



JORDAN

LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS

In Jordan, gender issues and women's empowerment are critical areas of focus, and they have been addressed through a multi-faceted approach involving key stakeholders such as the government, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector. Each one of these actors plays a distinct, yet interconnected role, in fostering gender equality and empowering women across various sectors. The Jordanian government has made some strides in advancing gender equality, reflected in national strategies and policies such as the National Strategy for Women, which aims to promote women's participation in political, economic, and social spheres. The government, through entities like the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), works on advocating for policy reforms, raising awareness, and addressing issues such as gender-based violence, equal pay, and access to education for women.

Despite these positive initiatives, significant cultural and societal challenges persist. Patriarchal norms, which have been deeply rooted in Jordanian society for generations, continue to influence gender roles and expectations. In many communities, women are still expected to prioritize household duties and care giving roles over education and employment opportunities. This traditional view of gender roles has made it difficult for women to break into male-dominated fields and achieve leadership positions in politics or business. Additionally, there is a widespread lack of understanding that gender rights are fundamental human rights and not privileges that can be granted or withheld based on societal preferences. This misconception is particularly prevalent in rural and conservative communities where gender roles are strictly defined, and deviation from these norms is often met with resistance. Such beliefs not only hinder women's empowerment but also perpetuate harmful practices such as child marriage, restrictions on women's mobility, and limits on their decision-making power.

One of the biggest obstacles to achieving gender equality in Jordan is the persistent gender gap in education and employment. Although women in Jordan are highly educated, with many excelling in fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), their participation in the workforce remains relatively low compared to their male counterparts. This discrepancy is often attributed to societal expectations, limited access to affordable childcare, and workplace environments that are not conducive to balancing work and family responsibilities.

Young people, particularly youth workers and activists, are keen to address these challenges. They are increasingly aware of the need to engage in meaningful dialogue about gender issues and to break down barriers to women's empowerment.

Many young people see education as the most powerful tool for achieving this, and they are eager to learn more about gender equality through a variety of mediums. In particular, there has been a significant demand for interactive training courses, workshops, and programs designed to provide young people with practical knowledge about gender issues. These educational initiatives often include role-playing exercises, debates, and case studies that allow participants to explore real-world scenarios involving gender discrimination, workplace inequality, and domestic violence. Through these interactive activities, youth workers and young people are empowered to understand the complexity of gender issues and to develop strategies for creating more inclusive and equitable environments. Moreover, the use of online tools has been instrumental in deepening young people's engagement with gender issues. As digital platforms become more accessible, young Jordanians are increasingly turning to social media, webinars, and e-learning platforms to participate in discussions, share information, and collaborate on initiatives related to gender equality. Social media campaigns in Jordan have successfully raised awareness of key issues such as domestic violence, gender-based harassment, and unequal pay. These platforms not only provide a space for advocacy but also enable young people to connect with global movements and learn from activists in other countries.

In summary, despite the significant challenges posed by cultural and societal barriers, there is a strong desire among Jordanian youth to engage in learning and activism related to gender equality. The growing interest in training programs, interactive activities, and digital tools highlights the potential for young people to lead the charge in advocating for women's rights and achieving meaningful social change.

The legal framework surrounding gender equality in Jordan has seen important developments, particularly over the last two decades. The new reforms reflect the government's recognition of the need to protect women's rights and to bring national legislation in line with international human rights standards. However, despite these advancements, Jordan's legal system continues to reflect certain gender disparities, particularly in areas related to family law, personal status, and employment. For example, the Jordanian Constitution, adopted in 1952, guarantees equality before the law to all citizens. However, it does not explicitly address gender equality, and this omission has allowed discriminatory practices to persist in various aspects of life, particularly in family matters such as inheritance, divorce, and child custody. The absence of explicit gender protections in the Constitution has prompted calls from women's rights activists and legal experts for constitutional amendments that would specifically guarantee equality between men and women.

In recent years, one of the most notable legal reforms was the repeal of Article 308 of the Penal Code in 2017. Under the previous law, a rapist could escape punishment if he married his victim. This provision was widely condemned by women's rights organizations and international human rights groups, as it placed the burden of the crime on the victim and failed to address the broader issue of sexual violence in Jordan. The repeal of Article 308 was a major victory for women's rights activists and brought to a shift in how the Jordanian legal system deals with gender-based violence.

