

# Enhancing the Agricultural Sector's Response to Gender-Based Violence Risks in Jordan

## Policy Paper





## Phenix Centre for Sustainable Development

Phenix Centre for Sustainable Development is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to independent policy research and measuring public opinions on impactful current and emerging issues in areas of economics, society, and its legislative environment in Jordan. The Centre was founded in Amman, Jordan, in 2003. It works to promote a sustainable development paradigm in Jordan, rooted in human rights and the principles of democratic governance, by focusing on reforming labour policies, lifting restrictions on freedom of association, and strengthening social protection policies. The Centre specialises in promoting inclusivity in development processes. It compiles databases of relevant actors and stakeholders, develops research, studies, papers, and reports, conducts conferences and advocacy campaigns, and empowers several actors to participate in steering development through capacity building.



## Action Against Hunger – ACF

Action Against Hunger is an international non-governmental organisation founded in France in 1979 by a group of scientists, doctors, and writers committed to ending hunger and malnutrition worldwide. In 2013, the organisation established its office in Amman, Jordan, as part of its regional response in the Middle East. Since then, it has been working to support vulnerable Jordanian communities and refugees through programs in food security, water and sanitation, health, livelihoods, and psychosocial support.

The organisation's work in Jordan is rooted in the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and non-discrimination, aiming to strengthen resilience and dignity among individuals and communities. As part of the global Action Against Hunger International network, which operates in more than 50 countries, the Jordan office benefits from extensive expertise in emergency response, sustainable development planning, and advocacy to influence public policies and achieve lasting impact in the fight against hunger and poverty.

# Grow Economy Project

Enhancing Decent Work & Working Conditions in Jordanian Agricultural Sector  
Policy Paper

A Collaborative Policy Paper by:  
Phenix Centre for Sustainable Development  
Action Against Hunger – ACF

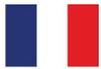
This policy paper was developed as part of the “Grow Economy” project, an initiative dedicated to fostering decent, inclusive, and sustainable economic opportunities for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians within the agricultural sector. The policy paper specifically examines the status and application of decent working conditions and OHS standards on small and medium-sized farms across four Jordanian governorates: Irbid, Balqa, Ajloun, and Madaba.

“This policy paper is supported by Agence Française de Développement. The ideas and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Agence Française de Développement (AFD).”

This policy paper was prepared for research purposes only. Phenix Centre bears no responsibility for the views, information, or statements disclosed by interviewed participants, as they reflect their personal opinions and do not necessarily represent the Centre’s views or positions.

 January 2026

This work has been made possible thanks to the generous support of:

**France** 



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# INTRODUCTION

Estimates indicate that women constitute approximately 26% of the total agricultural workforce in Jordan, positioning them as pivotal contributors to agricultural production and sustainability.<sup>1</sup> Despite this essential role, women working in the sector face a complex array of challenges and violations, foremost among them gender-based violence (GBV), wage discrimination, poor occupational health and safety (OHS) conditions, lack of legal and social protection, and limited access to resources and training opportunities. These challenges are further compounded by the failure to account for the specific circumstances and needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as their heightened exposure to verbal and physical harassment. This vulnerability is intensified by the absence of accessible and women-friendly banking and financial services, which reinforces dependency, constrains economic autonomy, and exacerbates power imbalances and risks of exploitation within agricultural workplaces.

According to the Gender Analysis and Occupational Health and Safety assessments conducted under the Grow Economy project by Action Against Hunger (ACF) Women in agriculture often suffer from lower wages compared to men, typically receiving daily wages ranging

between 1 and 1.5 Jordanian dinars per hour.<sup>2</sup> They work long hours in addition to carrying household responsibilities, creating what is known as the “double burden.”

This situation contributes to exhaustion and increased exposure to accidents and health issues. Overall,<sup>3</sup> OHS standards in agriculture are poor, particularly for women. Many employers fail to provide appropriate personal protective equipment, such as clothing, footwear, masks, and gloves.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, women are frequently denied basic labour rights, including maternity leave, paid nursing hours, and access to safe and reliable transportation.



