



Policy Brief

What Role for Refugee Women in Jordan Thirteen Years After the Syrian Crisis?

In recent years, Jordan has demonstrated significant humanitarian leadership in the region, hosting over 1.3 million refugees from Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, and Somalia, a substantial part of whom are women. Often showcasing leadership within their families and communities, women play a critical role in weaving a resilient social fabric within Jordan, both in refugees and host communities. Nonetheless, their active participation at different levels of societal development still needs to be fully prioritized by policymakers and stakeholders, alongside the incredible potential it has in transforming challenges into opportunities and shaping

a more inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Arab world. Today, thirteen years after the Syrian crisis that led to displacement and biggest flux of refugees in Jordan, **it is crucial to look at the situation from a strengthened, more inclusive point of view.** Greater emphasis should be placed on how women refugees' involvement in social and economic opportunities and the creation of space for their voices to be heard is enriching not only their own lives, but also the broader Jordanian community, holding immense potential for bolstering the country's socio-economic reality.

In line with these efforts, **the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) represents a long-lasting voice in the Jordanian context**, advocating for a more integrational approach and opportunities to enhance the potential of women refugees in the country socio-economic scenario.

What Role for Refugee Women? The Integrational Approach

Women refugees have been majorly excluded by formal cultural and socio-economic integration in Jordan, also due to a general reality characterized, in the last few years, by stagnant employment rates and lack of resources, further aggravated by Covid-19 pandemic and the war on Gaza since last quarter of 2023. In this context, despite being subjected to different forms of GBV, exploitation and economic insecurity, education disruption, cultural and social barriers, **refugee women thrive to actively engage** in Jordanian society not as mere aid recipients, but **as effective agents of change in both refugee and host communities**. Accordingly, **it is of utmost importance to enhance women refugees' active role in the social fabric and empower them**. To do so, main critical steps can be summarized as follows:

- The **prioritization of education and awareness opportunities** for young girls and women, with particular attention to **technical and vocational education and training (TVET) / Skills Education**.
- The **localization of the refugee response**, also prioritizing the **role of local CBOs and CSOs in leading and implementing strategies of support for refugees** - this step is even more relevant when considering that social cohesion remains a priority for host countries.
- **The increase of allocation of funds to CSOs, particularly WLOs**, to formally enhance their meaningful participation in achieving women empowerment in the context of displacement in Jordan.

These concrete strategies have been ultimately highlighted at the Global Refugee Forum, held at the UN Headquarter in Geneva in December 2023; during consultations, ARDD firmly advised the need to **support a concrete localization of the response that formally integrates refugee women in every step of its implementation and amplify the voice of WLOs internationally**.

Conclusions

In the last thirteen years Jordan successfully implemented several mechanisms to prevent discrimination and marginalization, but **more effective strategies are still necessary to accomplish a full and fair integration of refugees into economic and social systems**. In this respect, enhancing wom-

en's formal and legal participation to Jordan's socio-economic growth represents a fundamental milestone in a country marked by refugees prolonged presence and unique characteristics of the refugees – host communities' relationship. Effectively integrating women refugees into the legal workforce, supporting their skills acquisition and education, and expanding their access to diverse job sectors or entrepreneurial opportunities can translate into **concrete positive outcomes**, such as:

- **Advancement and diversification of Jordanian society and economy through refugees' backgrounds and skills**, also stimulating market growth and job creation.
- **Promotion of social cohesion**, equal share of benefits and shift in the negative narrative around refugees.
- **Mitigation of GBV and labor exploitation** for women refugees.
- **Mitigation of impact on vulnerable host communities**.
- **Mitigation of economic support's reduction** from international donors and its impacts on refugees' response.