However, while the repeal of Article 308 was a significant step forward, other areas of Jordanian law remain problematic from a gender perspective. The Personal Status Law, which governs family matters, is heavily influenced by Sharia law, and contains several provisions that are seen as discriminatory toward women. For example, under the current inheritance laws, women are typically entitled to half the inheritance that men receive, a rule that stems from traditional interpretations of Sharia. Divorce laws also tend to favour men, making difficult for women to obtain a divorce and secure financial support or custody of their children.

In terms of political representation, Jordan has made some progress in increasing the number of women in decision-making roles. The introduction of a quota system for parliamentary and municipal elections has helped to ensure that a minimum number of seats are reserved for women. However, despite these quotas, women remain underrepresented in key political and governmental positions, and cultural attitudes toward women in leadership roles continue to pose challenges.

Jordan's commitment to international conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), reflects its desire to align its national laws with global standards. Jordan ratified CEDAW in 1992, but it has placed reservations on certain provisions, particularly those related to family law and nationality rights. These reservations are based on the argument that certain CEDAW articles conflict with Sharia-based personal status laws. Women's rights advocates have long argued for the removal of these reservations to ensure that Jordanian women have the same legal rights as men, particularly in matters related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

In conclusion, while Jordan has made important strides in legal reform, particularly in areas related to gender-based violence, significant challenges remain. The Personal Status Law, in particular, continues to reflect gender disparities that disadvantage women, and there is a need for continued advocacy to address these issues. Additionally, amending the Constitution to explicitly guarantee gender equality would be a critical step in ensuring that women's rights are fully protected under Jordanian law.

EDUCATION

Gender studies as an academic discipline is available in Jordan, but it is still in its nascent stages compared to other countries where gender studies programs are more widespread and well-established. Leading universities in Jordan, such as the University of Jordan, Hashemite University, and Yarmouk University, offer courses that address gender issues, women's rights, the social and cultural factors that shape gender dynamics in Jordan and the broader Middle East region. At the University of Jordan, students can take courses on gender and development, feminist theory, and women's rights, often integrated into broader programs like sociology, anthropology, and political science. These courses aim to provide students with a foundational understanding of gender equality, the history of women's movements, and the challenges women face in both public and private spheres. By exploring topics such as gender-based violence, women's political participation, and the impact of patriarchal norms on women's lives, students gain critical insights into the complexities of gender relations in Jordan and the region.

However, dedicated degrees in gender studies remain limited in Jordan. Students interested in specializing in this field often have to pursue interdisciplinary programs or focus on related disciplines such as human rights, social development, or public policy, where gender studies are integrated into the curriculum. These academic programs are essential for equipping future leaders, activists, and policymakers with the knowledge and tools they need to advocate for gender equality and challenge discriminatory practices.

In addition to formal academic programs, universities and NGOs often collaborate to offer workshops, seminars, and conferences on gender issues. These events provide opportunities for students, academics, and practitioners to engage in discussions about women's rights, gender-based violence, and the role of women in peace building and conflict resolution. By fostering a culture of dialogue and exchange, these initiatives contribute to the ongoing efforts to promote gender equality in Jordan.

Sexual and reproductive health education is another critical component of gender empowerment in Jordan. The Ministry of Education oversees the integration of basic reproductive health information into the national school curriculum, covering topics such as puberty, hygiene, and human anatomy. However, the scope and depth of sexual and reproductive health education vary across schools and communities, depending on the level of openness and cultural sensitivities. In many conservative communities, discussions about sexual and reproductive health remain taboo, and educators may be reluctant to address topics such as contraception, sexual consent, or sexually transmitted infections. This has led to gaps in young people's knowledge about their reproductive health and rights, making it difficult for them to make informed decisions about their bodies and their futures.

To address these gaps, NGOs and international organizations have played a crucial role in delivering comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education. Organizations such as UNFPA, Save the Children, and Plan International have developed programs that target both in-school and out-of-school youth, particularly in marginalized and underserved communities. These programs cover a wide range of topics, including reproductive health, gender-based violence, and the prevention of early marriage. By providing young people with accurate and reliable information, these initiatives empower them to take informed decisions about their health, relationships, and futures. In addition, many of these programs emphasize the importance of gender equality and challenge harmful gender norms that limit young people's ability to access sexual and reproductive health services.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Jordan play a pivotal role in addressing gender issues and empowering women. These organizations are essential in driving social change, particularly when government policies are lacking or slow to be implemented. Their work extends beyond advocacy to include hands-on support, education, and outreach programs, making them indispensable players in the fight for gender equality. NGOs act as a bridge between legal reforms and practical implementation, helping to ensure that on the ground the changes introduced in laws or policies translate into real benefits for women. For example, legal aid is a critical area where CSOs make a significant impact. Many women in Jordan, particularly those from marginalized or low-income backgrounds, face legal challenges that stem from inequalities in family law, inheritance rights, or workplace discrimination. CSOs provide free or affordable legal counselling and representation, helping women to navigate the legal system and fight for their rights in courts. These services are especially important for women facing issues such as divorce, custody battles, or disputes over inheritance, where traditional interpretations of Sharia law may disadvantage them.

