

Promoting Women's Economic Activity in Jordan

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Allison Jacobs Anderson recently completed her PhD at the University of Washington, where she focused on gender and development in the Middle East. A 2018–19 Fulbright Research Fellow in Jordan, she also holds an MA from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.



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Low women's employment in Jordan is perplexing given the kingdom's middle-class attributes. Creativity in U.S. development initiatives could deliver lasting gains.

In Jordan, a mere 14 percent of women are formally employed, compared to the global average of 51 percent. This outcome is somewhat perplexing given the Hashemite Kingdom's relatively high education levels for women, declining fertility rates, high average marriage age, and other attributes of a middle-class society. Jordan watchers have therefore searched for a cause. One common explanation centers on cultural constraints, including pressure to stay home, families disapproving of vocational jobs, and concerns about women working in mixed-gender environments. But an alternative view suggests these concerns may be overstated, in part owing to recognition of the essential role women can play in a fragile economy.

In this new Policy Note, Dr. Allison Jacobs Anderson, an expert on gender and development, makes the case for encouraging greater women's economic participation in Jordan. She outlines the many associated personal and societal benefits, and shows how a creative approach by U.S. development entities could deliver lasting gains. ❖

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