



## Changes in the US Policies and their Impact on Women's Rights and Women Organizations in Jordan

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President Trump's administration's decision to globally freeze US foreign development assistance for 90 days, pending reassessment, and to halt all initiatives related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) sent shockwaves through the humanitarian and development sectors worldwide. In Jordan—home to one of the largest refugee populations and heavily reliant on foreign aid to support critical sectors like infrastructure, health, and education—this decision is deeply concerning for stakeholders and observers alike.

To discuss the impact of the DEI program's cancellation and the funding freeze, Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD), JONAF, and the Al-Nahda Women Network organized a roundtable on February 23, 2025, to examine these policy shifts and their consequences for women's rights and women's organizations in Jordan. The present document summarizes the discussions and includes the recommendations made by participants.

### The Impact of the American Funding Freeze in Numbers

The US is a major contributor to global foreign aid, providing 40% of all humanitarian assistance accounted for by the United Nations in 2024<sup>1</sup>. As one of the largest recipients of US foreign assistance, Jordan has received over \$5 billion since 2021<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> How will Trump and Musk's freeze on USAid affect millions around the world: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/feb/20/how-will-trump-and-musk-freeze-on-usaid-affect-millions-around-world>

<sup>2</sup> <https://foreignassistance.gov>; <https://jordantimes.com/news/local/us-world-bank-top-list-foreign-aid-donors-jordan-contributing-85b>;

According to the Foreign Aid Financing Report from the Ministry of Planning, Jordan, with a population of 11.5 million and the second-highest number of refugees per capita worldwide<sup>3</sup>, has received the majority of its foreign aid from the US over the past four years<sup>4</sup>. This assistance, provided through loans, technical support, and direct budget allocations, has primarily supported economic initiatives<sup>5</sup>. Initial estimates indicate that USAID cuts will amount to approximately \$770 million<sup>6</sup>—the yearly sum Jordan has relied on since 2021 to fund critical programs, including water infrastructure, education, healthcare, legal aid, gender-based violence response, and advocacy for women’s rights.

## **Immediate Impact of the Policy Shifts: A Shared Fate for Jordanian Civil Society and Vulnerable Communities**

Participants began the discussion by emphasizing the alarming impact of recent policy decisions on Jordan’s stability and economy. They highlighted that the immediate consequences extend beyond women’s rights organizations, affecting all civil society organizations (CSOs). The abrupt freeze on aid has stalled critical projects and interventions, creating uncertainty for both NGO operations and government programs. Many international organizations are facing liquidity shortages, which in turn are impacting their national and local partners, leading to suspended services, terminated contracts, and reduced support for vulnerable communities.

Initial estimates suggest that thousands of Jordanian employees working on U.S.-funded projects may face contract suspensions or terminations. Representatives from Jordanian CSOs underscored the financial burden of terminating staff contracts and the penalties they must pay. Women’s rights and women-led organizations, particularly smaller and community-based ones, are at risk of closure under these conditions, leading to significant losses in capacity to serve the most vulnerable populations. While no immediate cessation of life-saving services for refugees and other vulnerable groups has been reported, such effects are expected in the medium term if the freeze is not lifted.

The proposed reduction and politicization of U.S. assistance—particularly affecting the United Nations and refugee populations—could reshape Jordan’s socio-economic landscape and further constrain its civic space.

## **Medium-Term Impact of the Policy Shifts: Domino Effect Weakening Gender Justice**

Participants warned of a “domino effect,” where reduced funding for life-saving assistance to refugees and vulnerable groups could lead to diminished focus on gender equality and weakened community-based responses. Other donors, including the European Union and its member states—historically strong supporters of gender equality—may struggle to fill the funding gap, especially as countries like the Netherlands and the UK consider foreign aid reductions. This could significantly hinder Jordan’s progress in women’s rights.

A weakened civil society sector, particularly organizations focused on gender and social justice,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/countries/jordan>; About 654,000 were the Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR in Jordan in 2023, “Additionally, refugees of Iraqi, Yemeni, Sudanese, Somali and other nationalities, for a total of some 730,000 individuals, making Jordan one of the countries with the highest refugee population per capita, and placing enormous pressure on the country and its host communities.”

