

ERF Policy Brief

Advancing Women's Agency in Jordan: Progress, Gaps, and Policy Priorities, 2010–2025

Evidence from the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey

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In a nutshell

- Patterns of women's agency in Jordan show uneven progress over 2010-2025 across dimensions. Gains in women's voice in household decisions and rejection of intimate partner violence are now high in many groups, especially among married women, while other dimensions still lag behind.
- Freedom of movement and financial autonomy remain the weakest dimensions. Even in 2025, many women still cannot go alone to key places, about half report access to household money, and only a small minority own savings or other valuables in their own name.
- Education is a powerful equalizer. Women with secondary or higher education are more likely than less educated women to participate in household decisions, move freely, access money, own assets, and hold supportive attitudes toward gender equality.
- Regional and nationality gaps are modest but persistent. Women in the Middle and South regions face greater constraints on mobility and financial autonomy, and Syrian women lag behind Jordanian women in ownership of assets.
- Gender attitudes have become more ambivalent. Support for women's right to work and equal schooling remains widespread, but enthusiasm for women's leadership and for men sharing household and care has weakened over time, especially among younger and less educated women.
- In 2025, men are consistently less supportive than women of women's work, financial independence, and leadership, although both women and men reject intimate partner violence in nearly every situation.
- Deepening women's agency requires not only expanding girls' education and decent jobs, but also securing women's independent control over savings and assets, expanding safe transport and childcare, targeting refugee and low-income women in financial inclusion and social protection, and engaging men and communities to shift restrictive social norms about women's work, mobility, and leadership.

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1. Why women's agency matters for Jordan

Jordan has invested heavily in girls' education and has adopted multiple strategies and action plans on gender equality (JNCW, 2020; UN Women, 2022; UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2025). Yet women's participation in paid work remains among the lowest in the world, and progress has been slow (IMF, 2022; World Bank, 2023; Asfoura and De Moura, 2020; Krafft, Assaad and Abushehab, 2026). This paradox reflects not only labor demand and macroeconomic constraints but also limits on women's agency, including their ability to move freely, participate in decision-making, control resources, and challenge restrictive norms (Felicio and Gauri, 2018; OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020; Burniat, Cano and Asfoura, 2022).

This policy brief draws on Alkasasbeh and Istaiteyeh (2026). Using data from the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey (JLMPS) for 2010, 2016, and 2025 (OAMDI, 2018a, 2018b, 2026), this brief tracks five areas of agency for women aged 15–59: decision making, mobility, financial autonomy, gender role attitudes, and rejection of intimate partner violence (IPV). The 2025 data also cover men's and women's views on women's work, childcare, financial independence, and leadership, allowing gender comparisons. The findings show progress but also reveal stalled or fragile agency, suggesting a reform agenda that combines investment in services and infrastructure with efforts to reshape norms and improve women's economic security.

2. Women's agency in Jordan: overall patterns

The JLMPS data for 2010, 2016, and 2025 reveal a complex picture of women's agency in Jordan. Changes over time differ across domains and across women with different levels of education, ages, regions, and nationalities. The following subsections describe how these patterns unfold in household decision making, mobility, financial autonomy, gender role attitudes, rejection of intimate partner violence, and gender gaps in norms about women's work and roles.

2.1. Household decision making: broad gains, especially for unmarried women

Women's involvement in household decisions is now near universal for married women and rising, but it remains lower and more stratified among unmarried

women. Between 2010 and 2025, unmarried women's participation in major purchases, daily needs, food decisions, and visits rises from about 17–39 percent to about 53–58 percent. Married women start from much higher levels and reach about 85–90 percent or more in most domains by 2025, with only a small decline in decisions over buying personal clothes, as Figure 1 shows. Among unmarried women, involvement increases with age and is strongly shaped by education, with the highest participation among women with secondary or higher schooling and the lowest among women with little or no schooling. Regional gaps are modest but growing: women in the North and Middle report more decision-making involvement than women in the South, especially among married women. In 2025, Syrian women report slightly higher involvement across an index of all decisions than Jordanian women in both marital groups: about 65 percent of unmarried Syrian women compared with 59 percent of unmarried Jordanian women, and about 93 percent of married Syrian women compared with 89 percent of married Jordanian women.