In addition to legal support, CSOs in Jordan offer counselling services for women who are victims of domestic violence or other forms of abuse. With the social stigma surrounding these issues, many women in Jordan feel isolated and are unsure where to seek help. CSOs play a crucial role by offering confidential, supportive environments where women can access counselling, shelter, and legal assistance to escape abusive situations. These organizations also help women reintegrate into society, offering psychological support, job training, and educational programs to ensure that they can achieve independence after leaving harmful environments.

One of the most significant ways civil society promotes gender equality is through its tireless advocacy for policy reforms. For years, Jordanian NGOs have campaigned for amendments to discriminatory laws, particularly those related to gender-based violence, personal status, and employment. Through awareness campaigns, petitions, and collaborations with international organizations, NGOs have successfully pushed for key legal reforms, such as the repeal of Article 308 of the Penal Code, which allowed rapists to escape punishment by marrying their victims. This landmark victory for women's rights was achieved thanks to the relentless efforts of CSOs, proving that civil society can influence even the most entrenched legal systems.

Moreover, CSOs work tirelessly to increase women's representation in leadership roles and decision-making bodies. In Jordan, where women's participation in politics and governance has traditionally been low, NGOs advocate for greater inclusion of women in public office, the private sector, and civil society leadership roles.

This push for representation includes lobbying for quota systems, mentoring programs, and leadership training initiatives aimed at equipping women with the skills and confidence needed to take on leadership roles. Jordan is home to several prominent NGOs that are dedicated to promoting women's rights and gender equality. Among them, the "Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW)" stands out as a leading organization that focuses on policy advocacy and legal reforms. The JNCW collaborates with government agencies, international bodies, and local communities to promote gender-sensitive policies that aim to improve the status of women in all aspects of life. It plays a key role in drafting national strategies for women's empowerment and ensuring that gender issues remain a priority in the government's development agenda.

Another notable NGO is the "Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI)", which is well-known for its work on gender-based violence. SIGI provides essential services to women who are victims of domestic abuse, offering shelter, legal representation, and psychological counselling. In addition to its direct services, SIGI runs public awareness campaigns to challenge social norms that perpetuate violence against women, advocating for the legal protection of survivors and harsher penalties for perpetrators of violence.

The "Jordanian Women's Union (JWU)" is another prominent organization that provides critical support services, including shelters for victims of domestic violence and legal aid programs. The JWU is also deeply involved in education and outreach programs that aim to raise awareness about women's rights in Jordan. These programs cover topics such as inheritance rights, child custody laws, and women's rights in divorce cases. By empowering women with knowledge about their legal rights, the JWU helps women to take control of their lives and assert their rights in a legal system that can often be biased against them.

The "Arab Women Organization (AWO)" is particularly active in promoting economic empowerment for women in Jordan. The AWO focuses on increasing women's participation in the workforce by offering vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, and financial literacy workshops. These initiatives are crucial in helping women to gain the skills and confidence needed to start their own businesses, secure stable employment, and improve their economic standing. The AWO also advocates for better working conditions for women in Jordan, addressing issues such as equal pay, workplace harassment, and discrimination in hiring practices.

In addition to the efforts of established NGOs, grassroots movements have also emerged in Jordan to address specific gender issues, often focusing on areas where government action has been insufficient or slow. One such movement is the "My Mother Is Jordanian" and "Her Nationality Is My Right campaign", which advocates for the rights of children born to Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians. Under current Jordanian law, these children do not automatically receive Jordanian citizenship, a policy that has far-reaching consequences for their access to education, healthcare, and employment.

The campaign, which has garnered widespread support, seeks to put pressure on the government to amend citizenship laws and grant equal rights to these children. The movement has not only raised public awareness but has also sparked national conversations about discriminatory laws and the need for reform. Despite some government concessions, such as granting children of Jordanian women married to foreigners certain residency and work rights, activists continue to push for full citizenship rights. This campaign is an example of how grassroots movements can effectively mobilize public opinion and influence government policies.