Final Recommendations

As the likelihood of a political solution to the refugee question in Jordan is at date very limited, **policymakers and stakeholders need to focus more on structural and durable solutions**:

1. *Enhance effective gender mainstreaming within the discussion on durable solutions through Gender-Responsive Policy Framework and high-level advocacy at international stages.*

Advocate for the integration of gender mainstreaming process into all policy frameworks addressing settlement, return possibilities, and within refugee camp management. This involves conducting gender impact assessments and developing targeted strategies that address the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women and girls within the camps and urban setting or should they be able to voluntarily come back to their homeland. Also, **enhance high-level advocacy and follow-up mechanisms on international forums and commissions** to ensure that the outcomes of these enhanced discussions reflect the priorities and needs of women and girls and are effectively implemented.

2. *Establish a Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation System to track the impact of funding reductions on women and girls, focusing on key indicators related to their well-being, access to services, and participation in society.*

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by funding cuts, which can lead to increased vulnerability and reduced access to essential services. **Continuous monitoring is essential to understand the dynamic impact of these drastic changes and to identify related challenges and impact faced by women and girls.** A robust monitoring system will provide real-time data, enabling timely interventions and policy adjustments. Existing data collection frameworks can be used to enhance them with specific metrics focused on women and girls' access to funding opportunities.

3. *Enhance access to education for young girls and women*

Expand scholarship programs and provide targeted educational support for young girls and women refugees to improve their educational outcomes. Education disruption is a significant issue for refugee women and girls, limiting their future opportunities. Scholarships and support programs can improve educational attainment and open higher-skilled job opportunities, also spendable in the future, should political conditions allow for a safe return to the home countries.

4. *Implement targeted legal empowerment programs to enhance women's access to justice, ensuring they are aware of their rights and have the necessary support to navigate the legal system.*

ARDD is on the frontline of comprehensive efforts to provide legal aid to those unable to afford it, with particular attention to most vulnerable groups (refugees, women, and children). ARDD Legal Aid numbers and factsheets for the year 2023 indicate that **women use the legal system less frequently than men**, often due to a lack of awareness, social barriers, and limited resources. By providing tailored legal support and awareness, women can better understand and assert their rights, leading to more equitable access to justice. These programs can be developed in collaboration with local NGOs, legal aid organizations, and community centers.

5. *Establish community-based skill-sharing initiatives that bring together refugees and host community members to exchange knowledge and expertise, fostering mutual growth and integration.*

Both refugees and host community members possess **unique skills and experiences that, when shared, can lead to enhanced economic opportunities and stronger community bonds.** Skill-sharing initiatives promote social cohesion, reduce stereotypes, and cre-

ate collaborative economic opportunities. These initiatives can be implemented through local community centers, NGOs, and CBOs with support from international partners and local authorities.

6. *Develop and implement targeted Resilience and Participation Projects aimed at enhancing the resilience and participation of women and girls, ensuring they do not suffer from reduced social services.*

Targeted projects focused on participation can provide immediate support and build long-term resilience, enabling women to thrive despite funding challenges and shrinking civic engagement. To do so, it is of utmost importance to conduct thorough needs assessments to identify the most pressing areas where women and girls require support, designing programs that respond to critical needs in areas such as education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and protection from GBV. Leverage partnerships with international organizations, NGOs, and community groups to execute these projects is also essential to ensure their reliability as a mechanism for improved participation at the local, community level.

7. *Implement Comprehensive Training Programs*

Develop and implement comprehensive training programs and TVET opportunities specifically tailored for refugees, particularly women, focusing on high-demand sectors such as healthcare, education, and information technology. Also addressed by the Global Compact on Refugees and UNHCR's Education 2030 Strategy, TVET proved to be an efficient educational pathway to reach durable solutions, being useful skills both in the host countries and should refugees voluntarily return to their homeland.

8. *Implement certification and fast-track employment procedures to integrate qualified women refugees into sectors in need in Jordan.*

Specific sectors in Jordan (healthcare, education) have a growing demand for skilled workers, and many refugees possess relevant qualifications and experience. **Utilizing the skills of refugee women can address sector shortages and provide them with stable employment.** Establishing partnerships with ministries and professional associations will support the streamlined recognition and validation of foreign qualifications. **Creating job placement programs in collaboration with sector unions and institutions will enhance and facilitate legal employment.**