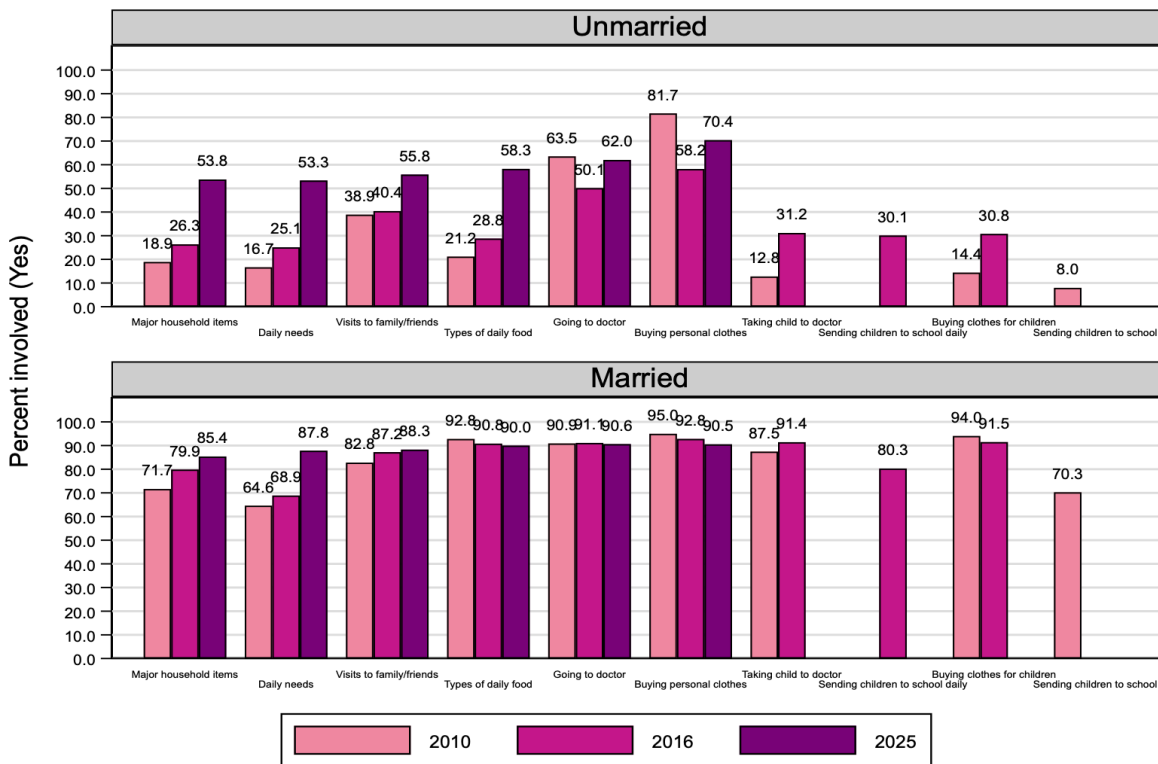
2.2. Freedom of movement: the most persistent constraint

Women's mobility remains a persistent constraint despite gains by 2025. As Figure 2 shows, the share of women able to go to key destinations alone or after informing someone, without needing permission, was limited in 2010, declined further in 2016, and then recovered by 2025. By 2025, 36 percent could take a child to the doctor, 38 percent could go to a health center, 39 percent could go to the market, and 41 percent could visit family or friends. Still, fewer than half report this level of mobility to any destination, underscoring mobility as a central barrier to agency.

Freedom of movement rises with age and education. Younger women and those with little or no schooling have the lowest autonomy, while women in their forties and fifties and those with basic or secondary/higher education report the highest mobility, though still below half in most cases. Regional gaps are modest but persistent, with women in the North somewhat more mobile than those in the South and Middle. Nationality differences are small: Jordanian and Syrian women report similarly limited mobility overall, suggesting that restricted movement is a widespread constraint rather than one confined to particular subgroups.

