured member, reflecting lower female labor force participation and the additional time constraints and care responsibilities that young children impose on women's ability to access and sustain formal employment. Non-contributory social assistance partially compensates for this deficit, as female-headed households with children are more likely than their male-headed counterparts to receive cash benefits: 18 percent versus 12 percent overall for households with a youngest child under five, and 29 percent versus 27 percent for those with school-age children. However, this offset remains insufficient to close the overall effective coverage gap. These patterns suggest that household structure, particularly the presence of young children, exerts an important role in shaping gender disparities in access to SP, with caregiving responsibilities and unpaid care work considerably constraining women's ability to participate in the labor market, and their access to contributory social security schemes.



Figure 5. Receipt rate (%) of contributory and non-contributory cash transfers and effective coverage rates by household structure and sex of head of household (percentage of covered Jordanian households out of total Jordanian households), JLMPS 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

High and increased social insurance coverage among Jordanian workers

Social insurance coverage among Jordanian workers increased from 60 percent in 2010 to 67 percent in 2025. Coverage rises steadily with age, peaking during the prime working years (30-49), before gradually declining as workers approach retirement. This pattern reflects both life-cycle effects, as workers accumulate more stable employment, and cohort effects, whereby older generations, especially women, are more likely to be employed in public sector jobs, which are associated with the highest levels of social insurance coverage. The observed improvement in social insurance coverage across age groups may be potentially linked to recent social insurance reforms, including the expansion of maternity and unemployment benefits, and programs such as *Estidama* ++.

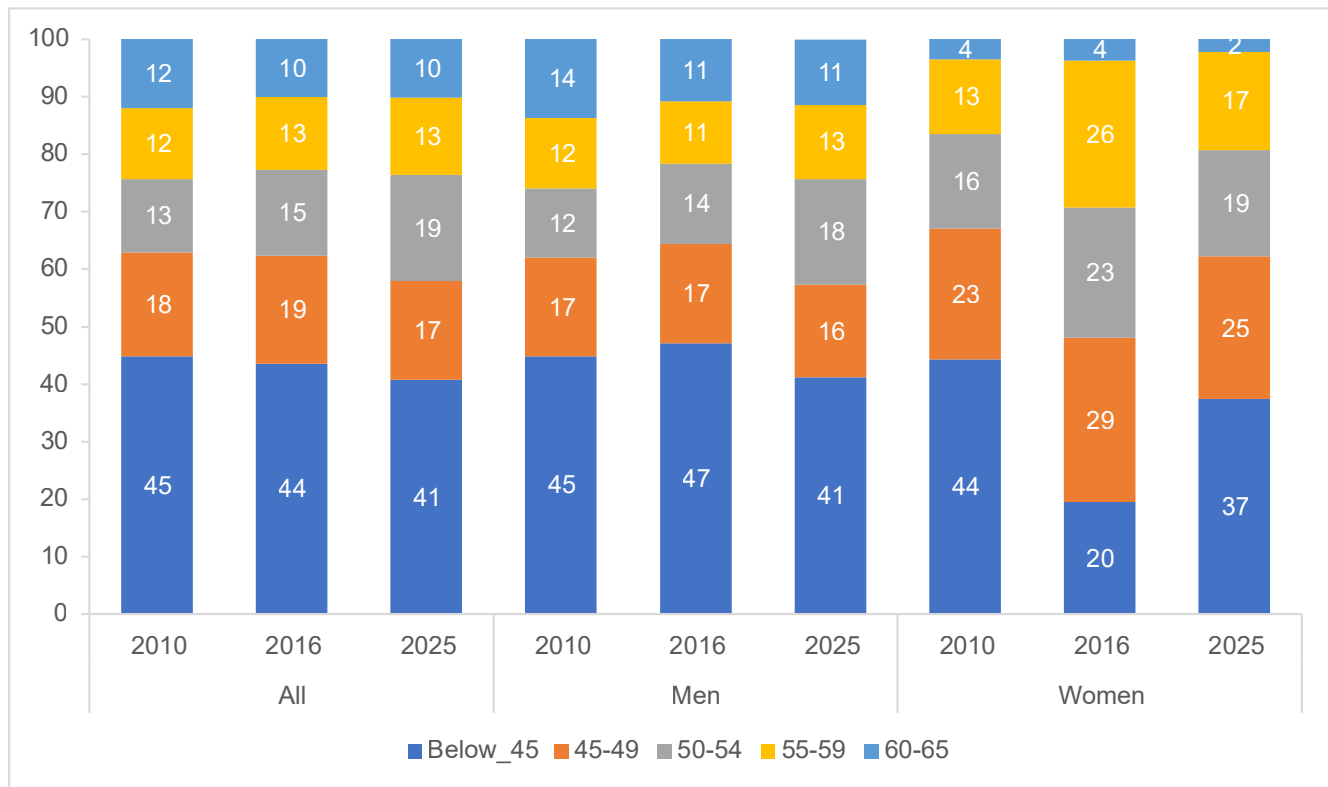
Notably, coverage among employed women reached 83 percent in 2025, exceeding that of their male counterparts (64 percent). However, this figure must be read against women’s very low employment rate in Jordan of around 12 percent in 2025, meaning that only a small fraction of working-age women are effectively protected through contributory schemes.