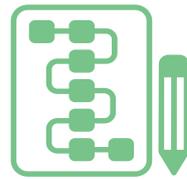
## POLICY PAPER OBJECTIVE



The weak protection from GBV in Jordan's agricultural sector is attributed to a set of policy-related causes that exacerbate risks faced by female workers. A deficient legislative framework and the absence of adequate protection measures have widened the gender inequality gap within agricultural workplaces, rendering women more vulnerable to GBV, especially in informal employment contexts.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to analyse structural and policy challenges impacting women agricultural workers by identifying legislative and implementation gaps in national policies related to the sector, particularly those concerning OHS, violence prevention measures, and the effectiveness of monitoring and inspection systems in farms. Additionally, the paper seeks to propose a package of actionable policy recommendations to improve the working environment for women in agriculture and ensure their protection from violence.

## PAPER METHODOLOGY



This policy paper draws upon an analysis of three key reference studies conducted under the Grow Economy project. Baseline Assessment, which provides both quantitative and qualitative data on agricultural working conditions. Gender Analysis Report within the Grow Economy project, offering an in-depth understanding of gender roles in agricultural value chains and gender-related barriers. This was supported by 11 local agricultural civil society organisations in targeted governorates and included focused group discussions (FGDs).

An Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Study in the agricultural sector revealed poor workplace protection levels, particularly the lack of safety equipment, inadequate facilities, and neglect of women's needs. The study utilised two surveys: the first targeting 215 agricultural workers (male and female) and the second targeting 195 farm owners across Irbid, Balqa, Ajloun, and Madaba governorates. Additionally, 10 FGDs were conducted with workers of both sexes and relevant stakeholders, enabling deeper insights into OHS gaps and possible remedies.

# POLICY-RELATED CAUSES OF WEAK OHS ENFORCEMENT

## 1

### WEAK NATIONAL LEGISLATION ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

The legislative environment in Jordan lacks a comprehensive legal framework to address GBV in workplaces, particularly in agriculture. Although nearly three decades have passed since the enactment of the Jordanian Labour Law No. 8 of 1996, it still does not explicitly define GBV or sexual harassment, nor does it categorise these violations as administrative or criminal offences within labour relations.

A major gap lies in the absence of obligations on employers, particularly in the informal agricultural sector, to provide violence- and harassment-free workplaces. There are no legal requirements for adopting preventive internal policies, establishing safe reporting mechanisms, or providing training on professional conduct and human rights.

Furthermore, the law does not oblige small and medium-sized farms, which constitute

the majority of Jordan's agricultural sector, to apply minimum OHS standards, such as separate facilities or gender-sensitive protections. The lack of legislative clarity also weakens the ability of labour inspectors and government representatives to intervene effectively. Even when cases of violence or harassment are reported, the absence of a clear legal classification constrains authorities from taking immediate action. In addition, many women especially those working in the agricultural sector are not aware of where to seek help if they experience any form of harassment. Cultural restrictions, combined with the lack of a clear referral system, negatively affect women and limit their ability to report or access protection services. This legislative gap undermines women's economic participation, perpetuates unsafe work environments, and leaves GBV unaddressed and invisible.

## 2

## LACK OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MONITORING AND INSPECTION MECHANISMS

The absence of a gender lens in monitoring and inspection systems significantly weakens the state's capacity to protect women agricultural workers. Although a national manual for labour inspection exists, its implementation faces structural challenges, including an insufficient number of inspectors relative to the vast number of farms, and an inequitable geographic distribution of inspection staff.

Field evidence shows that farm inspections are extremely limited and tend to focus on larger, formal enterprises while neglecting small and medium-sized farms, which employ most women workers—especially refugees and those in rural areas. Inspections that do occur often concentrate on procedural aspects (e.g., licensing, documentation) rather than examining real working conditions or interviewing female workers.