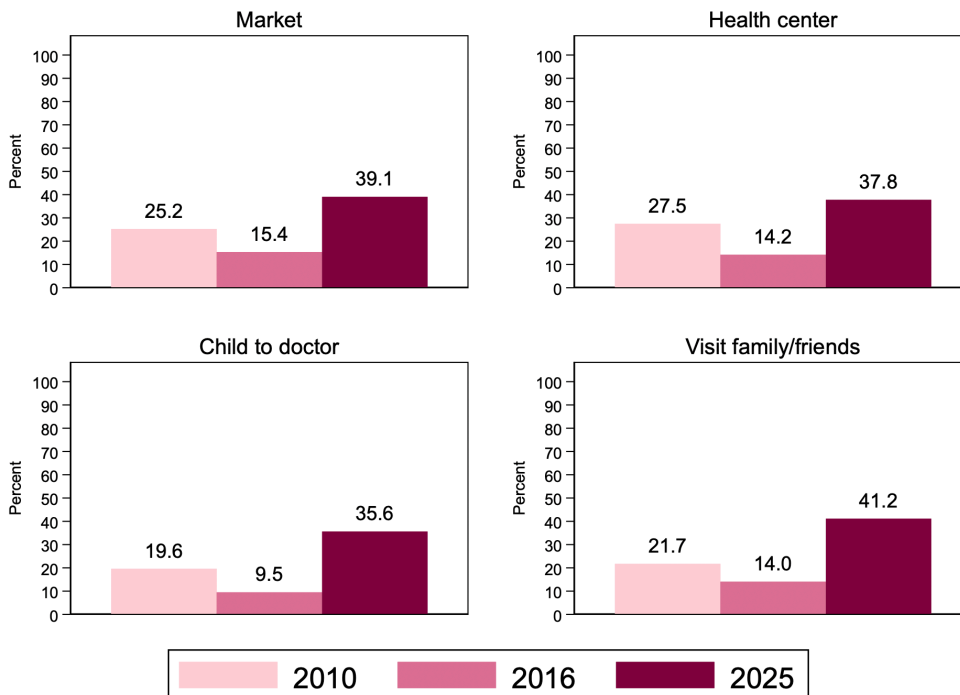


Figure 1. Percentage involved in household decisions, by marital status, women aged 15–59, 2010–2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010-2025

Figure 2. Percentage with free movement, by destination, women aged 15–59, 2010–2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010-2025

Notes: Free movement is able to go to destinations alone or after informing someone, without needing permission.



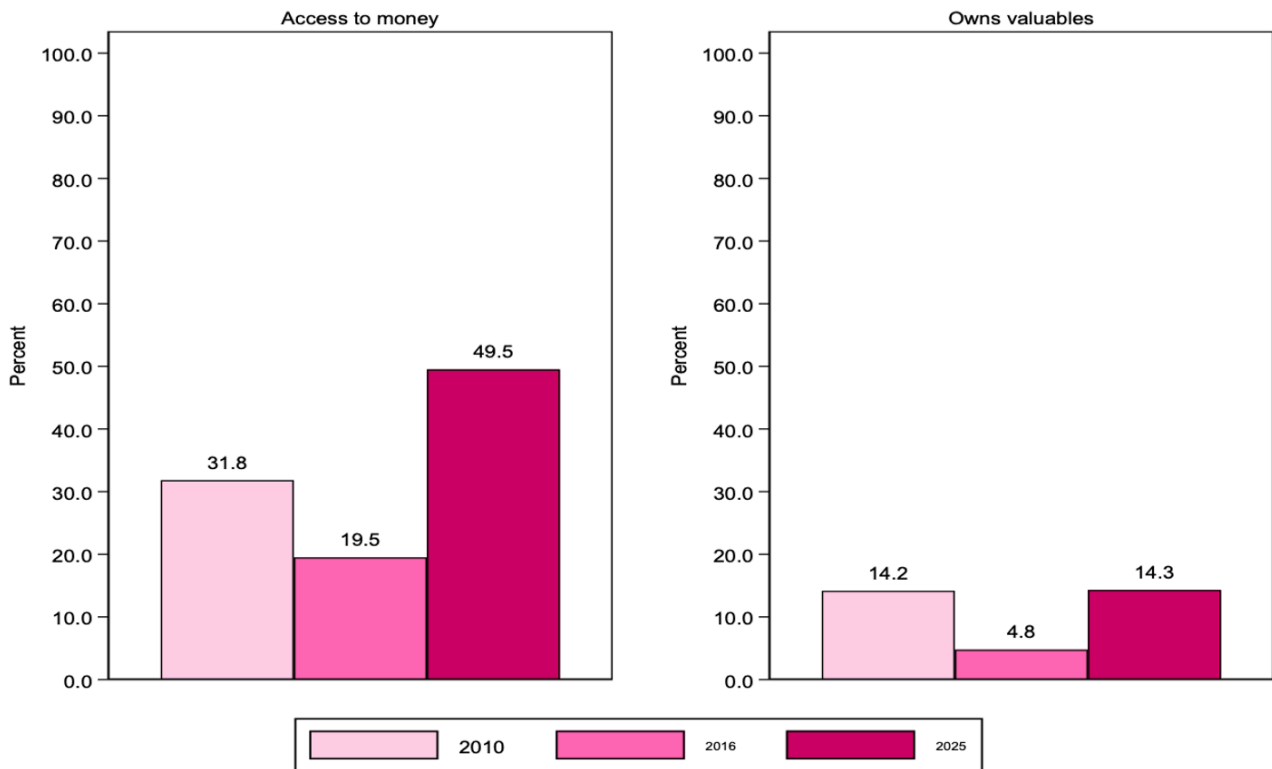
**2.3. Financial autonomy:
a U-shaped trajectory**