A growing disparity in effective social protection (SP) coverage by employment status of household heads

Nearly all households with heads employed in the public sector (92 percent) or in private wage jobs within establishments (67 percent) receive at least one form of SP, primarily through social insurance coverage. In sharp contrast, only 28 percent of households headed by private wage workers outside establishments are covered. Self-employed and employer-headed households have below average coverage (48-51 percent vs. 66 percent on average), aligning more with non-employed rather than with formally employed households. Among non-employed heads, households headed by disabled individuals stand out as a particularly vulnerable group, with an effective coverage rate of 54 percent in 2025, a decline of 4 percentage points since 2016, despite their evident need for support. This declining trend underscores the need for greater efforts to reach households headed by disabled individuals, as well as own-account workers and those in precarious jobs (wage workers outside establishments), reinforcing the importance of integrating employment and SP policies under the NSPS framework.



Figure 6. Distribution (in percentage) of Jordanian retirees by age of retirement (five categories) and by sex between 2010-2025, retirement age between 30 and 65



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, 2016, and 2025

Focus on early retirement patterns

Ongoing reforms to the social insurance scheme since 2010 have sought to enhance the long-term sustainability of the Social Security Corporation (SSC) pension fund, by tightening eligibility criteria for early retirement and increasing minimum contributions requirements (Alhawarin and Selwaness 2019). While the 2016 survey wave captured immediate post-reform adjustments, the 2025 wave provides a more robust profile roughly 15 years after the reform, reflecting stabilized behavioral responses.

The stricter vesting requirements appear to have delayed rather than prevented early retirement among men. The share of individuals retiring below 45 contracted, while the share retiring between ages 50 and 54 expanded noticeably from 13 percent in 2010 to 19 percent in 2025, reflecting two distinct retirement tracks: a persistent but reduced group still exiting before age 45, and a new concentration in the early 50s consistent with the increased minimum service requirements.

The reform's impact has been markedly different for women. Their retirement age distribution shifted substantially toward the statutory retirement age of 55, suggesting the reform was more binding for women than for men. However, women who ever worked remain more likely than men to exit the system via a lump sum payment rather than a monthly pension (19 percent vs. 14 percent), and less likely to receive monthly pensions (50 percent vs. 57 percent), reflecting their weaker attachment to formal employment and greater difficulty in meeting minimum contribution requirements for standard pension eligibility.

4. Policy discussion

The paper's findings point to the need for better consolidation and integration for system-wide effectiveness. The components of Jordan's social protection system work in silos, where social assistance and social insurance operate in parallel, with the National Aid Fund (NAF) focusing on poor households and the Social Security Corporation (SSC) on formal workers.



This fragmentation leaves a “missing middle”, such as women, low-income earners, informal and own-account workers, excluded from both systems, and discourages transitions from assistance to contributory coverage. The National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2025–2033 can serve as a critical vehicle to build an integrated social protection architecture, gradually linking the social assistance and insurance pillars through shared registries, unified beneficiary identification, and aligned eligibility rules. Integration should allow movement between programs without penalty: enabling NAF beneficiaries who enter formal work to retain transitional benefits or receive SSC subsidized contributions would transform social protection from a static safety net into a dynamic pathway toward inclusion and formalization. Realizing this potential, however, requires a stronger evidence base. Jordan lacks nationally representative surveys designed for regular monitoring of poverty and vulnerability or susceptibility to shocks, that may affect vulnerable populations. Jordan could draw on international practices such as the Risk Transfer Mechanism (RTM) of Social Protection utilized in OECD countries, which helps identify emerging needs, adjust eligibility criteria, and allocate resources more efficiently, and which would strengthen the NAF existing electronic beneficiary registry, by anchoring it in regularly updated survey evidence.

Some groups remain structurally excluded from social insurance coverage, including own-account workers, workers outside establishments, women, refugees, households headed by non-employed disabled individuals, and youth. Bridging these structural gaps requires embedding social protection and care policies with labor market reforms and leveraging it as a driver of formalization through incentives and subsidies. The Estidama ++ program offers a practical basis for action: time-bound contribution subsidies for informal and vulnerable workers, paired with improvements in communication and service delivery improvements to build trust and retention. This initiative generates not only financial incentives but may also generate behavioral ones: Participants who experience the tangible benefits of social insurance coverage such as maternity, work injury, or health benefits, are more likely to remain in the system even after the subsidy phase ends.

Old-age income security remains tied to formal work histories meaning coverage gaps widen precisely at the stages of life when protection is most needed: during child-bearing years, in old-age and in the event of disability. Introducing a non-contributory social pension to complement the SSC’s contributory system would guarantee a minimum level of income security during

these stages of life, aligning with the NSPS 2025–2033’s life-cycle approach. Modest, fiscally sustainable social pensions can close protection gaps quickly, especially when anchored in existing delivery infrastructure such as the National Unified Registry (NUR) and NAF’s payment infrastructure. Similarly, introducing a disability allowance, separate from poverty-based targeting, would ensure that persons with disabilities are protected as rights-holders with distinct needs, not merely as members of poor households. These allowances could be integrated with other measures already under development, such as Takaful or the professionalization of social work, to create a coherent disability inclusion framework. Together, a social pension and a disability allowance would anchor Jordan’s transition toward a comprehensive life-cycle protection floor, reinforcing the universality principles at the core of the ILO’s Recommendation No. 202.

Reforming social protection and achieving universal coverage is a complex but gradual and achievable process, requiring sustained commitment at the political, institutional, and fiscal levels.

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