Moreover, inspection tools lack gender-sensitive indicators. They do not assess GBV, harassment, or wage discrimination, nor do they verify the provision of safe facilities or protective policies. Employers are not required to demonstrate compliance with anti-violence policies or provide GBV-related training.

As a result, many violations remain undocumented and invisible in official reports, perpetuating impunity and undermining workers' trust in regulatory institutions. The lack of specialised training for inspectors on gender issues further prevents them from detecting violations in culturally sensitive and safe ways, particularly in rural settings where abusive behaviours may be normalised under customs.

### 3

## ABSENCE OF A COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL POLICY ON GBV IN AGRICULTURE

Despite national efforts, such as the National Strategy to Combat Gender Based Violence (GBV) (2022–2026), policies rarely address agriculture as a sector at risk. This exclusion leaves female agricultural workers without access to preventive, legal, psychosocial, or social support services available in other sectors. FGDs under the Grow Economy project revealed that most women did not know where to turn when facing violence or harassment and feared losing their jobs if they reported incidents.

This policy gap structurally reproduces GBV within agriculture, as farms are not formally

recognised as spaces requiring protection. Consequently, training programs, resources, and awareness campaigns seldom reach female agricultural workers, particularly in rural and marginalised areas. The lack of sex-disaggregated statistics by sector further obscures agricultural GBV in national reporting, limiting evidence-based policymaking. Beyond the workplace, this situation also has profound social consequences, negatively affecting women's mental health, family well-being, and their ability to interact and communicate effectively with family members, thereby reinforcing cycles of stress, silence, and vulnerability.

### 4

## LIMITED REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN UNIONS AND AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Women's limited participation in agricultural unions and associations represents one of the most significant forms of institutional exclusion, weakening their ability to defend rights or influence policies. Leadership in these bodies is overwhelmingly male-dominated, with few active women's committees or internal systems ensuring gender-balanced representation.

Gender analysis findings under Grow Economy show that fewer than 10% of women agricultural workers are members of associations or unions. This low level of involvement reflects not only weak engagement but also a lack of inclusivity and perceived effectiveness within such

structures. Consequently, women are deprived of collective spaces to voice concerns, negotiate rights, and advocate for better conditions.

This absence of women's voices results in policies biased toward male interests, neglecting issues like OHS, protection from violence, flexible working hours, or workplace childcare. Instead of serving as vehicles for change, unions and associations risk reinforcing existing gender inequalities.

## 5

### WEAK INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION

The lack of effective coordination among government institutions responsible for agriculture, labour, and gender issues severely undermines responses to GBV risks in the sector. Each institution often works in isolation, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) focusing on inspection, the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) on production, the Ministry of Social Development on poverty, without a unified gender-sensitive approach.

This fragmentation results in the absence of a national, sex-disaggregated database on

women agricultural workers and the violations they face. Without such data, evidence-based planning and evaluation of existing policies remain impossible. Furthermore, overlapping and fragmented initiatives waste resources and reduce the effectiveness of interventions. Moreover, the limited presence of humanitarian and protection-focused organisations working specifically within the agricultural sector further exacerbates this gap, leaving many women agricultural workers without adequate support services or accessible protection mechanisms.

## 6

### WEAK OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY (OHS) STANDARDS FOR WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Field findings indicate that agricultural workplaces in Jordan inadequately address women's needs, lacking essential infrastructure and services. A major challenge is the absence of safe, reliable transport, forcing women to bear extra financial and physical burdens. The lack of public transport in remote farming areas restricts women's mobility and ability to respond to emergencies.

Farm facilities also show critical deficiencies: the absence of separate, safe restrooms compels

women to use unsafe or exposed areas, exposing them to harassment. The lack of designated rest spaces and privacy creates a psychologically and physically stressful environment.

These conditions heighten exposure to GBV in its verbal, physical, psychological, and economic forms, particularly in the absence of complaint mechanisms. Wage discrimination and denial of maternity leave further entrench inequality, ultimately reducing women's productivity and driving them out of the labour market.