Women’s financial autonomy has improved but remains limited and unequal. Figure 3 shows that access to household money and ownership of valuables both follow a U-shape: they drop sharply between 2010 and 2016, then recover so that by 2025, about half of women can obtain money when needed, and asset ownership is back near its 2010 level. Autonomy is strongest among older and more educated women and weakest among adolescent girls and those with little schooling, with modest but persistent gaps across regions. Jordanian and Syrian women report similar access to day-to-day cash, but Syrian women are far less likely to own assets. Most women can manage routine spending and their own earnings, yet a nontrivial minority still lack control, underscoring that financial agency remains far from universal.

**2.4. Gender role attitudes:
more instrumental, less egalitarian**

Women’s gender-role attitudes remain supportive in some areas but have become more mixed over time, as Figure 4 shows. Support for women’s right to work declined from 91 percent in 2010 to 77 percent in 2025, while support for husbands helping with children fell from 95 percent to 76 percent, and support for husbands helping with chores declined from 88 percent to 73 percent. Rejection of the view that working women cannot be good mothers also weakened, from 85 percent to 64 percent. By contrast, support for girls’ schooling as preparation for work increased from 52 percent to 74 percent, and agreement that women need paid work for financial autonomy rose from 56 percent in 2010 to 73 percent in 2025, despite peaking in 2016. Overall, attitudes have shifted toward viewing women’s education and work as economically important, while support for shared care, maternal employment, and broader egalitarian roles has softened.