Another important movement is “Equality Without Reservation”, which advocates for Jordan to fully implement the international conventions it has signed regarding women's rights, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). While Jordan has ratified CEDAW, it has placed several reservations on the convention, particularly regarding family law and nationality rights. The movement calls for the removal of these reservations and the full implementation of CEDAW's provisions, arguing that it would bring Jordan in line with international human rights standards and significantly improve the legal status of women. Also, this movement focuses on reforming personal status laws, which govern issues such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, as these laws often disadvantage women. By advocating for comprehensive legal reforms, the movement seeks to ensure that women in Jordan have the same legal rights as men, particularly in areas that affect their personal and familial lives. Furthermore, the movement pushes for greater women's participation in public life, emphasizing the need for women to play a central role in shaping the policies and laws that govern their lives.

RELIGION

The role of religious institutions in addressing gender issues and women's empowerment in Jordan is complex and multifaceted. While some religious leaders and organizations actively promote gender equality and women's rights, others may hold conservative views that perpetuate gender-based discrimination. This duality reflects the broader societal tensions regarding gender roles and the interpretation of religious teachings in a rapidly changing world.

Positive Contributions:

- **Advocacy and Activism:** some religious leaders and organizations advocate for women's rights, challenging discriminatory laws and practices, and promoting gender equality within their communities and beyond. These leaders often draw upon religious teachings that emphasize justice and equity, framing women's empowerment as a moral imperative.
- **Community Mobilization:** religious institutions can mobilize their communities to support women's empowerment initiatives, providing a platform for women's voices to be heard and fostering a sense of collective action. By organizing events and discussions centered on women's rights, these institutions can galvanize public support and drive meaningful change.
- **Education and Awareness:** religious leaders and organizations can educate their communities about gender equality issues, challenging harmful stereotypes, and promoting positive gender norms. Through sermons, workshops, and educational programs, they can raise awareness about the importance of gender equality and the detrimental effects of discrimination on society as a whole.
- **Social Services:** many religious organizations provide essential social services, such as healthcare, education, and economic support, which can benefit women and girls disproportionately affected by gender inequality. These services not only address immediate needs but also empower women by enhancing their skills and improving their economic standing within their families and communities.

Challenges and Limitations:

- **Interpretation and Misinterpretation:** religious texts can be interpreted in various ways, some of which may be harmful to women's rights. Conservative interpretations of religious texts can be used to justify discriminatory practices, such as unequal inheritance rights, restrictions on women's mobility, and limited access to education and employment. This selective interpretation often hinders progress toward gender equality and reinforces traditional power dynamics.
- **Patriarchal Structures:** many religious institutions in Jordan are inherently patriarchal, with leadership positions often reserved for men. This can limit women's participation in decision-making processes and perpetuate gender inequality within the organization. The lack of female representation in leadership roles means that women's perspectives and needs may be overlooked in policy and program development.

- **Cultural and Social Norms:** religious institutions are often deeply embedded in cultural and social norms that may be discriminatory towards women. Challenging these norms can be difficult, as they are often seen as integral to religious identity and practice. The intertwining of culture and religion can create barriers to reform, making it essential to approach these issues sensitively and inclusively.

Addressing the Challenges:

To maximize the positive impact of religious institutions on gender equality in Jordan, it is essential to address the challenges they face. This can be achieved through:

- **Interfaith Dialogue:** promoting dialogue between different religious traditions can help identify shared values and principles that support gender equality. By engaging in constructive conversations, religious leaders can learn from each other and develop unified strategies for promoting women's rights across diverse communities.
- **Empowering Women within Religious Institutions:** encouraging women's participation in leadership roles and decision-making processes within religious organizations can help to challenge patriarchal structures and promote gender equality from within. Initiatives that mentor and support women aspiring to leadership positions are crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where women's voices are valued.
- **Critical Interpretation of Religious Texts:** promoting critical interpretations of religious texts that emphasize gender equality and challenge discriminatory passages can help to shift religious discourse towards a more inclusive and empowering perspective. Scholars and activists can collaborate to produce resources that provide alternative readings of religious texts that highlight the importance of justice and equality.
- **Collaboration with Secular Organizations:** religious organizations can collaborate with secular organizations working on gender equality to share expertise, resources, and networks. These partnerships can amplify the impact of initiatives aimed at improving women's rights and provide a broader support system for addressing gender-based issues.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging their unique strengths, religious institutions in Jordan can play a vital role in promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. Their ability to reach large audiences and influence community attitudes positions them as key players in the movement towards gender equity. Through ongoing efforts to reconcile religious teachings with contemporary values of equality and justice, these institutions can help to create a more equitable society for all, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of sustainable development and social cohesion in Jordan.