# ALTERNATIVE POLICIES & LEGAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Protecting women agricultural workers from GBV and discrimination requires strengthening Jordan's legislative and regulatory framework. Key proposed policies include:



- Amending the Labour Law to explicitly define GBV and workplace harassment, with clear sanctions.



- Introducing specific provisions in the Agricultural Workers' Regulation obligating farm owners to provide safe workplaces, separate women's facilities, and appropriate protective equipment.



- Issuing binding ministerial directives requiring all agricultural enterprises to adopt professional codes of conduct that incorporate GBV prevention principles.



- Redesigning labour inspection tools to include gender-sensitive indicators addressing GBV, discrimination, and OHS conditions for women.



- Increasing the number of female labour inspectors to ensure safe communication with women workers, especially in rural communities.



- Updating the National GBV Strategy (2022–2026) to prioritise agriculture.



- Mandating women's representation in agricultural unions and associations through quotas in decision-making bodies.



- Establishing a joint national committee between the Ministries of Agriculture, Labour, and Social Development to develop women's protection policies.



- Creating a sex-disaggregated national information system on agricultural labour that documents GBV and harassment cases.



- Publishing a binding national OHS manual for agriculture that considers women's needs (separate restrooms, rest areas, safe water points).



- Incorporating care services (e.g., mobile childcare, flexible working hours) into agricultural projects.



- Linking agricultural licensing to compliance with gender-sensitive OHS standards through a "Gender-Responsive Agricultural Compliance Code."



- Implementing structured awareness and rights-education programmes for women agricultural workers, focusing on labour rights, GBV prevention, available referral and protection services, and safe reporting channels, particularly in rural and marginalised agricultural communities.



- Mandating women's representation in agricultural unions and associations through quotas in decision-making bodies.

# GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS – PRACTICAL MEASURES

Alongside legislative reforms, practical field interventions are needed to enhance women agricultural workers' ability to access safe workplaces, claim rights, and report violations. Key recommendations include:

- Supporting community awareness campaigns in rural areas that highlight GBV risks in agriculture and engage men, employers, and local leaders.
- Producing culturally appropriate awareness materials (brochures, posters, short videos) to inform women of their rights and reporting mechanisms.
- Conducting training workshops for women workers on negotiation skills, handling violence, and accessing legal support, in collaboration with civil society.
- Supporting the establishment of self-help groups to strengthen solidarity and collective reporting.
- Encouraging local youth initiatives to develop innovative solutions to issues like lack of sanitation or transport through incubators or microfinance.
- Funding pilot “women-friendly farms” that model decent work, health, and psychosocial support, serving as replicable best practices.
- Engaging local media to cover women’s experiences in agriculture and raise public awareness from a gender perspective.
- Organising community councils and open days linking women workers with officials to directly discuss challenges and reporting channels.
- Providing incentives to farms offering fair, safe employment for women, such as priority access to technical assistance programs or facilitated market opportunities.

# ANNEXES

## Annex A: Quantitative Indicators on Women's Working Conditions in Agriculture

This annex presents key quantitative findings derived from the Gender Analysis conducted by Action Against Hunger (ACF Jordan) under the Grow Economy project (January 2024), covering Irbid, Ajloun, Balqa, and Madaba governorates.

### Key Indicators:

- **Women's participation in agriculture:** Women constitute approximately 26% of the total agricultural workforce in Jordan.
- **Informal employment:** The agricultural sector is characterised by high levels of informality. 16% of women working in agriculture are informally employed, compared to 5% of men, exposing women to heightened risks of unsafe working conditions and limited legal protection.
- **Income and wage-related disparities:** While men and women may receive similar daily wages for identical tasks, women's work is largely concentrated in lower-paid agricultural activities and informal arrangements. This structural division limits women's overall income-generating opportunities and contributes to persistent economic inequality.
- **Harassment and unsafe working conditions:**
  - 16% of surveyed agricultural labourers and smallholders reported that women face medium levels of harassment and verbal violence at work.
  - 70% of respondents identified safe working conditions as one of the two most important requirements for women to achieve decent work, highlighting widespread exposure to unsafe and unregulated agricultural environments.