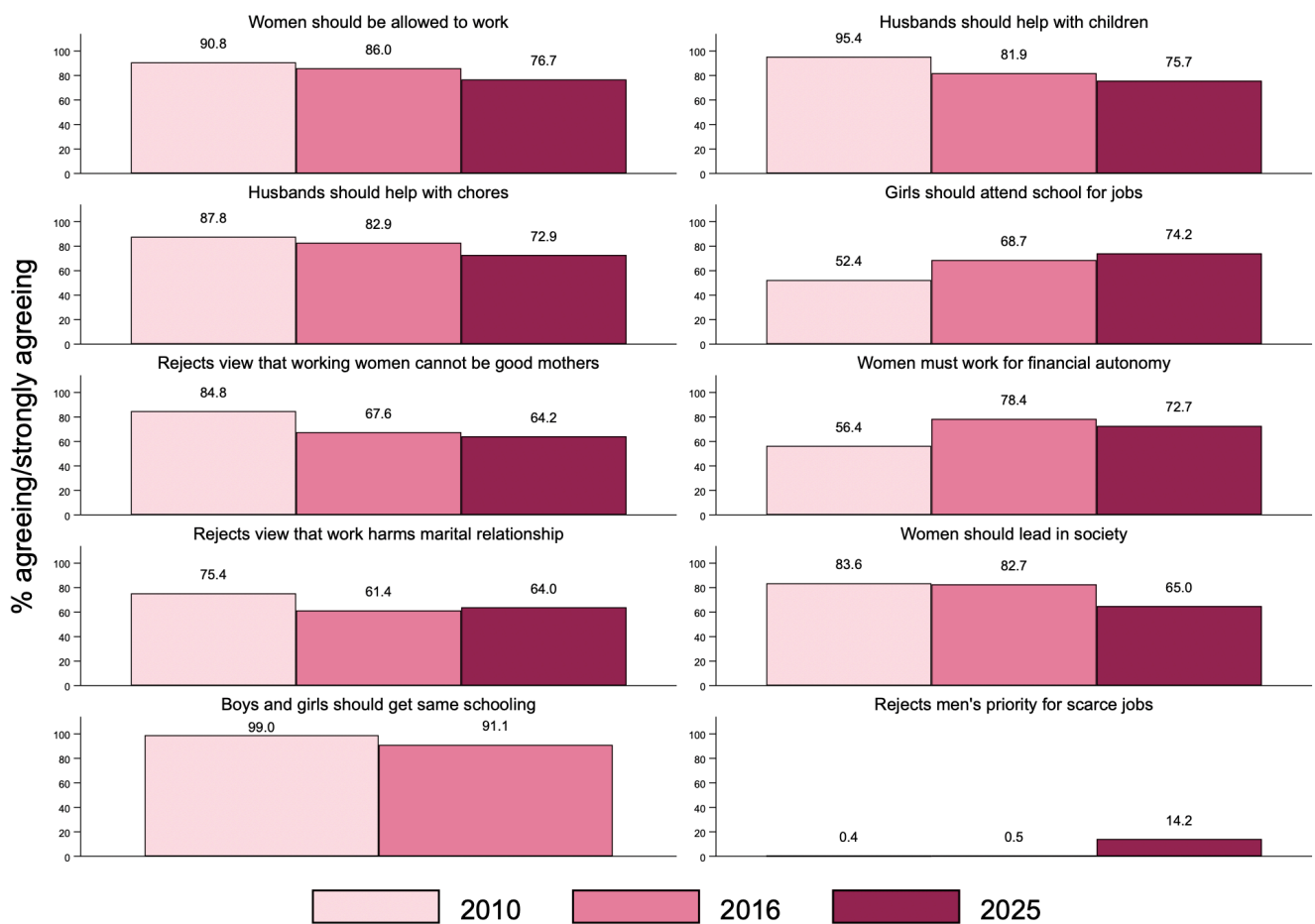
Figure 3. Percentage with access to household money and ownership of valuables, women aged 15–59, 2010–2025



Source: Authors’ calculations based on JLMPS 2010-2025



Figure 4. Percentage agreeing/strongly agreeing with gender-role attitude statements, women aged 15–59, 2010–2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010–2025

The egalitarian gender attitudes index reflects the proportion of women who agree or strongly agree with various statements promoting gender equality in areas such as women's right to work, shared housework and childcare responsibilities, and equal treatment and education for boys and girls. Support declines from roughly three-quarters in 2010 to about 64 percent in 2025. The decline is steepest among women with little schooling: by 2025, support is 56 percent among illiterate/read-write women, compared with 68 percent among those with secondary or higher education. Regional gaps also widen, with support highest in the North at 72 percent and lower in the Middle and South, at 62 and 59 percent. Jordanian and Syrian women report identical levels of support, at 64 percent.

In 2025, women remain more supportive than men of gender-equitable roles: 77 percent of women compared with 67 percent of men support women's right to work, 72 percent of women compared with 60 percent of men support husbands sharing chores, and