LOCAL AREA BACKGROUND

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the research context, we delved into the specific nuances of each location, including:

AMMAN GOVERNORATE:

- **Socioeconomic Disparity:** Amman presents a stark contrast between affluent neighborhoods like Abdali, characterized by modern skyscrapers and upscale shopping malls, and marginalized areas like Marka, where poverty, unemployment, and social issues are prevalent. In affluent neighborhoods, religious institutions may focus on community enrichment and women's empowerment initiatives, fostering a culture that values gender equality. Conversely, in marginalized areas, they often prioritize addressing immediate socio-economic needs, which can include supporting women who are disproportionately affected by these challenges.
- **Cultural Mosaic:** Amman's rich cultural tapestry is influenced by various factors, including the presence of Palestinian refugees, expatriate communities, and a diverse mix of religious and ethnic groups. This diversity shapes the city's unique identity and social dynamics. Religious leaders within these communities can either promote progressive interpretations of gender roles that align with modern values or adhere to traditional norms that may limit women's rights, significantly affecting community attitudes toward gender equality.
- **Urban Challenges:** rapid urbanization has led to numerous challenges, including traffic congestion, air pollution, and inadequate infrastructure. These issues have significant implications for public health, quality of life, and sustainable development. Religious institutions may respond to these challenges by providing social services, but the effectiveness of these responses can vary based on their resources and commitment to addressing gender issues within their programs.

IRBID GOVERNORATE:

- **Educational Hub:** Irbid's reputation as a center for higher education has attracted students from all over Jordan and the region. This influx of young people has contributed to the city's vibrant cultural scene and economic growth. Religious institutions in Irbid can play a critical role in promoting gender equality by fostering inclusive educational initiatives that empower young women and encourage their active participation in civic life.
- **Rural-Urban Migration:** the migration of rural residents to Irbid has led to significant demographic changes and social challenges. The integration of these newcomers into urban life requires careful planning and policy interventions. Religious institutions can serve as vital support systems for these migrants, helping them navigate the complexities of urban living while addressing gender-specific challenges faced by women in transition.

- **Conservative Values:** while Irbid is a modern city, traditional Islamic values continue to shape social norms and behaviors. This interplay between tradition and modernity can be seen in various aspects of daily life, including dress codes, gender roles, and family structures. Religious leaders in Irbid have the potential to advocate for progressive interpretations of these values that support women's rights while also respecting cultural heritage.

MA'AN GOVERNORATE:

- **Bedouin Heritage:** the Bedouin communities of Ma'an have a rich cultural heritage characterized by their nomadic lifestyle, strong family ties, and deep respect for tradition. However, the increasing sedentarization of these communities has led to significant social and economic changes. Religious institutions can play a pivotal role in this transition, promoting gender equality by advocating for women's rights while respecting Bedouin cultural values.
- **Economic Challenges:** despite its natural beauty and archaeological sites, Ma'an faces significant economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, poverty, and limited job opportunities. Religious organizations often provide essential social services, but their effectiveness can vary. Those committed to gender equality can create programs that empower women economically, offering skills training and access to resources that can improve their livelihoods.
- **Tourism and Development:** the development of the tourism industry in Ma'an, particularly around the iconic Petra site, has both positive and negative impacts on the local community. While it has generated economic benefits, it has also led to concerns about cultural erosion, environmental degradation, and social inequality. Religious institutions can serve as advocates for sustainable tourism practices that also consider the implications for gender equality and women's empowerment within the local community.

By conducting research in these diverse areas, we aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing gender issues and the role of religious institutions in Jordan. By considering the specific cultural, social, and economic contexts of each location, we were able to identify unique insights and draw meaningful conclusions. Religious institutions have the potential to be catalysts for change, promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls across various local contexts. Their effectiveness, however, hinges on their willingness to engage with contemporary gender issues while respecting local traditions and values.

Through this exploration, it becomes evident that the intersection of local culture, religious beliefs, and gender dynamics plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of women in Jordan. Addressing these issues requires a nuanced understanding of local contexts, along with collaborative efforts from religious institutions, community leaders, and policymakers to foster an environment where gender equality can flourish.