<sup>4</sup> <https://jordantimes.com/news/local/us-world-bank-top-list-foreign-aid-donors-jordan-contributing-85b>;

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> More than 70% in 2023 and 100%: <https://foreignassistance.gov/> in 2024: Foreign Aid: a double-edge sword”, The Jordan Times, January 29, 2025; <https://jordantimes.com/opinion/raad-mahmoud-al-tal/foreign-aid-double-edged-sword>;

could face further setbacks due to the reprioritization of limited funds and increased competition between governmental and non-governmental actors in an already crisis-prone region. This shift may result in the near-complete deprioritization of women's rights and empowerment, reducing efforts to mere gender mainstreaming rather than substantive progress. The Jordanian progress on the Beijing Platform of Action and meeting the targets of various Sustainable Development Goals is at stake.

## **Long-Term Impact of the Policy Shifts: Reinforcing Backlash and Further Limitation of Civic Space**

Cuts to Jordan's government budget could negatively impact key sectors, including education and healthcare. Participants anticipate reduced access to quality education for girls, a rise in maternal mortality rates, and diminished availability of prenatal care and contraception—affecting women's reproductive rights and overall well-being. The deprioritization of gender-based violence as a key protection issue could further endanger Jordanian women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.

Economic self-reliance for women is also at risk. Women in Jordan already face high unemployment rates, and U.S. funding has played a crucial role in supporting vocational training, entrepreneurship, and small business grants. The aid freeze threatens to limit women's economic participation, increase financial dependence, and restrict opportunities for self-sufficiency.

Additionally, heightened competition for scarce resources may strain Jordan's fragile support systems. The weakening of civil society could result in a loss of expertise and wasted decades of progress, reducing the ability of local organizations to mobilize communities and advocate for gender equality. These setbacks may reinforce traditional hierarchies and social norms, further marginalizing women in Jordan and the region. Ultimately, the aid freeze could exacerbate social instability and intensify regional security concerns.

Fears are growing that reduced public-sector funding could trigger a backlash against civil society, leading to further restrictions on Jordanian and regional civic space. The elimination of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) program, coupled with ongoing rhetoric targeting gender equality efforts, risks strengthening opposition to women's rights and inclusivity. This could undo decades of gradual progress in shifting social norms and addressing gender stereotypes.

## **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

Participants at the roundtable emphasized the need for both immediate and long-term strategies to mitigate the crisis and preserve the progress made in gender and social justice.

### **1- Immediate Action to Coordinate a Mitigation Plan**

Jordanian CSOs should collaborate with international NGOs to support local organizations facing financial difficulties, particularly regarding legal requirements for terminating staff contracts. CSOs should engage with INGOs negotiating fund suspensions and advocate for emergency funds to be included in future projects.

## **2- Reconsidering the Framework for Foreign Aid Assistance in Jordan**

Participants stressed that aid dependency has hindered local organizations' sustainability and distorted Jordan's labor market by creating salary disparities. They called for a renewed foreign aid framework that integrates human rights, decolonization, and localization. This framework should be developed through dialogue with all stakeholders, including the Jordanian government, private sector, and civil society organizations.

## **3- Building a Resilient Civil Society Capable of Absorbing Shocks**

Strengthening collaboration among CSOs can maximize resources, reduce duplication, and improve efficiency. Platforms like JONAF and Nissa Al Nahdha should be consolidated to provide a unified space where Jordanian civil society can coordinate, set priorities, and advance gender and social justice agendas.

## **4- Engaging in Dialogue on the Sustainability of Jordanian Civil Society**

Some participants advocated for income-generating initiatives to enhance sustainability and reduce reliance on foreign aid, while others questioned whether CSOs should adopt a social enterprise model. There was a consensus on the need for further research and policy dialogue to explore sustainable funding models. Key areas for discussion include legislative reforms that encourage private funding for CSOs, tax incentives for donations, and an improved understanding of corporate social responsibility.

## **5- Enhancing Government Engagement with Civil Society**

Participants stressed the importance of collaboration between the Jordanian government and civil society to coordinate responses and explore medium-term solutions, such as decentralization efforts, private-sector involvement, and volunteer engagement. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Social Development should lead efforts to coordinate and share data with CSOs, identifying funding gaps and prioritizing key community needs-particularly in gender equality.

## **Conclusion**

The US funding freeze and cancellation of DEI initiatives pose significant challenges to gender equality in Jordan and beyond, threatening to undo decades of progress and hinder broader societal development. However, this crisis also presents an opportunity for Jordanian civil society to adopt a localized, self-sufficient approach, setting its own gender equality agenda and building a more resilient and independent framework for future growth.