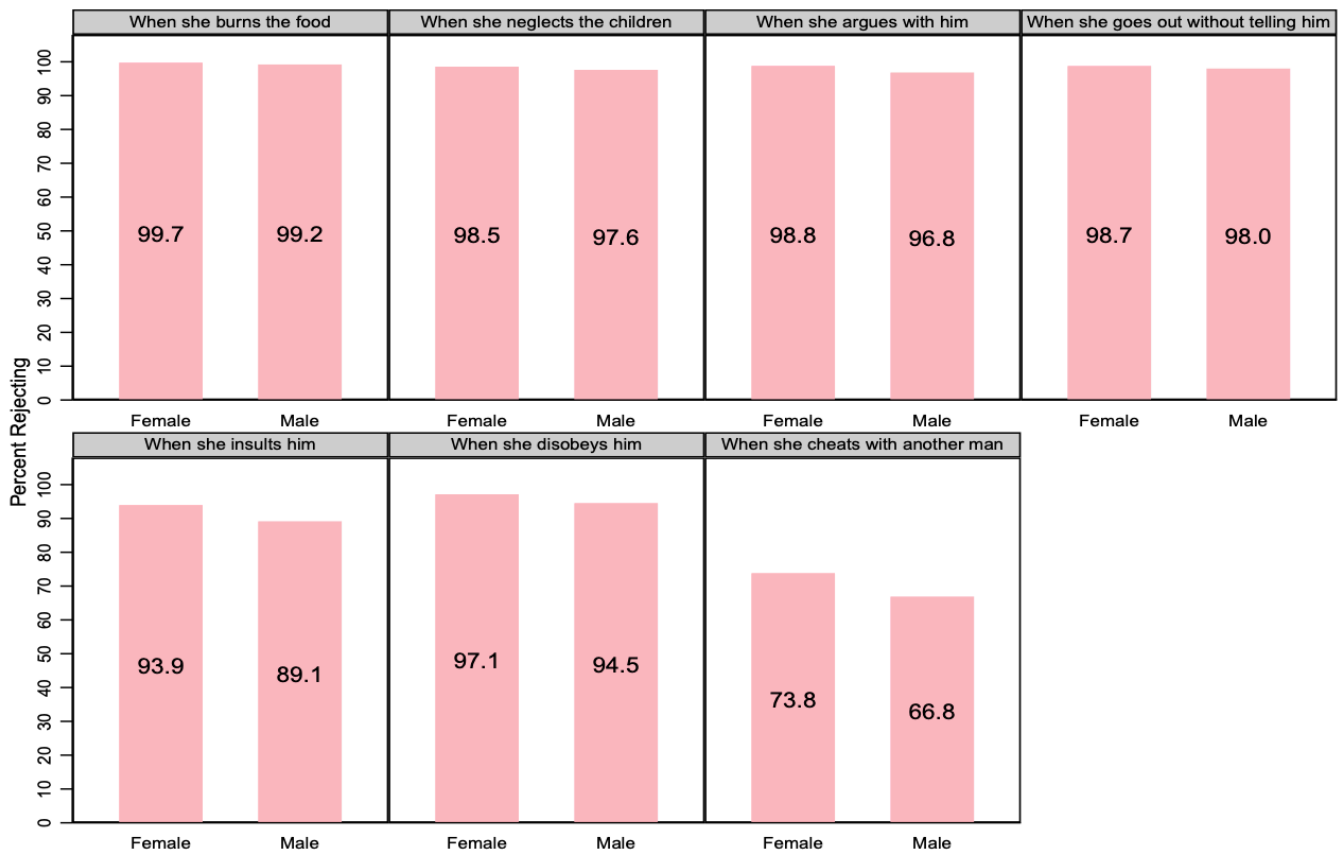
65 percent of women compared with 50 percent of men support women's leadership. Negative views of women's employment remain a minority position, while both women and men continue to view paid work as important for women's financial autonomy.

2.5. Rejection of intimate partner violence: near universal

Figure 5 shows that attitudes toward intimate partner violence show the strongest and most complete shift toward equality. The IPV rejection index, defined as the share of respondents who say wife beating is never justified in any of the listed situations, rises from about two-thirds of women in 2010 to roughly nine in ten in 2016 and is almost universal by 2025 across age, education, region, and nationality. The largest changes are for situations like neglecting children, arguing with a husband, wasting money, or refusing sex, where rejection of violence rises from about 40–65 percent in 2010 to around 99 percent in



Figure 5. Percentage rejecting intimate partner violence, by scenario and sex, women and men aged 15–59, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

2025. Rejection is already very high and becomes almost universal when a wife burns food, and it also increases strongly—though from a lower starting point—when she talks to unrelated men or cheats. Educational and regional gaps that were large in 2010 have almost disappeared by 2025, and Jordanian and Syrian women show nearly identical, near-universal rejection. Men in 2025 also overwhelmingly condemn wife beating in all scenarios, although women remain slightly more likely than men to say that violence is never acceptable.

2.6. Gender gaps in norms around women's work and care (2025)

In 2025, few Jordanians say women's work prevents marriage. Views are most favorable toward public-sector jobs and least favorable toward self-employment. Among women, 54 percent say public-sector work improves marriage prospects, compared with 50 percent for private-sector work and 40 percent for self-employment. Men are less positive, at 47 percent,

42 percent, and 33 percent, respectively. Only 2 to 6 percent say women's work prevents marriage, while "no influence" is especially common for self-employment.