## Annex B: National GBV Referral Pathways and Key Actors Relevant to Women Agricultural Workers

This annex is informed by the Protection and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) domain of the Grow Economy Gender Analysis.

### Indicative GBV Referral Pathway (Agricultural Context):

- **Entry and identification:** Disclosure through community-based organisations (CBOs), health facilities, or trusted community actors engaged in the Grow Economy project.

- **Immediate support:** Provision of psychosocial support, safety planning, and confidential case management by specialised NGOs and trained staff.
- **Protection and legal services:** Referral to formal protection mechanisms, including Family Protection services, where accessible and appropriate, based on survivor consent.
- **Longer-term support:** Linkage to livelihood support, awareness-raising activities, and economic empowerment interventions to reduce dependency and future risks.

*The Gender Analysis highlights that most women agricultural workers—particularly Syrian women living on farms—lack awareness of available referral pathways and fear retaliation, underscoring the need for clearer referral systems and outreach.*

### Key Actors Identified:

- **Ministry of Labour (MoL):** Labour inspection and enforcement of labour standards.
- **Ministry of Agriculture (MoA):** Regulation of agricultural activities and coordination with farms.
- **Ministry of Social Development (MoSD):** Social protection and coordination of protection services.
- **Local civil society organisations and CBOs:** Awareness raising, psychosocial support, and community-level referrals.
- **International NGOs within the Grow Economy consortium:** Technical support, protection programming, and monitoring.

## Annex C: Gender-Sensitive Monitoring Checklist for OHS and GBV Risk Mitigation in Agriculture

This checklist is developed based on documented gaps and risks identified in the Grow Economy Gender Analysis and is intended to support labour inspection and farm-level monitoring.

### 1. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

- Availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) suitable for women
- Access to safe drinking water
- Presence of rest areas and protection from extreme weather
- First-aid supplies available on-site

## **2. Facilities and Privacy**

- Availability of sanitation facilities
- Separate, safe, and private toilets for women
- Adequate lighting and secure access to facilities

## **3. Working Conditions and Wages**

- Transparent wage calculation and payment mechanisms
- No withholding of wages or unpaid working hours
- Reasonable working hours and rest breaks

## **4. Pregnancy, Breastfeeding, and Care Responsibilities**

- Adjusted tasks for pregnant and breastfeeding workers
- Access to rest breaks and flexibility during maternity and nursing periods

## **5. GBV Prevention and Reporting**

- Zero-tolerance approach to harassment communicated to workers
- Safe and confidential reporting mechanisms available
- Workers informed about available protection and referral services

## **6. Inspection and Monitoring Practices**

- Gender-sensitive indicators included in inspection visits
- Private consultations conducted with women workers when possible

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- Action Against Hunger (2024). Gender Analysis Report – GrowEconomy Project: Promote Sustainable, Inclusive, and Decent Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Vulnerable Jordanians in the Agricultural Sector.
- Instructions on Occupational Health and Safety Conditions and Procedures at Agricultural Worksites, 2021, issued under Articles (11) and (17) of Agricultural Workers’ Regulation No. (19) of 2021.
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- WANA Institute (2021). Women Working in the Agricultural Sector within the Northern Jordan Valley District: Realities and Challenges.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Action Against Hunger – Jordan (2024). Gender Analysis Report – GrowEconomy Project: Promote Sustainable, Inclusive, and Decent Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Vulnerable Jordanians in the Agricultural Sector.

<sup>2</sup> WANA Institute. ( 2021) Women Working in the Agricultural Sector within the Northern Jordan Valley District: Realities and Challenges.

<sup>3</sup> تعليمات شروط وإجراءات السلامة والصحة المهنية في مواقع العمل الزراعي لعام 2021، الصادرة بموجب أحكام المادتين (11) و(17) من نظام عمال الزراعة رقم (19) لسنة 2021.

<sup>4</sup> The Jordan Times (2024). Tamkeen calls for reforms in agricultural labour regulations to protect workers' rights,

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