Yet only about two in five married women report that their husbands are supportive or strongly supportive of their paid work, around one third say their husbands are not supportive, and about one quarter say there is no clear opinion. Among unmarried women, roughly one third expect to work for pay after marriage, just over one fifth already expect not to work at all, and almost one half say it "depends," usually on their future husband's views and household circumstances.

Attitudes toward women's work are also conditional on care and workplace context. Acceptance of mothers' employment is highest when childcare is provided by adult relatives: 78 percent of women and 74 percent of men agree. It remains high for formal nurseries, at 67 percent of women and 60 percent of men, and for early childhood programs, at 59 percent and 54 percent. Support drops to about half when care is provided by



a family member under age 18, and to 39 percent of women and 35 percent of men when care is provided by a neighbor or friend.

Overall, 72 percent of women and 60 percent of men agree that women can work outside the home. Support falls in more contested settings: only 46 percent of women and about one third of men agree when the workplace is mostly male. About 68 percent of women and 63 percent of men reject the idea that paid work harms women’s reputation. Views are sharply divided over acceptance of a married woman returning from work after five in the evening, with 35 percent of women agreeing and 26 percent of men agreeing.

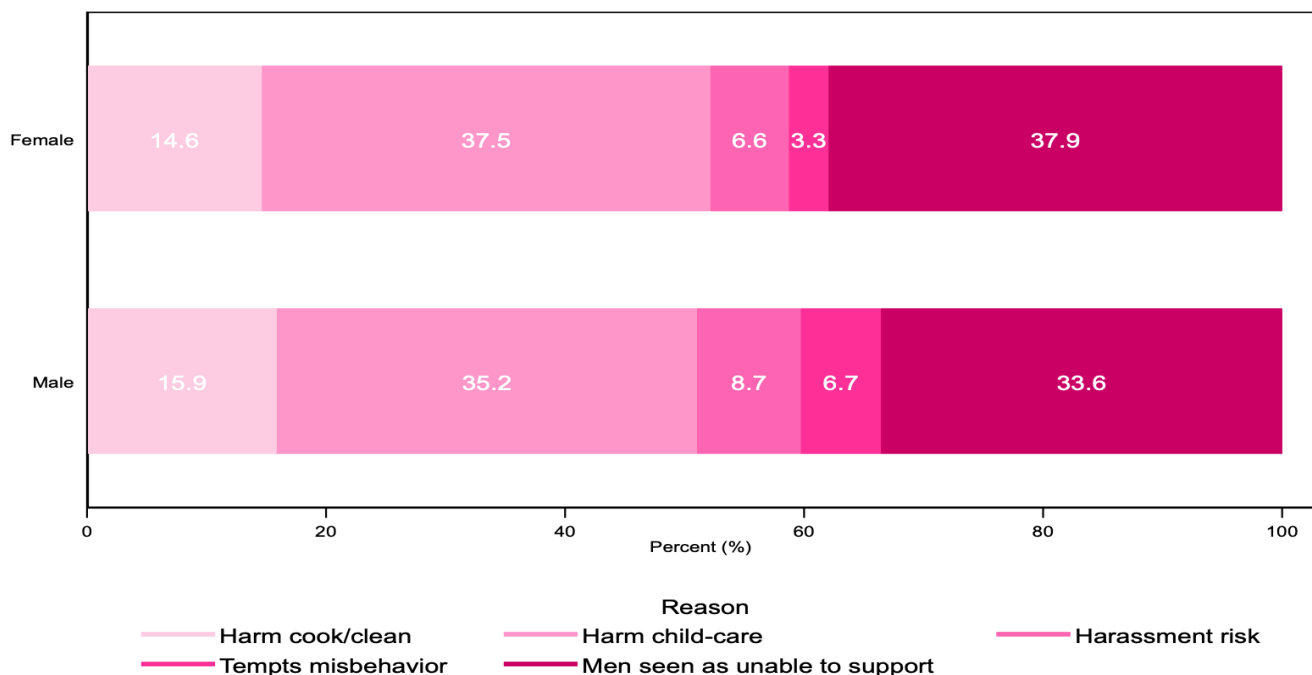
When respondents oppose women’s work, the main reasons reflect domestic responsibilities and provider norms. Figure 6 shows that around 35 to 38 percent across men and women cite strain on childcare, 34 to 38 percent emphasize that women’s employment undermines the idea that men should support their families, and about 15 to 16 percent point to disruptions in housework. Only about 7 to 9 percent mention harassment, and 3 to 7 percent refer to women’s “misbehavior.” This pattern shows that resistance to women’s employment is driven more by care burdens and expectations about men as providers than by safety or morality concerns.

3. Policy directions

The results point to uneven progress in women’s agency in Jordan. Women’s participation in household decisions and rejection of intimate partner violence have increased over time, while mobility and financial independence remain more constrained. Support for some egalitarian gender attitudes has also softened, especially among younger and less educated women. These patterns suggest that legal and institutional reforms are important but insufficient on their own. Expanding agency also requires addressing the social, economic, and infrastructural constraints that shape women’s everyday choices (Alkawasbeh and Istaiteyeh, 2026; Felicio and Gauri, 2018; OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020).

Access to money and ownership of assets remain fragile, especially for younger and Syrian women. Policies should expand women’s access to formal accounts, savings, insurance, and digital financial services, building on the National Financial Inclusion Strategy and targeting low-income Jordanian and refugee women (Central Bank of Jordan, 2023). Because secondary and higher education are strongly associated with greater agency across domains, financial inclusion efforts should align with programs that keep girls in school and support young women’s transition to work (Alkawasbeh and Istaiteyeh, 2026; UNICEF, 2025). Gender-sensitive financial products,

Figure 6. Percentage distribution of main reasons for opposing women’s employment, by sex, women and men aged 15–59 who oppose women’s work outside the home, 2025



Source: Authors’ calculations based on JLMPS 2025



including accounts, savings tools, and digital financial services, can help reduce women's access-to-finance barriers and support economic autonomy (Burga et al., 2021). Integrating financial literacy and rights-based information into livelihoods, social protection, and refugee programs can also help address the gender norms and household constraints that limit women's economic participation (Felicio and Gauri, 2018).

Many women experience mobility restrictions and encounter opposition to working, primarily due to domestic responsibilities and traditional male provider roles. Expanding safe, affordable public transport in women's travel areas, especially in villages and outskirts, and bringing health, education, training, and employment services closer would ease mobility barriers and build on recent transport and safety initiatives (Kurshitashvili et al., 2020; Morad et al., 2022; UN Women, 2022). Expanding quality childcare in trusted settings, including home-based care, community centers, and formal options with relatives or trained staff, can help address care constraints, but it is unlikely to be sufficient on its own. It should be paired with flexible hours, safer transport, nearby services, and child-friendly workplaces so women can pursue jobs within their mobility and safety constraints and maintain economic participation (Felicio and Gauri, 2018; OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020).

Widespread rejection of IPV strengthens the case for action on violence. Policies should support law enforcement, improve complaint processes, and ensure survivors have access to shelters, legal aid, and health support (UN Women, 2017; UNFPA, 2024). Routine screening for violence in health, social, and refugee services, with integrated gender-based violence and mental health support, can support early detection and confidentiality (Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group, 2024; UNFPA, 2024). Community dialogues and media campaigns that challenge honor-related and adultery-related justifications for violence and promote non-violent conflict resolution can help maintain this progress (UN Women, 2022; Burniat, Cano and Asfoura, 2022).

Sustaining agency gains also requires working with men and youth. Programs targeting young men and women, especially in the South and among low-education groups, should promote flexible provider roles and address economic pressures (Alhameedyeen, 2025; Burniat, Cano and Asfoura, 2022). These initiatives should address provider-role anxiety and care burdens, which are key reasons for opposing women's work. Partnerships with religious leaders, media, and civil society can showcase supportive husbands, involved

fathers, and women leaders, backing legal and service reforms with compelling narratives (OECD/ILO/CAWTAR, 2020; UN Women, 2022). Regular monitoring of gender-role attitudes and agency through surveys such as JLMPS 2010–2025, the Jordan Population and Family Health Survey, and the World Values Survey will help track progress, detect backlash, and adjust interventions over time (OAMDI, 2018a, 2018b, 2026; DoS and ICF, 2019; Haerpfer et al., 2022).

Jordan stands at a pivotal moment. While key agency gains are real, sustaining and deepening them will require not only new services and systems, but a societal shift in how women's autonomy, mobility, and leadership are viewed. With targeted investments, continued norm change, and inclusive monitoring, these gains can be secured across generations.



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